

Coniston 14 2022 by Paul Greene

I blame Tony Bastin who first suggested we enter the Coniston 14, a flattish 14-mile road race around Coniston Water, one of the jewels of the Lake District. I should have smelled a rat at that point – flattish, Cumbria, erm, but I fell for it. As did Katharine and Richard Ashworth, Katherine Scott, Judith Smith and Alistair White.

This race is one of the most scenically attractive road races you can do. Virtually everywhere you look it is stunningly beautiful, with the Old Man looming over the Lake and pretty village of Coniston. With all the other surrounding fells it really is a visual treat. But flat? Flattish? We were going to find out.

With the race starting at 11am it was entirely possible to travel there first thing in the morning and bang on 7am, Tony turned up and we headed off to Coniston after collecting Al and Judith. The sun shone and burned off the morning chill as we sped through the Dales into Cumbria. The temperature gauge climbed as did the surrounding scenery, 18C by the time we reached Coniston. There was even talk in the car of sun cream and shades.

And as we rolled into the school carpark at 9.30am it was a lovely sunny day. We headed for a stroll into the village and quickly found Team Ashworth sat outside The Black Bull; they may have been there all night. But in hindsight it was a bluff by Richard as he went on to do a brilliant time. The rest of us had a cup of tea, with Judith and Al mainlining on strong coffee.

After a bit of happy walking around in the sunshine it was time for the race. The local brass band oompahed into life and was soon banging out a jaunty tune in the sunshine while over a 1000 smiling runners strolled to the start. Richard and Tony dragged me indecently near the start-line, but I knew I'd be taking it easy, still nursing an aching glute.

Soon we were off and straight away you head up a hill, turn left out of the village and into another long slope. But quickly you are in magnificent scenery, and I found my own pace, happy to fall into a semi-trance soothed by the ever-changing vista of the lake and hills, the colours always beautiful. There are some mild 'downs' but always followed by another 'up', then another. 'Flattish' is a misnomer and translates to 'undulating' in West Yorkshire and 'mountainous' for East Anglia. I'm not sure there are any flat bits, or that is what my legs told me. At one point you burst, slowly in my case, from a wood and there is the Old Man majestic over the lake. I was in some mild agony at that point but didn't really care.

I spotted Tony some way ahead looking back – did he really think I was going to catch and overhaul him? No chance. I even walked for about a mile after the last water stop at about Mile 10, but then got going again down a glorious downhill stretch leading back to Coniston. On the run-in you pass a 'half marathon marker and realise you've still got some way to go. The crowds thicken as you approach Coniston and blissfully the uphill start becomes a downhill finish, even a mild sprint.

In the Abbey way we counted and cheered everyone in. We all did great and hats off especially to Judith who did her longest ever run. After, we all ambled back up to the village, sat outside The Black Bull with loads of other happy runners and hikers in the sunshine and had a well-earned pint and some grub.

It was a fab day! Sunny, a tough and beautiful course and great Abbey company. I blame Tony Bastin.