

THE BOWLAND WATERSHEDS TRAVERSE



Success but where are the crowds? Perhaps it was something to do with the 7 hours of Bowland aroma!

The route goes from Chipping Post Office via the main watersheds of Fairsnape (597 473), Hawthornthwaite (579 515), Whins Brow (636 533), Wolfhole Crag (634 578), White Hill (674 588), Great Harlow (695 612) and Bowland Knotts (722 604) to finish at Giggleswick Post Office (814 640).

Andy reckons that the route is just over 30 miles with 5300ft of ascent.

After the success of Les in 2002 I had thought about this route. I knew I had no chance of matching his time but I thought I might get near to that of Andy in 1997 especially if I could pick a day when the bogs were dry. Having dropped food and water I finally made the decision to have a go on Sunday 6th June. The main problem was who would give me a lift back?

I set off at 7.15 from Chipping Post Office. I don't know if it one of The Reverend Robert's rules that you have to get stamped first, but it was already getting too warm to wait.

I decided to use the road to get to Fishhouse Farm (GR 610 441) as on one of my reccys the slurry pit seemed to have consumed a lot of the fields and the ground quaked as I walked over it. For someone as fastidious about cleaning off, the thought was not worth considering! I ran past Fish House farm and counselled the barking dog – if everyone shouted the same instruction it would need an enlarged bladder! Anyway the cows were being milked so I would have not got through the yard without considerable udder fondling - and I didn't have George with me to deal with this problem!

As I climbed up Parlick the windsock lay limp without a breeze. It was going to be warm, and I was glad I had dropped a lot of water during the previous weeks.

At 1707 I stopped to drink, and as I ran down a dry Webster's Meadow a few shreds of mist blew up from Bleasdale. During the day the breeze on the tops stayed with me and helped to keep me cool. I was running without a shirt by now and most of the day was too warm for any top despite my lack of sun cream.

One again it seemed a long way from Fiendsdale Head to Hawthornthwaite. The dry bogs were a sea of cotton grass like lighted candles on an old mans cake!!

After a feed at Hawthornthwaite trig it was a pleasant and dry run out to Holdron Moss. Here the bogs may appear subdued, but as I waded through one it was more like pond dipping! I decided that

Jules Verne got it wrong when he wrote 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth' going down an old volcano in Iceland is just too far fetched when you can descend through a Bowland Bog on Holdren Moss!

By now I was well into the run and thinking about whether I could match Andy's time of 3 hours 39 minutes to Wolfhole Crag. Unfortunately I would not have the facilities of the Reverend Robert's Traveling Tabernacle that Andy had had in 1997.

I had dropped two cans of rice pudding, a banana, and a twix at the Trough, and having eaten them and drunk, I poured one can into a plastic bag and set off up Whins Brow. Once again I could find no real trod even though I kept right of the fence. Ian had said I had to go to the trig on Whins so out and back I went.

By now the knee was starting to behave like Rob Wynne at a Kylie concert! There was no way I was going to get to Wolfhole in 3 hours 39 minutes (I got there in 4 hours 9 minutes).I still thought I would be OK as Andy had stopped for a 15 minute feed so I thought I could make up time over Great Harlow. Another lesson - you don't make up time on runs this long!

At Brennand Tarn I stopped to wash off the layers of salt. See what I mean about cleanliness! I plodded up past Millers House and Brennand Great Hill. By now I knew I was well behind Andy's schedule and even thought there was still time to pack in and cut down Whitendale. It wasn't until Great Harlow, when I could see Settle in the distance that I began to realize that I could do it.

The water drop at the County Gate was still there and I drank 500mls and filled up. This time I managed to find a very feint trod up to White Hill but I stayed with the fence all the way to Botton Crag before I cut across. There were a few trods here and not as many peat mountains to scramble up. I ran on past the trig and headed down for the Cross of Greet road. I thought that I had finished with the peat hags. This must be a condition known as hag amnesia – you refuse to admit that they actually do go on forever and that flat paths have not actually evolved up here.

Finally I crossed the road (5 hours 28 minutes) and ran up the quad track to the summit of Great Harlow. At last I could see the buildings of Settle. I phoned home for my lift and announced that I was going to make it. It was time for a last feed before Giggleswick. It is best not to look at the contents of the bag of rice pudding as you squeeze it down - but with two slices of malt loaf it tasted delicious.

From here on you are spoilt by the quality of the dry quad tracks all the way to Bowland Knotts. It was hot by now as I descended past Cold Stone and ran the track up to Bowland Knotts Trig. (6 hours 15 minutes)



The crowds gather at Bowland Knotts!

Unfortunately I now couldn't remember which crag I had stashed the water in so I had to backtrack to find it and fill up. At the road an old MG was parked up, tempting but I would have spoilt the upholstery! I ran on sticking to the north side of the wall.

Ash Clough Swamp still contained its dead marinating sheep and at Resting Stone I left the path and headed across a makeshift pallet bridge below Foxholes Crag to climb Big Hill. It isn't but it feels it at this point after over six hours.

The run off to Sandford Farm (7 hours 11 minutes) seemed to send me too far right but I eventually descended to meet the road and the last leg across the fields.

My knee that had reluctantly accompanied me from Whins Brow had a go at folding up on me as I ran past Lower Wham and I had to start to remember all the revision of the night before on the PowerPoint. (I had put all the pictures from my reccy with The Reverend onto a PowerPoint - and used it to revise this last complicated section – sad!)- and no I didn't drop off a laptop the night before!

I ran all the way across the fields - there wasn't much choice by as I watched the somnolent bull all the way across the first field by Birchshow Rocks. The problem now was coaxing a stiff knee and cabbaged pair of legs over the stiles, and trying to figure out which way the shanty technology worked on each particular farm gate! At least Andy had a professional gate opener at this stage.

As I ran up past Close House the wife phoned to see where the hell I was. She was obviously enjoying the delights of shopping in Giggleswick - well known for it's closed Post Office and dormant pub. I ate some Turkish delight as a final energy boost to and set off across the last fields. I wasn't sure about the last gate but I eventually emerged on the road and remembered the way to the Post Office.

There wasn't much of a welcome. A closed Post Office and a bored wife. Still at least I was chuffed. After months of planning and dithering I had finally completed it (7 hours 47 minutes). The old granny looked bemused - having stared at me fondling the door of the post office obviously confusing me with the official club granny fondler! (see page 1). She found it hard to believe I had run from Chipping - some third world village over in Lancashire!

So that's another one down -where next? I've a few ideas but in the meantime you will have to turn to the Reverend Robert's hymn 'Blessed are the Bowlands' - which I'm sure he will hum for you if you ask!!

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