

13 Valleys Run Report (organised by The Great Run Company) – Victoria Morris and Lena Conlin

Victoria Morris

Myself and Lena Conlin attempted the 13 Valleys ultra (<https://www.13valleysultra.com/>) and Tom Hodson attempted the 7 Valleys. Unfortunately none of us completed the course (though I think we can get at least 13 valleys if we pool our totals).

I have some serious concerns about the race organisation which I would like to make other Ripon Runners aware of, in case they should consider entering in future years.

I don't want to come across as being grumpy about being retired, or trying to make excuses for not finishing; even if I had finished, I would still not have been impressed by the event.

Obviously I can't tell other people what to do, and I can't speak for either Lena or Tom, but I certainly can't recommend entering any events organised by this group - or at least not until they have had a few years to get themselves sorted out. Part of me would love to enter for next year and give it another go, but I don't want to give them any more of my money! If I pay a lot of money to enter a race, then I want to feel that they are looking after me, which I certainly did not feel to be the case.

1. Kit list changed about 3 hours before race start. Most runners were not aware of the change until arriving at registration/kit check. (Kit list was a bit random in any case - bowl required, but no spoon! No requirement for compass, despite route description using cardinal directions. Eventual clothing requirement was for us to carry/wear 3 jumpers (plus t-shirt and waterproof coat), which seems somewhat over-cautious for September.)

2. Route changed DURING THE EVENT! Runners were notified by text message, and instructed to download a new GPX file. Anyone without a smartphone, or without a cable if needed to connect smartphone to GPS device will have been unable to access the revised route.

3. Route clearly hadn't been checked in the lead-up to the event. Logging between Hawkshead and Wray Castle had left a couple of miles of deep, serious mud bath. Extremely unpleasant, and could easily have been avoided with a minor route change. I understand that this section is the reason why a lot of people dropped out.

4. Food. "Pasta agile bowls" had been advertised. What was not specified was that these came in a variety of spicy flavours (Mexican and Green Thai Curry are the ones I can remember). It felt like there was a serious lack of 'plain' but substantial food options.

5. Food again. Checkpoints seemed to be reluctant to provide hot food - "I can make you some soup or pasta, but you'll have to wait while I heat it up".

6. Lack of support for retirement; no 'body wagon'. Retirees were asked to get themselves back to Keswick, and retrieve their drop bags themselves. I had to change money in a cafe to use a payphone to phone my parents who were thankfully only(!) a couple of hours away. I spoke to one participant who retired in Rosthwaite. His van was parked in Keswick, and his van keys were in his drop-bag in Ambleside ; no assistance appeared to be forthcoming.

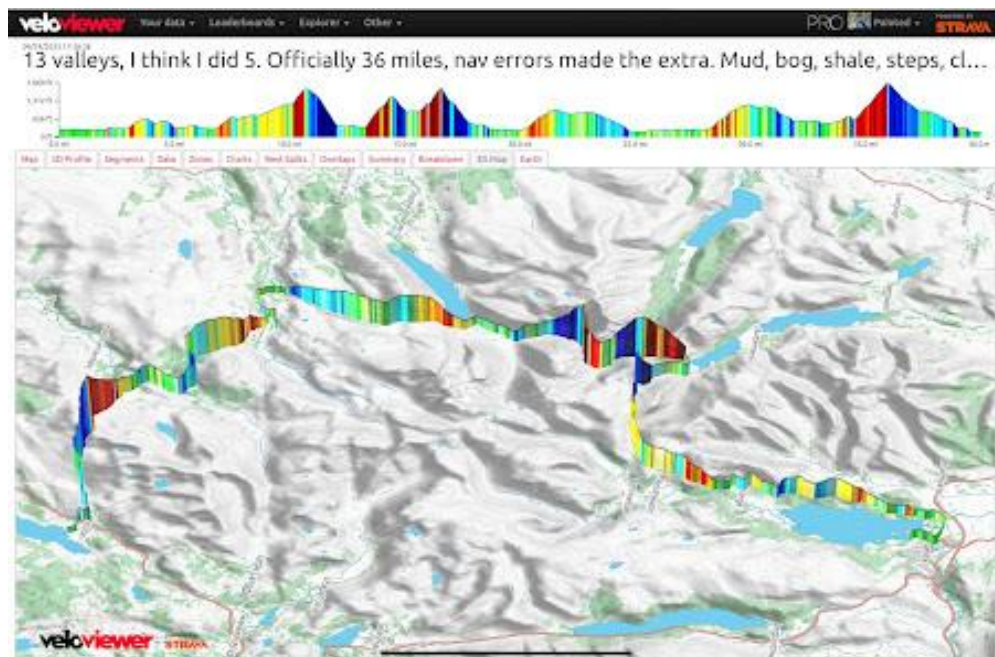
7. Lack of concern for safety/wellbeing of participants. Whilst in Borrowdale, a worried lady reported that her husband and daughter were in a group of 6 whose trackers had not moved for an hour. No marshals seemed to have noticed, or wanted to do anything about it, despite the fact that the group could have been reached from the nearest road in under 30 minutes. It later transpired that one of the 6 had injured their knee. I provided ibuprofen gel since marshals didn't seem to know what to do.

8. Drop bag chaos. Those 'in charge' of drop bags had no idea whose was where, and when/whether bags belonging to finishers/retirees would be transported to the finish.

9. General feeling that we were being exploited for publicity (nice photos) while we were doing well, but limited help if we were struggling.

Obviously I am sure that there were some excellent marshals doing a brilliant job of looking after people. I am sorry that the less-than-ideal service provided in some areas has clouded my appreciation of the hard work of others.

Lena Conlin:

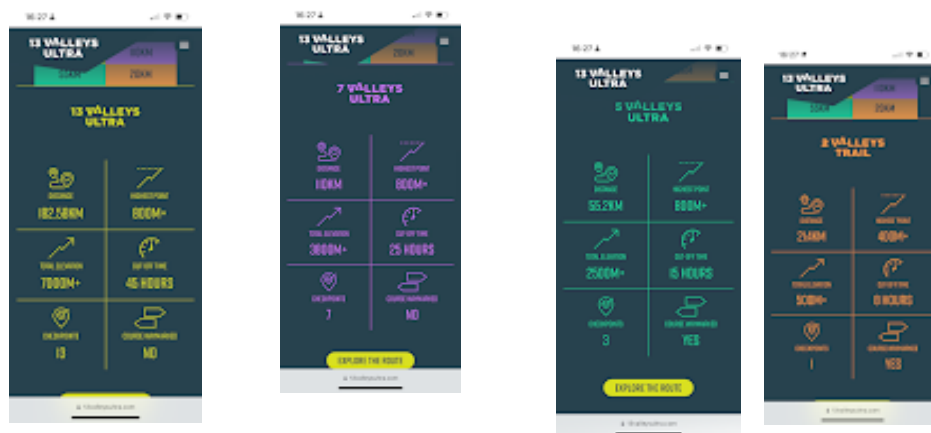


13 valleys Ultra, Keswick to Keswick via all 13 valleys of the Lake District 29/09/23 - 01/10/23

I have been nervous about this event for a while. I knew it would be difficult, starting at 6 pm on the Friday and going into the first night at around 1 hour into the race. I have not really done any running on the Lakeland Fells but thought that Race Across Scotland would be good preparation.

I entered about a year ago, at that point there was no route, I seem to think that it would be marked and that I had 48 hours. I was mistaken, the route was unmarked and I had 45 hours to complete the 180 km course, which became 182.58 km. The kit list was massive and they said if it was going to be cold we had to carry an extra 2 warm layers, if it was going to be warm, we had to carry another litre of fluid, on top of the litre we were already carrying.

There is a 7 Valleys (110 km), 5 valleys (55km) and 2 Valleys (20 km) event too. The 7 Valleys and 5 Valleys runners had to carry the same kit as the 13 Valleys.



Billy and I had booked our usual guest house in Keswick, Billy would meet me at 4 of the checkpoints. Supporters were not allowed at most checkpoints.

I packed my kit, my race vest was fit to burst, it weighed so much. We drove to Keswick and went straight to the Theatre By The Lake to register. I went through kit check and struggled to get all my kit back in.



Billy suggested we just bought a bigger pack. We went to Cotswold and bought a bright yellow Ultimate Direction 20 litre Fast pack. It had no bottles with it and my Salomon ones were too tall, Cotswold did not have the bottles.

So we traipsed around town to find some, eventually getting 2 OMM bottles from Kong, that fitted.

We went back to the guest house and repacked my bags. Everything fitted and was accessible.

Then we found out that cold weather kit was required, 2 more warm tops.

The pack was so heavy but everyone else was in the same boat.

We walked back to the start area at Crow Park to wait for the 6pm start. It was nice to catch up with the runners that I already knew, Victoria, Sean, Andy and Kev. Also Laura who was doing the 7 Valleys starting at Ambleside at 6 am Saturday.

We gathered in the start area, the compare introduced some of the runners who were taking part.

They counted down and we were off, as is usual, I was soon at the back of the pack.



There had been 96 on the start list, there did not seem that many runners. I had to run a bit quicker than I would like, but I wanted to keep people in sight as long as possible.

A couple of miles in, there was a jacket on the floor in the woods. Others were running past it. It looked as if it had just fallen. I stopped and picked it up, the bulging pockets probably contained gloves and hat, as that is what I do. The jacket was highly likely to be one of the runners. So I carried it with me as I ran to catch sight of the other runners. Once they were back in sight I messaged Billy to say I had a size 12 blue Montane Via jacket and could he let the race crew know, then the owner could wait for me to get to Honister with it. There was a point where I lost sight of the runners ahead again, I passed through a gate and onto a road. There was a van there, the lady said that other runners had gone back onto the track. I went back, I could see no path.



It was still light at this point, the runners behind caught up and said the path was by the wall. You would never have known, it was so overgrown, I was bent double at times, and soon it got dark under the tree canopy but soon we emerged onto wet boggy ground, no more dry feet.

As it came in dark I was soon on my own again but gently gaining on the lights ahead. It was Andy and Kev, I had been behind them when the path had disappeared. It was good to have caught back up. Soon we caught up with 2 ladies, I asked if one had lost a jacket, they checked and were shocked to realise it was gone. I returned it and ran on. It was nice not to be carrying something.



I stuck with Andy and Kev and we approached lights; we thought it was a caravan park, we carried on past the Honister mine buildings and then realised we had



passed the checkpoint. We turned round and went back. There was nothing I fancied at that moment so I went to See Billy at the van.

I had a drink and got some food. People were leaving the checkpoint, Billy wanted me to leave with them. We were about 40 min ahead of cut off.

I could see the lights trailing ahead and above me, I stopped and put my jacket on, it was likely to be cold up there. The climb went on for ever, not overly steep, but long, as we went over the top, the trail turned

to shale, that rolled underfoot. I took my time and the others started to pull away, but I couldn't rush, my left calf was threatening to cramp. I could see lights across the valley, again high up, so knew another climb was coming. As the descent became less technical, I started to catch up the others, the 2 ladies and Andy and Kev.

We passed inches from the heads of some huge cattle that were laying by the path. Scary moment. We crossed the valley and started to ascend, the 2 ladies and Andy started to pull away using their walking poles. Kev got his out and I decided I would too. By the time I had wriggled them out of my pack and put them together, the others had gone and I was alone again.

The path was clear though and I could follow the line on my watch. It felt such a long climb again, once at the top, the descent was not as steep, I could still see lights in the distance and jogged and hiked on, I was melting in my coat though.

The full moon was bright and the air was mild, because I was working I was too warm. I was relieved to get to the Black Sail aid station. Andy, Kev and the ladies were just leaving. I stripped off my jacket, refilled my bottles, drank flat cola, had half a banana and some ready salted crisps to help stop my leg going into cramp. It was so good to take off my pack to put my jacket away. I struggled back into it and set off, following the lights.

Soon the path became unclear, I followed the line on my watch and clambered up some rocks. There were some footprints on it so I knew it was right. At the top, however, there was no clue as to where to go next. I went left a bit, right a bit, towards the roaring river for a bit. Then I spotted lights, I aimed for them and then realised that I was heading back to the aid station. I went back looking for a path. A man caught up, together we worked out the route.

Occasionally it would rain a bit, but it came to nothing, but hid the foot prints on the rocks that I had been using. Suddenly there was a marshal at the top of the hill, It was good to know we were on the right route. The track headed down and I moved away from the other runner. My head torch battery started to fail, I knew I could not be far from the next aid station and with great relief there was a load of lights and as I got nearer I could see the 13 Valleys banner.

I went to the loo, changed my battery, the other runner arrived and after some food, I set off, leaving him to his brew. I was 30 min ahead of cut off and the man and I were the last runners. There were 4 trackers and DNF tags on the table.

This next section had no big climbs, I hoped to make up some time, the section started flattish and was soon on road, I could see lights across the road and assumed it was runners. Soon I was back on trail and heading upwards. The lights were on a different trail to me. The paths were like streams, my feet always wet, but it was not cold, I missed the point where the route left the nice track. When I realised, I set off cross country to get back on track. I was following the line, but the route was indistinct and I kept losing it, but occasionally I would see a footprint on a rock.

Soon I was wading through wetlands aiming for the top of a lake. On route, off route. The runner behind was catching up, following the light on the back of my pack. I crossed the river and set off uphill, ahead there were cattle laying each side of the track with 1 standing guard, I had to go through, I walked slowly, looking at the ground ahead and quietly thanking the cows for letting me through. I made it and pushed on, jogging along the track until I was faced with more cattle. The guard one was moving. I could not approach, I aimed around the little herd looking at the line on my watch, I was off track again, I walked through the grass, bushes and bogs, getting back on track.

The other runner, Colin, caught up and we worked the route out together as we had earlier in the evening after Black Sail. Annoyingly we soon found ourselves back on the good track. The route turned down and I broke away again. It seemed Colin's strength was ups and mine was downs.

I kept checking back to see he was still nearby, knowing there was no one else behind us. I reached the Eskdale Aid station a few minutes ahead of Collin. I had some rice pudding and bread. A few cups of flat cola and set off again. I knew Colin would catch up on the climb.

I found out that the route had changed due to weather. The organisers had sent a new GPX . I had no way to upload it onto my watch and no signal for OS maps. It was on the 5 Valleys route though, so I assumed it would be signed from that point.

tagged on to 2 other runners leaving Eskdale. One was pretty good at navigating so we were making good progress. As the climb started, I thought they would pull away, but I kept up. We came across another runner who was unwell, dizzy, and cold. We held him up whilst he got his insulated layer on and had some nutrition, I managed to get a signal on my phone and phoned the control centre. I could hear them but they could not hear me. I ended the call and texted, staying in the same spot, not wanting to lose signal. I was starting to get a little chilly and thought about putting my coat back on. The runner felt he could get down off the hill, so I let control know we were making our way down. As soon as we were moving, I warmed back up pretty quickly. Soon the runner was feeling better and one of the other guys started to struggle with tiredness.

Colin caught us and overtook us, He said that he had fallen, but sorted himself out.

Our progress was steady but we would struggle to get to Coniston by 08:15. At the start of the last climb, we could not find the path. There was a gate, but no path, just a raging river to cross. We looked up and down stream and in the end we went back to the bottom of the hill crossed at a bridge and set off the last 4 miles to Coniston. We now knew we could not make it in time, we worked our hardest though to get back as soon as we could. At last we could descend, the views were stunning, a long wide path leading us down.



Once in the town we missed the turn and headed up the wrong street. We soon got back on track however, making it to the boat house at 09:50. We knew it was over for us. Colin was there too. They sent transport to return us to Keswick, But I got Billy to collect me.

The organisers have been in touch today and offered me a free place next year as I was timed out whilst helping another runner.

The organisers have put out a survey and are listening to feedback. I think this was a massive learning curve for them and that next year there will be changes.

96 were entered

68 started

26 finished