

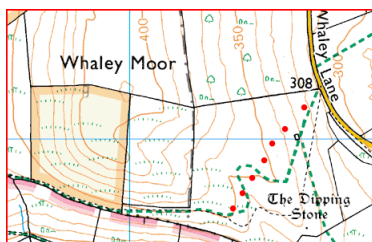
## Bullock Smithy Hike 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013: 'Blistering Pace'

The initial weather forecast of heavy showers, and general rain in the afternoon meant kit choice was tricky for me and others. Then as the morning wore on and the 12 noon start approached the weather appeared to be relenting with broken cloud and strong sun. At the last minute I swapped skull hat for sun cap. Most on the start line wore long sleeves, some multiple layers. Prerace announcements finished with "looks like the weather's going to be good". So it appeared the forecast was overly pessimistic. A few years ago James Scott-Bucleuch set the course record of **8:46**. The announcer mentioned that he was attempting to break the record again today – to which James got a big round of applause as many of those gathered knew what an achievement that would be.

We're off. The 'warm up' jog along the A523 saw the Stockport boys bunched behind the record chaser James who had Charlie Sharp for company. I ran with Charlie a little on his first Bullock Smithy two years ago. He was fit even back then, carrying a large rucksack. He easily finished ahead of me and would have done better except for his route finding and the fact that his rucksack contained an additional alternative pair of shoes – not knowing what the terrain and surface would be like. My last glimpse of these two was just after leaving CP1; they could be seen far away disappearing over Whaley Moor at a blistering pace. Good luck with the record.

As with many previous Bullocks I have enough early energy to just about keep up with Paul Rushworth for the first few CPs. I know it won't last but the feeling of being somewhere near the front is great and to me worth it despite the slowing down later.

Of course everyone tries to improve their time and one way to do this is to walk/run faster (or slow down less). Another way is to shorten the normal course, legitimately, by taking optimal routes (aka short cuts). These can be worked out by a reece or better still get the knowledge from someone else, especially multi-completers like Nick Ham, Steve Jackson and Paul Rushworth. But it did surprise me that en route to Furness Vale a few were taking a short cut over Whaley Moor rather than the gentle curving grass path; I doubt this one was beneficial; however many other deviations certainly are.



*On route to Furness Vale; short cut or just an alternative route?*

It was good to see a variety of supporters out around the route. Of course Paul's wife Tracey was there encouraging him on as she always does at many races. At Bow Stones (CP1) there was a whole stream of cars parked, and similarly at CP2.

This year I carried a platypus/tube to avoid getting a bottle out of my sack each time I wanted a drink. I'd hoped this would encourage me to drink more. One benefit it did have was that at a number of checkpoints I could pass quickly through without refilling water bottle – which for me meant being able to stay in touch with the person or peoples ahead of me – a big morale booster. It did have its downsides though in that my drink was always warm as the bottle was next to my back, plus the extra weight. In the end I still did not drink nearly enough.

Up towards Edale Cross, CP3, along with Paul, five Stockport chaps and with Steve J and two others a few minutes back. I hear some general chat from the Stockport guys, with one talking about his 1:15 half marathon time – wow! - it takes me that long nowadays just to get my muscles warmed up.

I felt good on the climb up to Edale Cross, once past the rough stones on the path a slow jog was possible for most of the way. My family was monitoring my progress back at home with the online live results on the Bullock Smithy web page and I wondered if the data coming through included positions – if so they would see I was going well at CP3. Actually the online data only held a record of what CP a person had visited and the final finish time. The additional information displayed on the screen in the scout hut is not available online – may be next year. Interesting I was told the online information at one stage was reporting that I had passed through CPs 1, 3 and 5 but not through 2 and 4. Eventually the system caught up though and the anomaly is explained by the remoteness of CPs 2 and 4, near the tops of hills with contact back to base trickier.

By now we were warm. Sun had been out, short sleeve top was all that was needed, even sun cream could have been used – I have a 'short line' to show for it. The legs were cramping and my running gait changed to accommodate. Thankfully not a full 'I can't move and must lie down with legs in the air' cramp, just a nagging 'stiff leg - don't do anything stupid like over stretch crossing a stile' cramp. Paul was ahead down the Jacobs ladder descent, full concentration needed. Surprising there aren't causalities down here, especially with a bit of rain. This year Paul omitted a possible short cut and stuck to the normal route; so did I. I know the jog along to Upper Booth highlights my

cramping legs, amplified when hitting the road to Edale so I took it easy. At Edale Paul and 4 of the Stockport lads were just leaving. I refilled Platypus –with the aid of a helpful CP lady, declined the food on offer and jogged away up and over Hollins Cross, with new stile, to Castleton.



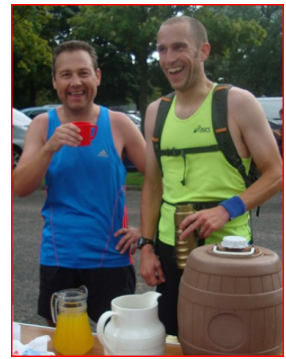
Steve Holt at the start;



The author on the way to Bow Stones;



James looking cool at Edale and so his Steve J & Co.



Behind me as I slog up to Hollins is the fifth Stockport guy, he really has got a pace on. Down the hill from Hollins he drops back a bit but once on the road he's off at a blistering pace checking directions with me as he passes. We're in a rain shower – the forecast did predict some after all; it's not bad enough for a cag though. From past Bullocks I know the location of the CP at the far side of the Castleton car park but it's tricky to find in the rain as they've closed down a bit and are not so visible. I get there and find my over taker relaxed chatting to someone. A jam sandwich – I leave the crusts and deposit them in a bin – and take the back road to the start of Cave Dale.

A bizarre sight unfolds in Cave Dale. Half a dozen campers are descending down the grassy slippery steep slope (not the best place to be) carrying gear and a small tent partially erected. One of them decides to go on an ice axe type slide down the full length of the bank – he makes it thankfully with no injuries, just soaked trousers and a shout of 'Yeah!' I was gone before the others followed. I navigate over the greasy limestone path, through quite a throng of Polish people. A few weeks ago I'd also found Cave Dale populated by Polish walkers!

I top out on to the Limestone way and along here Steve Jackson and 2 others nearly catch up to me but we stay slightly separated to Peak Forest.

I'm starting to feel uncomfortable on the sole of my left foot – is a blister developing? The pain is sharper when walking than jogging. If this gets worse I'll have to stop and give it some attention. Once on the road to Peak Forrest I tighten the shoe a bit to reduce slippage. Although this makes no difference at least it's not worsening. My shoe/sock combination has been tried and tested in 3 events so I had hoped it would be fine, but maybe I'd left my shoe a bit loose and perhaps descended some of the steeper roads sections quicker than normal causing some abrasion. Now back at home I'm thinking that maybe the socks have worn down/out and a replacement is required.

Orange and banana from Peak Forest CP. The orange bits stick between teeth and remain there for hours. There must be many orange and banana skins in the hedge along the A623.

I could see Paul in the distance crossing the fields at Dam Cliff and onto the road to Wheston. I'm soon on the Wheston road and ahead I see the farmer get out his Land Rover and open the cow field gate and immediately out come the cows heading for Wheston to be milked. Soon the road would be blocked with a field's worth of cows. A similar thing had happened to me on my first Bullock Smithy – the farmer told me to avoid the cows by climbing over the walls! Paul had gone past and was probably oblivious to this – just as well as he is not over keen on cows. I go past when just 3 cows had made the road, Steve and the guys behind apparently put on a sprint to get past quickly and were only faced with half a dozen cows. By the time I reach Wheston we are bunch of four with Steve and the two guys he's with; we jog together to Mill Dale CP.

At Mill Dale farm gate a scout photographer is at the ready to photo us trying to get past more cows – a few have been cornered at the end of the track next to the gate. We gingerly squeeze past; no doubt Paul had found this fun ten minutes earlier.

As usual there was the concerned 'How are you feeling' from the Mill Dale check point lady – said in a way that really made you wonder if you looked terrible – I probably did. Off again with much road work to do (B6049). I felt good though and able to jog up some of the road. I needed to jog as Steve's walking is faster than mine so we played an overtaking game all the way up the road with him fast walking and a bit of jogging and me slow jogging with a bit of walking. Over the top of Carlton Hill and Chelmorton CP comes in site – 2km away. I was feeling it now and looked forward to some rest bite. But I managed to keep the slow jog going and Steve got left behind a little but by the fields after the limestone quarries he was back again and charging ahead going well.

I was pretty sure now that I had gone at a blistering pace as Mr. Blister informed me of his presence with every step. I also know the effort is getting to me as the occasional snippets of conversation with Steve when we're level I can feel myself slightly slurring my words – coming from an inner tiredness – and we're only seven hours into the race.

The usual noise from the 'mad' dogs at Brand End. The children there have put a paper sign on the large gate 'Please close the gate' and of course we did and got a shout of 'Thank you' from one of them. Steve commented that one day a chain holding one of the dogs is going to break – hope I'm not there when it does!

Making steady progress with a chance of reaching Cumberland cottage without a torch was now the aim. The conditions were very good although temperature was now dropping and getting cooler. At Brand Top Steve put on an extra layer over his 'singlet'. I hold off until the next CP.

We jog along the roads to Knotbury with dusk approaching. No one else around really, although behind in the distance we glimpse another competitor – who is this mystery competitor? Down the rough stony track to Cumberland cottage, just about light enough, although we slow to a walk for the last bit – better safe than sorry. The CP crew are all outside having a jolly time. As it was now dark this made it tricky to get in my rucksack and find the head torch and get out my extra layer. Whilst doing this the mystery competitor comes in – it was Tony Audenshaw (Emmerdale) 8 mins faster than last year at this point apparently. He wasn't hanging about and soon shoots off. Steve said he was a good road runner so I expect he'll enjoy the rest of the course now as no rough stuff left.

The Road. I struggle to match Steve's pace, feeling him holding back so as not to lose touch – thanks. He has done no long distance training this year; his longest run being only 13 miles and that was last weekend. How can he perform this well with so little long distance training? The guy's a natural.

No moon so quite dark along the roads, difficulty to make out the edges, especially when cars come along. At last Walker Barn is reached, well lit outside and inside. Chips are being consumed by most helpers and I envy them in their warm clothes sat indoors – not running! However, one does need to give some credit to these checkpoint helpers as they have to give up a huge chunk of time to sit around maybe not doing much for long periods of time, then suddenly a person appears, has a quick drink then goes. The chips might help them through the mid-evening, but at 2, 3, 4am etc. it must be quite tiring and uneventful.

Down, down now, and onto Kerridge then Bollington to join the canal. It's a struggle to manage any sort of pace for me even going downhill. On the canal path with torch blazing looking at the ground I nearly bump in to some locals walking towards me, only a shout from them avoids a collision.

Steve J is going well, doing much more jogging than walking. The last CP is reached at Whiteley. I take a seat and drink at which point Steve decides to carry on – good, I'm holding him back. I shuffle off and another competitor arrives, competitor X. As I trudge off along Middlewood Way I wonder where competitor X is. I then sense him coming along, but no, it's yet another competitor (Peter Woodhead) bombing along at a blistering pace (given he's covered 50+ miles). Crikey where has he got that speed from? He'll probably catch Steve ahead at that rate too – in fact he does. Eventually competitor X comes past.

I go Wood Lanes and roads to Coppice – just to break up the Middlewood trudge. It's no quicker, and looking at my times you'd think it was much slower – however, that's just me slowing down. Towers Road, nearly home now. Resurfacing etc. along here makes it easier to run, but a middle section of pot holes still forces the concentration and head torch is needed. I see no other competitors behind and turn onto the A523, phew. But then out of the dark another competitor does come past - Phil Burns - with some words of encouragement. I wonder if I can keep up with him, I try, and fail miserably. However, I more or less jog to the finish with a few glances behind – no one else now. Analysing the results later - may be Phil Burns was competitor X and took a wrong turn somewhere?

Scout headquarters and Finished! Great! I immediately do a few stretches to stave off the cramp from hitting me. A great reception from those already finished and mutual handshakes all round. I listen to a few stories about how the race had gone up front. Charlie Sharpe reintroduces himself to me – I didn't recognise him and have to say on reflection I was probably a bit terse (my apologies) as by now my whole body including ability to speak much is shutting down. His second place in 9:23 is a massive improvement for Charlie compared to his previous two attempts. Steve J had been overtaken by the superfast finishing Peter Woodhead, but Steve had finished 16 minutes ahead of me – all time gained from last CP.

Soon out of the Scout Hut and into the car for a quick (haha) change and lie down and sleep. Julian is just coming in to finish – slightly slower than usual. Amazingly Steve J was going to drive home down south – he said he was wide awake, no need for a nap. To top that Charlie is in another event tomorrow (Sunday), although this time only 33 miles – I suggest that he holds back from starting at a blistering pace.



*Results management by Andrew Whitehead; The author glad to have finished; Winner James; First lady Hazel Winder*

Nigel Aston  
(10 finishes)

*Photo credits: John Corfield, BS web site, Paul & Tracey Rushworth*