



DARK PEAK NEWS



SPRING / SUMMER 2026

EDITOR'S LETTER

BY ADAM SAMUEL

Welcome to the spring/summer 2026 edition of the Dark Peak newsletter. And welcome on board Evie Crook, who has kindly taken on the role of newsletter designer. Please consider the previous newsletter design to be a phantom slice of Dark Peak nostalgia never to be repeated! Gratefully received submissions this time come in the form of a gel making masterclass from Lisa Watson, a Meirionnydd Round completion by Ralph Skrimshire, a standard day in the office for David Lewis and a close-up interview with Zane Agapova, fresh (or rather not so fresh!) from a spring filled with mountain running in Scotland, culminating in the Jura Fell Race. As ever, the newsletter is built on the submissions we receive from club members and we are always keen to hear what you have all been up to in this the 50th year of DPFR.

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A WINTER KINDER DOZEN

BY BASIL MOSS

Saturday 14th February was a glorious day: snow on the tops, sunshine, the best of winter weather. I ran the Winter Half Tour of Bakewell with friends and enjoyed it so much I thought another day out the next day might be just what I needed, hence planning a Kinder Dozen the next day. I had hoped for some company, but the forecast was a bit rotten and offers were hastily withdrawn, so it was alone I headed out to Edale on my motorbike on an overcast day with some icy patches on the road.

I set out clockwise and for the first couple of climbs and descents, was following the fresh prints of a pair of Walshes – was someone in the club out? The top of the plateau was thick with snow and a near whiteout in the clag, while lower down the hill the visibility was fine and the snow gave way to cold wet mud, with some treacherous ice on the descent from Edale Cross, and I took a nasty tumble, luckily without injury. Over the first few ups and downs I was managing half an hour per climb and descent, and I wondered if 6 hours was feasible... Up and down I went, making my way around the plateau – it was a bit windy but the forecast rain didn't really materialise and I barely used my waterproofs. The compass was very necessary, and the trigs appearing out of the clag a reassuring sight.

I scrambled down the rocks over The Edge at Upper Red Brook and headed down to the Ashop for my first visit, munching Kendal mint cake and thinking about my first try at this route a few years ago. Back then I got halfway round and packed in with sore legs, while last year I managed eight of the climbs before cutting back across the plateau. I was certainly getting tired, but the legs were still moving and I felt optimistic, although by this point the climbs were taking a little longer.

The descent from Fairbrook Naze was thrilling, the icy rocks at the top adding to the excitement, and after scrambling around the sheepfold I set off on the climb of Gate Side Clough, with just a hint of drizzle on the way to make me don waterproofs. Back into the arctic wasteland of the plateau, shortly after Seal Stones I met a group of

five lads in shorts, with running poles etc. They may have heard me going "Ar Ar Ar!" at the top of my voice as I passed the stones, and we had an odd exchange:

"Can you tell us where the nearest road is please"

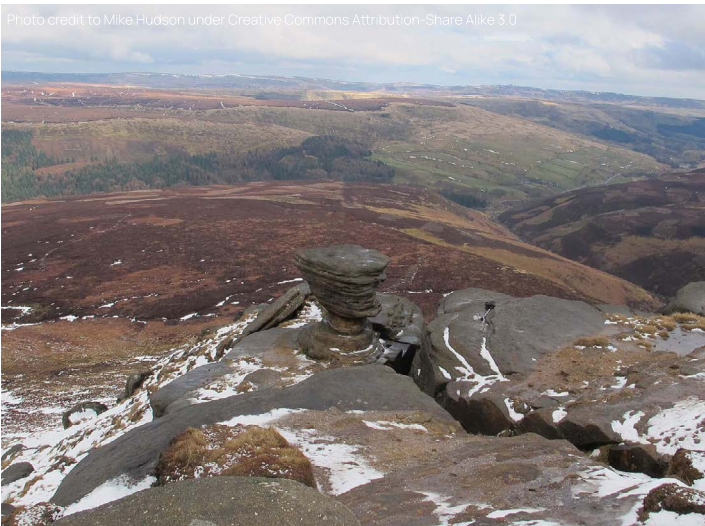
"Which road do you want?"

"Any road will do!"

"Oh I see! Do you have a map?"

"No mate, we're fine, we've got Garmin!"

Photo credit to Mike Hudson under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0



At this point I quipped, "Ah well you won't need my silly old map then!" and made as if to leave, but immediately regretted it as he actually looked like he might cry... I gave them directions to find Gate Side Clough and thus the Ashop bridge, recommended they carry a map next time, and continued on my way.

After the next descent and the climb back to Kinder East trig, I was heading into the unknown: I've only run a little around here and had not got so far on previous attempts at the Dozen. Legs were getting tired and I was getting a strange sensation akin to dizziness from the endless climbs and descents and the repeated changes of conditions from arctic whiteout to damp winter's day. Nether Moor was a slog, but as I neared the finish, my optimism returned. After the Druid's Stone the end was in sight, and I pressed on, legs leaden but heart light. My bag was light too for that matter, I had eaten most of my food! The descent into Edale was superb, fast despite sore legs, and I ended my round in 7:06. Not bad for a winter dozen?

Back at my bike I ate a little more, got changed into chilly, damp leathers and set off back to Sheffield. On my way back, who should I see but the poor lads from Seal Stones, trotting along the road back to Edale! Had they really gone all the way around on the road?

HOMEMADE GELS

BY LISA WATSON

I am always looking for ways to reduce the amount of money I spend on running kit and nutrition while limiting the amount of waste I produce. One my recent experiments has been making my own gels. It's so cheap, quick and easy that I'm completely converted. No more sticky wrappers in my race vest and a few more pounds in my pocket to spend on post-race refreshments! It's too good not to share with you all so here is my quick and easy guide on how to do it. Flavourings are still a work in progress. For me, I prefer it plain but have found coffee flavour works well too. I've added some ideas of things you can try from conversations I've had with others who make their own gels.

Good luck and enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

There are only three ingredients and one of them is water!

The others are:

- Maltodextrin powder: I get from Bulk (plenty of other sources available) about £12 for 2.5kg
- Fructose powder: I get from Peak Supplements (again plenty of places you can buy this) about £7.50 per kg

THE METHOD

The ratio of maltodextrin to fructose should be 2:1 so for a 90g carb gel you would use 60g maltodextrin and 30g fructose. The amount of water is up to you and depends how gloopy you like it. I find half the amount of water to powder works well. So for a 90g gel I would add 45ml of water. The overall gel will weigh 135g for 90g carbs.

Simply weigh the powder, add hot water, mix and decant into your chosen receptacle.



Here's an easy list of gel volumes (m - maltodextrin, f - fructose)

30g CARB GEL: 20g m + 10g f + 15ml water = total weight 45g

90g CARB GEL: 60g m + 30g f + 45ml water = total weight 135g

150g CARB GEL: 100g m + 50g f + 75ml water = total weight 225g

200g CARB GEL: 133g m + 67g f + 100ml water = total weight 300g

300g CARB GEL: 200g m + 100g f + 150ml water = total weight 450g

ADDING FLAVOUR

I think the easiest way to add flavour is to add this into the water component. I have found that anything with added sweetener makes the gel too sweet overall, but coffee works a treat. Instead of adding water to dissolve the gel, I make a strong coffee and add that instead. I plan to experiment with flavours like mint, lemon and ginger etc. by making strong teas and adding this. I would love to hear what else you try! You can also try adding electrolyte powders into the mix too, but just be careful with quantities and sweetness. Personally, I prefer to keep hydration separate.

STORAGE

Most commercial gels contain preservatives, but obviously homemade ones do not. You should keep your gel in the fridge and consume it within a few days. Apparently, you can freeze it and defrost to have later, but I haven't tried that yet. If you add anything fresh like fresh lemon juice, consider that may make it more likely to go off quickly. Also consider how clean the receptacle you put the gel into was especially if you are reusing a bottle, this may affect how quickly it goes off (check your soft bottle nozzles for mould).

WHAT TO PUT IT IN

I have mostly been using a 250ml lockable Decathlon soft bottle for my gels, but any soft flask will do. With the ratio above you can fit a 200g gel into one of those. I have also been reusing Precision Hydration gel pouches and resealable juice pouches. Soft flasks are easier to use as you can just pour the gel in, they have the added benefit of being transparent so you can see if anything untoward has happened to your gel. Pouches work really well for smaller quantities, but it's trickier to get the gel into them. I use a 100ml syringe to transfer it. If you plan to reuse it, you should wash your pouch/bottle out as soon as you can after using it. Most soft bottle lids come completely apart and baby bottle brushes are good for cleaning the nozzles. I keep my bottles and pouches in the freezer after I've washed them between uses to stop them going gross between use (I do this with all of my soft flasks).

PRACTICAL "HOW TO" TIPS

Basically this is very similar to making icing. I've got limited patience for baking and like to do things quickly so here is a little guide to the corners I have cut that you can get away with! For smaller quantities, i.e. less than 100g of powder, I weigh everything out into a jug and pour water directly from the kettle on top. Then give it a good mix and pour straight into my flask. I use a silicone spatula to squish any lumps and to help get it all into the flask. It tends to stay cloudy but as it cools down it dissolves and goes clear.

If you've rushed the mixing and there are still lumps you can just squeeze them while it is in the flask and that tends to do the job. For larger quantities I weigh the powder into a small saucepan and mix in the pre-measured hot water over a low heat to help it dissolve, then either pour straight into the flask or via a jug/funnel. The flasks are remarkably tolerant of hot liquid but you should let it cool down a little to save your flask from getting damaged. If you find your gel is too thick, I have had success with adding more hot water directly to the flask and squishing it around to loosen it up. If it's too runny you could try adding a bit of pectin, but probably better just to put up with a slightly runny gel.

COST

Taking the cost of the ingredients, assuming you have plain gel, the products above cost £20. This is enough for 3kg of gel with 500g maltodextrin leftover. This works out at 60p per 90g gel. Precision Hydration's jumbo gel (90g) is about £5 per gel so a decent saving!

MOUNT TOUBKAL 4167M

— BY DAVID LEWIS —

Disclaimer: As with all good tales, the contents of this narrative are 100%, totally completely and utterly fictitious and bear no resemblance to any real-life events. The characters involved are entirely invented from the author's imagination.

The story begins at the previous weekend when, after a rather disappointing DNF at Fairfield Horseshoe, a conversation between myself and Charlie Allmond (student at Lancaster University and reluctant member of Ambleside AC) turned from our respective miseries with women and under-par race performances, to whether or not we fancied a holiday. As a man with very limited annual leave allowance, I naturally had to consult my diary before I could give a firm answer (which was yes!). Charlie being an undergraduate student just having finished exams had no such qualms.

Next port of call was who else we could recruit. Rather surprisingly there were few people who had availability at such notice, and indeed it did take a significant amount of persuasion to get a reluctant Finlay Grant away from the warm bosom of his Geordie girlfriend! After a very brief period of deliberation, and £30 Skyscanner flights, it was decided that we would all fly to Morocco two days hence, staying a night in Marrakesh before heading onto Imlil, a village two hours to the south, deep within the Atlas Mountains.



At 4167m, Mount Toubkal is the highest peak in North Africa and standing in the vicinity of Imlil made an ideal challenge for us to conquer during our visit. We figured that although a big day it would be doable at around 30k and 2500m elevation. We therefore pencilled this in for Thursday the 14th. These plans were almost immediately thrown into jeopardy when a chance encounter with Harry Bond of Staffordshire relayed some grave news: in Morocco it was a legal requirement to have a guide to climb Mount Toubkal, or even enter the national park which it is situated in. Moreover, one must do the climb in two

days – the first being a long march up along the valley to a basecamp at 3000m, the second to the peak top and back along the valley into town. Even more concerning, however, were the details of how these were strictly enforced. Police checkpoints at various points, where passports would have to be inspected and guides interrogated on who they were taking!

The logical solution was to completely ignore such trivial concerns. A bit of last-minute research and Harry's testimony allowed us to pinpoint fairly accurately where these checkpoints would be located – one about 3k in on the valley base, a second at a small collection of huts halfway along to base camp, and a third at base camp before the truly steep snow-covered mountain slopes began. If we could simply avoid passing through them when anyone was there, we would probably be fine.

After much debate we agreed upon a gameplan: simply put, don't get shot by the Moroccan rozzers! To do this we would avoid checkpoints by heading off path,

keeping out of sight in river valleys or vegetation where possible and moving as fast as we could in exposed regions so that on the off-chance we were detected, it would be nigh on impossible for any Moroccan bobby to catch us!

We also decided that we would start late in the day at around noon. The reasoning for this was three fold – firstly it would allow us to hire microspikes/crampons that we would need for the upper slopes before we set off, secondly it would allow us to hit the summit when the wind had dropped (from 60mph to 50mph) and of course most importantly it meant the three laziest runners known to man could lounge around in bed until midday!

Therefore, when we had finally started running – towards the hopefully only metaphorical guns – we did so well rested and in high spirits. These were soon shattered by mix of forest, farmland and rockface we had to encounter to skirt



beneath checkpoint 1. Feeling like the original SAS working in North Africa, we crept through a pathless gorge of scrub, boulder fields and snakes (only later finding out about the multiple deadly/unpleasant species of viper native to such habitats) until we felt we were a safe distance past the checkpoint.

As we hadn't seen anyone looking at us we had to assume we were fine, so the next problem was how to climb the crumbling cliff face back to the path. This may not have been particularly tricky in and of itself, but it was not helped by the presence of several guides who, were probably wondering why three white men with minimal mountain equipment were climbing up out of a ravine towards them. Not wanting to stop and explain we did what all naughty schoolboys do in times of need and did a runner. This was fine apart from the fact we were at well over 2000m of altitude, and my physical fitness was leaving much to be desired...

The problems that occurred with dodging checkpoint two was less death by guns, more death by ravine. As the checkpoint was situated at the corner of the river, it was possible to drop down to the riverbed and then cross over a higher ridge to meet the path again further upstream – effectively travelling one (very hilly side) of a triangle. The downside of this was that it also involved dropping 50m back down to the river on a crumbly cliff face, before climbing an equally steep, but thankfully more stable, mountainside to get back to the path. Elevation that my already tired legs were not especially pleased about. However, given we had no desire to spend the evening behind the bars of an Imlil prison, we ploughed on in our noble quest.

The route up the valley to basecamp was fairly routine. Naturally we got odd looks from the walkers, guides and donkeys as we plodded past them, but all in all nothing of any great note happened in these minutes – it was a time of rest, recuperation and refuelling. The final checkpoint was in many senses the most ominous and with several hours of hard graft in the legs,





the prospect of being caught this close to our goal was not a pleasant one.

Sat at the head of the valley it loomed before us like Barad-dûr, with the knowing eye of the Moroccan wizard monitoring our every step. As with the original fellowship, the weight of our packs was increasing with every step in the ever-thinning air, along with the anticipation of what we would encounter at the mountain top. To get round base camp/Barad-dûr, we had two options: either climb across an icy camber above a cliff of certain death, or skirt under the walls keeping

out of sight of the guides/guards. Valuing our lives – and also being rather tired – we went for the second option and soon found ourselves jumping across the fields of slush which the camp's residents were seeming to use as their own open air rubbish dump, making us rather relieved that we had not sampled any of the water downstream!

Whether by luck or by skill we had made our way past the camp and now it was only the peak itself, two kilometres and 1000m above us. Being almost 4 o'clock at this point, we found the mountain deserted, so we could tie our crampons on in peace and start the slow plod upwards. Air was short, and so we did little more than trudge into the mist, stopping only to shelter from the swirling winds which beat us with its icy fingers. Although bodies were weary, spirits were high – and although I had started to get a rather nasty headache and Fin was now veering from one side of the ridgeway to the other, our success was imminent. When it came we savoured it, drinking in the views, cursing the dark forces that would see us fail, and posing for a selfie with the woolly hats we had haggled for several hours earlier at the valley bottom.



As any mountaineer will tell you, however, the most dangerous part of any climb is the descent that follows it, so we had to keep our wits about us. Charlie set the pace

on the upper slopes, while Fin as ever did his best 'arthritic old man trying to get down the stairs' impression. All was going well but I did start to feel that Charlie was taking maybe a few too many risks – taking more speed into the corners than I was comfortable with and pushing a little too much on the steep sections.



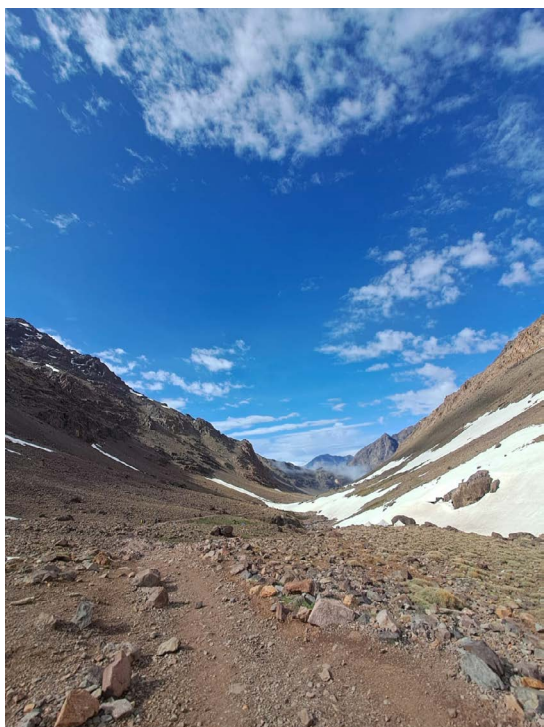
Putting it down to the enthusiasm of youth, I let Charlie plough on with his folly, until of course I realised the problem has nothing to do with Charlie. As the Charlie was now disappearing over the horizon, I stopped to

investigate the clicking coming from my right shoe, and to my horror discovered that the midsole of my crampon had sheared, rendering it effectively useless – even an attempted botch job of tying it onto my laces on wasn't doing much good. Five hundred vertical meters above the snowline this was far from ideal, but with one working crampon this was surely doable at a slow speed. Fin to his credit was sympathetic to my predicament, and it was agreed that as I still had one working crampon, he'd keep going at his leisurely speed and I'd catch him on the main downhill once we were below the snowline where I could get a run of speed going. In the meantime, I would just hobble down slowly, mumbling my prayers to the mountain gods.



I can only assume that in Morocco the mountain gods have a dark sense of humour – or at the very least are ambivalent towards prayers – for as soon as Fin had got out of earshot, my second crampon did the same trick as the first and sheared. Now in normal circumstances a completely worn-out pair of second hand Scarpa Goldengates would not be most people's number one choice of footwear for an icefield and although I do rate the shoe I wasn't best pleased about it myself. To cut a long and unpleasant story short, I did manage to get off the snowfield without losing my footing, plunging to my doom or requiring rescue from a rather pissed off

Moroccan guide (or worse a smug Fin Grant). In the meantime I had also perfected my French swearing for when I returned the crampons (which were now tied to my bag in four distinct and unconnectable pieces).



Now many a reader will probably be wondering how we were able to pass back through the three checkpoints we had so skilfully avoided on the way up. Well this is where the true genius of starting our adventure in the afternoon began to pay dividends – with the time now being gone 6 o'clock, the police who did the checkpoints would almost certainly have gone home – if only because who on earth would want to go up the mountain at that time of evening. Thus, we were safe to send the descent along the main path through the checkpoints, in the knowledge that nobody would come out and chase us. And on the off chance that this did occur I was primed to spout some semi-comprehensible excuse for our presence in French or just have faith that the officers on nightshift were unlikely to be able to match our

speed. Alas none of these scenarios came to pass we sailed back through the terrain which we had previously spent hours battling through, bringing an end to one of the wildest days any of us had experienced. It was only when we were sat back in our lodge that night, gazing at the many stars that were now illuminating the mountains above us that I was reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela, and we began to plot our next great mischief.

"After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb."

HEART OF GRANITE RACE REPORT

BY BASIL MOSS

I had tempted my brother Simon into entering this Scottish AL on the pretext that it's in Galloway where rumour has it the OMM will be this year, making it a useful recce. We arrived the night before in driving rain and camped in a field, having met Cynog who was also racing and Despina, Lisa and co. all getting ready for the bigger race,



Bruce's Crown, held the same day. Cynog, Simon and I felt sorry for them, cramped together in a camper van with cups of tea studying a map, as we enjoyed a few scotches together in a spacious Terra Nova Laser... That night, incessant rain and howling winds coupled with a pessimistic MWIS forecast to make us feel rather apprehensive, but in the morning the rain stopped and the sun came out! The day was very windy at times, but it didn't rain and views were good. I was hobbling a bit with a sore knee and ankle from a fall the previous weekend in the Lakes, so opted for the early start

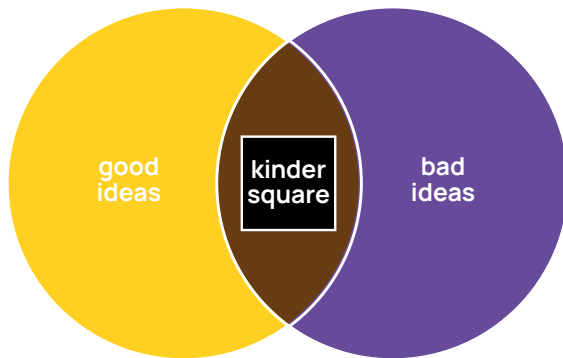
with Simon and fully expected to pull out at the first checkpoint. Cynog set off later with the fast runners, and I was happy to hold him off until the climb towards Loch Enoch before he came storming past. The race is a superb route, with very bristly tussocks and bogs leading to good running along ridge lines on the tops. The line along Rig of the Jarkness is particularly enjoyable and the long climb up to Merrick also very satisfying - the route has a very adventurous feel to it. I was happy to get round, although my knee and ankle are rather less happy about it, and very impressed with Cynog, who came second to Harry Pulham who set a new course record - hats off! The marshalling by Galloway MRT was excellent, as was the hospitality and refreshments at the end. It's a superb race which I heartily recommend - perhaps next year Dark Peak can turn up in force?

1 st	Harry Pulham (Shettleston)	2:42:15
2 nd	Cynog Williams (DPFR)	3:08:12
15 th	Basil Moss (DPFR)	4:23:51
19 th	Simon Moss (Unaffiliated)	4:34:13

THE KINDER SQUARE

BY GUY WARD

It has long been said that some of the best ideas are created in a pub (e.g. cats' eyes). Unfortunately, some of the worst are too (e.g. the mobile barstool). Felix and I are still not entirely sure what category the Kinder Square falls into.



The idea behind the Kinder Square was born during an evening in the pub after a Wednesday club run. The idea was simple - the Heart of Darkness was not (usually) a perfect line on the OS Gridline, so why not do a perfect one. If we are going to do a perfect line, why not make it a 3x3 square?

Some thought was given to the precise square that would be used. Eventually, a 3x3 square with the north-east corner at SK110900 was used, as it ensured action below the northern and southern edges, plus a sojourn below the downfall for good measure. It also seemed vaguely doable - a few cliffs appeared to lie on the route, but these seemed doable with a bit of positive mental attitude.



ATTEMPT 1

Attempt one was made on a fine summer's eve after work. Alas, disaster ensued. Adam Samuel, Despina Berdeni and I set off from the Blackden car park at around 6:30 pm. By 7:15, we hadn't even made it to the first corner of the square, thanks to head-high bracken. We licked our wounds, spent a lovely evening wandering round Kinder eating cucumbers and falling into holes while recceing the square line.

A fun time was had, but we knew we needed winter/spring conditions and more daylight.

ATTEMPT 2

Attempt two came more than a year later, courtesy of Mr Watts. Felix, having starting running again after breaking his leg, decided that the square was a candidate for his first decent run back. I was more than happy to join (i)

partly because of psyche, (ii) partly because I didn't want Felix to beat me to it, and (iii) partly because I had a first aid qualification in case he spannered himself. This time we decided to start from Birchin, and agreed it needed to be "raw-dogged". I believe this is a term that kids like Felix use to describe using a map and compass only.



Setting off, striking south, the first section up onto Kinder was rough but relatively straightforward to stay on the line. This changed after clambering up onto Kinder. It turns out that the peat groughs were not set up for someone following an OS grid line and, when hitting them at a 10-degree angle rather than perpendicular, you can get terribly muddy. We plan to write to the council to ask them to address this.

As we hit the southern edge, our first cliff

appeared. We considered doing it "free solo", but realised that we could skip it. Leg one fortuitously ended with a handy wall corner right on the square corner - well planned Ordnance Survey!

Our western leg below the southern edge was probably the hardest. Every fibre of our beings wanted to contour, but the magic blue line demanded we instead stick to an approximately 2 degree uphill, plus the occasional clamber in and out of Grindsbrook and Crowden. We did sadly go the wrong side around Crowden tower and whiffed on the grid corner a bit - a tussock at a specific distance and bearing from the Kinder Low trig.



Leg three to the north was uneventful, but we began to realise that the day was going to be longer than expected. Legs 1-3 took an hour plus each for 3km. My shoes began to fall apart at this point and Inov-8's rubber began to show its use when we slithered over a dry stream bed. After climbing out from under the downfall we took some time to eat Squashies and listen to Elgar's Nimrod. A crisp corner was achieved by adopting a vibes-based approach and picking a random rock to turn at.



Leg four was the glory leg. Unfortunately, it was not the 'trod leg'. We spent almost the entirety of it approximately 10 metres off of the nice trod below the northern edge, before finally getting back to the start (a tree that we had guessed may be on the gridline).

Few things were more satisfying than seeing the perfect square on the watch upon finishing. Felix claimed it was a greater achievement than his

Bob. The second leg bearing west could have been tidier, but this can be fixed moving forwards. Unfortunately, the shoes went straight into the bin afterwards.

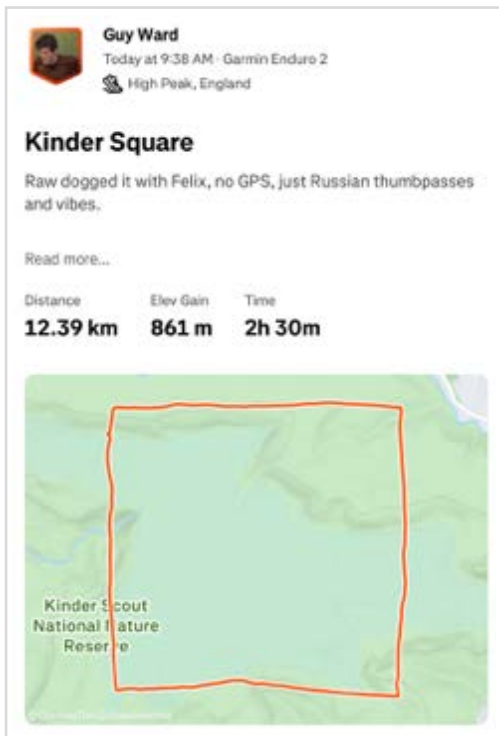
Personally, the highlights for me were the people who we confused the hell out of on the way round, including:

- the old lady who took the mick out of us for "straying off of the path"
- the orienteers racing on Kinder who clearly thought we were just a bit rubbish
- a wild Despina Berdeni who looked off the northern edge (and down her nose) at two runners and "wondered what those idiots we're doing"

We highly recommend anyone having a go at the square to see if you can do it neater or faster. We may put in some neatness requirements if we start recording times for it (and only if there is the

interest for it). It's a brilliant day out for anyone wanting to run on some shocking terrain and practicing sticking to a bearing.

Next on our list is a 6x6 square up on Bleaklow. By my maths it is an 8-hour job if we are lucky, but hopefully won't require two pairs of shoes!



SKYE RUNNING

BY ADAM SAMUEL



Some mountain days simply stir the soul more than others and you quickly realise just how special they are as they unfold. Acting on the advice of a close friend to “go to Skye if you get good weather” we set off in the van from our base for the week in beautiful Dornie (next to Eilean Donan Castle) to run the Red Cuillin. The poem started forming in my mind on the journey over to Skye and on the run itself until the demands of the terrain meant I no longer had the bandwidth to compose. Enjoy!

SKYE RUNNING

Nerves and expectation on the A87,
Suncream palava, Skye's fireball ascending,
To glint its flare off black mountainside,
Where jagged rock bit teeth into bluebird sky.
And the sea, oh the sea, with your thousand-sparkle smile,
Beckoned from down low “Youse linger a while!”

Sweet trail from Sligachan then Sgùrr na Strì for good measure,
A photo panorama of pure volcanic pleasure.

We turned then to Marsco,
Where with body and mind climbed,
To gaze blue eternal,
Through the weightlessness of time.

So as heather clung to rock,
We held close to our course,
And closer to our friendships,
The mountainside our forge.

Thwarted alas,
The steep screes of Glamaig,
We harked Chisholm's haunting notes,
The Black Cuillin in our wake.

THE MEIRIONNYDD ROUND

— BY RALPH SKRIMSHIRE —

The Meirionnydd Round is a 72ish mile route around southern Eryri (Snowdonia), created by Yiannis Tridimas in 1993. It was Laurence Piercy's idea to have a look at it. He'd ticked off a few of the better known 24hr rounds and was looking for something new. The Meirionnydd was obscure, had a vague reputation for toughness and remoteness, and had seen few completions. A connoisseur's round. I signed up and we started going down to Wales to recce bits of it. Our first visits were eye-opening. Big chunks of the route are through seldom visited areas of rough ground with no path or obvious way through. We spent many an hour scrambling down sketchy, grassy cliffs, pushing through overgrown or nonexistent forestry rides and labouring across endless bog.

There is very little beta available. An old thread on the forums, Yiannis's schedule from his inaugural completion and a basic map on the go far website. It's not even completely clear which tops are on the route. This meant we had to do all the recce work ourselves. The trickier sections are like puzzles to be solved. Repeated crossings of a boggy valley might yield a line that seems to work but that is hard to find a second time. The northern Rhinogydd are an amazing maze of slabs and tors that is impossible to impose a straight traversing line onto and seemingly impossible to cross the same way twice. We ran these sections multiple times, trying different variations, whittling down to the least worst ways of getting across the bogs. The fact that our route knowledge was so hard won made it precious to us. At one point we heard a rumour of a Facebook group set up for people interested in the round to share info on route options. I was a bit gutted when I heard this: some of the magic seemed to go out of the project. Then I realised we didn't have to engage with it. For all I know that group exists, but we happily ignored it and went on ploughing our own furrow.

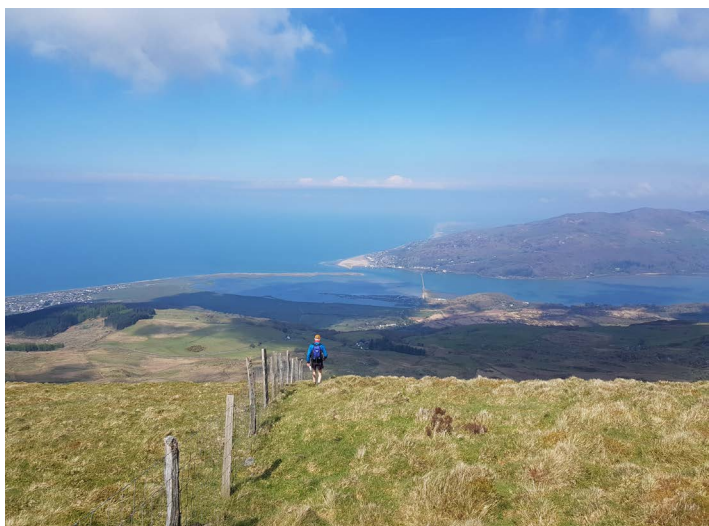
And then Damian Hall went and wrote an article about it in the Fellrunner magazine. He took a slightly casual approach to recceing it, had a go and finished in 27.5 hours. I was sure this would lead to a surge of interest and argued that we needed to get ours

done before the crowds arrived, since people are mad for an FKT nowadays and everyone wants to make a name for themselves on a new challenge. Laurence thought Damian had done a good enough job of not selling it and that would deter them. Remains to be seen who was right.

Me and Laurence had an attempt in 2023 and limped round in 26 hours. A year later we tried again but abandoned after 10 hours when it became clear we weren't going to improve on our previous time. In July 2024 I was back for a solo, self-supported attempt. Our

support crew on the first two attempts was top notch, but the simplicity of the solo approach was massively appealing. I felt free and unburdened. I drove round and dropped food stashes at the five road crossings, then at 10pm I was off.





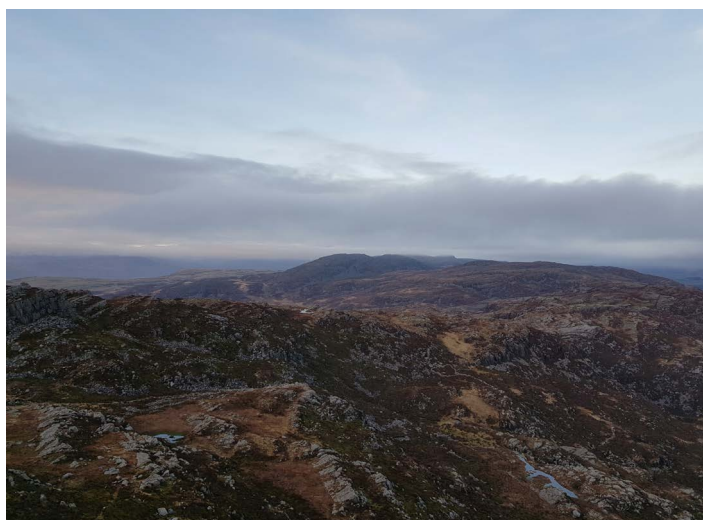
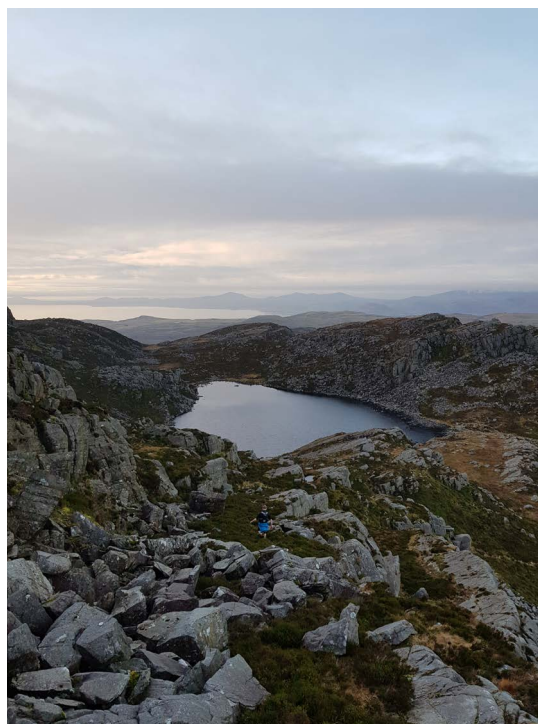
I start the first climb like I've been let off the leash, full of beans. I'm knocking time off the first splits and try to hold back, but I'm enjoying it too much. Fly through the first mini leg and start the big climb onto the Cadair Idris ridge. The last of the light is gone and I'm into darkness, wind and the clag that will stay with me for most of the next 20 hours. It's hard not to have doubts and second guess yourself on broad, featureless hill tops in the misty dark but I trust the compass and hold the line. Curse my failing 47-year-old's eyesight: my days of reading 1:40K maps by torchlight are

numbered. Steady on the ups, flying on the downs. Cross the Dyfi estuary footbridge to Barmouth in the pre-dawn dark 10 mins up on schedule. Up onto the pre-Rhinog grassy ridges. Breaks in the clag show the sky lightening over the sea to my left. By dawn I'm on Rhinog Fach and into the Rhinogydd proper. I make a wrong turn and lose some time. Last time I was here, Laurence was deciding that our attempt was doomed and that he was pulling out: disappointment in the stunning red dawn. This time the clock looks good and I push on.

I thread the crux section of the Rhinogs no problem. A sequence of hidden gullies and squeezing through gaps. The hard bit is done, but the "easy" bit manages to throw me off a few times, it's impossible to learn this place by heart. In the past the resident herd of wild goats have appeared at key times and seemed to show me the way. Today they're nowhere to be seen but I can smell them, and I take this to mean I'm on the right track.

Down from the hills, slog along the long road to the old nuclear power station. Recover my stash from behind a wall to find it's been raided, probably by a mouse. She's shredded some bags and had half a maltloaf bar. Fair enough, I take what she's left and press on into the wet morning. Up onto the start of the Migneint and the rough ground that is the heart of this round. Grassy hummocks, sphagnum bog, tussocks. The Meirionnydd features every grade and type of tussock, from shin high ankle turners to majestic, chest high grass mounds that look 100 years old and must be the mega flora of the tussock world.

After Craig Wen I go wrong in the clag. The mists clear to reveal a vista that doesn't make any sense and I've apparently broken my compass which is now pointing 90 degrees the wrong way. When I finally work out where I am my stomach sinks. There's an extra kilometer of soul-sapping bog to cross



to fix my mistake. Feels like a minor disaster but I get back on track and somehow haven't lost too much time, though I am down on schedule again. I'm trying to keep the pressure on, stop myself settling into an easy pace. I've taken to shouting at myself out loud like a nutter whenever my mind starts to wander. Focus! We are



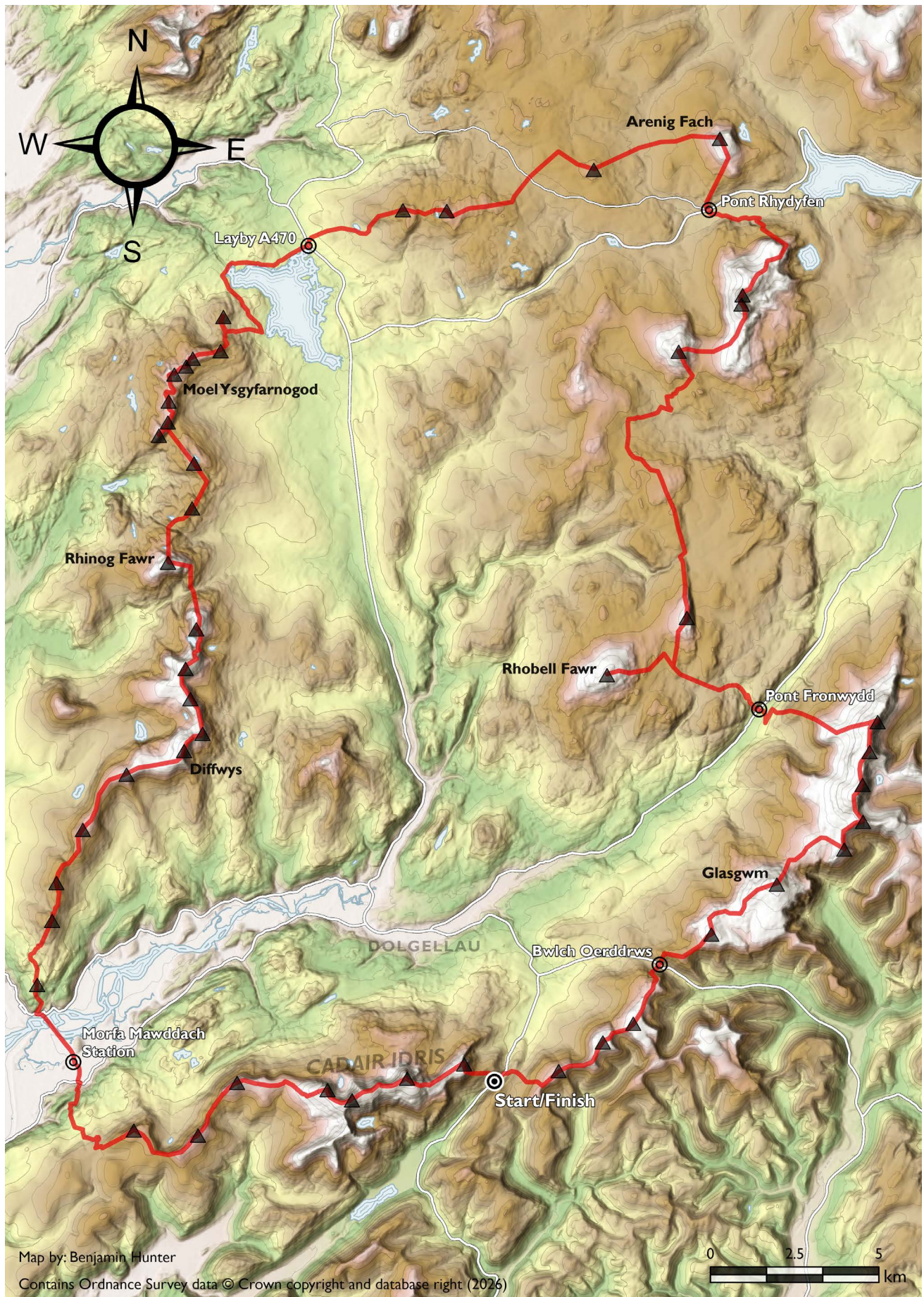
doing this thing! Til the end! Pause a moment on Craig Wion to contemplate the vast bog that lies between me and the slopes of Arenig Fach. We're into the nitty-gritty of the Meirionnydd now: stringing together imaginary trods and faint lines of weakness through the bog and heather. Follow a short-eared owl hunting in the mist, imagine I too am gliding a foot above the swampy tussocks. Hit the foot of Arenig Fach and the return of solid ground. Haul to the top and salute the Migneint stretching back north in all its glory.

Down to the road and another stash raided by mice, then up onto Arenig Fawr. Each time I use my hands to pull myself up through the heather I find ticks on my hands. Check my legs but find nothing, only on the hands. I could do without catching that old Lyme's disease. I have one line from a song stuck in my head every time I'm slogging up a steep hill. I only know a few words but they perfectly fit the rhythm of hands pushing down on knees so I've sung them a few hundred times by now. Barmouth is nothing but a distant memory, but there's still a long, long way back to the van...

Moel Llyfnant, remote hill farms and more majestic bleakness on the long traverse to Dduallt. Over 20 mins behind schedule by now, but there doesn't seem to be much I can do about it. After Rhobell Fawr the faint quad tracks from earlier recces have almost disappeared, buried in thigh-high summer growth. Manage to follow the faintest hints of lines: without that track I'd be lost in a heather sea. Finally emerge onto the farm track, pick up my final stash from inside a hollow tree and it's time to face the endless climb up Aran Benllyn in the fading light and permanent mist. I am still 20 minutes down but once up on the final ridge I manage to claw back a bit of time and somehow this gives me wings. I pull out all remaining stops and hammer along the tops and down the hills with the same energy I had going up the hill 23 hours earlier, finishing in 23:12, a new record for the round.

Back at the van I collapse on the tarmac and take a long time to get my breath back. Crawl into bed and sleep the sleep of the just. In the following days I feel a deep peace and satisfaction at the completion of an 18-month long project. I am full of respect and affection for these hills and bogs and this gnarly, awkward round.

THE MEIRIONNYDD ROUND



TIME FOR A HAIKU... OR TWO!

FROM THE BOG MONSTER

The Bog Monster writes...

EYAM MOOR

Old gang are all out!
Stone circle and rough down hill.
Delightful trails home.

The Bog Monster writes...

Worselled the chairman,
with a loop round Birchin Hat.
Alport Castle ho!

IN THE GROUSE BUTT WITH ZANE AGAPOVA

BY SAM WILLIAMS-DUNCAN



Zane's adventures were first brought to my attention by Adam, the esteemed editor of this noble newsletter, who told me that she was running sections of the Scottish Watershed en route to Jura fell race. An esoteric endeavour of quite some measure with a venerable race at its end certainly piqued my interest, as well as adhering to my own notions of some of the traditions of both our club and our sport in undertaking such adventures. Without further ado, Zane and I convened in the grouse butt for her to tell me a bit of what she's about (reader: we actually conducted this interview via WhatsApp – apologies to puncture the metaphor).

Zane moved to England from Latvia, close 20 years ago, initially residing in Northallerton and then Kirkby Fleetham in North Yorkshire. "I moved to Sheffield for university [to study a degree in Business Studies] in the summer of 2015 because I had a few friends at the university, who told me how great Sheffield was," she tells me. "A big deciding factor was the Peak District and the fact that all the outdoors and nature was just a stone's throw away." Her route into fell running was an interesting one. "A bit of cycling and a bit of running here and there," along with bouldering during her Master's in Digital Media Management and walks in the Peak, struck me as quite a common path into fell running. However, I was fascinated to learn that Zane "was mostly into weightlifting/powerlifting" as an undergraduate, as it's a world I know almost nothing about (more on that later). Covid and ensuing lockdowns meant that "it all kind of stopped", but as restrictions eased she sought out details online of a running club to join to go out running with in the Peak District and happened across the Pertex film about DPFR "and thought 'that's a bit of me – looks amazing!' But I put off joining for a bit as I didn't think I was good enough." She notes that "coming from a flat country, I had no idea about mountain running and the whole culture around it." Circling back to the world of weightlifting and powerlifting, I ask Zane if she competed in the sport: "No – one of the gym instructors asked if I was interested in competing, but I wasn't. I just did it because I wanted to be strong and enjoyed seeing my progress, being able to lift really heavy weights." She later told me that her deadlift PB

was an astounding 105kg and squat PB an equally remarkable 95kg – numbers which make my own puny frame quiver by comparison! I ask if she thought that weight training might be beneficial to her running: “I guess if you do any it will be beneficial and maybe it has been for me, but I’m not sure.” She says that her days of weight training have given her “strong quads that are not bothered by steep descents” and we agreed that there were likely benefits to posture, as well as tendon and muscle strength that might help prevent injury.

We talked between us about outdoor communities, leading me to ask what she made of this aspect of our sport. “The fell running community is amazing! I love how it’s still very old school and true to its roots!” I ask if she had raced much locally: “Not really – I tend to do the bigger and hillier ones in the Lakes and North Wales because I just love the challenge of the mountains. I’ve done a few sky races, including ultras, in the Lakes too, as I love the more technical ground. I haven’t really got one favourite race,” she says, though notes that she enjoys “gnarlier ones – like Langdale, Buttermere, Teenager with Altitude, Peris... also, ultra sky races such as Helvellyn and Scafell.” Locally, she enjoys the delights of Kinder Scout that keep so many of us returning to blanket bogs and heather bashing: “A few of us like to make it more interesting by turning our run into navigation practice, including the many plane wrecks that are scattered around the Peak.”

We moved onto discussion of her recent adventure along parts of the Scottish Watershed – what inspired her? “I absolutely love running the Scottish mountains because they feel a lot more wild and remote... I was doing some research earlier this year on some lesser-known big routes in Scotland I could do as a challenge.



Eventually, I came across the Scottish Watershed and the book *Ribbon of Wildness* by Peter Wright – the man who walked and mapped out the route in 2005. It got me so excited because so much of the route goes through some of the wildest and remotest parts of Scotland. The whole route covers 745 miles but I decided to only do the most mountainous section of it, which goes through the Highlands, because to me it was the most exciting and fun part. In the end, I did around 200 miles in the mountains.” Were there any parts that particularly stood out? “There’s still a lot that I haven’t explored... but the

wilder parts such as Glen Dessary, Glen Affric and the Curroul estate, where Ben Alder is located. They felt so remote – even the approach to the base of the climb in Glen Dessary was 5-6 miles. And Curroul, you can only reach either by train – to the remotest and highest station in the UK – or a 20km gravel bike ride or hike.” Given the size of the undertaking and the remote nature of vast swathes of the route, may not surprise you to learn that Zane reckons “only 10 people or so have done the entire route so far.”

I was keen to know how Zane managed the essentials of her trip, the navigation, nutrition and all the gear required for such a lengthy multi-day challenge. “I mapped out the route in the OS Maps app on my phone using Peter Wright’s book and used the GPX files from that. It was quite easy to do it this way as the book had what you might want to call ‘checkpoints’ and good descriptions of the route.” After initially mapping out a route of 300 miles she revised this to 200 miles due to weather, terrain and time constraints – with the ultimate destination being Jura and its eponymous race, taking place three weeks after her journey commenced. “Rather optimistically, my initial plan was to do it in a linear fashion. However, I only managed three days before I had to reconsider!” With a 20kg bag on her back and restocking options

en route limited by its remoteness, this seemed a wise decision. "When you add in so much rough ground off piste with a heavy load, it makes it very hard going. On day 1, I covered around 17.5 miles with 6,000ft of ascent which made me realise I really had to reconsider my plan. I did a 3-day linear to a campsite in Glencoe where Caru, a fellow Dark Peaker, joined me for a couple of days. She gave me a lift back to my car on her way back home; from then on, I drove to places to do either out and back or horseshoe routes." Her decision was absolutely vindicated, as the weather took a significant turn for the worse shortly after she and Caru parted ways. She was hindered further still by a bout of sinusitis that resulted in bronchitis and, after a cold and windy day on Ben Alder where she noticed "a burning sensation in my chest if breathing heavily," decided it best to take "two or three days off because I didn't want it become worse, especially when I had to camp over cold nights" in lieu of this. Despite the challenge that difficult conditions present, she is keen to say that, "I actually really enjoy running in crazy weather - there's something about that when you come back down after having beaten the elements."



I ask Zane if she had any big running plans ahead – perhaps another challenge or a round? "I like to follow the flow, keeping things open for change and adjust plans to how I feel. I definitely want to start doing more fell races in the Lakes and North Wales, as I enjoy mountain races the most. Maybe have a go at some shorter stuff, as I haven't done a race that's shorter than nine or ten miles. Maybe a couple of sky races next year." She does not plan to return to the Watershed, having covered the mountainous sections that most interested her in the first instance. "The first 170+ miles passes through rather populated lowland which I have no interest in and after the mountains, beyond Ullapool, you have a huge section of massive featureless bog – and I have even less interest in doing that! It is pretty soul destroying from what I've read in accounts by people who've done it." On the Big Rounds she tells me that she feels she "doesn't have enough miles and mountain days in my legs yet, but maybe in a year's time I might feel ready for one." However, I would wager that she has certainly built the strength of mind necessary to undertake a round and, in taking on sections of the Watershed that presented great difficulty and resulted in personal adversity, has the experience to boot.

Outside of her time on the fell Zane works in digital marketing, though is considering a career change. "I'd love to get into environmental protection, sustainability or the outdoor sector. Back when I was at uni I didn't know anyone who worked in these sectors or that you could have careers in them, so I will see what I get my feet into." I am certain, though, that her intrepid disposition and her willingness to take on challenging encounters will serve her well in whatever she chooses to do. It was a great pleasure to talk to a fellow brown vest who has continued the club tradition of undertaking the most esoteric of endeavours in the most squally of settings. "What I enjoy most about running," she says, "is being able to explore new places – the wilder the better – so hopefully I'll do more of that."

THANK
YOU FOR
READING

"If that content didn't turn your head I don't know what will, Jesus!"

