

Bowland 1500ft Trigs

5/2/2012

With the cancellation of the Pennine Bridleway Relay due to ice I had to find something else equally or more tiring to subject young Dan too. I'd done more than my quota of Lakeland Fells in January so it was time for something epic in Bowland. Conveniently the previous week had consistent sub zero temperatures, which meant the 1500ft trigs looked a goer (I'm too soft to go hunting for contours). Saturday was forecast to be slightly warmer with a band of snow and rain moving in by the afternoon with Sunday settled and slowly warming. Garstang only got a dusting of snow on Saturday and the ground remained frozen, my parents reported not much snow to be seen on their walk up Clougha so it looked good for Sunday. Sunday dawned foggy with no ice on the car, it was damp and green all the way to a fog free Stoop's Bridge at Abbeystead, the mud in the car park was frozen, still looking good.

Hawthornthwaite

A 8.15 start was all we could manage, we took the footpath through the woods and frozen fields to avoid the road climb and were soon at the turn off up the fell, which was lurking in the fog The climb passed pretty quickly, we followed nano tracks through the frozen heather and soon got wet feet after some stream crossings. As we got higher there was a covering of crunchy ice on the tussocks and this had turned to a few inches of snow by the top, we'd be in snow all the way to Cabin Flats now. Despite a total lack of navigation we came out right by the resting trig point.



Fairsnape

We made good progress on the pathlets by the fence round to Fiendsdale Head, a covering of fluffy snow was lying on top of the frozen peat, this probably made it easier than its normal soft condition, although the snow was slowing things down a bit. From the flagstones it was a straightforward climb up the meadow to 1707 and then across to Paddy's Pole. The sun even managed to nearly burn through the fog as we approached the trig.



Totridge

After retracing our steps to 1707 it was just a matter of following the fence to Totridge. The downhill gradient at the start was welcome and the swamps were nicely frozen but the path was still pretty tortuous as it navigated the peat hags. Before too long we had picked up the wall and bumped into the trig.

Whin Fell

We started off on the descent path from Totridge but soon lost it and dropped off the edge of the fell a little too far right, this meant we had to climb a little to pick up the path again. As we dropped out of the cloud a snowbound trough was revealed.



We took the bridleway to Mellor Knoll as it's easier going than the direct route and then dropped down the snowy field to the farm. To my relief the field was cow free, as last time I almost got stampeded. The trough road was snow covered with some surprisingly difficult to run along tractor tracks and essence of grit on the hills, my legs felt like they had done some miles but were still working fine. Smelt Mill cottage had a few snowy cars outside and as we climbed up the fenceline we saw what I presume was the Mountain Rescue team messing around with tents across the fell. The climb was initially difficult going but we managed to do a bit of running when it levelled out and got more peaty than tussocky. We crossed the Ouster Rake path and stumbled the last bit to the trig where the porridge reserves had got a little low so it was high time for a honey sandwich.

White Hill

I chose a flowing descent route down the left hand side of Swine Clough, which was all going well until we got to the stream at the bottom and had to negotiate its steep banks and slalom through a newly planted wood. We crossed the river before Brennand Farm and managed to run most of the way up the track and across the col. Near the top I managed to somehow miss a rung when descending a stile and ended up sitting in the snow, brr. We had some surprises with ice hidden under the snow on the steep descent to Whitendale Farm.



We jogged up through the winter wonderland of Whitendale, seeing our second human of the day in a field by his farm. The relatively easy going above the stream was quite enjoyable before the path reared up to the Salter Fell Road, my legs were feeling good but definitely tiring. We stopped for traffic to pass (a noisy quad bike) then went straight across and up the fell, aiming to hit the fence after a while. This was the first time I had experienced the delights of White Fell's pathless wilderness, once at the fence it was slow going as the snow was much deeper than anywhere else we'd been (maybe that's why it's called White Fell), it was calf depth or deeper and hid all sorts of nasty holes and bogs. We ended up walking all the way to the summit and were glad when it eventually appeared out of the whiteness.



Wolfhole Crag

At least on the way back to the Salter Fell road it was slightly downhill and we could stand in our previous footsteps part of the way, although they were all at the wrong angle. It meant a fast walk

until it steepened, we took the fence by Shooter's Clough by mistake (not on my map). Despite not getting us directly to County Gate, this was probably a good thing because we could run along the track for a while to stretch the legs. Dan was getting a bit low on water so filled his spare bottle up with some manky stream water just in case (tempted to raid Duncan's cache!).

Some sheep had bashed down the snow for us so we made good progress up the fence towards the ridge... until we met the sheep. They ran away from us up the fence then a few of them jumped in a deep bog, when we caught them up they were obviously struggling to get out and away from us. Two managed to thrash their way out but one was tiring and ended up just giving up and sitting in the deepest bit. Pushing its rear end wouldn't make it budge so we ended up both getting in the more-than-knee deep bog and wrestling out the immobile animal, me at the back and Dan at the front. As soon as its back legs had been flopped onto the side it struggled up and hurried away to find its mates, not even a thankyou. Good job Dan and I didn't get stuck in with it or there'd be some interesting headlines.



We soon warmed up as we climbed some more but the snow got deeper and was drifted in places after we turned the corner, so it was tough going up to Wolfhole trig. I think part of the difficulty was due to the realisation that my legs were running low on fuel so it was time to get out the malt loaf, I spent the rest of the trip doing a lot of chewing and discovering bits of malt loaf stuck to my gums.

Ward's Stone

I'd been telling myself it would be straightfoward from Wolfhole Crag as we would be on familiar territory, although it always seems quite a way on an out and back trip. There was a chill breeze and we were now moving quite slowly due to fatigue and the snow conditions (it was no longer fluffy and needed to be squidged out of the way on every numb footfall), in fact it was easy to do a striding walk with the occasional attempt to run thrown in. The familiar landmarks passed gradually and we were eventually on the last climb up to the Ward's Stone plateau. Just before the first trig we

encountered our first human footprints of the day and managed to make better progress by using them to get the second trig. I donated half my remaining water to Dan as I had more than enough, meaning he didn't get to find out if his ditch water would kill him.



My legs had been feeling really heavy from Wolfhole Crag but they were soon perked up by a sickly energy gel and the descent towards Cabin Flats. The way now seemed easier going, probably due to having less snow, a well used, frozen and downhill path underneath and no more hills to climb. We managed to keep up what seemed like a good pace (considering the miles we'd done) to the gravel track junction.

We were still in the cloud but it now looked a lot more gloomy than previously on the ridge, when we had even got occasional glimpses of blue sky and high clouds. The track was a bit slushy but downhill and a lot easier going than anything we'd done all day, which was nice. Tiredness seemed to disappear from our legs (but not feet) as we managed to sustain a run down the track, although the illusion was broken for the short climb over Marjery's Hill, at least we were out of the snow by then. Although the grey gravel track is dull it was just what we needed at that point of the day, down at the bottom it was just a short track through the fields back to the car. We hadn't looked at the time all day so we had a game of guess the time, Dan's quarter to five was spot on: 16:47.

We really enjoyed the adventure, it was hard work but we coped well enough and covered a lot of familiar and unfamiliar ground in some atmospheric wintry conditions. It was also impressive not to see another soul or even a human footprint on the paths for the majority of the day, although there were plenty of animal prints from mysterious beasties. I'll have to try it again one day with some extra tops maybe (but that would have to be snow and fog free!).