

## Race Across Scotland Run Report 12-16 August 2023 – Lena Conlin



When you have a random dream to run 200 miles, this is a great option. GBUltra's Race Across Scotland is advertised as a 215 mile in 100hrs race normally but is actually 220 miles due to out and backs to checkpoints off the Southern Upland Way with no leeway for the time cutoffs.

My watch says I covered 228.39 miles. I had a couple of nav errors. But nothing major but I suppose over 96 hours, they add up.

## Background

In 2019 I entered the race at short notice. I didn't have a crew, I didn't have time to recce it so researched the route as much as I could. I had a lot going on in my life at that point including a broken tooth, which was extracted the week before the race and then the clot moved, exposing the nerves. So a sleep deprived start in pain struggling to eat was not ideal conditions. Falling asleep alongside the wrong road at 153 miles ended my race with a phone call from the RDs telling me that the checkpoint was closing in 10 min, and I was 10 miles away.

I was exhausted and my blisters had blisters. The race crew took good care of me and I vowed to be back, so I entered for 2020.

In Feb 2020 Billy and I went to recce the bits I hadn't done, we recce'd Tanquair to Lauder and planned to do the rest around Easter.

Then there was Covid.

It was planned that I would complete the Race Across Scotland in 2021, Billy would crew me, enabling me to sleep and change shoes more than in 2019. Things were

going to plan. Until in June 2021 I was charged and trampled by an angry cow. No way could I do Scotland now, I had multiple injuries. I contacted Wayne and Laura and explained the situation. They gave me a voucher to use, valid to 2023. That seemed a long way away. But I needed that time to recover. at one point I felt I would never be fit enough again.

I got a coach, Sarah at Renew your Running, has been amazing, rebuilding my confidence as well as my running. I have balanced running with swimming, pilates and cycling for a whole body work out. I have had regular sports messages with Caroline at Wellness at Home.

As August arrived Billy and I pored over maps to look for meet points, In 2019 you could not meet your crew before Glentworth, so we went with that as the first meet up. From there our meet points would be checkpoints until after Watch Water where we had a couple of extra spots to break up that last 21 mile stretch.





Friday, August 11

We travelled to Portpatrick. The journey is not a long distance from Aiskew, but it takes a long time, over 4 1/2 hours. We checked in at the Portpatrick Hotel and walked down, in a howling gale, to The Waterfront for our evening meal. Portions were massive.





We then went to the village hall for kit check and registration, got my t shirt which was stashed away, can only wear that on completion. Back up the steps at the start of the Southern Upland Way to the hotel to pack and repack and go over the plans for the next 4 days. We set the alarm for 4 am and tried to sleep. I awoke around 01:30 and could not get back to sleep, I lay as still as I could and just rested my body as my brain was in overdrive.

### Saturday August 12

The alarm went off and breakfast eaten and ablutions complete, Billy taped my known blister prone areas of my feet, and I put on Injinji liner socks and Drymax socks over the top.

My shoe choice was Brooks Catamount trail trainers, they have some cushioning and not an overly aggressive tread as I remember this section as having a lot of hard surface as well as wet Boggy ground.

We went to the village hall to collect the tracker, it was blowing a gale and pouring down. At 05:45 we all headed to the start, no race brief on the rock this year, but the pipes and drums accompanied us.







We gathered on the harbour, many more competitors than 2019. I thought I may not spend so much time alone this year.

Everyone chattered nervously and the wind and rain roared around us. I set the map up on my watch and my hand held gps. Wayne was doing a briefing as everyone clapped but I couldn't hear it at the back.

Then there was a countdown, and we were off, heading for the steps past the hotel, front runners, running, the rest of us taking it steady and it was a nice pace, but my heart was racing, I was not bothered about pace at this point, I had worked out that my average pace, including rests needed to be under 27 min miles. I waved at Billy as I passed, I would see him again in 47 miles, around 12 hours, I hoped.





A multicoloured ribbon of runners weaved their way along the coast to the lighthouse before turning inland towards Stranraer and ultimately the east coast.





Long sections of roads, boggy moors and woodland trails were spent chatting to different runners; this was so different from 2019 where I was mainly on my own and even got lost on the first section of moor, now there were enough people around to see the route. The weather was showery and blustery, sometimes it was a tailwind, that was nice.

Coming into Castle Kennedy Checkpoint (CP)1, 13 miles, I could see lots of people had their crew meet them there. This had not been clear to me in the race instructions so Billy and I had gone with the 2019 rule of meeting at Glentrool.

I had some salted boiled potatoes and jam sandwiches and set off for CP2, New Luce. I checked the weather on my phone and decided that it was worth taking my Gortex jacket off now, as I was cooking.



The grounds of castle Kennedy were beautiful, the lake shone in the sunlight. I said good morning to the fishermen who were camping on the banks of the lake. It was turning out to be a nice day.

I walked the hills and jogged the flats and downs and any uneven ground. This section was moors and woods, bogs where one foot is on the surface the other is submerged, energy sapping.

My left foot started to hurt, I took off my shoe and the insole had creased up causing a hot spot under the ball of my foot. I straightened it out and for a short while it was ok. Then it would hurt again, I would have to stop to straighten it every couple of miles, CP3 could not come soon enough. Coming off the moor to New Luce, there

were cows on the route, I steeled myself and slowly walked by, as I descended, I could hear the cows becoming very vocal. I momentarily froze. Fearing for the runners behind, I decided to go back up, in case someone needed help.



The guy behind came bounding past he said there was no issue, relieved I followed him down the hill. Avoiding a massive puddle. I spotted a little mouse/vole in the grass. I stopped and took pictures and nettled my hand in the process. Worth it though.



CP2, 22 miles, New Luce more potatoes and jam sarnies. I filled my water bottles to the top as I remember last time I struggled on this section for water. I took a couple of bits of chocolate to eat on the way and set off up the road. This is a long section of woods, windmills and bogs. I was a little ahead of my projected times the weather was fine and the miles were steadily ticking by.

At the Beehive Bothy, 27 miles, I went inside to sit down to sort my shoe. There were a couple of runners having a break, and a walker who was walking the route over about a month. I felt guilty at us all popping in and disturbing his peace. Shoe sorted I was back on my way. Sometimes with other runners but often on my own.



Approaching Bargrennan the boggy fields were boggy, I picked my way through. A group of runners ahead were making short work of the terrain and soon were out of sight. In 2019 this field was almost dry, now it was totally waterlogged.

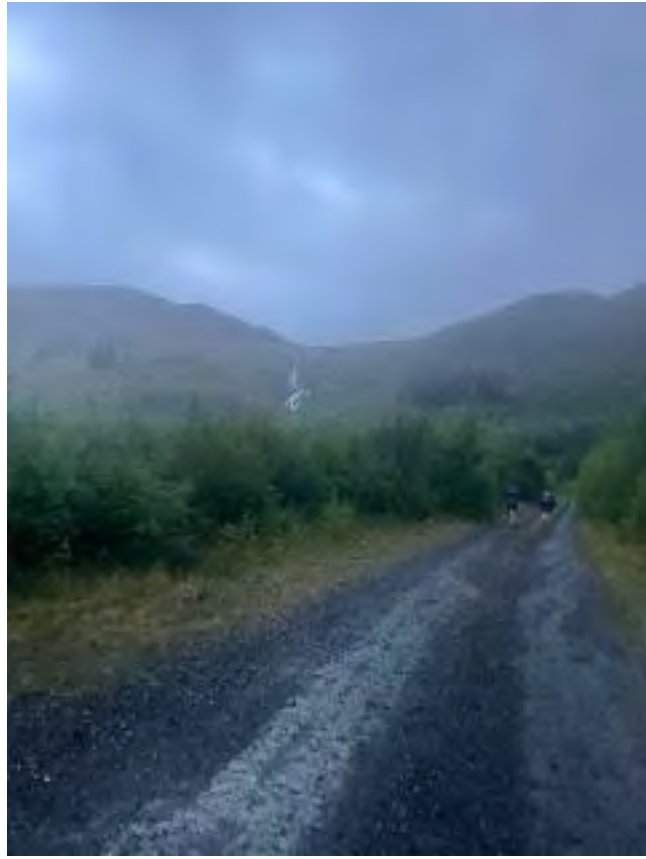
The wooded track by the river was slippery and in the dim light under the tree canopy, difficult going without my contact lens in. I see ok in large open spaces without my lens, but in dim light and smaller spaces things around the distance of my feet are blurred.

I took my time through the woods, but as soon as it was clear, trotted onwards, closing in now on CP3 Glentool and new socks and shoes. Wet through I checked in at The CP, 47 miles and went to find Billy in the car park. I stripped of my socks and shoes, the heel tape went with it but some of the toe tape survived.



I had programmed 1 hour rest here to give my feet chance to dry and for me to eat my rice and sausages. I struggled to eat these and ate a can of semolina instead. My feet dried, Billy re taped them, the insole of the trainer had left a hotspot. But we left it as now I had my red Scott Ultra Trac on, there should be no issue. I put in a contact lens and was ready to go.

22 miles to Cp4 St John's Town of Dalry. I had my head torch ready to go and trotted off down the road. I stopped to tighten my shoes and was instantly attacked by midges. I got going as quickly as I could. It started to rain, and it was heavy, I put on my coat and got my head down running the flats and downs and walking the ups. I caught up with Siobhan and Woody, I stayed with them a while.



Hunched in raincoats the rain posted upon us as we avoided frogs on the rivers that once were tracks around the lochs. I can only go "my pace", so after several miles of their company I found myself ahead on my own again for a while, I caught up with a couple of guys, and then Siobhan and Woody and a lady whose name I didn't get (sorry) caught up and Woody navigated the tricky bracken tracks for us all.

At one point I slipped and ended sat in a hole, Siobhan and Woody helped me out. As we hit the lane we separated a bit, I was with the guy from Luxembourg, he told me his wife was in the race too, and that their son was crewing, a real family affair.

We admired the now clear sky and saw a shooting star, my battery started to fade, he stayed and helped me change the battery by shining his torch on my pack. A great help. We carried on, leaving the lane to the boggy field where last time I had slipped and ended up waist deep. This time the bogs had duck boards and were easy to navigate. The last hill was longer than I remember and now was trailing the others. I crossed the suspension bridge and approached the village hall CP4, 69 miles St John's Town of Dalry.

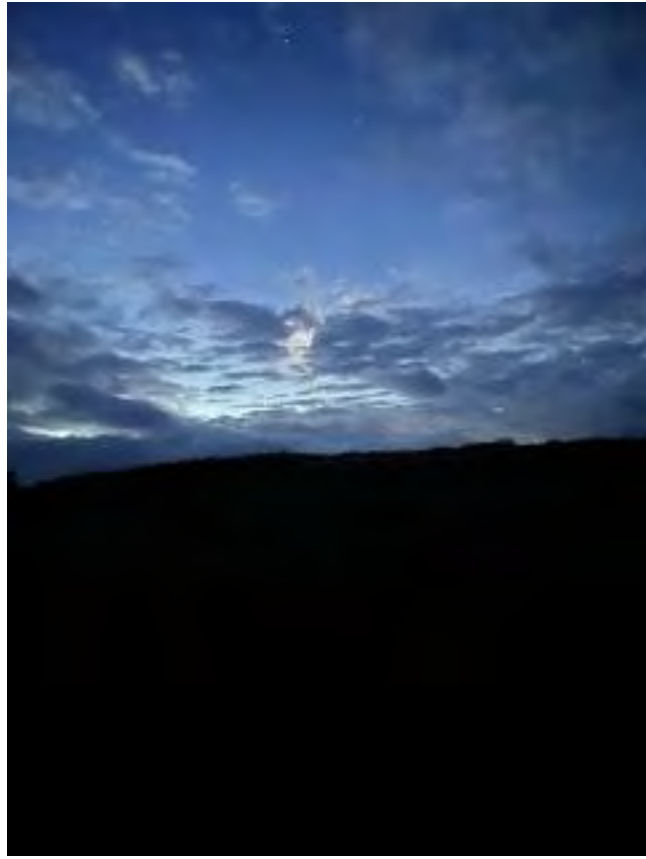
#### Sunday 13 August.

Billy was waiting. I let the marshals know I had arrived and they took my tracker because it needed charging. I went to the loo and then back to the van to rest. I had allowed myself 2 hours rest at this stop.

I stripped off my wet clothes and put clean dry ones on whilst eating soup and drinking coffee, I lay down to sleep with feet bare, drying in the night air. About an hour later Billy woke me to start sorting my feet, taping hot spots and the now torn blister under the ball of my left foot. Putting on clean socks and shoes, blue Scott super Trac. It was pouring down again. I thought I would take poles for this section, as I knew it had some long ascents and descents and lots of muddy/boggy sections. I went to the loo again and collected my tracker.



We parted outside CP4 and I headed alone into the coming dawn. Still too dark not to wear a head torch. I soon spotted the glow of another head torch in the distance. I steadily gained on that person. And then another. Head torches off, soaked though from wet grass and mud. Dry feet were a short lived luxury. I stayed with a guy for a while as we worked our way over ankle breaking rocks and roaring rivulets. I had got lost on this section last time, so was glad to get it over with. Eventually though I moved ahead.





I spotted a couple of runners ahead and worked on gaining on them, as I closed in on them, they started coming towards me, they had gone off track a bit, I had followed them off track too, not by far though, a few meters. We went through a farm and I could see peoples' crews parked on the road ahead. We had decided not to meet here, not knowing the area, how narrow the roads were, or if there would be anywhere to park. In the end we had opted for meeting at suggested sites only. This was only 8 miles into the section and I was feeling ok. The bottom of my foot burned every step but as long as my foot never slipped in my shoe, I was managing it.

My poles were still strapped to my pack at this point as I would only use them if I was struggling. Most people I saw had poles and were very handy with them, leaving me standing on the ascents, but I would regain some ground on flats and descents. The couple I passed earlier passed me by again.

This section is tough, 26 miles between the checkpoints, slogging up and down hills of bog. The clag came down masking the Andy Goldsworthy's Striding Arch on the summit of Benbrack. One of the highest points of the race at 581m.



I got my poles out to help me up the muddy ascent and to stay upright on the muddy descent. Shortly after, Woody and Siobhan trotted past, making it look easy, I stayed with them a short while but could not maintain their pace. They did not use poles.





This section was mainly forest, I like trees, but was fairly sick of the sight of them by the time I finally reached the forestry track to the Chalk memorial/Polskeoch bothy. I remembered this long road to the final hill, Cloud Hill of this section. I got down to the bothy, RD Laura was there, not long to free sandwiches and cake she said. A few meters on there was a sign for free water and food at the farm. I thought a moment and passed by, I could hear lots of jovial chatter from the garage of the farm but decide to slog on to Sanquhar.

My feet were sore, my pack heavy and I felt that I would just waste precious time stopping now. The road to Cloud Hill was long and winding, I could see others ahead. I put one pole away. The sun was out and shining making up for so many miserable rain filled hours. Cloud Hill had the joy of stiles, ladder stiles. Great on tired legs, not. But eventually I looked over the top to see Sanquhar in the distance. I messaged Billy to let him know I was on my way. I was amongst other runners now, we worked our way through the trails, cows and streams together. There was one point, where my foot sank so deep, that the mud formed a vacuum and I formed a road block on the only route across the stream. I tried to pull my foot out but it was stuck, a guy offered me his pole to try to break the seal. In the end, I used my hands to dig my foot out, pulling handfuls of mud out until its greedy grasping hold was broken. Throughout this Sanquhar got no closer. The group of us wound our way down the hillside through farm tracks, over bridges and stiles until, at last, a road. I walked as quickly as I could but did not want to make my wet sore feet worse, so took a deep breath and let the others disappear into the distance. I wasn't even half way and my feet, and their ability to blister were my biggest enemy. I needed to protect my delicate skin at all costs. Eventually I turned a corner and there was CP 5.

Billy was waiting with lunch, soup and a sandwich and started to sort my feet while I ate. The sun shone, there was a local parade and it was so lovely to sit down.





It had taken me 12 hours to cover a marathon. I had planned an hour's stop here as I knew it was daylight and I wanted to get through Wanlockhead and the highest point of the route in daylight.

Billy cleaned and redressed my feet, He had washed and dried my socks and I put my dry blue Scotts on; it was so nice to have comfy dry feet again.

I took only 1 pole and set off for Wanlockhead; there were a few of us close together on this section. the first bit up Cow Wynd was very busy, the locals were gathering for some sort of presentation, it was difficult navigating the crowds but I felt guilty for invading their event. Up up up, we went. The couple from earlier in the day and Siobhan and Woody, also a couple of guys ahead. I first met Siobhan at my first attempt in 2019, she was at the checkpoints volunteering, she was a superstar, helping feed me, sort my feet and trying to facilitate rest, she shoved me out of the door at Boston Memorial Hall close to cut off. And was there to pick up the pieces when I DNF'd. She had planned to do the race herself in 2020 but C19 and several health issues meant that this was her year to do it.



I felt remarkably strong on this section and soon found myself on my own again, trotting down to the old mining works.

I could see that some peoples crews were by the road. Billy and I had agreed to meet at the checkpoint as the 2 positions were so close and meeting too often would waste precious time. I would my way through the village. It looks a nice place and worth a revisit one day, when not racing.





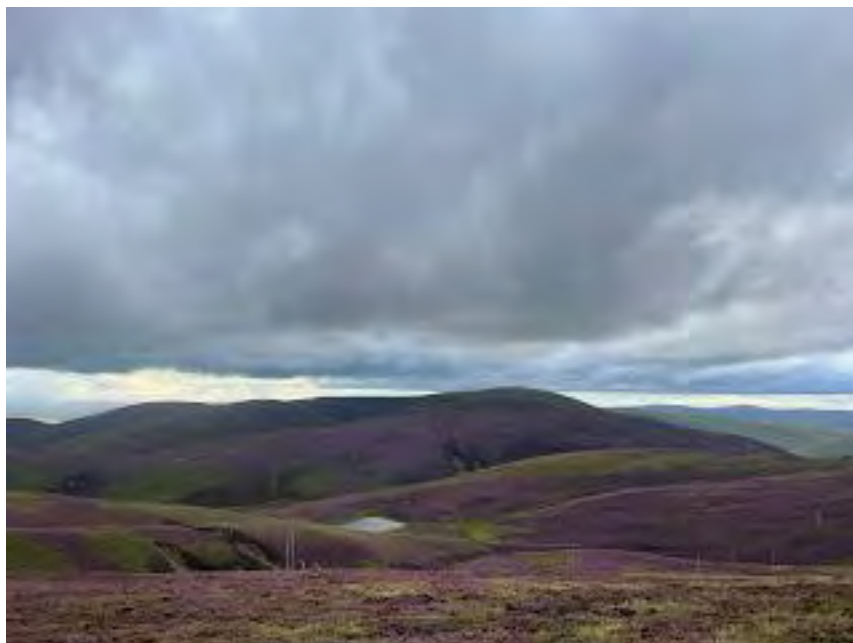
At CP6 the hero's welcome was amazing, as were the chips and melon.

I did not want to stay long as I wanted to be across the next set of hills before dark.



I put a warmer top on and some gloves and headed out again. Last time I did this section in the dark, the clag was down and it was pouring. I followed the road up, wandered around the golf ball and need directions from race control to find the route, then pairing up with Adam from there to Beatoch.

This time I realised that the route does not follow the road, it cuts across it several times, it then cuts off before the golf ball. I looked back there were people behind but no one ahead.







A guy strode past, and just ate up the distance, disappearing quickly. I slogged up the steep ups and gingerly worked my way down, I remembered 2 maybe 3 of these, but it was more, up down, up down, up down, I felt the route should be moving to the right and was disappointed to have to go upwards again, so steep, little toe holds in the grass bank, I grasped at the grass to support each step, hands and feet, hands and feet, when would this end?

Finally I summited and gingerly got myself down to a ladder stile, tired legs and brain making more work than necessary of it. Then down through Bracken covered bogs and streams as, yet again, the heavens opened. The light faded fast, the couple behind caught and passed me. We got to the road and I followed the couple to the lay-by on the A702 and a scheduled 2 hour break.

I got out of my wet clothes and changed for the next section, a night section, so I put 3/4 leggings and a long-sleeved top on.

After about an hour's rest, I slept maybe 45 min, I started getting ready to go. My feet were coping ok, the pain in the ball of my left foot was awful, Billy cleaned and re taped it. Clean dry socks again, I can't remember what I ate. I could hear the rain hammering on the van roof.



I set off for Beatoock. I would pass the halfway point.

It was not cold, it was just wet, I was warm in my Gortex jacket. I walked along the road and then left the road for a path through long grass. Feet were soaked again.

I saw 3 or 4 different barn owls, siting on posts, sailing through the night sky, not bothered by the rain.

I was on a wide track with several gates. As I closed the gates I would sometimes see the flash of a head torch behind. I passed the halfway sign and trotted on.



I could see lights ahead, they were from building works. I remember crossing the dam in the light of dawn back in 2019 so was looking for that feature. The whole area was bright lights and barriers. I walked past a car with someone in it. A lady got out and called me back. She pointed to a gate that I needed to take. I thanked her very much. I was confused and disoriented, where was the dam? Last time we crossed a dam then headed up the fields. It was dark and the clag was coming down.

#### Monday 14 August

I followed the line on my watch as there were no other features. I climbed stiles, bog hopped, but kept going upwards, there was no respite, I could only see a few feet ahead so could not plan my route. I got my second head torch and held it at waist height.

The lights behind we're getting closer, they were making a better go of navigating than me. I could hear them talking, it was Woody and Siobhan. They were moving faster than me but I stayed close as long as I could, the clag lifted, or we dropped below it, but it became easier to see, the rain stopped and the sky cleared.



It was back to never ending featureless forest trails, there was a stile and a field as a brief respite and then back into the forest.

Billy had said he had found a place just outside Beatoch on the route, as crews were not allowed into Beatoch. I kept checking Google maps to see where I was overall in the forest, I could see I needed to get on a track, go left a few meters, right into the trees again and then there was a car park as the route came out onto the road. It felt like forever until I saw the lights of the crew vehicles, I looked for Billy, he wasn't there, I messaged him, he said he wasn't there, he was nearer the village. I set off down the never-ending road. A competitor was walking towards me, it was the man who had strode past me at Wanlockhead. He said he had handed his tracker in and was finished. I was sad for him.

On down the road I went, where was he? Then finally I turned a corner and he was there, ready with warm dry clothes and food and a chance to rest.

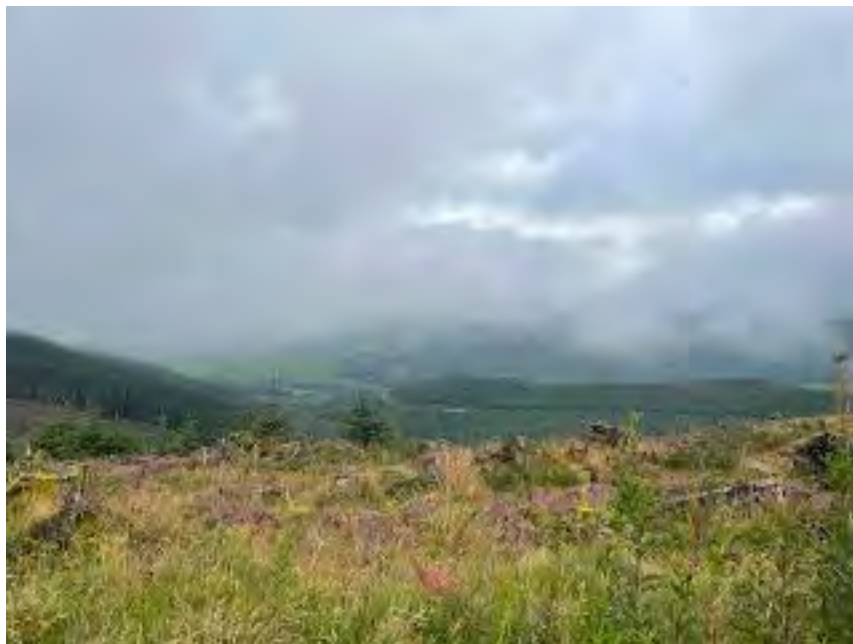
After a short rest and some food, clean dry clothes, feet redressed. I went into Beatoch CP7, 125 miles, to let them know I was there, use the loo and set out again.

I have no idea of the time, it was daylight and I am sure I was ahead of 2019. I did not want to be close to cut offs at this stage.

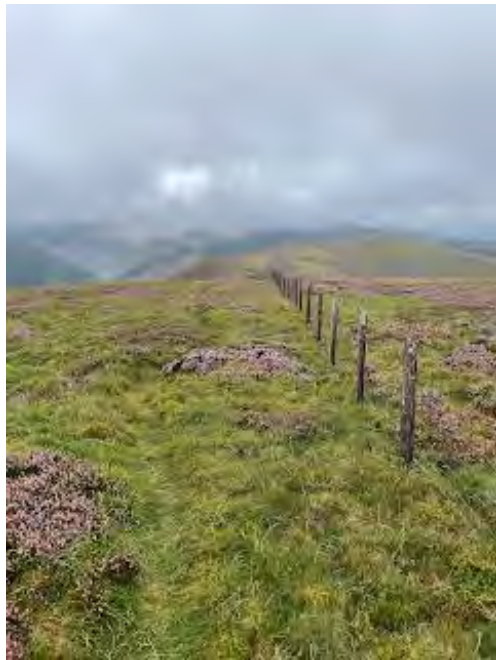
This year we were to take the high route, last time we took the low. First there were fields to cross. Fields of cattle, I settled around the edge, relieved to get out of the gate.

Through the woods, it was getting warm, so once clear of the woods, I stopped and stripped off my jacket. I wandered up the lane passed the farm looking to the turn onto the high route, apparently there is a ridge on this route, so I was nervous. I was caught up again by Siobhan and Woody, they must have had a slightly longer rest

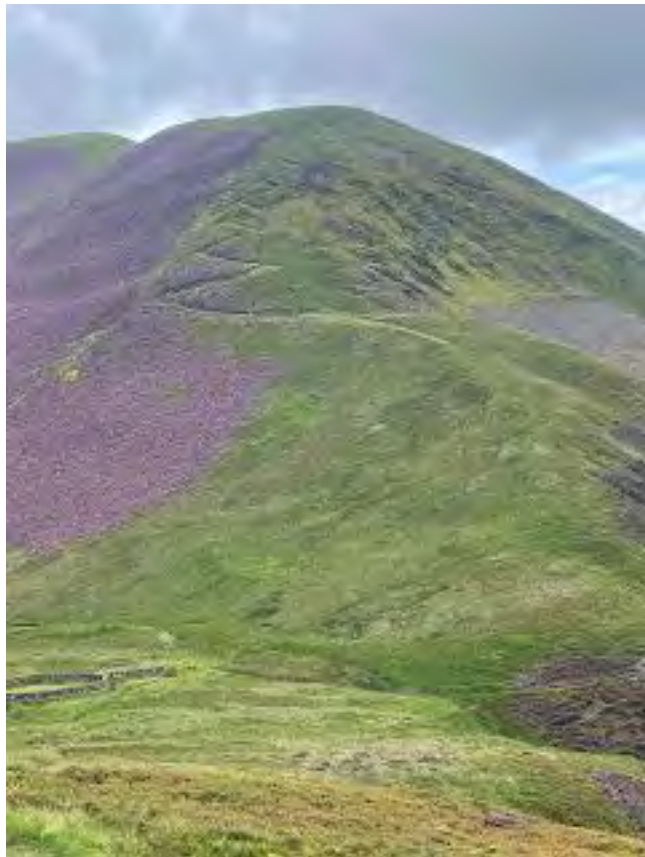
than me. Woody was familiar with the route and he and Siobhan were so strong on the ascents, the ascents were steep, stealing my breath and making me struggle, Woody said the ridge was not too bad, but I let them get a good distance ahead for fear of a public meltdown.











The purple heather glowed in the morning light as the ridge appeared. There was a fence on the left and a sloping drop to the right, I stayed close to the fence on the narrow trail, the clag was forming and swirling around the drop, it made me feel a bit dizzy, I focused on the fence.

Finally the trail headed down, I could see woody was already down; I zig zagged down the hill and it appeared that Siobhan had taken a rest on the bench, way down in the valley. I longed to sit on that bench. I followed the trail and passed by the bench, taking a seat on a cairn to eat an Eccles cake and watch others descend the zig zag path.

Right, onwards and upwards to the next meet point above Over Pawthorpe Bothy.





As I entered the woods I tried to text Billy to say I was on my way but there was no signal. I kept trying but there was no signal all the way to the van. Soup is amazing on an ultra, salty and sweet, just what I needed. And my Brooks Glycerin road shoes. Nicely cushioned for the 7.5 miles of road ahead.





This section took me hours of pain and delirium in 2019 and was the beginning of the end of my race. This time, physically my feet were so painful but felt better with a cushioned road shoe, and mentally I was focused and alert, crack on. I ran and walked to Boson Memorial Hall where a sleep was planned. I thought runners coming towards me had overshot the path to St Mary's Loch. But I was further down the road than I thought.

I had no trouble sleeping at CP7, Billy woke me from a deep sleep to get me back on the road. He brought me cheese on toast from the checkpoint and I sat in the sun getting ready to go again.



I wanted to get to Traquair in daylight and have a good kip there.

Back into trail shoes I was close to Siobhan and Woody again. I followed them over the hills and through heavy sloping deer gates. Towards the distant water. Like everything on this route, you get to see where you are going and then you seem to turn away, being taunted by your destination.

I knew Billy would be at the end of the loch before I hit the hills and moors to Traquair. I got to the loch and the path was covered in cattle. Cows one side, calves the other. No way was I passing between them, I scrambled on tender feet down to the shore and picked my way across the rocks until I was past the cattle and scrambled back up. Again the trail goes on forever, I could see the van in the distance but it took so long to get there.







Finally I entered the car park.

Billy was talking to Woody as he and Siobhan were leaving. I had been able to hear cattle making a fuss for some time now. Billy said the farmer had just moved a herd of cattle into the fields and lane that the route went through, the cattle were very unsettled.

Looking at the maps the only route round them was through the farm. Not an official path but it would past the Dryhope Tower and rejoin the route. I went that way. If stopped I would explain about the cattle.





I wasn't stopped. The sun was sinking as I passed the tower, I needed to get a move on, past the point where I was confused last time, over the brow of a hill and more cattle, big brown ones with calves. I was on my own. The cattle were calm and quiet.

I made my way down the track and through the gate, phew!! Along the lane the route was unclear, on the OS it looked like it went through the buildings, on my watch I kept moving off route, eventually I picked it back up again and set off into more forest.







Thick dense trees surrounded a reasonable trail but it was making an early twilight. I knew that somewhere up here there would be a stile, where I had sat in 2019 to change the batteries on my gps unit in the dark and had been woken in the dawn by midges breakfasting on my face. Where was it? Another turn, another hill, surrounded by the deep dark forest, and then finally, I could see light. I stomped up the hill and clambered over the stile.

In my memory it was a short downhill to Traquair from here. It wasn't. Long moorland paths as the sun sank led to more heather trails. I eventually had to put on a head torch, thinking it would not be for long I put on my emergency light weight one. It was ok but didn't have great range and night fell fast. I stopped and swapped for a better light. The trail was less clear but I made to a fence and followed that to a gate. I did feel like I was getting off the moor finally.

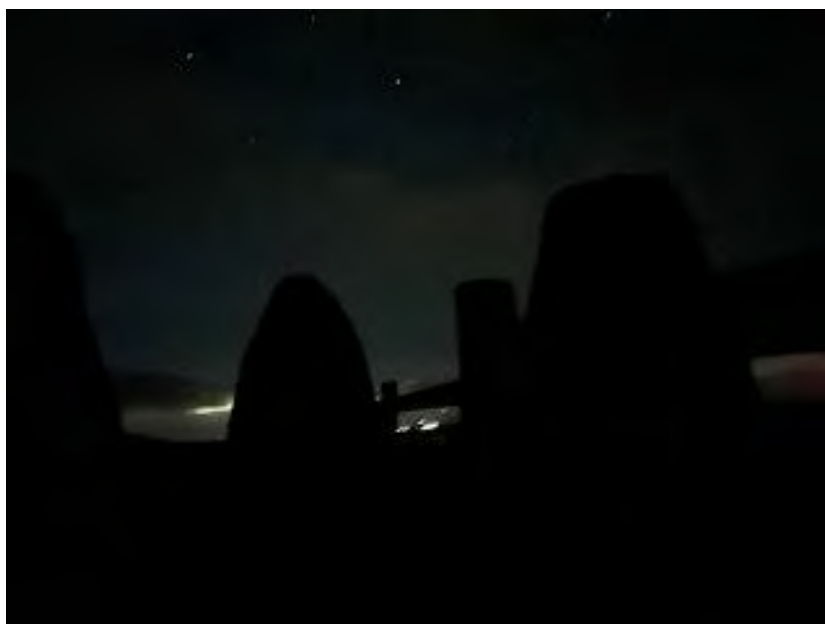
Onto a lane, remember, turn left I kept reminding myself. In 2019 I had gone right and fallen asleep beside the road. Race control had phoned me to say I was 10 miles from the CP (which was at Fairnlea) and had 10 minutes to get there. They sent someone to collect me and take me to Lauder. Race over. That was NOT happening this year. There was a CP at Traquair this year and I had a 1-hour rest planned before heading over Minch Moor to Fairnlea.

On the road I passed some houses and Traquair church, I kept on the road, it was pitch black and went on and on and on, and on, I was becoming dispirited, where is this village? There were no lights, just dark. I phoned Billy and told him that I had no idea where I was. Where is the village? He said I was close, keep going. I passed someone on the road, and then there was light. A lady volunteer met me and took me to the CP. Billy was waiting. I just wanted to sleep. You can't stop long, he said, the cut offs are tight, if you leave here at cut off you probably won't make the next one, you need to be gone by midnight. I went to the loo, had a short sleep and some food and drink and Billy sent me off again, following another runner.

Tuesday 15 August

I was oddly surprised now that although stiff at first when leaving a stop, my muscles quickly eased off. This time however, I found that the pains in my feet felt more manageable. Only if my feet slipped did the sharp stabbing pains happen. If I picked a reasonable route I could jog along short sections.

I passed the other runner. It was a long haul up the Three Brethren. I passed through short sections of clag but the skies were clear when I arrived at the top. I saw a gate and headed down, glanced at my watch and was off track. I slogged back up to the 3 giant cairns and saw another gate a few feet away, this track was made up of big pointy rocks. Each step was agony, I hoped that the trail would open onto a nice smooth road. It did, I crossed it and continued with its cruel surface. I saw a light behind.







Closing fast and a man sped (or so it seemed) past as I gingerly picked my way down. Finally road, my feet were quite dry, I was quite dry. It was nice. I made it over the bridge to CP10. Now I could rest.

I probably had about an hour and a quarter of sleep. I actually felt refreshed. I set off for Melrose and the chain bridge in the morning light and good spirits. I was further than 2019 and in better time.

Why is the exit of all checkpoints uphill? A rocky track leading to fields. Two men caught up with me and I was so relieved as, as we left the woods, the field had cattle by the stile. We went as a little group, off the track and round the herd. I find it easier to manoeuvre around cattle when I am with others. I was with brothers Jan and Tomasz for the next few miles to Galashiels.









I needed the loo, so slowed and they moved off. The next few miles there were a few of us travelling at different paces. The loos in the park were locked. I carried on to the rail station. I asked was there a toilet and a worker directed me to the loo which he was fixing the lock. He guarded the door. I thanked him and set off to Melrose.

I caught up with the brothers and was with them to the chain bridge. It is like the Southern Upland Way avoids crossing a boring stone bridge over the Tweed just so you can enjoy the chain bridge and then walk all the way back on the other bank.







Billy was at the bridge with a brew and a tea cake cheese sandwich. I sat on a stile to eat it. He was not letting me get comfy however and soon waved me off, over the bridge, heading UP to Lauder. This was the last of the sections we had recce'd way back in Feb 2020. I knew it was a relatively straight route but predominantly up. It was a lovely sunny morning.

The cows were behind walls, so that was good, I was run/walking the country lanes no one in sight, mainly. Then ahead I saw 2 figures, it was Jan and Tomasz. Tomasz was struggling in pain he had slept badly and strained his back. Jan wanted help for him, he asked that when I got to Lauder I could send help, he hoped that a massage would sort him. A short while later, Jan passed, he had left Tomasz to get him help. A short while later on a road crossing a car pulled up, it was Jan and Tomasz's brother to pick him up. His race was over, I felt sad for him, he had come so far and in so much pain.

Finally Lauder came into view, a woman, no 2 ran past, so strongly. Using her poles, she traversed the contour hugging path. I caught her later as she phoned her crew. Getting down to Lauder was one of the easier descents, I left the Southern Upland Way and headed up the high street for the checkpoint. I got to the Flat Cat Cafe (they do good coffee, I remember from Billy and I's recce.) There is a hall across the road, I thought it was the checkpoint, but it wasn't. My trail on my watch led me further through the town. My sense of humour failed, where was it? This is miles off route, again.





Eventually I saw Billy and he led me to the van parked by CP11.

I had a sandwich that Billy bought from the bakery, I struggled, clearly they had had the ingredients or utensils near onions. I managed to eat about half of it.

Billy got the medic to help with my feet. By now, my blisters had blisters. I had 9/10 toes blistered, at least 3 would lose their nails and all their skin.

With a relatively short amount of the race to go, Billy and the medic popped blister, Billy threading cotton for drains into the worst of them and then they were taped.

Those blisters bothering me worst was the popped one that was now like a gash under my left ball of my foot, the inside of right heel, where the blister was a blood blister and kept refilling, and 2 toes.

The 2 worst toes now had so much tape, they would not fit into my toe socks. I had some cheaper ones than Injinji, I asked him to use them. He cut the toe pockets of the two fat toes, put dry max socks on top, newly dried shoes on and I was nearly ready to go.



My pack weight had been bothering me so we stripped it down, repacked all the compulsory kit and a first aid kit, left the rest, including my pole, which I had not used since Traquair.

I set off out of the town, getting back on to the Southern Upland Way, I was moving along nicely until the cow field.





There were loads of cows. I checked the OS map for the exit and decided to go around the edge of the field. As I thought I had cleared the herd, there, in the dip, were cows and calves, tiny calves. Most of the cows nudged their babies to their feet and moved away. 3 didn't, they stood their ground, and to be fair who can blame them, I was the interloper in their home, I was off the official route. I wish I'd had my walking pole in case of incident. I picked up a stick, the field had an electric fence and next door a herd of interested bullocks. I was trapped, I would have to walk back around the edge, and then what? I still had to get through the field. I dithered on the edge of panic for ages, then 2 men were crossing on the path. I called over and asked them to wait and let me cross with them, they did, they were very patient with the middle-aged woman panicking in a field of cows, especially when one started to move in our direction. But we made it safely.

Phew!!

I tried to keep with the guys as long as possible in case of more cattle. We were following the way markers, which led us to a bridge, our gpx trails were saying we were off track. We back-tracked a bit but the OS map was directing us over the bridge. We saw a figure at the top of the hill, they were running at great pace, back towards us, and then another. This isn't the route, said Jo No 2, Laura phoned and said to follow the GPX. We worked our way up a hill to a gate and onto a moor trail.

The GPX kept taking us off the trail and rejoining it. In the end, instead of wading through heather we stuck to the track until we got to a small holding. There was a ford to cross. Norman who had been with Jo said that the route he reced 3 weeks ago was the other route but both routes joined here. I looked across and saw loads of cows on that route, I preferred the heather and ford.





I was the only one of our band of 5 who did not have poles and I had to run to keep up with the walking pace, eventually Norman and I were trailing, we chatted a while, he said he was on for his 3rd finish. I was quicker than him at that time and jogged and walked the twisted route up to the Twin Law, 2 massive cairns overlooking The Watch Water reservoir and final CP.

CP11, I kept closing the gap to the other 3. Billy phoned to say they could not get to the CP so had parked a little way away, he was with Jo's crew. We were to sign in and out at the CP and carry on. "See that black car?" He asked. I looked around the water, then up the road. "We are near that" what. I passed the message to Jo, who had had a similar message from her crew,. We were not amused, up that hill!!!! Chatting, I learned that Jo was a fellow Lakesman triathlete, and her crew were Lakesmen too.

We signed in, used the loos and signed back out, over the dam and up the hill. We decided it wasn't so bad, because the crews were on route and we would have done the hill.





We decided to stay no more than half an hour and crack on, into the last night together.

After a brief refuel and short kip, it was time to go. I put on long tights as it was getting chilly. We had just over 21 miles to go, we each had 2 planned regroup, but the crews would work together so Billy could get to the A1 crossing, one we had struggled with using the road maps and Billy would get Jo's crew to The kennels where we had thought a good meet point after the woods, before the coast and the final push.

We did not think about the final destination from this point, we were going from meet point to meet point. This helped break the distance down. Most of the time it was just us, occasionally we would see lights and we were joined by Norman for some sections. After an early section of steep downhill grass where I struggled with the descent and Jo lent me her poles to get to the bottom, at the first meet point, Abbey St Bathams I took 1 pole with me. I didn't want to hold Jo up.



The route had some annoying sections where the gps and Southern Upland Way differed. At one point we ended up in a wood, there was a massive crashing noise as something ran away. We tried not to think of it.

We came across fallen trees, clambering under them. It felt wrong but gps on our watched said we were on track. There was no obvious route out. We stopped and compared the gps with the OS map. We needed to be outside the wood. We backtracked, finding a slightly longer route around the fallen trees. We exited the wood via a stile to see Norman wading through the Bracken, debating the route on the phone, we said we were not going back in the wood and would follow the OS map, Norman did and soon we saw a route confirming post. We followed a wide trail into Abbey St Bathams and our crew meet up. We decided to virtually grab and go.

I collected one pole in case of further tricky terrain, and we were off, pockets full of cheese; we set off for our next regroup at the A1 crossing. This section was farms and detours through fields of long grass with no obvious exits, the final section being a long, downhill lane.

Time had no real meaning, just one foot in front of the other. We saw occasional lights behind, sometime Norman was ahead, and sometimes behind. Jo was suffering with her foot and I was feeling tired. At the A1 crossing, Jo said she wanted to sort her foot. I said I would have 40 winks whilst she did that.



We got to the vehicles, the A1 had regular traffic on it, roaring past, civilisation after hours of silence.

I got in the van and fell instantly asleep. I don't know how long for, but when I woke, I had no idea where I was. It took a few moments to realise I was in the van. I must have slept ages. I got out of the van and Jo was just getting ready to leave. Martin and Billy came with us for the crossing of the A1 helping us judge a clear point.

The A1 at this point is a single lane each way but still 60mph traffic is a challenge at this stage. We crossed onto a lane that was clearly an old A road that had now become a fly tippers paradise. We bemused why people would go out of their way to dump rubbish and smash it up. I knew from reading tales of SUW crossings that the route took us through yet more woods, and we would have to take the highest route, WHY?

I read Lonewalker's daily accounts last week and he said that the forest track was covered in sharp rocks but that there was a space alongside to walk. This was great knowledge. The last thing our tender tootsies needed at this point, was spiky rocks.

We had to go further into the wood than I expected before the switchback that would lead us up and ultimately towards the coast.

"Hey, we just ran across Scotland", Jo said we laughed manically. We were nearly there.

"Just a parkrun to go", she said. "Oh my god! Did you remember your barcode. Hope you didn't leave it in Portpatrick"; more manic giggles.

Finally we descended steps to see the crews at our last meet point. 2.5 miles to go. Instead of being greeted with food and drinks we got, "If you get a move on, you will be 9 and 10th women, there is someone closing on you". Now, in a race like Race Across Scotland, the "Race" part only starts at the end. We picked our pace up. Down to caravan parks, we saw the sea for the first time in nearly 4 days, we were racing but stopped for a couple of photos of the sun rise.





The coastal path was rough going, winding along the cliffs, we could see torches behind. I was flagging. We turned inland and I looked at the time on my phone, don't wait for me I said to Jo, go for it. I'm going to try to get in in under 4 days, we have smashed this.

We had discussed earlier how we didn't care if we scraped in by a minute. Dead last, we just wanted to finish, we were going to get under 4 days if we kept this pace up. Go, I said to Jo, get that top 10 position. I took a moment to remove my jacket, buff and head torch, I was melting.

Feeling cooler I took off after Jo, sub 4 days, I couldn't believe it, we had crossed Scotland, been mainly awake and on our feet for over 95 hours and now we were running up to Cockburnspath and the finish. I had to walk a couple of times on the hill, but soon got going again. I felt I was sprinting, up the hill, round the corner, there was the hall, WHAT!!!! Where is the finish, ah! The finish was down a grass bank at

the back of the hall. The bank made my tired legs feel wobbly, there was the finish, and Billy and Jo.

Watched stopped 95 hours, 43 minutes and 21 seconds since standing in the wind and rain at Portpatrick harbour, 4 years since the journey started it was over.





44/57 finishers

10/15 female

We were presented with our buckles and had a finish line photo shoot. It was a great feeling to remove my shoes, revealing my ruined feet, drink coffee and go for a shower.

I still had one job to do. 4 years ago I picked a pebble out of the sea, the evening before the race start. The pebble had sat in a drawer for 4 years and gone back into my pack on Saturday morning. Pebble crossed Scotland with me, but the route does not actually go to the sea. On the way home, we stopped at Eyemouth and I hobbled from the van and ceremoniously dropped Pebble into the sea, job done.

Time to go home.

My watch says that I covered 228.39 miles and I have no reason to disbelieve it.

150 signed up to race with 121 on the start 57/121 completed the race. 47% completed

42/89 male 48% completed

15/32 female 46% completed

GBUltrs Race Across Scotland is a great event, it's tough, it can be lonely but you also make great friends on this great trek across the country.

## **Kit**

- Salomon Slab 12 ltr vest
- Rab waterproof trousers
- Montane Spine Gortex jacket
- Brooks Catamount shoes
- Scott ultra trac
- Scott super trac
- Brooks Glycerin road shoes
- Occasional use of black diamond poles
- 2 pairs Ron hill shorts
- 2 pairs Ron hill 3/4 tights
- 1 pair Ron Hill long tights
- 3 pairs injinji liner socks (washed and dried on route)
- 3 pairs Drymax lightweight socks (washed and dried on route)
- 1 pair cheap toe socks.
- 3 merino long sleeve tops and 3 t shirts (washed and dried on route)
- Several buffs.
- Petzl neo head torch with 3 batteries
- Petzl head torch as back up
- Petzl bindi as lightweight emergency light source.
- Garmin etrex gps unit
- Watch Garmin fenix 7x solar recharged whilst I rested.

## **What did I eat?**

- 4 cup a soup
- 4 tea cake and cheese
- 2 porridge pots
- 3 bananas
- 2 Eccles cake
- Some Savoury rice and a bit of a sausage
- Tin of semolina
- Ham and egg roll
- Cheese on toast
- Empire biscuit
- 1/2 tin beans and sausage
- Star bar
- 2 small bags of Salted peanuts
- 12 ish Gels
- Several bottles of high 5 and tailwind. About 16 litres
- Bottle of oasis x2
- About 6 coffees
- A bottle of lucozade
- 2 bottles plain water
- 3 small bags Haribo.
- Tin of rice pudding with blackcurrent jam.

## **And how do you recover from such an epic adventure?**

Hobble your way around Sorrento Italy for a week, Pompeii, Herculaneum, up and down Vesuvius and around Capri. We had to buy sliders at the airport because my feet swelled up when I walked.

Day by day my feet have healed leaving me with 2 main issues now. The blister on the inside of my right heel is still tender and the hole under the ball of my left foot is sore under my increasing weight due to all the good food. But the other blisters have dried up, 3 toenails have gone and my feet and lower legs have stopped swelling up.

Almost ready for a new adventure ...