

# Every Witch Way But Loose

By

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The one certain thing about any 24 hour event (at least this side of the Arctic Circle) is that some of it will be run in the dark of night. I only have a small amount of experience of this, with the Fellsman last year, a couple of December snowy night walks from Kettlewell with work friends and a couple of off-road headtorch club runs in 2013, so the idea of a night navigation event on Pendle Hill in Lancashire sounded like ideal preparation as well as a lot of fun

After a 2 hour car journey over from Leeds, with a fantastic sunset, followed by an intimidating view of the hill as I dropped down into Barley, I arrived at registration excited and nervous.

The event lasts exactly an hour. You are given a map 30 seconds before you start which has 20 circles marked on it spread over several square miles. The idea is you navigate to the circle where you will find a post with a hole punch on it which you use to mark the box of the relevant checkpoint on your card. Each hole punch has a different pattern of spikes, to make it possible to check you have visited the right checkpoint. The furthest checkpoints give you more points, but for every 30 seconds over an hour you take you lose 5 points. Starts are staggered to stop everyone following each other around. Simple.

So just after 7pm I was handed my map and then told to 'go!' Not knowing the area very well, I decided I would just set off following the route of the Tour of Pendle fell races and then decide which checkpoints to pick up once I was away from the start. I immediately passed the team of 3 (plus Molly the dog) who had started in front of me but were arguing about which way up the map should go, and headed away from the lights of the village and into the dark of the slopes of the hill.

My only plan was that, as the night was so clear, I wanted to get up to the summit of the hill. I was also pretty sure that the checkpoints up there would be worth most points (I didn't realise until I had nearly finished that I had folded the map in a way that obscured the points and descriptions of the checkpoints- never mind).

After finding a few of the red and white marked posts, I started the big ascent up to the top of Pendle, seeing the pinpricks of other runners' headtorches as I climbed higher and higher. Once at the top, I picked up a checkpoint hidden behind a wall in a pile of snow, then allowed myself a few seconds to look up at the mass of stars seemingly a few feet above my head, and around at the lights of the Lancashire towns and the dark bulk of the Yorkshire Dales to the North.

However, I was also aware that I was at about 40 minutes by now, so I found the trig point, took a compass bearing to a checkpoint on the side of the hill, and dived off the edge, swinging my headtorch like a lighthouse to find the post. There it was behind a sheep shelter; I quickly punched my card then got away from it to stop anyone seeing where I'd been.

By now I was worried I was going to be late and ran down a lane in what I hoped was the right direction for the pub, making half hearted, unsuccessful attempts to find checkpoints on the way, and finally sprinted back along the road to the finish with 48 seconds left.

In the pub, everyone had something to say about tactics and missed checkpoints. The winner was a quick runner from the local club of Clayton-Le-Moor, and the person who finished last was also a quick runner from the local club of Clayton-Le-Moor. I was somewhere in the middle, but had had a brilliant evening, completely separated from real life for the hour I was out. It also gave me a bit of confidence for the night sections of the races I have coming up.