

THE MARILYN'S OF BOWLAND - MONDAY 30TH AUGUST 2010

This had been an idea for some time but the logistics had defeated me. The route from Easington Fell to Spire Hill on Longridge Fell had proved impossible to do on tracks and paths. It was just going to be a lot of road running. Until Ian Roberts suggested a bike and run combined attempt. The logistics of leaving the bike were easy. Park it at Bradley Fold and run up Spire Hill. Then back down onto the bike and across to Fell Foot. Here I could hide it behind the ruin opposite Fell Foot and lock it to a fencepost. I could then stash my kit and set off. All I needed was a good clear day to do such a long a memorable run. The statistics were 45 miles and 7000 ft. It would be a long day in Bowland but it would be as near as possible to a full round of Bowland taking in the five most prominent hills.



Sunrise over Easington fell

I parked at the top of Waddington Fell and watched the sunrise over Easington fell in the east. It was cold and as I set off at 6.54 am down to Waddington on my old rickety Raleigh I needed my gloves, leggings and balaclava. It would have been a lot quicker on a decent bike but that might have been the last I saw of it leaving it at Fell Foot on a Bank Holiday!

Waddington was asleep and I was soon at Balshaw Eaves and heading down to cross a misted Hodder. This was one of those summer days that had been extinct since St Swithins Day on 15th July. Today was a day to enjoy the best of Bowland. As long as I could avoid the Bank Holiday crowds.

The section from Higher Hodder Bridge might be described as undulating and I regretted not being on my Trek.

Eventually I arrived at Bradley Fold and locked my bike behind the fence. I took a steady climb up to Spire Hill as I was not convinced that this 45 mile epic was actually viable. Yet!

Back on the bike and across to Fell Foot. As I hid the bike behind the ruined shed I wondered why no one else was up. There were two lads with their dogs down the lane but as yet not a sign of anyone else on this beautiful blue-sky morning. I stashed my bike kit and set off up Parlick. Looking across at the radio mast on Waddington I felt that I had come a long way already - really I was only just beginning. I ran steadily up to 1707 and bagged my second Marilyn. The next one was Ward's Stone!



1707 summit

Down to Fiendsdale head was easy but as soon as I turned right the trod disappeared. There used to be quite a good trod here but today there was little sign of any usage. Up here Right to Roam does not seem to exist and the stock ratios seem to have been drastically reduced.

You wouldn't find this sort of thing in Wales where they know a good sheep subsidy when they see one!

At the fence corner by the access gate there was more of a trod but it was overgrown by penitent heather and difficult to follow. Does no one fancy this as a good day out on a quad bike?

Finally as I ascended to White Moss there was grass. I could run again, and made quick progress to the accompaniment of the swarms of gulls that eddied over to the east.

Soon I was peering down into Wyresdale. The lonely trig at Hawthornthwaite, now a casualty to peat erosion is not a Marilyn so once at the new fence I descended. There was a lovely mown strip all the way down to the gully at Hawthornthwaite Greave, where two peregrines screeched in indignation. They are not used to visitors around here.

I could see the field corner now above Fell Side Farm and headed across the dead shin grating heather to pick up a good trod through the sedge. I headed straight for the road but would have been better going right for the footbridge that I eventually used to drop onto the road. Then it was a short climb to my

feeding station above Hawthornthwaite, Farm. The rice pudding tasted delicious. A few cars passed but the Bank Holiday seemed to be avoiding Wyresdale or maybe it was a personal thing! Down through the woods and into the hive of Abbeystead village there were a few cars about and I was soon over the road, cerebrally twitching at the sight of cars and people, and running besides the Wyre. Then up to Higher Lees where I passed my first walkers of the day replete with massive rucksacks that Pickfords would envy!

The run up to Marjory Hill was a good steady climb fuelled by rice pudding and at the Luncheon Huts I headed east along the track. This would give me better quality running than along the rough erode path over Cabin Flats.



Ward's Stone West

Under Wards Stone I cut up mostly on grass to the trig and then climbed the pachydermal boulders to ensure I had reached the highest point. Over to Wards Stone East and the same procedure climbing the Grey Mare and Foal to make sure I had got every possible top. I didn't want to have to go back and redo this!

This was now the anchor leg and I hoped to get to White Hill by 2 pm. If the trods were as good all the way I could have done.

After 5 hours my knees began to demand Ibuprofen as I headed down to the top of the Tarnbrook track I stumbled on some bank holiday picnickers who gave me a quizzical look! Weirdoes!

Finally at the County Gate on the Salter Fell track I dug out some water from another stash. Then up to White Hill. The trod I have used in the past seems to have disappeared and need a forensic scientist to locate its intermittent meanderings. I cut across through the peat hag canyon lands, but there is no track and I notice that the vegetation is becoming more diverse now it is not grazed. Finally I reach the enigmatic tower and the trig.



White Hill summit

From here it should all be downhill to Slaidburn but the trods have gone and only appear as I descend to the Salter Fell Track. At last I can speed up and am soon passing walkers and heading down to Croasdale. I begin to think a time near 10 hours is possible.

I had reccied this a few weeks ago and found a good track above the east bank of Croasdale Beck. Today I stay on the west bank and follow the yellow-topped posts. The signposting is deceptive and leads through lots of sedgey bogs with oil slicked surfaces and I am glad to cross and descend to Croasdale Farm where a girl apologises for the dog barking at me. It obviously has a keen sense of smell!

To the east the road beckons but I carry on through the fields. The descent down the grassy spur into Slaidburn is worth it and I am soon over the newly silaged meadows and crossing the Hodder into the seething cauldron of Bank Holiday Slaidburn (cue more cerebral twitching!)

By the river the café is spilling out onto the pavement and a walker is washing off his boots by the toilets. I borrow the hose and tell him that if it's clean enough for his boots it's clean enough for me to drink. Another quizzical look comes my way! With a full bottle I run off up the hairpin and into the field aware that I am being watched by the corpulent crowds. I pass through the gate where the inaugural 'Bash the Bishop' took place and head off for Broadhead Farm. Through the fields here is tricky and mentally I bonk going up the track to Fell Side. I eat a whole packet of Shot Bloks and trudge on. At the farm I take a direct line up the fell into sedge and regret it. I should have gone left

and around on the track. Over the brow and I have to descend to the track and then cut up left. At last I spot the cairn on Easington and my journey is nearly complete. Its 10 hours and 6 minutes since I left Waddington Fell over by the road. And I have completed a Grand Tour of Bowland. I take the usual holiday snaps and head off across the moor. I have had a brilliant day out, avoided the crowds and run and cycled round the whole of Bowland. I have earned my wings as a Bowlandologist at last.



Easington Fell summit and the end of a 'Grand Tour' of Bowland.