

## Saunders Lakeland Mountain Marathon 2016

It all started back on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016. I said to Lizzie, “should we do the Saunders this year?” Lizzie is always up for challenge and we then got ourselves entered onto the Carrock Fell class. We did deliberate over doing one of the longer classes, Bowfell or Kirkfell, but the rules do state that you should not enter these classes without a member of the team having previous mountain marathon experience. Yes, we both do fell running and continue to orienteer, if only on a Wednesday evening, but we are “law abiding” citizens and therefore followed the rules! So there we have it, T minus 6 months and counting... Thankfully, we had been doing a few longer runs at the weekend so felt, we were at least fit enough be able to handle the distance. The question was, could we do this over two days whilst carrying clothes, camping gear and food in what is typically wet July weather. There was only one way to find out....

A couple of months later, I had an email through from my sister Sarah, asking if I had heard of the Saunders as she had just been entered with her friend and ex GB orienteer Mhairi Mackenzie. I did chuckle to myself when I saw that she was entered on the class above us, Kirkfell. It would have been nice to have raced against them and get one up on my big sis! Now in April, we were starting to think a little more seriously about the event and what kit we would need. This being our first MM, we weren't going to go out and buy a lot of expensive, super light-weight kit and therefore opted for asking friends if they could lend us kit and give us plenty of advice on what to wear, what to eat and when to eat etc etc. Training on the other hand was going ok, we were continuing to get out of a weekend for some long runs and my achilles was holding up ok.

Come the start of June, we had a month to go and therefore organised a nice 20km run from Hartsop up over High Street to get some more miles in the legs. The sun was out and it was a great day to be on the fells! A couple of days later, the final details were released, where we found out that the event was to be staged from just outside Pooley Bridge. With a month to go, it all became very real so got in touch with Lucy and Wil Spain to pick up rucksacks, single skinned tent, camping stove and sleeping bags. We now had all the gear (and some idea) and were ready to go! The day before was spent picking up pasta, energy bars and for myself a full Soreen malt loaf. Early night on Friday was followed by a very early start on Saturday arriving at Pooley bridge at 7am. Bags packed, kit checked and ready for the off at 08:42.



*Ready and raring to go*

Beep, Beep Beep, Beeeep, and we were off. First thing to do was to get control descriptions and draw on our route using the six figure grid references provided. This was made slightly more challenging with the rain, which had just begun as we knelt down on the damp grass. After spending a good 10 minutes ensuring we got this right, we set off to our first control. Lizzie set a good pace and managed to overtake a number of the earlier starters. Controls 1, 2 and 3 were all relatively easy, we were running well and making good progress. What's more, the rain stopped and there was a little bit of sunshine. As we dropped into our third control and an hour and half into the race, we had some food. Unfortunately, as we didn't want to stop we carried on running and I did not look at the map properly for the next leg. I decided to take a more straight line route which involved a little more climb and in hindsight should have gone round the top of the valley. It took us nearly an hour to get to the next control where we should have been at least 10 minutes quicker. Never mind, next control. No. 5. We were now at far end of the course and the control was on the top of Gray Crag with the only real option available to go up over Kidsty Pike, High Street and then skirt Thornthwaite Crag. At this point, the weather really came in and we were battered by the wind and rain. As we climbed Kidsty Pike, I had another Gel to keep my energy levels up. We second on this leg and as we approached the control, total running time was 3 hrs 27 mins. We were going well and Lizzie was continuing to push the pace with only three 'short leg' controls to go. We had no problem in finding these, with the penultimate control on a ruin located on the steep slopes heading down in to Patterdale off Angletarn Pikes. We came in to the finish with a time of 4 hrs 30 minutes and currently in 1<sup>st</sup> place.

The rain was lashing down when we arrived at the campsite so had the enjoyable experience of putting the tent up and spending the next hour or so warming up. We spent the rest of the afternoon catching up with other competitors and chilling whilst 're-fueling'. One of the benefits to the Saunders is you can pre-order drinks for when you finish and to take advantage of this, Lizzie and I bought ourselves orange juice, water and 6 pints of milk!

The alarm went off the next morning at around 5:30 but by the time we got up it was nearer 5:45... Legs were feeling ok. We knew that as the current leaders on the course, we would be setting off first at 7:15am on a chasing start. At around 6:30am, the organisers handed out the control descriptions for the day. I went and collected these but as we were still trying to finish have breakfast and get packed, we did not spend long enough drawing our map. It all became very rushed and we ended having to run to the start, me without my contact lenses in and Lizzie trying to finish and dispose of our final pint of milk! We ended up being a minute late and saw the second place team of Ben Procter and Karl Mason (only 2 minutes behind us after the first day) waiting to start. The first control was at the top of Place Fell and with us losing a minute to Ben and Karl, we pushed hard up the hill pulling out around a 3 minute lead on them. As we descended to the next control, they caught us back up as we lost a bit of time going



through an area of boulders/bracken but were able to pull away as we climbed to the second control. At this point we never saw them again. The next control was to in a re-entrant but whilst marking our map we did not put this in the right location and therefore lost a good 10 minutes on our rivals. We eventually found it and pushed on to the next control without any issue. Even with this error, we still did not see any pairs come past us so knew we were still in the lead. We headed on a good bearing to the fifth control and again we lost a little time navigating to the correct hill but this was not drastic. It all went slightly on the next control where we had not put the circle on a particular feature and ended up wasting time again navigating vaguely to an area. When we finally reached this control and male pairing dropped in at the same time. At the time, I thought they were not in our class and as we headed to the sixth control they went in a different direction to us. Unfortunately, after making another error due control placement on the map, we saw this same pairing coming out of this penultimate control and heading down the hill to the last one. We pushed on to the finish with now tiring legs in a time of 3 hrs 36. We looked at our splits and saw that we were in fact in second place and first mixed behind this male pairing (very frustrating!). Being the first mixed pair back, we had our kit check, got ourselves changed and enjoyed a nice meal and cake whilst waiting for the remaining competitors to finish.

We ended up being the first mixed pairs and second overall in the class. A little annoyed at our navigation at time but it was a really great experience, thoroughly enjoyed it and would recommend it to anyone.

Rob and Lizzie



Lizzie and Rob - 1<sup>st</sup> Mixed - Carrock Fell  
Sarah and Mhairi - 1<sup>st</sup> Women Kirk Fell