

Tour de Helvellyn 2024

1, 2, 3, GO!!!

Well not really, Nav4 races are really relaxed and casual in the sense that there's no mass start. There's porridge and tea facilities an hour before the event opens for you to help yourselves. Sitting in the community hall in Askham village, supping tea and eyeing up the 'competition' I waited for Dan Miller to roll in. That sounds like we'd had a night out boozing the evening before, but the truth was, we had arrived to register and then get an early night in our campervans. Being able to register the night before didn't give us much advantage to the morning's procedure. Lining up to enter the 'No Faffing Area' I felt an uncomfortable feeling of anxiety. Had I packed the right kit to pass the kit check? Had I bought enough food and was it the right food? Should I start my watch? Should I use the race pro function to help keep me on track for a good time? Have I chosen the right shoes? Which is the best route to take? HELP, HELP, HELP Screamed inside my head. But what was I worried about?

We'll see shall we.

Once we stepped outside into the cold dark air we were faced with the first challenge of the day. Standing in the middle of the crossroads of the village we both laughed and said which way is it?

The course is set for you to begin whenever you choose to time it accurately for your pace. All because, one of the very few rules is, the checkpoint at Side Farm in Patterdale doesn't open until 09:30hrs and you're not allowed to pass there before. Otherwise you are instantly disqualified. Then you simply have to make it back to the same checkpoint by 16:30hrs. That's it. You can take any route you like to meet all of the other checkpoints along the way before arriving back at the finish for soup, cake and more tea.



It's known as a tough winter race. It forms a lollipop shape with the first and last 10ish miles as the stick. Leaving an 18ish miles loop. Once you reach Glenridding you take on the long climb up to Sticks Pass (700m) at the highest point of the day. Here is where we felt the full force of the wind. With temperatures recorded at feels like minus 12 made even lower by the wind chill we ploughed on. The freezing rain was mixed with everyone splashing through the muddy stream of icy water running down the hillside making it a truly 'type 2 fun' experience.

Dropping down out of the wind having slipped over a couple of times for good measure we eventually made it to the Swirls car park check point, where we could eat and have a cuppa. The easy and pleasant forest trail that passes through the forest was a welcome chance to run in the shelter of the trees. All too quickly we reached the base of the next big climb. Up and over to Grizedale Tarn (575m). The climb looks like it's going to be severe, but it's a

steady and well maintained path that was fairly sheltered from that biting wind. It was just the fact that we were at the halfway point at the bottom of the climb that made it feel tougher.

Taking the open ground handrailing the northern slopes besides water's edge I slipped and fell, AGAIN. It would have been easy to curse, moan and whinge about the tiredness, conditions, the wrong choice of shoes but instead you get up, smile, pretend you're alright and say, "Lets crack on". Resilience is something I'm constantly preaching about at work. Resilience is a form of conditioning. The more we expose ourselves to discomfort, the more we become mentally strong. The Royal Marines have a number of qualities that they expect their soldiers to uphold and Cheerfulness is one of them. For me it's the most important one of all. 'Cheerfulness in the face of adversity' Smile and laugh as if nothing is ever going to get you down.

Inevitably passing over the top we were exposed to the westerly winds. With the wind being funnelled between the surrounding mountains it was finally on our backs. More splashing through freezing cold water running down the rocky path we made a rapid descent back into Patterdale. "Let's not stop now. Let's get to Side Farm, have a cuppa, put on warm dry layers for the final leg to the finish" we agreed.

With headtorches back on we decided retracing our journey up Boredale Hause (399m) would be far better than taking the Ullswater Way path back to Martindale Church. The slow climb on aching limbs didn't feel too bad. The steep descent furthermore brought me to my backside landing heavily in cold water. Then what? Dan is human! He went flying too! Shouldn't laugh I think to myself but once I knew he was good, I secretly chuckled.

Running down the final stretch through Askham village we crossed the finish line and entered to bustling hive of elated runners all enjoying the warmth of homemade soup and a welcome luxury of a sit down. Without saying anything, we shook hands and said how much we enjoyed that. Haha, how convincing we must have sounded?

123 & 124 STOP, overall positions in 11hrs 4mins. 38 miles and 2880m of ascent/descent burning 5480 calories. Now where's that Christmas cake, we've earned it?

