

The Durham Hewitts Round

[Sunday 10th July 2011] I set off at 9:20am, already 80 mins behind my schedule due to a rather busy night before. Indeed, after looking at the weather report, I had intended to set off early and then considered postponing but in the end I figured I might as well give it a go. I was opting for an anti-clockwise round starting in St John's Chapel, Weardale, the same as the inaugural round by Stu Ferguson and Steve Lumb in 2006. I had separated the route into four sections, three of which were almost identical in distance at about 9.5 to 10 miles each (legs 1, 2 and 4) and one of which was a real monster taking in the highest summit, the biggest climb, a river crossing, and a rather intimidating 18 miles. I chose the war memorial in the village square as my start/finish point. I reflected on the added poignancy of this as I read the names of young men, almost certainly younger than I am now, who never have had the chance to engage in such follies and whose challenges in life were not self-imposed but related to real survival and ultimately deadly situations. Burtree Fell came up within the hour and Killhope Law about 30 mins later. This section is very tough with few paths on the open ground and the famous Killhope peat hags. I got to Killhope Cross 8 mins ahead of schedule. I was feeling good but it had been warmer than I had expected. Across to Deadstones the ground was very wet with last week's rainfall but there were some decent trods. I left my baseball cap at Burnhope Seat and didn't realise until it was just beyond the sensible point of return. Great Stony Hill and Three Pikes came up easily and I enjoyed this section as it is one of the most runnable and scenic. I made it to Harwood in 2h03, 57 mins up on that section. I took my time up Viewing Hill and had a couple of sandwiches, which were a welcome change from energy gels. Felt the first few specks of rain from some dark clouds overhead and got out my waterproof ready for the worst, but it never came and never again threatened. On several occasions I was to reflect on just how lucky I was with the weather. Coming off Viewing Hill I had a bad ankle twist but was just off the track alongside Cow Green reservoir so had a chance to rest it from all the twisting and turning there. I was beginning to slow now and feeling pretty rough. Got to Cauldron Spout and had a little sit down and some water before tackling Mickel Fell. This is restricted access land but I knew today was open to the public. It was a long climb up which felt much harder than the previous week's recce. As I reached the summit plateau I was bathed in glorious and warm sunshine. I had another little rest before what I knew would be an arduous slog to Bink Moss, my least favourite part of the route. Bink Moss eventually came and, thankfully, quickly went. Even the descent from this 'summit' isn't enjoyable but the one redeeming feature is the passage through Holwick Scar at the bottom. I really perked up here as I knew that leg 3 was almost over and I had only leg 4 left, which I consider to be quite easy. I had another short rest at Bowlees nature reserve and more stream water, then a very slow jog/yomp to the top of James' Hill. I finally gave up on any chance of sub-10 hours but figured I should manage under 11. I had some glorious early evening sunshine which made the yomp up James' Hill enjoyable. Spirits were up now knowing that this was the last big climb of the day. Twisted my other ankle just before the summit trig but jogged it off and made good progress towards Chapel Fell. Got to Chapel Fell, a hill I know well, and started on my descent, promptly twisting my ankle again but this time I just ploughed on through. I really started to the up the pace as I set myself an entirely arbitrary target of finishing before 8pm, which I managed with 1 minute to spare. I felt surprisingly OK. I staggered into the Golden Lion and had a pint of lemonade and half a pint of beer. 20 minutes later I was driving home through Weardale in lovely late evening sun. My

total time was 10h39m04s, nearly 3.5 hours quicker than Stu and Steve's round, although they had to contend with much worse weather. I had put a big effort into training for this event with long training runs and a full route recce in four sections. Each recce was a solo effort and required me to park at the finish then cycle to the start, do the run, and then drive back to the start to pick up my bike. It was all worth it in the end. I believe that this is only the second successful completion of the round since Stu established it in 2006 and I would encourage others to have a go. I can provide full OS 1:25K maps of my route and other tips; there is no need to drive all that far to get your kicks. In the all the runs of the route I met only 4 hikers on the route (both pairs on the full attempt) and except for the usual 'crowds' around Cauldron Spout and Bowlees, came across no one else at all. Now onto Stu's reservoir round

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