

# 2010 The Fellsman Hike

by Andy Mouncey

It's not a good start.

Halfway up Whernside the second mountain of the day – there are nine – I'm sitting on my backside with both shoes and socks off surrounded by bits of my first aid kit while concentrating firmly on the task of taping my heels.

And I'd been worried enough, thankyou, without this little addition.

I mean, you would be too, right, contemplating 62 miles of up hill and down Yorkshire dale on the back of little and sporadic specific training when the last race you did two weeks previously over a pathetic 24 miles had you hanging on like a dying dog over the final third?

Still, sometimes the only way to really see where you're at is to really see where you're at.

So I'd swallowed hard and made some mental adjustments.

Chief among these was to push Competitive Running Bloke right down into the bottom of my rucksack: Today would not be about him.

Today would be about head up, enjoy the views and the company, relax and keep everything in the green. Get to know the route for next time – so there'll be a next time? – and finish with plenty still in the tank.

Got that?

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My pre-start activity did set the tone: Chasing our very excited 3 year old round the start area who was intent on demonstrating his capacity for interval training with simultaneous commentary all at high volume: 'Look at me, Daddy! I'm a really fast runner!'

This meant I chugged off quite happily way down the field of over 400 souls with a smile on my face mentally ticking off the 'happy box'.

Thanks, son.

This continued up the first climb of Ingleborough as I threaded my way through the field pausing now and then to chat to folks I recognised and some I didn't.

The hotspots on both heels started on the approach to Whernside, and while I am wearing brand new trainers this is not unusual for me: I'd used the same make, model and size straight out of the box for years with no problems.

Except today.

Today there will be screaming and crying and gnashing of teeth and rending of clothes later if I don't STOP RIGHT NOW and sort this out.

So I press 'eject' on the lovely, calm, happy world with gorgeous views and easy running I'd been enjoying and get decisive about Reality.

Right, over this next stile then...

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Rucksack off, sit down, shoes and socks off.

Footcare kit out, examine the damage. Yep, blisters about the size of 50p starting on the backs of both heels, but no fluid build up yet and it looks clean.

Good. Tape and strap. Make sure to get a good seal.

On with the shoes and socks taking care to lace firmly – I suspect that was the problem: sloppy, Andy, very sloppy – repack the sack, stand and test.

It's as fast as I can make it, but Competitive Running Bloke escapes and whispers that many minutes and lots of people have gone past.

I push him back down: Today is not your day...

Now, where were we?

Whernside is the first chance to get a look at the leaders as there's an out and back detour to the summit. Steve Burkinshaw thunders past looking like he's doing 6 miles not 60 followed by Mr Fellsman himself 10-time winner Mark Hartell and a bunch of other faces I recognise.

I have a little smile to myself and chug on upwards as the wind does it's best to blow us all off the ridge, but the view really is to die for.

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It takes me to Dent (about one third distance) to catch up with Pete again who'd I'd run with as we'd come off Ingleborough. It's windy on the tops, sure, but the sun is out periodically and lack of recent rain has given lovely underfoot conditions. I'm running easy, climbing strongly and being Polite Sociable Chappie at checkpoints.

Dent village is the first big food stop.

I refuel to strict nutritional guidelines all at the cutting edge of endurance sport: Sausage roll (warm) and cheese sandwich washed down with a mug of tea.

(Well, this race is staged by Keighley Scouts and when in Rome...)

\*

SE on the long climb out of Dent on the Craven Way talking 'stuff' with Pete as we head to the next top of Blea Moor. This is the first real route choice piece across open ground which is a key feature of the second half of the Hike route. Decisions are therefore a combination of your own navigation certainty, local knowledge, and the lines any other runner is taking in front of - or immediately behind you.

Sure, it's so much easier to follow...as long as you're cool with ceding control, (and all the implications in that) and comfortable with doing the freeloading bit.

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We nail it and head into the checkpoint at Stone House for another big feed and a moment of levity:

'Secret kit check, lads!'

We're pounced on by a group of scouts armed with clipboards and armfuls of enthusiasm.

Secret kit check?

'Yeah, everyone's getting it!'

So, erm, it's not much of a secret then, is it?

'Guess you had to be there...'

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The big climb up Great Knoutberry is the final one before halfway and also a second chance to check people in front on the out and back to the summit.

Competitive Running Bloke clocks the faces, notes the gaps and presents his report.

I grunt and file it away under 'Pending'.

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Halfway and Pete and I are drinking tea in the big checkpoint tent on the road between Hawes to the north and Ingleton to the south. I know we've been on the go for over 6 hours but I've no idea how much more. Closer to 7? Well, I'm not wearing a watch and I'm really not that interested.

Of much more interest are the faces and postures of runners in the tent, the refreshments on offer, and the realisation that I'm still feeling Mr Perky.

'Must be his lucky day.'

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Pete and have been bigging each other up periodically over the last section which has helped keep the momentum going. He is however, vaguely disgusted at my seeming ability to put away solid food at a rapid rate - he complains his digestive juices have gone walkabout and his mastication capacity seems somewhat diminished. Well, there's always those lovely gels...

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And so the fun begins. The second half of the race is full of difficult going over open ground where navigation, route choice, and an ability to move efficiently over the rough stuff will

pretty much dictate whether you are Fun To Be With – or not. And while Pete and I make good time on the approach to Dodd Fell, we lose it all on the final climb to the top and the descent line. It's all grass tussocks, heather, and dry peat bogs – and you either know where to find the sheep trogs, or you don't.

We fall into the latter category, though still arrive at Fleet Moss in time to clock the Usual Suspects either in or just leaving the checkpoint. So, not lost that much then...or you lot are hanging about abit here.

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It is tempting. I have reckoned getting across Fleet Moss with sanity intact is the crux of the whole route, and while it is unseasonally dry, the whole area is a mass of intricate up down peat bog beds which just sap the will and the legs.

The route choice is to either just go for it straight across on a bearing or to take a longer and more runnable route round the southern edge – though this second option only opens up if you know it's there in the first place. Once again, route knowledge is a huge advantage, and care with your nav absolutely essential.

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I seriously consider getting straight through the checkpoint in order to hook up with one of the runners ahead of us who is just leaving and I know he knows the route. And while I've also done my homework, I'm looking for some additional security on the section that has concerned me most. It also means I jump a bunch of places and make a chunk of time, because I'm also clocking that many of these guys are starting to hang around longer at checkpoints.

And are sitting down.

Yep, Competitive Running Bloke makes a massive full frontal appearance and I am hugely, hugely tempted...but only briefly.

Today is not that day.

Time to change channels.

Relax, feed, chat, feel good about progress and register a familiar face slumped in a corner. Charlie, bless him, looks on his chinstrap

and as about as enthusiastic about this next bit as, well...

Time for a pick-up, then.

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We go south with Charlie tagging and a handful of runners strung out in front of us which we periodically catch sight of as the ground opens up. It's compass-contour stuff over stop-start terrain and a relief to finally catch sight of the summit trig on the high point of Middle Tongue.

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Two smiling faces emerge from the checkpoint tent on the wind-blasted summit in the middle of nowhere – the things some people do for fun – and then we're off on the final leg-sapping tricky section. Charlie has rallied big-style as we all stumble-jog-walk towards to enticingly-named Hell Gap. A final piece of easy running on a good track brings us to Cray at the foot of the penultimate climb up Buckden Pike.

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It's now pretty much south to the finish and in my mind we're on the last section. I'm still Mr Chipper, Pete's chugging along happily, and Charlie is a completely different bloke from the one who scraped himself off the floor at Fleet Moss. We put Buckden Pike behind us and not long after find ourselves being grouped for safety at the checkpoint at the foot of the final climb up Great Whernside. We're now a group of seven which will run together as darkness falls sometime after 9pm.

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And that's pretty much it. There's no drama, the headtorches come out for about the final hour, and sometime around 10.30pm I find myself ambling down the final road descent into Grassington and the finish feeling like I've just been round the block.

I've slowed so I can enjoy the quiet on my own, watch the stars come out, and wonder at a day that has allowed me to move beyond all my fears and worries.

So it's just running, is it?

Yeah, right