



Yorkshire Three Peak Hike

The nerves kicked in on the Friday afternoon as my good friend Kate and I headed to our Airbnb for the weekend. Kate drove up the motorway, the car's windscreen wipers working overtime, furiously beating away the torrential rain that was lashing down. We chatted away attempting to quell the growing sense of trepidation of how we would be able to undertake the weekend's quest in these appalling conditions.



The next day we would embark on the Yorkshire Three Peak Challenge. A circular 25 mile walk climbing the summit of Pen-y-ghent (694m; 2,227 ft), Wharfedale (736 m; 2,415 ft) and Ingleborough (723m; 2,372ft) in less than 12 hours. Our aim was to raise money for the PURA Foundation.

It was approaching a year since I received the diagnosis of PURA Syndrome for my daughter Eloise and having something positive to focus on and work towards allowed me to feel more accepting about the looming anniversary.

It also felt like I was 'doing something to help Eloise.' When I expressed this sentiment to another mum of a child with PURA syndrome, she pointed out to me that whilst this is such a common feeling amongst parents in our community - we already do so much on a daily basis, such as all the extra care, therapy and advocating that comes with the territory of having a child with additional needs. That's so true and it got me thinking about why I wanted to do more and what fundraising really meant to me.

I suppose fundraising is different in that it helps me feel like I'm contributing towards the bigger picture. For me that means raising awareness of an unknown condition amongst my own friends and family; supporting the foundation in organising the annual conference to bring our PURA community together and ultimately, raising funds for research so we can learn more about PURA syndrome and maybe one day find a treatment or even a 'cure' for this rare disease. Maybe that seems far-fetched and I acknowledge that not all parents within

our community feel that their child needs to be 'cured,' but I hope and pray every day for a scientific breakthrough. I love and celebrate Eloise exactly as she is but the threat of seizures developing at any time and the other complications caused by PURA that could take her away from me any day fills me with fear.



We arrived at our Airbnb in the quaint Yorkshire village of Giggleswick just before tea time and met the lovely group of ladies we were completing the hike with. Together we headed to the local pub for a carb laden dinner to pack in those calories and a swift pint of ale for the nerves. Then back to our cottage for an early night ready for a 5:30 am wake up.

The next morning, thankfully, the rain had finally abated, despite the ominous forecast and we gratefully made our way to the car park nearest the first peak, Pen-y-ghent. We were amazed to see how many people had descended on the tiny Yorkshire village of Horton-in-Ribblesdale to walk the three peaks as well. Right on schedule we set off on our trek at 7am and as the sun began to rise, hundreds of hikers snaked like a line of ants making their way to the top of the jutting summit before us. A quick google search told me that around 250,000 people embark on the Yorkshire three peaks challenge each year to raise money for various charities or as a personal achievement. Our concerns in the run up to the hike about getting lost seemed silly with so many people to follow. However, later in the day the crowds certainly thinned out as people went at their own pace and we were told that many people drop out due to physical exertion, injury or simply running out of day light.

We easily made it up the first peak with a bit of a scramble over the rocks at the summit and reached the trig point an hour and a half after setting off. Pen-y-ghent is the lowest of the three peaks and after traversing it with relative ease a 'false' sense of confidence enveloped

us. Next was a 12 mile hike over fairly flat terrain to reach the peak of Whernside, which we could already see in the distance as we had been blessed with clear skies.



At the base of Whernside we stopped for a quick lunch break. We huddled in a circle using our waterproofs as a barrier from damp ground, all the time conscious that we were against the clock. The climb up this peak was more gradual but much longer and more tiring. The weather turned briefly and we experienced some light rain and we had to take extra care to watch our footing so as not to stumble and twist an ankle. This was the case even more so on the decent and I was very grateful for my walking stick to steady myself. The views of the rolling green and golden hills were spectacular but it's quite amazing how much time you

spend looking at the ground for the entire duration of the hike to find the next foot hole and stay safe.

After descending Whernside I believe it was around 3pm in the afternoon. We all began to feel quite weary by this point and we were buoyed by a sign we saw for a local farm with a promise of a café selling hot chocolate, coffee and cakes. It felt like we had to walk for miles more to reach it, sometimes seemingly like a mirage in the distance and we were worried it would be closed for the off-season but finally we made it there. We were so grateful for hot drinks and a real toilet.



Refreshed, we set off for our final peak of Ingleborough. We made our way through a field of cows - which, by the way, had been one of my biggest fears of the hike. I have nightmares of being stampeded - but thankfully they were used to the year round crowds and didn't give us a second glance. As Ingleborough emerged in the distance we couldn't fathom how we were supposed to ascend it - every possible path looked so ridiculously arduous. By this point the crowds had really thinned but as we grew nearer we could see some people slowly embarking on a steep climb through the limestone cliffs leading to the summit. Maybe it was the sheer exhaustion that had set in but for us this was by far the hardest mountain of the day. We really had to dig deep. I don't think it's for the faint hearted and I was grateful for the swirling mist that surrounded me as I reached the top so I couldn't see the sharp drop down to the rocks below.

After descending Ingleborough we still had a 5 mile walk back to the car through the beautiful autumnal Yorkshire Dales as the sun began to set. We just made it within the 12 hours and it was absolutely exhilarating but also completely exhausting. And whilst I was so thankful to

have avoided any blisters or injuries during the hike itself, my feet ached for days afterwards, which made carrying around a non-walking 4 year old extra challenging. But it was honestly amazing and I am so grateful to have achieved it and for all my friends and family for their sponsorship - we were able to raise a whopping \$1,602 for the PURA foundation.



Doing one sponsored challenge is just a small contribution to the cause but for me it meant a lot. It helped me face some personal fears; not so much the hike itself as the putting myself out there. Asking friends and family for donations was so far out of my comfort zone and sharing Eloise's story on my social media made me feel very exposed. Now I've faced these fears head on, I hope to be involved in more fundraising over the coming years.

