

Bullock Smithy Hike 6th September 2014: Slowly slowly

The women's record went – down to 10:18, the men's record remains intact. I saw James Scott-Buckleuch begin his record attempt - disappearing over the golf course and that was it. He must have cracked on – perhaps too fast. The women's record was taken by Jayne Lawton. She was with the Stockport group who were sticking to a pre-planned schedule and I got to see a bit more of those guys.

A few minutes before the start I talked to Tony Audenshaw who was recording another audio blog into his phone and we discussed how he had passed me at Cumberland Cottage last year. "Wont be the same this year", he exclaims, as he was not as fit. Before the start weather as usual played its part in the hike. This year the sun remained in, and we were blessed at times with a light drizzle, yet still warm, light breeze and muggy. I was glad I was carrying plenty of fluid. Steve Holt set us off after a bash of the anvil – more people were near the main park exit than normal so we squeezed through to begin the jog along the A523 North causing the traffic to avoid the swarming sea of runners emerging, to return many hours later to car-less roads.

After a mile or so I was at the back of the leading bunches and pleased with my initial pace. Jim Thompson who I met two weeks ago at Skiddaw said hello, good to see him again so soon. As the first hilly bits appeared in Lyme Park I was able to keep jogging as others slowed and got up with Julian Brown and later Colin Wood for a while. As previously mentioned there was no sign of the leader James as we looked across the valley from the first CP at Bowstones.

At CP2, Chinley, the mist was down and visibility reduced such that an unknowing entrant could easily have gone astray. My experience kept me correct having followed Paul Rushworth [18 completions] on many occasions over this patch. This year he was missing – taking life easy with his wife Tracey in S.America. A water top-up at the Peep-O-Day road refreshments and then on towards Edale Cross. The large pebbles that make up the lower part of the track make it hard walking/jogging until some trods are available when one feels obliged to increase the pace a bit.

At Edale Cross CP the marshals informed me of my position to which I replied "Not for long", as I could sense the chaps coming up behind. Sure enough my cautious descent of the 'Ladder on the drizzle covered rocks and steps meant 8 people overtook me and they cemented this lead, as is often the case, by travelling much faster than me on the flat section down the track, over the fields and along the road to Edale Car Park cp. A few lady supporters in yellow Bullock Smith T-shirts say some words of encouragement. I suggest that they could cheer a bit louder.

Some rice pud, deciding against the fruit, and soon off down the road and the steep climb up to Hollins Cross. I'd hoped to make up a bit of ground on the front bunch; it did not happen; I was slowing and feeling the effects of the journey so far. The drizzle had also made the Hollins Cross descent a little tricky so I slowed and took care, eventually onto the road and into Castleton – and lost 10 seconds by overshooting the turn off down the jitty to the car park cp. The lady supporters I saw earlier cheered a little louder this time. I requested a jam butty without marg but took whatever was on offer and nibbled it whilst jogging up to Cave Dale, passing a competitor on the way who'd dropped out of the Stockport bunch.

The buzz of a sunny Castleton behind me and a quieter Cave Dale ahead. I managed to jog bits and actually nearly caught the bunch ahead but once at the top they soon distanced themselves, apart from Colin who had dropped off the back and slowed to a walk. I kept up my slow jog pace to Peak Forest and went into the back room where the refreshments were. Four helpers watched as I carefully filled one of my water bottles about one third full. "Not really worth it you're probably thinking", I said to them, which made them all chuckle – I still had one bottle nearly full. A slice of orange and away down the road.

Another competitor was now in sight (you can see over 1km up the road) but remained ahead all the way through Wheston (cows just coming on to the road for milking) and to Millers Dale cp. Water only here and soon off ahead of the competitor, down the steep track slightly back on yourself (is there a better way?) then along the B6049 following it to the A6. At the top of the field near Calton Hill I joined up with whoever and we jogged into Chelmorton cp together – although I think he was talking about retiring with hammies as the two lady cheerers consoled him and didn't do much cheering. A good water bottle fill, no food taken, then off with a steady jog.

Good, well over half way now and the temperature and conditions were near ideal. I consulted my target times for the cp and found I was way behind. Oh well, I optimistically thought that if I could keep going steady then maybe I would make up some time. Ahead was Jim, he'd also dropped off the back of the Stockport bunch who were presumably still on track for pacing Jayne to the women's record (they did this a few years ago for Sally Keigher). Jim had been drinking tea and appeared to wait for me. He jogged along when I reached him and explained the others were too fast for him and he'd quite like to run with someone who knows the way rather than by himself.

The route is familiar, through the quarry and down to Earl Sterndale cp. The yellow T-shirt supporters cheer and enquire our names – Nigel and Jim – so they can more specifically cheer us! I forget to get a butty and just take on water. No matter, I still have supplies of my own. Great scenery round this area and lovely distinctively shaped hills. In

the distance we hear – the dogs... Stoop farm and dogs negotiated and in and out of Brand Top. Jim wonders which cp has hot dogs and says that normally he would spend a bit of time at a cp – I pass through pronto.



The scenic route from Earl Sterndale to Brand Top

A chunk of road through to Knotbury and in the fading light we found the right combination of stiles to get us over the A53 and onto the track to Cumberland Cottage. As we near the cottage the two lady supporters spot us coming from their vantage point sat on a bank above the track and cheer our names fairly loudly “Come on Nigel and Jim” which is weird in the dusk seemingly in the middle of nowhere. They said more cheering will happen at the Cottage. Sure enough on approaching the Cottage there is much cheering and hollering – it is normally a quiet place. Jim and I get out our head torches and as we do I hear someone mention Tony’s coming. No, yes, it was, and a short distance past the cottage Tony comes passed, full of it, just the same as last year. The lady supporters were for him and we don’t see them again until the finish.

Further along the road Jim knows there are a couple of route choices here and for a change I opted to go Macclesfield Forest rather than the road. This had the advantage of missing out traffic although there is a continuous walking climb to do. It is only a track yet is shown as a thin yellow road on the 1:50000. We get to the Walkers Barn cp, have our Tally clipped but don’t go into the warm back room, instead continue on down the main road. Along the back road through Kerridge, Bollington, and the canal bank. Plenty of boats moored this year. Still jogging a bit we come to the final cp which is a new looking campervan, hidden at the back of the car park.

Jog, walk, jog, walk. I took us via Wood Lanes – Jim knew no different. Coppice, Towers, A523 and a jog into the Scout Hut and finished. Although a few earlier finishers were sprawled around the scene was one of calm and tiredness. Usually I don’t hang around as sickness grabs me. This year I lingered, had some tea and a single sole fried egg which slips down easily, and served by a most helpful lady. A handshake with Jim – he did well on his first event. It was 20 minutes before the next finisher appeared, punctuated by one or two retirees who came back courtesy of the Scout mini van.

Such a well organised event over a now familiar route for me. He gets no easier though. Thanks to the scouts and the many helpers.

Nigel Aston (11 finishes)