



So it's taken nearly a week to get my brain and body back in some kind of normal function to be able to throw together some words to sum up The Trail Outlaws Dark Skies Double.

This is a lengthy ramble so if you really want to read to the end grab yourself a cuppa and a biscuit or 2! The Double consists of running the advertised 26.5 miles on Saturday night and the advertised 14 miles on the Sunday evening. Put like that it sounds so simple, it's just running right?

Well that's how I was approaching this weekend event as after finishing what turned out to be 27.2 miles at the 2017 event and seeing the trophies handed out to those awesome people who completed the double I wanted one.... badly. As soon as the event opened for entry I was in.... immediately. However put the clock forward nearly 12 months and being only a few days before the event someone mentioned to me that I was crazy for running 40+ miles over the course of the weekend, and bang that was the first time that the maths had computed in my head..... help!!!

Still, forward to Saturday afternoon and Andrea rocked up to drive us up to Kielder, one of my favourite places in the whole world. Having ran it together in 2017 we had a fair old idea of what was ahead of us which pretty much consisted of 27 miles in the dark! We saw many Blyth faces (Steve, Pete & Steven) and took these as photo opportunities before heading to the start line. Being on the start line I was full of excitement of what was to come, Trail Outlaws had decided on a run song and soon Stereophonics Dakota was blasting from the speakers getting everyone slightly confused by the choice of words... 'I don't know where we are going now'?! Wonder how many actually felt like that was the truth!!!

Anyway roll on 17.30 at Hawkhirst Centre and off went 297 runners (9 from Blyth) onto what was still a daylight route clockwise around the reservoir. Those quicker runners soon disappeared and left a lot of us (Me, Andrea & Louise) at the back of the pack quite happily running onwards. Chatter could be enjoying the up and down of the course. hills... and inclines, running on the tried and tested method for us before enjoy it, being able to run without all soon picked up the pace and went to ultra runner friend Loveness caught up the next few miles listening to her listening to. Sometime around this point (Davina, Adele & Julie) 5.5 miles was feeling good so shouted out our checkpoint at 9.5 along the North Hall so torches on, quick comfort break thiviz was totally invisible and off on our mile 15 we met the official Anita who we stopped and chatted to way, they cycled along with us for the photo opportunity (Anyone who hasn't they are really beautiful). The next ran walked taking in the appearing stars very fortunate that the sky was mainly clear of stars and the wind of the previous day had dropped meaning near perfect running conditions, however it was cold and getting colder so once we checked in at the Dam and devoured some of the lovely almond cake (mmmmmm cake) it was time for a kit change, extra layers and a comfort break in civilisation resulting in a 24 min mile!!!



heard from all around and people appeared to be We chose the run walk method of walking all the flatter sections and flying down the hills!! It was a which not only saw us complete the course but the pressure of run run run till your done. Louise ahead, shortly after this my very crazy 200 mile with us a couple of miles in and we happily spent hilarious running tales that i'll never tire of the other lovely Blyth ladies went sailing past the first checkpoint at the Viaduct and we were numbers and headed on past towards the next Road. Light was starting to fade for us at this point somewhere off the beaten track hoping all the way we went once more. Somewhere around photographer and his eager prodigy our very own for a few moments before being told to get on our next half a mile before peddling off after the next seen Anitas pictures on the web site, get a look checkpoint was 16 miles at the Dam and so on we which is after all the highlight of this run. We were

Due to the inaccessibility of most of the reservoir the checkpoints are all accessible by road so only 1.5 miles later at Tower Know we hit the next one. Spirits were still on a high and we were in with a chance of getting a PB from last years time so this kept us going despite Andreas dodgy trainer needing readjusted every few mist for the next couple of miles!! It seemed a very very long way to the next checkpoint at Leaplish, and by now my mind was playing games on me, telling me it was 3 miles to Bull Cragg and then at least 10k around it when in fact it was 6.5 miles in total. I was rapidly losing the will to live but tried not to let onto Andrea as at least when one of

us is being positive it pulls the other along, my mind (not being able to calculate miles per hour required to get back quicker than last year) began to wander, and as we were now along one of the darker sections of the course I began thinking if there was a big bad man jumped out on us now I would totally freak out.... The the words came out of Andreas mouth, ' If someone jumped out of these trees now.....' So that was that we were both in the same boat and wanting the end to be in sight. Conversation was scares for this next section and in what seemed like several hours later we reached Leaplish which is always a pretty sight with the fairy lights in the trees. The coke cola was a very welcome addition to the check point and we were busy tucking in and listening to tales from the marshals about crazy ladies banging saucepans with ladles as the runners were coming past..... Yep the [#TeamBlyth](#) support crew who then were all summoned for cuddles and some words of encouragement that the end was only 1.6 miles away. This gave us the boost we needed and my head cleared, allowing me to work out if we kept up with the 13 min mile we would be able to come in somewhere under last years target so best foot forward and we managed a couple of our quickest miles (probably more due to the lack of incline on this last section of the course but we'll take that)!

We finally crossed the line after 27.3 miles 2 very happy ladies with a 4 min PB on last year somewhere around 23.30. We then had the mammoth decision of figuring out if we needed showered or our pre booked food first. In the name of humanity the shower won then we headed to the canteen for a very welcome hotpot. Back to the lodge we went but being the socialites we are, along with Anita and Michelle (who did an awesome job as tail bike) we sat talking into the small hours, which coupled with the clocks going forward made us 4 very tired campers the next morning. One hearty breakfast at Kielder Castle gave us the fuel we needed and we all headed off in different directions, (Me back to the lodge to chill, Michelle & Anita out on some red bike trails and the sensible one home)!!

In what seemed like only mins later but was actually 3 hours later David arrived raring to go. After lots of procrastinating and wishing the ground would just swallow me up it was time for the off once again. This time the start consisted of a bus ride along to The Dam and there I was stood like 'death warmed up' - not my words but those of a friend, the only 2 Blyth runners amongst 342 others to undertake the 14 mile course and myself being one of 40 to undertake The Double. Due to the later start time of 20.00 head torches were on from the start and layers aplenty were also in situ before one more round of Stereophonics Dakota, one more Klaxon then once again we were on our way this time in an anti clockwise direction. A mile in I started to feel somewhat human again but the inclines were now mountains not mole hills so warming up took somewhat longer than usual. The hobble walk was the style of choice for this leg much to Davids fresh legged despair! He also hasn't mastered the just talk rubbish to fill the miles that me and Andrea have mastered over the years whilst running so I spent a few miles in awe watching the lights disappear into the distance and thinking the first finishers will be home and dry now!! Running the course several times clockwise I thought I knew the course like the back of my hand but I soon realised that flipping it round had also had me totally lost. I had no idea apart from 2 very brief landmarked parts of the course where I was. There were pros and cons to this, i.e. it was exciting, just like discovering new territory, I didn't know where the 'incline' were, and couldn't see them as my head torch despite a battery change was outputting about the same power as me.. not much!! But the cons of not knowing where I was doesn't sit well with me and knowing these Trail Outlaw events don't always measure up I had no idea how far I still had to go. Despite all this the 2 checkpoints on this course at 6.5 and 10.3 miles flew by and I couldn't believe we had somewhere around 4 miles left to go. This gave me the boost I needed and David breathed a sigh of relief as we started picking people off playing cat and mouse with some and the rabbit and the hare with others. We began chatting with familiar faces around the course and this also boosted the morale certainly for me.



With less than a parkrun to go I felt good and was excited to get to the end, however I was using Davids light as mine had all but given up the ghost. With less than 800m to go David got excited, picking up the pace and ran faster than I could have ever kept up with, leaving me to walk the pot holed, flooded, muddy finishing straight in the dark! But I trooped home and was over the moon with a sub 3 finish which had it not been for David I wouldn't have achieved as I would have walked much more of the course. Despite feelings on the start line I had thoroughly enjoyed the total of 14.7 miles and was over the moon each mile had been below 13 mins. Grabbing the trophy I had waited 12 whole months to claim made the total of 42 miles exactly very worthwhile, but i decided then and there that 2019 would see me marshalling the 27 miles and running the 14+. A quick clothing change then too tired to even care about showers we grabbed another pre ordered meal this time a very spicy chicken curry followed by the biggest slice of Victoria sponge I could manage. That was it all over, well nearly over, heading out of the scout hut David tripped and managed to kick the top step hurting his foot and resulting in a very strange walking/limping style. So I pulled on the big girl pants to drive us home. How we ever got home i'll never know but we did, exhausted and excited to see the results the following day..... But David wasn't in them, it appears he was given the wrong number at registration so he had ran the whole thing as some poor lady, goodness knows if she ran or not, but several e mails, text, tweets and days later I'm pleased to report he is now in the results even though he's several seconds ahead of my time!!



So sitting here writing this can of cider in hand late on a Friday night I may be thinking could I do the double again and could I manage sub 6 on another day..... but thats another story!! Thank you for sticking with me till the end.

Lesley