

## **The Bowland 1500s. 21-2-2004..... Andy Verden and John Rodgers.**

The 1500s Integral is an extended version of a 1500s round pioneered some years ago by three Bowland fell-runners, Les Orr, Alan Heaton and Terry Houston. This earlier round was established using a two contour criteria for the tops. More recently largely through the research and efforts of Andy Walmsley, Les Orr, Ian Roberts and Duncan Elliot a one contour criteria route was identified. This route is longer than the original, visiting nineteen 1500 foot tops in its forty-one miles and involves over six thousand feet of ascent. Whereas the original two contour round started and finished at Fell Foot near Chipping, the 1500s Integral for optimum performance starts and finishes at Stoops Bridge at Abbeystead.

The full 1500s Integral round has been a challenge that Andy and I have been eyeing up for a couple of years, since we first became aware of its existence through the Bowland newsletters and website and also as a result of having become more and more attached to the area over a number of years with numerous excursions into what is such a beautiful area of solitude and wilderness. Most of our running, either together or alone has been in the Bowland hills for a good number of years now. We feel that there is a unique quality to the area. Certainly the absence of crowds [sometimes the absence of anybody!] is a major attraction, as is the generally traffic free ease with which we can access the area.

In December 2002 we made an unsuccessful attempt following Andy Walmsley's schedule, giving up on Totridge as a result of a strong and freezing headwind, deep icy bogs, numbness and sapped energy. That day revealed to us that the round was a most serious proposition over rough ground. We kept eyeing it up though, wanting the effort to be unsupported. Long runs over much of the terrain visited on the round, apart from section three, became our training runs over the past few months with route options being considered and explored. Some of these runs were variations of longstanding favourites of ours so it was really satisfying to be putting a number of them together in the shape of the 1500s round.

So.....Saturday 21st February. became the chosen day. A couple of weeks beforehand we had felt that we were getting in some sort of shape to make a serious effort. The weather on the day, and in the week or so before hand was crucial. Heavy rain makes the going really dreadful, as many local runners can testify. Strong winds whatever their origin, batter you and sap your energies over the very exposed terrain. The week before was largely cold and dry, with a number of nights of frost. The forecast for the Saturday was for a very cold night before then clear skies with a light north easterly wind, freshening considerably later in the day. This actually proved to be very accurate.

A fantastic day of sunrise, sub-zero temperatures, frozen ground, knee-high tussocks and heather, jelly babies, iced water, stomach ache, hidden valleys, tumbling streams, more tussocks, strapped feet, sore feet, steep climbs, blue skies, amazing views, bitter winds, sunset, a real sense of sharing and even time for a spot of hypothermia to round things off!

Section 1.

06.36. start...

Half light, sub-zero, minus 5c, clear skies. We bid farewell to Caroline and young Richard who` s sitting quietly but excitedly in the back of the car with the dog on his lap. I feel very grateful for the lift this morning at such an inhospitable time. Driving here would have been an unwanted additional stress. Instead I had extra time at home stuffing down a pan full of porridge and syrup, washed down with hot sweet tea.

A huge sense of anticipation as we head off from Stoops Bridge towards Hawthornthwaite Fell. We`re wearing balaclavas, gloves, thermal body- cover, wind - proofs. Carrying food, water, spare clothes, map, compass, whistle, head torches, first aid, etc. Still some forty minutes until sunrise, the early start intended to get us well up the fell in half-light so as to avoid detection.

Steady, silent running, particularly as we pass the farms on the lane before we head off onto rough ground. Easy pace, easy climbing, no farmers or landowners about it seems but we`re both on edge until some higher ground is gained. Occasional furtive glances behind us in case the hounds are in pursuit! An old gin-trap lying in the gully we climb serves to remind us of the nature of the land that we`re moving across. When we arrive on the summit plateau in good shape and good spirits the whole of the landscape for miles around comes to life under the morning sun. A fantastic moment! We stop at the very eroded trig. point [07.21] to tighten laces and for a photo. It`s desperately cold. We don`t linger.

On from Ha`thwt .More relaxed now, first climb gone. Frozen ground making for good going although at times we break through into the pools and bog beneath [a sure test for the sock/ food bag /sock combination I have on inside my Walshes] Andy is wearing waterproof socks. On to White Moss, [07.34] no problems locating the highest point today. We can see for miles. We take a big sweep right across deep tussocks, heather and drainage ditches to Holme House Fell [08.12]. We stop for a few minutes to inspect another patch of the RAF Blenheim crash site which we` ve not seen before. [See web site Lancashire Air Investigation Team]. We use the newest landrover track for a hundred metres or so in order to avoid the rough stuff, of which there is plenty!

Return back to the fence briefly using the path up from Hazlehurst to Fiendsdale Head just to avoid the rough stuff! Then the enjoyable, runnable climb to Fairsnape [08.38] and across to Paddy` s Pole. [08.45]. Here we think we see Lee Dowthwaite just leaving the top. Green hat/ orange shorts or was it the other way round? We shout across and all wave as Lee? disappears down over the top for breakfast as we turn to head off for Totridge.

Spirits high, sun warming us a little, but still the north- easterly chill factor although it `s not until much later in the day when we feel the wind`s increased blast. We run steadily, not rushing, reminding ourselves from time to time of what lies ahead. Private thoughts and silence too for lengthy periods, reflecting on inner struggles maybe? We take the time to enjoy the views and stop for photographs, though less so later on in the day when the temperature drops and the light fades.

Totridge. [09.30] Sheltered and warm on the descent. Pertex top off for the first time today. Quite slow on the downhill, frustratingly so. My right foot has hurt each step of

the way so far. It's taped to support the Plantar Fasciitis, which I've suffered for six months. I've been running on it but probably four or five-hour's maximum previously. Today is going to be a huge test!. We run out past Hareden Farm to the clamour and agitation of a number of sheepdogs which shatters the otherwise sleepy, warm peacefulness of the place. Up the lane to Smelt Mill Cottage at [09.57]. It's now a truly beautiful day. Sunny and warm in the valley bottom. We're really savouring the experience !.

## Section 2.

From Smelt Mill Cottage we take two different lines up the fell converging again as the fence reaches the plateau. Andy is on the fence line. I'm off to the west a little, following a small streambed. We stop for a water top up when we reach the Ouster Rake path.. A bottle stashed some weeks ago. It's part frozen but we decant what we can into our platypus's. Up the short climb to Whins Brow [10.42], then straight back down. We reach Whitendale via the wall running down to the Dunsop River, crossing this at the weirs before running the path on the east side of the river; [rather than going via Brennand farm and over the top to Whitendale.] It's a lovely path to run on. It gives us a change of rhythm. We reach Whitendale farm at [11.20]. From here, previously recce'd we slip away up Calf Clough, following the stream bed in a beautiful grassy valley until as the sides narrow we're forced up onto a spur on the left bank which gives us a reasonable plod through the heather and tussocks. Heading in a NNE direction we see the fence and lumber somewhat to the top of Baxden Fell. [11.52].

The descent from Baxden to the Salter Fell Track isn't brilliant underfoot, especially when you're hurting. It's so easy to turn a foot over, extra pain we don't want! We move down reasonably well though, crossing the Salter Fell Track and setting off straight up the fence on the other side on the White Hill climb. We soon stop for another hidden water bottle top up [big boulders]. This is our first rest of approx. five minutes. I want to lie down and sleep! It's warm, peaceful and the grass is comfortable. I'm just arranging my bed when I realise that we're only half way! Stuff down more jelly babies and continue the climb, Andy and I jollying each other along and still marvelling at the day. He's a good man to run with. Very positive and encouraging!. After the now very familiar rough stuff which does get very tiresome and frustrating we reach White Hill trig [12.43]. Coming off White Hill on the descent to Cross of Greet is a struggle for me again. It hurts. I'm walking more than I want to and feel that the pace is far too slow. Grumpydrawers gets crosser and crosser! Lower down the hill the going gets easier and, pleasingly, with a lift in my mood, running resumes!

## Section 3.

Cross of Greet [13.05] It's good to lean on the gate! We have a good scan of the land lying before us. It's not a big section and we can see what we more or less have to do. But we have to cross the tussocks first!. We use a quad bike track to ease the way through the tussocks on the gentle climb up to the Ravens Castle [13.30], Great Harlow [13.36] and Thistly Hill [13.48] ridge. [I'm looking for the quad bike to use.] This stretch is uneventful, but we've not been up here before and want to make sure

that we have all the tops correct. We dawdle a little I suppose. It 's warm and I 'm in that tired sleepy state where you just do n 't want to stir those aching limbs anymore .I believe Andy is similarly disposed! ..It's a time when we take stock of what we still have to do. It's a huge wilderness in all directions out here. Bleakly beautiful. From Thistly Hill we angle painfully across the unrunnable tussocks to the fence and back to the Cross of Greet [14.09]. We push along quite well on the climb up White Hill, swinging away to the top of Long Clough and another ankle rolling descent to the Salter Fell Track [15.06], which we reach with some relief. Runnable conditions again! It's pleasing to find that we can still skip along like the Von Trapp children! Section 4.

We've been looking forward to this last section, an area we are both very familiar with and know it to be [mostly] runnable. We pick up a decent pace, cheerfully running up Wolfhole Crag until I bonk about two hundred metres from the top. I've sensed it approaching, but have n 't kept the sugary foods going in regularly enough. There's the usual horrible emptiness, cold sweat ,nausea and lack of coordination . Andy checks I'm o.k. Then potters on quietly whilst I demolish three handfuls of jelly babies and gradually pick up again. We don't hang around long at the top of Wolf Hole Crag [15.40], as there's no warmth left in the sun and the easterly wind is freshening. It's getting colder by the minute. Easy familiar running to Brennan Great Hill [16.02] .We don't need the water bottle stashed away under rocks near the wall. We really don't want to stop in the wind either. The sky is becoming that dull, cold ,unfriendly ,steely blue-grey.

Across to Long Crag...A brief conflag first. We take a lower line across to the Tarnbrook Wyre; across Gavels Clough I find this really painful for my right foot and wish I'd asserted my unspoken preference to go over the top of the craggy ridge. [We'd rec ce` d both ways previously]. Anyway we cross the rough stuff; the river and climb out and up onto the track spot on at the start of the little path, which runs to Thorn Crag. Three minutes trot along here then straight up and over the heather and boulders to the right. Thirty yards to the east of the Long Crag cairn [16.38] .An icy blast hits us as we top the climb. Pertex tops back on in some hurry! The wind is now much stronger than previously noticed and bitterly cold. It's also head on as we travel northwards across an exposed heathery, peaty wasteland to Grey Crag [17.04]. The style of our progress is a sort of shuffling, stumbling jog, accompanied by much foul language. Andy tells me he's feeling sick, but he continues running nevertheless.

Along the fence we make good time to Ward Stone East trig [17.15] and again to the Ward Stone West trig [17.20] We ` re pushing each other along quite briskly now. Perhaps the end becoming a definite reality, the desire to get out of the wind and cold and the light failing considerably as the sun departs rather earlier than expected in a bank of grey clag over Morecambe Bay. At the West trig. Point, Andy finds mobile reception eventually by climbing on high boulders and 'phones Caroline to arrange the pick up at Stoops Bridge. Love to all, then off again for Grit Fell!

I shout to Andy how impressed I am with our running speed so late in a long day. He feels the same as we move really swiftly across the moor towards Cabin Flats. We've spoken too soon though for as we near the landrover track Andy drops back and we start the climb up to Grit Fell at a walk, Andy 's feeling the effects of the cold pretty acutely. He isn't responding too well and it's apparent that he's suffering from

hypothermia. We have a bit of the fumble, stumble, mumble routine going on. He puts on extra layers; tops and gloves and I urge him to down his remaining glucose tablets. Andy seems reluctant to do this because he's still feeling sick. He only wants to suck one tablet so I get all parental with him! Grit Fell is reached in the midst of this going on.. [17.51] .It`s a fair way back down the track before Andy feels anything like reasonable, then we jog slowly but steadily downhill talking quietly and staring at the grey surface beneath our feet, looking for obstacles. It's nearly dark. There are car lights ahead of us in the distance on the Trough of Bowland road which look strange, we can't work out what they are at first, both a little disorientated I think.

At the Higher Lee gate we put head torches on and sprint the last half-mile along the river to the twinkling headlights in the Stoops Bridge car park. No we don't. Just joking! We just continue with a steady run because with what's gone before it's all we can muster and we're feeling sore, cold and tired! We arrive at Stoops Bridge at 18.41, some 12hours and 05minutes after setting off. It's been a very long day. A very memorable day, and we've just completed something that's very, very special to us both.

Caroline and Richard are waiting for us, Caroline with a flask of hot tea, which is superb. It's really lovely to be met rather than contemplating driving ourselves. Eventually I sit in the warm car, don't bother changing as it`s a fairly short drive back home. Watching Andy throwing up vigorously under the light of his head torch, something he's threatened to do for hours, is a very interesting finale. It sounds dreadful .Caroline offers appropriate support. I'm unable to move. Just sit in the back of the car next to Richard and the dog, just like we've never been away ! The temperature is minus 1c. Very tired now. There are no crowds in Abbeystead as we drive away.

I'd just like to say many, many thanks to Andy for being such a supportive running partner and friend and for sharing the experience of this day! . To Caroline for the transport. To Caroline and Zed for their patience, encouragement and support. To Andy Walmsley for his schedules which really helped us to focus on the task, particularly the first time we had a go, and last but not least, the Bowland lads, previously mentioned whose running and planning led to the creation of the Bowland 1500s Integral .What a day! Thank you very much!. As Andy Walmsley says " dig the peat "

.John Rodgers.  
26 .2 .2004.