

STOCKS SKYLINE - DUNCAN'S DEVIATION!

Distance 19.6 miles Height Gain 2000 feet

The original idea of this came to me whilst I was reccyng the last section of the watersheds route last September. In December Yiannis and Alan Duncan went and ran round it in the frost and snow before they did the winter Solstice run at Parlick.

Andy W almsley attempted a round in March but was deterred by heavy rain and navigation problems. Subsequently we have discussed the route and Andy and I decided that as he ran up Croasdale Brook there was a ridge up to the right. To keep to the skyline meant you would have to run from the dam up to the white painted farm at Merrybent Hill 709 568 and then pick up the fence line leading up to White Hill. Over the Easter weekend I went and reccied this section and found a good trod heading up from Merrybent Hill towards White Hill. The section up to Merrybent would just have to be a long conspicuous trespass and therefore an early start.

Yiannis had decided to visit the trig points at 713 540 and at 768 564 near Tosside. I didn't really feel these were on the ridge and unlike Ian Roberts I don't quite feel the urge to fondle all the trigs in Bowland! The route down from Whelpstone Crag also needed a reccy as a lot of felling has taken place and there is no clear direct route down from the trig at Tosside. On a reccy last week I decided to omit the Tosside trig and cut down through the forest where I managed to find a fairly direct route through the trees without having to use the mountain bike trails.

I set off from Cockeret Car Park 746 550 at 8.00am and picked up the path to Black House 730 550 along here I crossed the fence and got on to the new courtesy path around the lake. The only sound was the distant hum of a fishing dinghy and on the dam a trio of anglers were faffing about getting ready to cast.

I followed the private roads back up past Hollins House and then cut across to the footpath and then the field corner at 716 559. There was a good trod here leading up through old dilapidated walls to 717 565 where I turned and headed up the side of the wall for Merrybent Farm. I was a very conspicuous target for anyone wanting to cull a Bowland runner – now that membership has reached epidemic proportions!

There was little sign of life at the farm and after a drink stop I headed up the wall to Hare Clough Head and the fence for White Hill. Once on the open fell I knew there was not going to be a problem with trespassing and I could now just get on with the route. There was a good grassy trod all the way up to where the inevitable heather cut in at Saddle Hill. It felt very much like the run north from Friendsdale Head – heather, bogs and almost invisible trods. The going got better up from 693 576 before reverting to type as I reached the first tower on White Hill. By now the sun was out but a cool breeze kept the temperature down. Northwards I could see Ingleborough where three weeks ago I had limped along with cramp, and blisters that really should have been grafted. Today by comparison was ideal, especially if you like bogs. The run down to Cross of Greet was enjoyable and by the road there was a party of twitchers on a bird race – the first to spot a hundred species so they said – don't ever say we are a bunch of sad bastards – even though I know someone who makes you sit on groundsheets in his car to prevent peat, or anyone else, staining them! Don't tell them who it is Ian!

The run up to Great Harlow was an easy plod, I cannot imagine what this feels like if you know that you will have to retrace your route all the way back to White Hill, as on the 1500's today it was a pleasure – especially if you knew you had been ticked off as a Lesser spotted Piblock! I spent a bit of time here trying to figure out which is the highest point marked as 486 metres – I'm not sure it is where the OS have it marked as lying on the ground it looks highest by the cairn at 695 612!

The run down to Cold stone is a delightful quad track and then up to the trig point on Bowland Knots, where it is best to climb the wall near the corner. I had a feed sat on the memorial seat looking across to Clapham before setting off on the final leg. I still had some drink left from the litre I had brought, so I did not need any of the water bottles I had buried in the crags the week before.

A really good quad track now led down to Rock Cat Knot where the wife phoned to see if I had survived serious trespassing. At Ash Clough Swamp a sheep laid dead in the bog, and past Resting Stone 755615 I was very careful to avoid the same fate as I leapt between the sphagnum tussocks - this was one problem Yiannis will not have had in December. Perhaps the sheep was a food cache for next year? The route now just followed the edge of the forest south and although it was rough in places I knew that it was fairly easy run in to the finish from here. I heard my first cuckoo of the summer as I climbed onto the rock knoll of W help Stone Crag at 759 592 and set off through the edge of the forest.

At 763 578 the forest had been felled and branches strewn all over. There is a path but not much of one until I reached the peculiar buildings that seem to be a generator just before Heath Farm. By now I had decided that the urban Tosside trig was not on my route! It would have meant a run along Bailey lane and back. I cut down and in to the forest at 762 574 where I had built a cairn to mark the way in. In another two weeks this would be impassable without a strimmer - another reason for choosing today. The mountain bike trail can be used but it is a lot further and seems very urban after all those lovely bogs. I cut down to the spot height at 252. At the end of the forest ride the trees had been felled and on Tuesday I had run left to 755 562 before cutting across. I wanted to beat 4 hours 30 so I tried to cut across the clear felled forest at 754 560. Big mistake! From in the dip I could not see that the whole area at the far side had been replanted and was unrunnable. The only way to get through

was to run in the drainage ditch. I was not the first as deer footprints led the same way - I was just a bit slower but much better at swearing. I finally picked up the forest ride.

At the entrance to the forest ride at 763 558 I had 7 minutes left and I could not remember how far it was. It was just a case of head down and run as fast as I could. The walkers on the final stretch must have wondered what the rush was as I hammered past them and hit the stop button at the car. Seconds to spare - and an emulation of that famous mad dash into Giggleswick by young Walmesley in 1997 - but the real version will have to wait for another day!