



So, the day to run the Dark Skies Marathon had finally arrived, and what a day (& night of course) it turned out to be ! I travelled up to Kielder with Steven (who very kindly drove) and Pete H, we thoroughly enjoyed the fantastic views as we drove up the A68 then across to Kielder.



We arrived just as the main carpark had filled up so had to park on the road at the entrance, which wasn't too bad apart from the fact that when we tried to register and get our number they told us we had to get our kit checked first, so it was back to the car for our bags, which was a bit of a pain. But once we trudged up the hill again and had our bags given the nod we got our numbers then bumped into Lesley and Andrea and then had a little wander down to the Reservoir. The conditions were perfect, clear skies and rather warm in the sun, but as we were to find out later once the sun went down it got really rather cold, no, wait, bloody freezing.



As time was getting on a bit we made our way back down to the car and made the final preparations for the race, and some coffee and a few snacks of course. All sorted we made our way back up to the start line at 5pm for our 5:30 start to see if we could find our fellow BRC buddies. We soon found everyone, seeing Anita and Michelle on their bikes as they weren't able to run , Anita was on photographing duties and Michelle was tail biker. Then we bumped into the knitting club, Davina, Adele and Julie, the marathon stalwarts of BRC, all smiling as usual, we also bumped into some friendly faces from Tri Northumberland who were also doing the race.



So, the time was nearing 5:30 so we had our safety briefing by one of the Trail Outlaws team, which was informative, humorous and a little scary, with warnings of hypothermia etc. Then we all gathered at near the start line, we were a little close to the front for my liking but before we knew it we were off ! The plan was for the 3 of us to run together but Mr H went off like a scalded cat leaving Steven and I wondering what the hell he was doing !, the first part of the race was a gentle introduction to the race, with a small loop around the scout centre area, I was a tiny bit worried about my choice of footwear (bought second hand only a couple of weeks ago) but this thankfully turned out to not be an issue as they served me very well. After crossing the start line again we made our way down the hill and turned right to start out trek around the reservoir, more about this hill later.....



Not long after the turn right I caught up with Steven and Pete, we then settled in to our pace with me trying to get them to slow the hell down for the first few miles, being Mr sensible as always. I was glad I plumped for the trail shoes rather than the road shoes as it was a bit muddy in places. The plan was to take it steady and enjoy the run rather than racing it, we had a vague goal of getting under 4 hours and we had made a good start.

The first of many, many, many hills arrived just after 2 mile, with a little switch back up a hill, then back down again, to be followed by another decent climb more or less straight away, this was to be the state of play for the next 24 miles, up then down, then up, then down, then, well you get the idea.

After about 4 miles we had settled into a fairly decent sensible pace of 8:15 ish and dug in, the light was just starting to fade a little and you could feel the slight drop in temperature to.

There were some stunning views across the reservoir to the right, I wish I could have had time to stop and take a few photos but we motored on. The first check point arrived at about 5.5 miles , I also coincided this with my first energy gel, a quick few gulps of water to wash down the gel and we were off again. At this point we started running with a Lad from Heaton Harriers (Paul) who we ran with us for the next few miles talking about, unsurprisingly, all things running.

We reached the northernmost part of the run at mile 6, punctuated by yet another hill, and now we were running down the west side of the reservoir (from now on I shall ref for to it as R as I am sick of spelling it wrong) towards the Dam at the southern end 10 miles away.

The next feed station came upon us pretty quickly at mile 9 but not before one of the toughest climbs of the day, it just went on and on, and on, rising 130ft in half a mile to the highest part of the run at 750ft. We took slightly longer at this feed station taking a few sweets along with the water and another energy gel. Our next goal was to get to the half way point and we enjoyed the slightly less hilly section at this point coming across a couple of runners as we did, one fella had done the Hardmoors 55 last weekend, nutter !

The light was really starting to fall now and after stopping for a quick Pee it was time to put the head torches on, at this point Paul and Pete started to Pull away, but Steven and I just settled in and kept plodding along nicely, passing some interesting art landmarks on the way.

The temperature was no really starting to drop, I was no rather glad of my multiple layers and hat and gloves, although my inner base layer was giving me a bit of gip, digging uncomfortably into my stomach, cue me trying to sort it out whilst running along, trying not to trip over.

As we approached the halfway point there was yet another tasty hill to get over, they were getting progressively harder to get over, with our pace no dropping a little, but we dug in and enjoyed the down hills , getting a little respite from the uphill sections.

So, we had now completed our rather long warm up and only had a ½ marathon to do so we pushed on towards the next Checkpoint at the Dam at roughly 16 miles. We could now see those ahead of us with their headtorches stringing along, it was really quite impressive, and also when we turned at the peninsula towards the Dam at mile 15 we could

also see all the lights across the water behind us, I couldn't resist a loud shout out of "WELL DONE EVERYONE" I also considered a bit of ogie, ogie,ogie but managed to restrain myself, just.

At mile 16 at the edge of the Dam we hit the next Checkpoint, taking more time at this one, consuming another gel, more water, pretzels, and a couple of biscuits. We also reconnected with Pete at this point, good to have him back in the group as I am sure Steven was too, so he didn't just have to listen to my constant drivel and swearing at hills.

We were almost across the Dam when my Dad appeared with camera in hand, unfortunately he could not get the flash to work so he jumped back in his car and told us he would see us in a couple of miles to try again !

We got off the Dam at mile 17 and then this is where it really started to get tough, our legs were now feeling the continuous effort from the previous 16 miles of hills, but we dug in. My Dad appeared again at approx. Mile 18 and we posed for a few quick photos and then we were off again, determined to get under 4 hours, and as long as we kept moving at sub 10 min pace we should be ok.



Once we left my Dad it was back to the usual up and down, and people were catching us up and we really didn't want to be passed at this stage so we put our heads down and pressed on. Peter started to struggle at 23, with us increase in pace with paul between 10 and 16 now starting to kick in. But we all helped each other, cajoling each other with lots of encouragement to keep going and to make the most of the the down hillers as Steven referred to them, and we did mostly achieve this, but even pushing going down was quite a struggle.

By mile 23 It was now looking a little touch and go whether we would break 4 hours but I was now determined to do it, after not really being bothered I was now really quite keen on getting sub 4, so I increased my pace a little and tried to encourage the guys to do the same.

At mile 25 Pete was running on empty and really struggling on the hills and at 25.5 with a mile to go (or so I thought) I am slightly ashamed to say I pressed on alone, leaving Steven waiting for Pete.

I managed to push on and pick up the pace a little, running strongly through Leaplish and past Lynn and the gang cheering everyone on, this was the last checkpoint but I didn't even slow down, as to stop here would be a very bad idea.

At his point I remembered the hill we had ran down at the start, this would be the final test, my quads were starting to really protest and I was flagging a little, none the less I managed to chase down and pass a couple of runners ahead of me.

I passed 26 and was expecting the finish to be visible in front of me, but it was nowhere to be seen, this was not good.

I eventually got off the track at 26.5 and could see the treeline of the hill ahead and a marshall at the turn point, it was now 3:56 by my watch, this was going to be close.

As I approached the turn for the final effort some twonk in a BMW X5 with its main beam on was also approaching the turn from the opposite direction blinding me in the process, cue more swearing. Now I was on the hill , I had less than 3 mins to reach the finish, I was cold, tired, sore but I was determined to get under the 4. I finally crested the hill and pushed on again towards the cheering crowds at the finish, Steven had prewarned us of the slightly strange finish inside the scout centre so I turned left and twisted and turned into the warm welcome of the hut, and that was me done,

stopping my watch with just a minute to spare, with the final total of 26.9 miles on the clock. What a relief to finally stop running, a quick glug of water, then I wandered to the other building in in search of food and drink, only to realise you needed to donate some dosh for tea and cake, unfortunately I had none, my money being in stevens car. But thankfully the guy took pity on my bedraggled state and let me have a cup of tea for free !.

I then stumbled back to the finish line in search of Pete and Steven, found them in the hut having finished just a couple of minutes behind me.

We had done it ! The Tshirt and medal were rather good

We then headed straight back to the car (sorry we didn't wait to see in our BRC buddies !) to get out of our cold sweaty clothes, cheering on the runners coming up the hill as we made our way down.

Once at the car we quickly stripped off and got some dry clothes on, it was effing freezing, we were cooling down very quickly and got ready as quick as we could then jumped in the car to get warm. Well, I say jumped, I mean levered our aching bodies into the car.

I was so glad I had brought a flask and the coffee warmed us up nicely along with a few yum yums I had brought along. I was barely able to drink my coffee as my hands were shaking so much !.

It was now time to get home, Steven got us back home safely then it was time for a shower and some more grub !

So in summary I thoroughly enjoyed my run at keilder, yes it was tough and flipping cold but so satisfying to finish, it wouldn't have been the same without Steven and Pete, running with them made the run so much better, it would have been purgatory running by myself.



So, would I do it again ? maybe.....

Thanks for reading,

All the best,

Steve D



Number	Firstname	Lastname	Club	Time	Postion	Gender	Gender	Category	Category
							Postion		Postion
111	Steve	Dobby	Blyth Running Club	03:59:19.19.927	28	Male	23	M40	13
179	Peter	Holmback	Blyth Running Club	04:02:04.04.611	32	Male	27	M	10
139	Steven	French	Blyth Running Club	04:02:05.05.521	33	Male	28	M40	17
351	Paul	Stephenson	Blyth Running Club	05:02:33.33.114	132	Male	98	M	34
232	Adele	Lonsdale	Blyth	05:14:42.42.458	156	Female	47	F50	9
233	Davina	Lonsdale	Blyth	05:14:46.46.458	157	Female	48	F50	10
225	Julie	Lemin	Blyth Running Club	05:28:52.52.771	186	Female	61	F40	22
131	Lesley	Falkous	Blyth Running Club	06:08:15.15.153	244	Female	92	F	35
400	Andrea	Wilson	Blyth Running Club	06:08:17.17.062	245	Female	93	F40	35