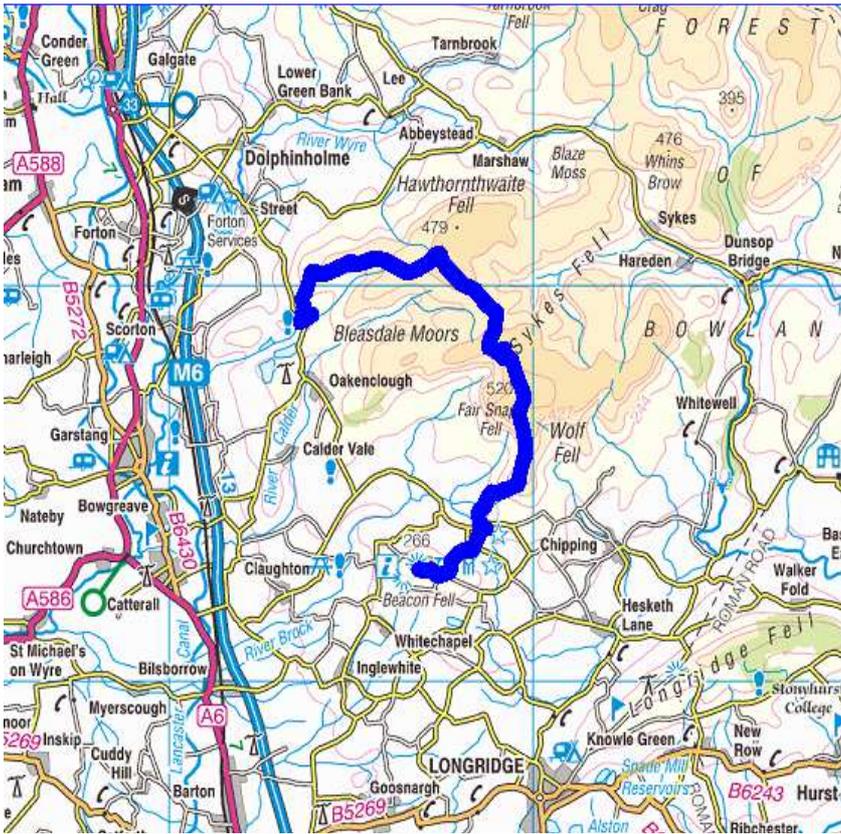


## BOWLAND WESTERN WATERSHEDS: WEDNESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2013



This was a route that I had identified on the map some time ago and that Ian Roberts and I had discussed but I had never got round to doing. Last year's monsoonal summer would have made the section from Fiendsdale Head north more ordeal than enjoyment.

But this year spring had been different. It hadn't happened! The snows had come again on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> March and Fiendsdale had been cancelled. In the Lakes and Snowdonia winter conditions still prevailed and I had returned from North Wales thwarted. In Bowland the snows had gone but the bogs had been starved of their usual sustenance. It was dry!

The plan was to park at Grizedale Bridge at the back of Nicky Nook. From here I would cycle to Carwags, lock the bike up behind the compound and set off, arriving back in the Tillies to announce the completion of another chapter in 'Dig the Peat'

So I set off on my Giant hybrid, crossed the Brock at Snape Rake Lane and finally arrived at Carwags. It was a lot hillier than I had thought and time had slipped away from my scheduled start time.

After a lot of faffing I finally set off at 4.45 pm. The watershed starts at the trig so I trundled up to the summit and set off. Given the east wind that we had had all month I was carrying a pack with a few layers in and food but as it transpired not enough water.

Across the fields on the Boxing Day route was bliss. They were dry and solid and I was soon running through the field from Watery Gate. I headed for the Blindhurst track hoping to climb the fence opposite it as I have done in the past, following a spot of pruning. It was in need of another visit as it was overgrown and I had to dogleg up to Lower Core and back along the road. More time lost.

Up the track to Blindhurst the farmer was unloading feed for his flock with no sign of the grass starting to grow. The fields cold and colour bleached by winter. So no chance to trespass across to Parlick. I had to take the long tedious climb from the farmyard and its schizophrenic dogs.

As I climbed Parlick a cold wind eddied in and I stopped to put some more layers on. An optimistic paraglider marionetted just above, hardly getting any lift and looking like I felt - tired and lethargic. Once on Parlick I set off on the long climb to 1707 and down the dried bogs to Fiendsdale Head.

I crossed the fence at the new water feature that has been constructed by Natural England just before Fiendsdale Head. The new stone slabs have damned the gully and it had backed up. I think the purpose is to regenerate the blanket bog. Personally I think it needs little help!

Off north from Fiendsdale Head I set off looking for the faint trod that used to exist. There was little sign of any trod or usage. At least most of the small peaty pools were low or dry and I ran across the bed of one strewn with the debris of a drowned water bottle. There was little sign of life as I reached the corner at spot height 434m. From here there was a bit more of a path to follow on the east side of the fence. Underneath the woody snow flattened heather it was possible to trot along and on the climb to White Moss patches of grass made it pleasant going. I was still concerned that I would run

out of daylight if the heather mown strip to Harrisend had been landscaped by Natural England.

Soon I was on stage for the enactment of a Bowland version of a well-known Hitchcock film. *The Gulls!* The cacophonous squeals preceded their swirling clouds. On the ground the remains of those who had perished for being noisy neighbours to local peregrines. The peregrines from Hawthornthwaite Greave must use White Moss for their trolley dashes judging from the debris of exploded carcasses littering the fence line.

Here the running is easier down into the deep gullies between the hags floored by gravel.

Soon I was at the fence junction and the watershed ran west. There are deep snow filled gullies to slide down into and clamber up, and progress is slow. Time ticks on but I know that at least I have my head torch in. And then the promised land appears at Grisedale Head. Like a newly unrolled carpet. It's flat mown heather on the north side and I speed up. Looking ahead I can see the curving ridge round to Harrisend. I am moving fast now and soon cross the fence to the south side by a boundary stone at 548 505.

South of the fence the mown strip continues and I am soon squeezing through the gate and heading across to the cairn at the edge of Harrisend Fell. The aroma of burnt heather reminds me how dry it has been and that gamekeeping arsonists have also grasped a dry opportunity, as I have.

I touch the cairn and turn left heading over to the last cairn above Grisedale Bridge. It sits surrounded by smouldering heather. The icing on the cake for a Bowland bonfire builder!

And then the final descent. I had not run this before and a narrow trod weaves down off the fell. The snow drooped heather masks it at first but as the waves of heather part it opens up for that most converted finish. A swooping descent! In the car park below I imagine I have an audience and that the speed of my descent will bring forth the applause appropriate for someone with mental health problems! I reach the road and finish elated. Trepidation far outweighed my

thoughts of success on Parlick but now it recedes like a fast ebbing tide and the triumph of a new route on a lovely spring evening surges over me. Even if the fells have felt that they are still partially gripped in winters pallid palm. Then it's down to the Tillies for the accolade of another 'Dig the Peat' completion in this quiet corner of the fells.

Distance: 11 miles    Height gain: 1700 feet