

Marsden-Edale Double Double

Helen Pritchard - (90 miles and 6,000 metres)

I'm not sure whether I blame Geoff Bell or Mike Zeidan for suggesting a Marsden-Edale Double Double. I think both in equal measures, which means I have both to thank in equal measures. Mike asked me in February 2017 if I had ever considered this challenge, and did I think it a good idea? The answer was a clear "No!" and "what a stupid idea....if I'm going to cover that distance I want sunshine, dry underfoot and stunning views". That was the end of the conversation until November 2017 when Mike, in passing, mentioned that Geoff Bell had mentioned in passing the silly venture, and a split second of insanity led me to say...why notas long as the weather is OK. Mike and I had a quick look at parts of the route to decide our favoured path. We discussed how we had both previously coped with the mental challenge of such ridiculous exploits. Mike assured me that he had some jokes to cheer me up should they be needed. His repertoire extended to three jokes. As he thought them so funny that he immediately shared two of them with me I was determined to make sure the situation never arose that I was threatened with the third joke. December was a busy month for us both, with all the usual Yuletide festivities and viruses to fight and, to be honest, I didn't really think about it. We had discussed that on Wednesday 3rd of January a decision would be made based on weather and, at this point, Mike's cold. Rae looked at endless forecasts, I checked one and I'm not sure where Mike took his information from, but it was on!!! Reality hit as suddenly we're discussing the finer logistics of support, are waterproof socks a good idea and what happens if we're not back to join the group doing the Double leaving Edale at 10pm on the Friday?

Julie kindly drove us to Edale on the Friday morning for a 6am start. It was strange and very exciting to be trotting gently towards Golden Clough so early, unfortunately knowing what lay ahead but not how it would transpire. Mike is faster than me but steady is the way forward over this distance. Daybreak was gradual., We turned torches off as we ascended Doctor's Gate onto the Pennine Way to Bleaklow Head. The Snake road was surprisingly busy for so early in the day and it was strange to think of all the commuters doing another day in the office as our adventure lay ahead. Bleaklow and Black Hill were dusted in snow and ice and flakes hung in the thick air. Several times we had the treat of glimpsing white mountain hares just as startled to see us as we were them. We had arranged for Rae to meet us at the top of the Wessenden track. We arrived at 11am and left bags and collected Julie to run down and back up the track before having a break. Psychologically this was a good idea as the track is exceedingly dull at best but, to be honest, the views and collecting Pip the dog (latest addition to my family) and Julie, Mike's long-suffering better half, made it pleasurable on this rare occasion. We had a long break of about 45 minutes which was lovely, as normally breaks last the time it takes to change socks whilst eating rice pudding. Rae had set our bags out in the back of the campervan; and

it looked like part of the world food programme there were so many bags. I blame Mike for most of the bags and I think the numerous pots of rice pudding were the main culprit. I think Mike must be a major shareholder of Ambrosia.

We left for Black Hill at 1pm, feeling dry and full of rice pudding, to ascend Black Hill and head back towards Edale. The weather as we ran over Black Hill was glorious with a slight breeze, beautiful shades in the sky and as good as it gets underfoot. This continued as we ascended Bleaklow via Wildboar Clough and we were both focused upon trying to get onto the Snake road before we needed torches. As we descended Doctor's Gate to the layby the last of the light bid us farewell. Torches on we headed on our route, ascending to Seal Stones on the edge of Kinder and Mike's navigation of the short crossing was first class as through the thick mist we arrived perfectly at the top of Golden Clough. We arrived at the Rambler Inn in Edale just after 6pm and about 2 hours ahead of schedule. Squinting through the Inn's misted window wondering whether to go in or look for the campervan in the car park, who should we see pint in hand at the bar? Rae looked very, very disappointed as he was looking forwards to his well earned pint. With four hours to spare we had a coffee and downloaded our day. Both Mike and I felt good and were buzzing from a superb day. Our feet were doing well, neither had any niggles and we were eating well. Mike was timekeeper of eating and drinking and, quite wisely, every hour and half hour reminded us both to eat and drink something. Mike seemed to eat endless egg sandwiches and boiled potatoes that he tried to palm off on me. I thought initially 'how kind' then, as his pack became lighter and mine didn't I began to think 'cheeky beggar'. I enjoyed my fruit bread, cheese butties and salted cashew nuts. After a very civilised half hour in the pub Julie was left in charge of Mike's torch battery recharging and we headed to the van. We still had three hours to eat, change, eat, rest, eat.

By 9:45pm the car park was beginning to fill with the Rucksack Club members and friends who had in a moment of weakness decided to put themselves through the Double. It felt like two events as the break psychologically separated the day from the night and I thought at least Mike has someone different to talk to in case he's bored with me. We left the Rambler at 10pm with eight new and fresh bodies in our group and Ben Llewellyn at the helm. His dad, Andy, was supposed to be leading the venture but there was some rumour or other of a virus (megasciveedoubleviridae). Ben gallantly rose to the job. Navigating in the dark would be easier than maintaining some level of decorum within the select group. The night section lasted eight and a half hours and kind of merged into the darkness and rain and sleet and snow and wind that chased us across the hills. Navigation was difficult as the fog and reflection from torches made the landscape change shape. I do clearly in my early morning stupor remember Dave Woolley's shoe. At Torside we stopped for a break and Woolley discovered that his grip hadn't been as confident as usual as half his sole was detached from the upper. After the predictable jokes about Woolley being sole-less a resourceful Kev Saville tried to tie the shoe back



Setting out with the 'Doublers' from the Rambler on Friday evening.

L - R: Kev Saville, George Yates, Ian Tapleton (g), Dave Woolley, Ben Llewellyn, Haydn Williams (g), Liam Brady (g), Helen and, Mike, Will Meredith.

Photo Rae Pritchard

on but I think it just survived the next sixteen hours held together by the best Peak District peat. I also remember that it was lovely to chat to people and hear the murmur and expletives of those sharing an experience there are no words to describe – or at least words that can be printed!

We ran off Black Hill in freezing cold icy conditions in a full blizzard. It was pretty grim actually; I was very pleased to say a quick hello to Rae in the campervan and start off again down the track. Poor Rae had only slept a few hours due to the wind (outside!) and now we were waking him up ahead of schedule just after 6am. Pip the pesky pup thought it great that we had appeared in the darkness, and she was desperately trying to climb through the window that Rae had opened to say hello. I had felt tired ascending Black Hill as the deathly 4am groaned and just kept focussed that after the track daylight would peek at us, and we would have breakfast before the last little bit home. Gareth and Netty Llewellyn were providing first-class support for the Doublers at the end of the track. Gareth, just needing an apron, handing out cups of tea and Netty, wearing the entire contents of a Rab warehouse, sat behind a huge cauldron of porridge.



Breakfast in Campervan.

Photo Rae Pritchard

The track was completed by 7:45am and we were again sat in the back of the van surrounded by rice pudding and looking at our bare, increasingly Hobbit-like feet as we tried to dry them off. I hid my feet as didn't want to put Mike off his breakfast. We had a good hour's respite from the wind and cold and drank lots of tea. It was a real treat not to feel rushed. No race. The aim was to complete. We had seen people walking Marsden-Edale, Singlers, and Doublers heading towards home in small groups with varying amounts of visible enthusiasm and hobbling.

We left the rice puddings at 8:45am and made our way up Black Hill. The day was improving and it seemed hours since we had made such a hasty retreat into the valley. It took me the climb to get going again, but then our steady trot saw us descend onto the track towards Crowden. We passed Granville's galloping gourmet kitchen, quite sad not to stop and enjoy the fare, but I don't think we would have set off again. The weather wasn't very kind for the next few hours as the fine rain in the valley became driving hail as we slid around ascending Wildboar Clough. We plodded onwards. I was concerned Mike would get cold as he is faster than me. Anyway, we saw through the snowflakes the outline of figures plodding along a fence line to our left. It had to be the Doublers, as who else is so stupid to have even left their bed at this time? We crossed the fence line at a different point as we ascended to the Pennine Way and disappeared into the groughs as we followed a runner's trod. Bleaklow Head certainly lived up to its name as we waited to say hello to the others. You had to stand facing away from the wind as it was cruel and stung any exposed skin. After a very brief hello we headed off along the Pennine Way. The ground was slippery as a mixture of mud and ice clung to the studs on your shoes. Lucky for Woolley really!



Helen and Mike after finishing at Edale.

Photo John Payne

As we were about to start the run along the Snake road who should turn up but John Payne? When asked if we were doing the Double there was a slight pause as we said “yes, sort of”, then I take full credit for leaving Mr Payne speechless as we told him our real route. According to Rae, when he had regained the power of speech he was far from speechless!

We wanted to get back to Edale before the dark as both of us had drained our best torches. I stopped a couple of times on the climb up to the north edge of Kinder, partly to catch my breath but mainly just to stand and look at the view of where I live and appreciate how lucky I am. Mike said he was ready for finishing but I was sad really that the adventure was coming to a close. Again, Mike navigated a perfect line for the short crossing and after a slippery descent of Golden Clough we were nearly home. We arrived back at the Rambler Inn at 2:45pm and were met by Keith Towell, John Payne (who had now regained the power of speech) and Mark and Jackie Hatton. A very select welcoming committee but fully appreciated. Even more appreciated when Jackie turned into mum mode and bought tea and cake. Poor Rae got grief from Mark for missing our return but, to be fair, I didn't expect to be back for another couple of hours. It was an honour to share a

drink with Geoff at the end. I owe him a big thank you as I would never have come up with such a silly idea for a wonderful day out!

Did I get bored on the route? Not at all. The weather and light, hand in hand, dress the landscape in ever changing gowns. The view is never the same twice, as neither is the person who is fortunate to share the moment. Bored? Watching mountain hares?

I felt quite overwhelmed by the whole experience and wasn't really ready to let it finish. There is a beautiful simplicity to a journey like this. You step outside your usual day to day experiences, expectations and roles and your focus is no further than your next step.

We calculated the route at 90 miles and 6,000 metres of ascent. Consumed an unmentionable amount of food of which a high percentage was rice pudding on Mike's behalf and, unlike Woolley, our shoes and feet were unbelievably not shredded as we sat in the pub at the end surrounded by friends. In the words of the man himself, Geoff, 'may this Rucksack Club madness continue'.



Mike and Helen with Geoff Bell.

Photo John Llewellyn