

Inaugural Silva Dales Traverse

Sunday 7th April 2024

The Silva Northern Traverse follows the Wainwright's coast to coast, St Bees to Robin Hood's Bay 300 km and was recently joined by the Silva Lakes Traverse, St Bees to Shap 100km. Then this year the Silva Dales Traverse, Kirkby Stephen to Richmond 55km and The Silva Moors Traverse, Ingleby Cross to Robin Hood's Bay 80 km.

I was initially drawn to the Moors Traverse as I am familiar with most of the route. Starting at 7 am at Ingleby Cross was reasonably local, but finishing in Robin Hood's Bay at 10pm on a Sunday, and work in Ripon at 8:30 am Monday did not seem a good idea, so I went for the Dales Traverse.

I managed to recce the last 15 miles, from Old Gang Lead Mines back to Richmond so was aware of the waterlogged sheep fields and the slimy rock steps that was more like a fast-flowing beck.

The rest was mainly a surprise, except Swinner Gill which I had done on the Dales Runner 30 last year.

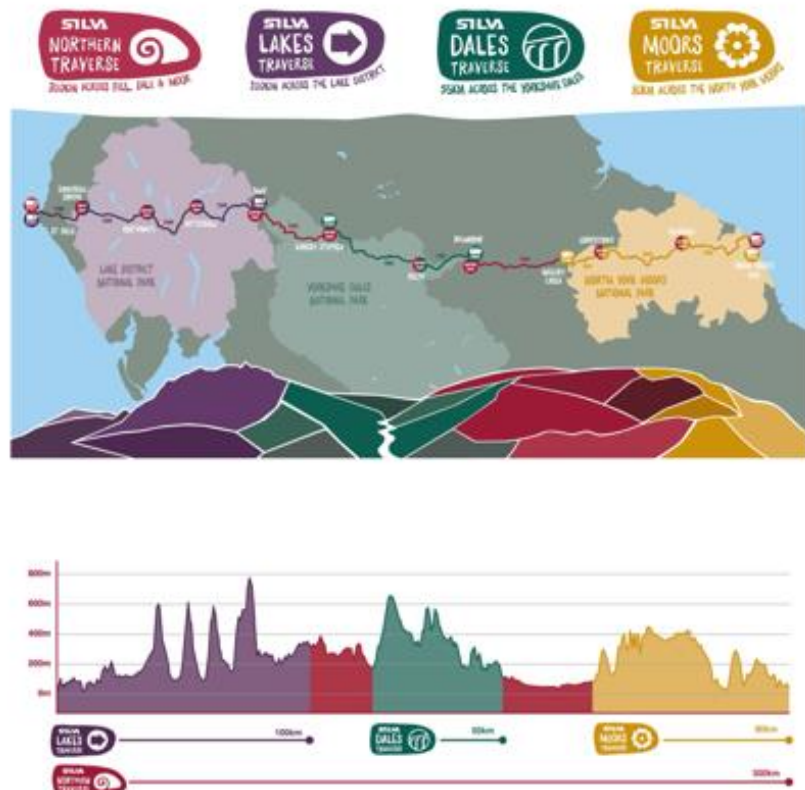
There was a bus available from Richmond at 7:30 am Sunday to take us to Kirkby Stephen. Once there our kit was checked; it was a very precise kit list, the same for all four distances. We were given our numbers, tracker, map and t-shirt. There was time to repack packs and not much more. It was nice to not have much waiting around. There were several Northern Traverse athletes having breakfast and a rest after their first wild night out on the fells.

After questioning others about how far Nine Standards Rigg was, I decided to start with my poles. It was really windy but the rain stopped in time to start at 10 am, and the sun even came out. We ran through Kirkby Stephen with Marshall's guiding us through the ally ways.

The climb started within a mile. It was road at first but soon the road turned to trail and then bogs. The nine cairns loomed on the horizon. I was near the back of the field at this point. Finally at the top, the full force of the wind hit, mainly sidewinds. It was an effort to remain on track ... track, what track? It was just a series of bogs that went on for what felt like miles. It was a relief to drop down towards Ravenseat and Keld.

Relief was short lived for next came the long slog that is Swinner Gill. At the top the sun disappeared and a massive hailstorm hit. It was a really exposed part of the course. Hood up, head down, perpetual forward motion. On the descent into Gunnerside Gill the hail stopped and there was a rainbow over the valley.

FOUR ICONIC TRAVERSES



The descent was steep slippery mud, thank goodness for the poles. The climb out was savage, steep muddy trails and strong winds trying to take me off the side, I struggled upwards and saw ruins in the distance, I mistook these for the lead mines, they weren't. A sign sent me up a steep scree slope, which again felt never ending, but it did finally flatten and turn down woods.

I saw the Old Gang chimney in the distance. At last. I found this section easier going and was so happy to reach the old buildings, 15 miles to go.

I started to make better progress on the better terrain and soon was in Reeth. The Dales Bike centre café was the only aid station on the route. A lovely volunteer refilled one of my bottles, I made use of the facilities and set off home. A mix of road and boggy fields and that awful slippery path through the woods that thought it was a beck. I made good progress now passing a few of the amazing Northern Traverse athletes. I was so happy to see Richmond and run down to the finish at the football club.

The time limit was 12 hours. I completed it in 9:25:12.

Colm O'Cofaigh also ran it, completing the course in 9:35:09.

It was a small field of 49 runners, with 43 completing.

The Northern Traverse have 5 days to get to Robin Hood's Bay.

