

2010 Lakeland 100: Finished Business

by Andy Mouncey

It's A Taper, Jim – But Not As You Know It

'Well, Mr Mouncey, the good news is that it's not broken.'

My entire being deflates about 3 sizes as every orifice that can exhales air.

Except I already know the bad news

With 10 days to go to the start of the L100 I am sat in a wheel chair outside the X-ray department of Kendal A & E wearing a grimace and a with right ankle the size of a small football courtesy of badly sprained ligaments.

I've been out on my final big training run on the western part of the course when my foot just rolled from under me while coming off a rocky descent to send me crashing.

I lay there stunned for a few seconds before the pain came – convinced something was broken.

I was in the middle of nowhere and the only way I was getting back to my car was through my own efforts. So with much swearing and lurching I tried a few experimental steps, and to my amazement was eventually able to get moving again – as long as I kept the foot in a straight line everything seemed more or less OK.

Reassured, I continued and put in the planned two hours intervals and sat in the river when I got back to the car feeling very righteous.

Well, if it's going to flare it'll be after 1.5 hours sitting on my arse in the car...

And so it proved.

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I drove straight to my physio folks at The Body Rehab in Staveley, but by the time I got there I was in serious pain and rapidly becoming a danger to myself and other road users.

Tipping myself out of the car I dragged myself through the doorway and a short time later was

sitting with my right foot strapped into a cryo-boot doing a very poor impression of a grown man in control.

I could see 3 months dedicated prep going right down the tubes.

The gods however, had other ideas, and had sent me an angel called Roxy.

'I'm 99% certain it's an inversion sprain, she said. 'But it's so swollen I can't be completely sure – it's off for an X –ray for you, young man...'

So followed 48 hours of intensive R.I.C.E. rehab, then more work, then a half hour test jog with 4 days to go.

'I can't believe it,' I reported to Roxy, 'That all felt fine...what the heck did you do?'

The angel smiled. 'We started treatment only 5 hours after the injury – early intervention makes such a difference – and you have been a very good boy with your homework...'

I get home and practically skip through the door.

Charlotte my wife raises a quizzical eyebrow.

'Well, am I packing my tent, or what?'

'Well, there is some more rehab to do...' I'm grinning like an idiot, 'but we're on!'

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Making The Complex Simple

The day after the race Family Mouncey are relaxing at Coniston race HQ with my great friend Geoff who ran the '50. We're catching up for the first time and comparing notes.

So How Was The Race, Andy - Really?

'Completely consistent – no low points at all. I'm mean, the legs got increasingly trashed to the point where I sat in the river just before the Chapel Stile check...but other than that, men-

tally and emotionally I felt fine the whole way.'

What Went On In That Head Of Yours Then?

'Ah, that's easy - three words: Relax. Light. Smooth, and I thought about my family a lot - Charlotte and our two small boys - so lotsa happy faces there.'

So Internal Focus The Whole Way?

'God, no. 'Switched in and out. Really relaxed during the night section. Adam (Perry) and I who I was running with did the 'torch off, have an 'ooo' moment at the moon above Briathwaite, for instance. Lots of moments like that.'

It looked like you held second pretty much the whole way round - that looked like a pretty consistent effort.

'Not quite. There was some chopping and changing in the early stages, and Duncan (Harris) got away on the Braithwaite section - didn't catch him again till halfway.

I ran this race completely differently to my other 100's.

At this race 2008 I walked the first mile, and at Western States in 2004 I walked the first two!

This time I ran from the front 'cos my primary goal for the race was getting answers to three questions:

What does it take to run at the front?

Do you have what it takes - and are you willing to make the commitment to find out?

So I was prepared to run hard to Wasdale - and I did: 'Ran the whole way and go out on record pace to get time and distance - especially as the other advantage I have is that I know where I'm going.

I was also prepared to blow up - 'cos that would've still given me an answer.

I didn't think I would - but even if I did I also figured I could relax and regroup through the night.

I looked at it like this: Everyone slows down over this distance - the issue is who slows

down the least.

Out of sight really is out of mind - I just figured my 'slow' might still be good enough.

Unfortunately for me, Stuart (Mills) had exactly this strategy and did it better than I did!

So that, really, was my race. No drama, no screaming and crying or flaying of undercarriage like 2008.

Solid, deliberate, thought-through.

Remarkably, as I said to Charlotte a few days later, this time it didn't even seem like such a long way. Now that is quite an adjustment.

I am however, all too well aware that a few short paragraphs don't really cut it from a race report perspective. Y'all want 'em coloured in don't you? Alright then, here it is...

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Off The Front

So exactly what pace do you run the first 200 yards of a 100 mile race?

No-one except eventually winner Stuart Mills seems to know.

The race is thirty seconds old and already Stuart is out of sight having shot of the front from the start. For those who know him it's a tried and tested Mills tactic. Sometimes it works, and sometimes...

Well, he's either going to come back or he's not, I decide - no way am I following that!

I am however, going to do my thing which is to get moving in these first 20 miles or so, and as I don't especially want to run with anyone, I fix my gaze to the front and get on with it.

The first little descent gives me a clue - I'm faster than the two guys who have come past me on the climb out of Coniston - and once again I have my desired personal space and a periodic glimpse of Stuart as we head up the Walna Scar Road to the high point of the stage. I'm caught again before the top and this time joined by a new face. I recognise Duncan Harris (Fellsman winner) and we share a quick mutual

appreciation of the glorious evening sunshine.

I redress the balance once again on the long descent down to the Seathwaite valley, but not before Duncan takes an almighty tumble in front of me – I mean, wipe out big style! I stop and check as he makes reassuring noises...but you really don't need a fall of that magnitude this early into this race. No matter, gravity tugs and I follow her lead. It feels awful fast and part of me flashes a warning light or two, but I figure that's just the girly cautious part and key the manual over-ride.

Straight in and out of the first checkpoint stopping only to 'dib' and a bottle refill and into the woods around Wallbarrow at the head of the Dunnerdale valley. I'm dialled right in now and though I'm not wearing a watch, (and will not ask for time gaps till Ambleside) I know I'm on target pace which will mean 75 minutes to Boot. Relax. Light. Smooth.

I relax into the steep climb running easily through the rocks keeping half an ear open to voices and gate noises behind.

The action's ahead of you, Mounce...

I dance through the bogs and the rocky sections round the base of Harter fell with a confidence which comes with multiple recces.

A whispered 'thankyou' takes me successfully past the site of my fall 10 days ago and I belatedly realise that there's been not a twinge from the ankle. Wow – maybe it really is gonna be OK...

Before long I'm cruising into Boot to the cheers of a handful of well-wishers outside the pubs. (I don't know it at the time, but I'm only two minutes down on my estimation. What I do know is everything's in the green and I'm grinning like an idiot. Having a good time? You betcha).

Another fast pit-stop at checkpoint 2 and onto the gradual climb out heading NE to Burnmoor Tarn above Wasdale. Still running everything I clock voices behind me for the first time as we clear the tree-line and head onto the open fell. Ah, so there you are...

I spot a figure ahead and assume it's Stuart

Fleeting delight turns sour as I close the distance and realise it's a lone walker. Stuart has well and truly gone – already 8 minutes ahead by the Boot checkpoint.

A couple of miles later Duncan and Adam Perry get their chance to move ahead as I pull over for a pit-stop with miles of open moor for cover.

An apologetic 'Sorry!' greets them as they run past: At least I've remembered to squat in the 'cheeks away' position.

Once again I hook up with gravity and run fast to catch them before the final road section into Wasdale Head. Introductions all round.

'Sorry about the full moon back there,' I say.

I find out later Duncan is surprised I'm back with 'em so soon.

'I thought that would give you much more problems,' he admits as we compare notes afterwards.

Nah, just a bowel movement. Sorry, fella.

We beat the checkpoint crew to the checkpoint.

Biting down the spike of frustration we get on with the job of being in and out of there sharpish and turn our faces to the first big climb up Black Sail pass.

Duncan forges ahead but by the time we're down the other side at the youth hostel we're back together.

A jog and power-hike up Scarth Gap and we're on the rocky drop to Buttermere.

Dance, man...

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Relaxing & Recharging

Before long Adam and I are running easily along the western shore of a tranquil lake with Duncan some yards behind.

For the first time in 25 miles I can feel myself relaxing with the aggression-driven battle-grin being replaced with something much more serene.

As Adam and I do the 'commune with nature' piece I realise I am almost blissfully happy with where I am right now: At the front end of the race, running easily in the twilight along a beautiful silent lakeside with only our footfalls for company.

Getting here before full darkness has been a real bonus, and while the next section has a couple of tricky nav sections in, I am 100% confident can nail 'em first time.

I still haven't used my map or route notes – something I will continue throughout the race.

So I spend a few self-indulgent minutes putting big ticks against a few boxes.

I dally a little too long at the checkpoint, breaking my rule about no food stops till 30, 55, and 70 miles, but the chicken soup proves a draw too much – or I'm still away with the cosmic fairies...

This allows Duncan to catch us and be gone ahead of us into the darkness.

I'll see his headtorch twice more, but will only catch him again just before halfway.

I'm still not completely sure whether it's because I relaxed or Stuart and Duncan pushed on, but I see later that over the next two sections Stuart puts close on 20 minutes into me.

That's for later. For now, I'm a very happy boy moving at my own pace through the darkened fellside as Adam and I thread our way through the bracken NE to Braithwaite.

I separate myself from Adam as we drop into the village, and one rushed bowl of pasta and rice pudding later he still hasn't appeared at the checkpoint. I spot a headtorch circling as I head onto the Keswick road.

'Adam! Over here!' I can almost hear his sigh of relief. 'See you on the next section, fella.'

I spot his torchlight catching up as I climb through the switchbacks around Latrigg.

Relax. Light. Smooth.

It's still coming easily and I'm still scoring 11 on the Happy Scale.

Then on the dogleg around Lonscale fell and Blencathra something strange happens.

I'm not looking but I swear I can feel Adam behind me.

'Wont be long now, I think,' he's done well to catch up...'

Then nothing.

I get a chance to check for torchlight as I double back on the run-in to Threkeld, but again, nothing.

Next time I see Adam it's at Coniston on Saturday evening.

'I just blew big style,' he told me, 'had to lie down on the track. Managed to get to the checkpoint at Blencathra Centre, got some food down me, but had to go to sleep again. Then as there was nothing there I decided I had to get to Dalemmain – so that's what I did – walked the next two legs.' He paused while we all took this in.

'I'm a bit pissed off,' he said, 'Cos now I really will have to race in two weeks time at Bradwell!'

That's all later. For now all I know it's back to me and my favoured personal space.

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Making Ground

Something new happens over the next 28km as we head into daybreak and the 'halfway' point (actually 59 miles) at Dalemmain on the north shore of Ullswater: I make time on Stuart. It's not huge and I'm still oblivious to relative progress being 'split-free' but I learn later it's enough to cause a few 'oos' and 'ahs' among the watching community as the live feeds come into race HQ.

What I do know is that everything's still working, and despite slowing over the final section I'm still moving along at a reasonable clip.

Remember, your 'slow' will still be good enough...

I get a massive boost as I spot Duncan for the

first time through the trees with about 3km to go to the checkpoint. I get another injection as I can see he's looking behind him.

So I close to a couple of hundred yards then I sit there.

He solves the 'how / when do I pass him?' question by diving into the toilet just before the checkpoint proper.

(He tells me later he was feeling so rough that when he got through the checkpoint he crashed out on a bench somewhere in Pooley Bridge and really struggled through the next section. But he picked up something strong in the later stages and had closed a sizeable gap at 60 miles down to 20 minutes at the finish).

The problem is that I've stopped way too long at Dalemain and it takes me an age to get going again. It's real exercise in patience and belief, and I'm talking to myself almost constantly on the couple of miles between Dalemain and Pooley Bridge.

I remember flying through this section in training imagining how revitalised I'd feel starting the final 40 miles.

Well, while my faculties are all there and firing, my trusty legs are somewhere else.

I do eventually get going again heading down the eastern shore of the lake, but someone somewhere has registered that I've lost what feels like oceans of time on what should be a simple section.

Relax, fella - your slow is still good...

Let's hope so.

I vaguely remember someone telling me Stuart was about half an hour ahead at Dalemain, but I really wasn't listening so I'm not sure how accurate that was.

I do know, however, that he's not stopping for food - so whether it was half an hour or not, he'll be a damn sight further ahead by now.

Unless he's blown.

A business-like stop at Howtown and I set my face to climb up Fusedale Beck to the high

point of the entire route at 655m with High Street off to the right.

This was where my world fell apart two years ago in driving rain, so I smile as I recognise that at least one thing will be different.

I climb strongly and get my lines nailed through thick bracken as I descend to the western shore of Haweswater.

And while I don't know it at the time, I make up my biggest chunk of time on Stuart and grab back all the time I lost between Dalemain and Howtown.

By the check at Mardale Head at 75 miles the gap is the shortest it's been since Braithwaite at 34 miles.

Back at race HQ the bets are being frantically re-made: Is this the start of a charge for the lead?

In a word: No.

This is as close as I'll get.

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Reality Strikes

Stuart puts an hour into me over the final quarter as my legs become progressively less able to cash the cheques my brain is writing for them.

I'm still able to power-hike up the steep stuff and hold it together on the flats, but to my dismay I'm getting less and less able to run the descents.

My ankle is starting to give me the finger on the wobbly sections and a combination of recent heavy rain and footpath repair work has given us all big horrible loose small rocks and big stones to travel over.

Throw in some wet stuff from the rain which has now set in and we've got one of the most user-unfriendly final 25 miles to cover.

And it's the same for everyone, Mounce, so shut the **** up and get moving. Remember, your 'slow' will still be fast enough.

Fast enough to hold second place, but I can

feel my hoped-for 24 hours slip away.

By the time I hit Ambleside with 16 miles to go I know I've got a near-impossible task on my hands to hang onto a '24 time.

'How far ahead?' I ask.

'About 45 minutes', they tell me. 'But he looked way worse and he walked out of here.'

That draws a snort: 'Listen, I'll be walking out of here!'

A sip of soup.

'45 minutes...someone's gonna have to shoot him, then.'

Right then and there I consign all thoughts of a chase over this final section to the bin and turn back to paying attention to the internal indicators.

'Daddy, you're doing really great running just like me!'

The world is a delightfully simple place when you're 3 years old, and my emotional turbocharge has been to meet the other members of Family Mouncey.

So while Tom races round the shop, I have time for a final hug with Charlotte and baby Joe.

'You look great, babe!' Her eyes are shining.

You just can't bottle it – so after tackling our racing toddler for a goodbye, I head out for what I regard as the final section.

And while it all feels slow I also know it's faster than two years ago, and that'll do, thanks very much.

I have a blissful beef stew moment at Chapel Stile and pause just to 'dib' at the last check.

'Sorry, gotta get on with it, ' I apologise to the crew.

There's nearly 1000' to climb over this last 4 miles or so and there's no time like the present. I allow myself my first look behind as I drop through the mines above Coniston just to make sure...then it's a very quiet jog through the rain back to where it all started one brief

day earlier.

'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy – you're back!'

Tom cannons into me and I momentarily drop my composure all over the road.

I scoop him - and it – up, registering that it's my first real fumble in a day that has given me so much.

And yeah, I'll take it all, thanks.

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Some Stats:

Total race distance: 104 miles / 6971m climbing & descending.

Andy finished 2nd in 25 hours 37 minutes

Total starters 123 / Total finishers 70

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Links

Results & photos www.lakeland100.com

More photos www.sportsunday.co.uk

More reports www.runfurther.com



Trying on my game face at the start





85 miles to the good, coming into Ambleside

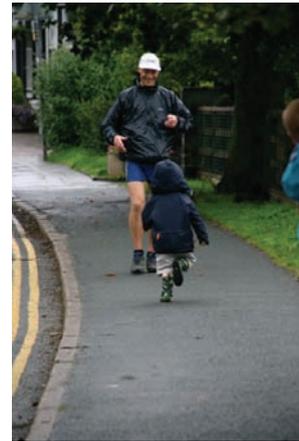


Catching up with Family Mouncey at Ambleside checkpoint: Charlotte, Joe, Tom, Daddy



Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, you're back!' About to drop my composure just before the finish

That's right: Bending & carrying after 104 miles - reunited and it feels so good!



What do you mean there's another lap?
It's all over - really.