



Bullock Smithy Hike, 2nd September 2017 (42nd running of the event)

“Keep Going”

Registration has come on a long way over the last few years and is now fully computerised with iPads to check people in. The traditional bashing of the hammer on the anvil is still used to start the race after a megaphone welcome and briefing from Scout leader Steve. This event raises a significant amount for scout funds which is one reason why it is so well staffed at the marshal posts and elsewhere.



Registration: Bang up to date with iPads in evidence [photo Nick Ham]



About to start in Devonshire Park [photo Nick Ham]

At noon the sun is shining- warmer than the forecast that I saw – and I am glad of a dose of sun cream applied earlier. Steve Jackson and I are in the large lead bunch as we turn off into Towers Road. The pace is not fast for the first mile. I could image Brendan Foster commenting; “well they’re just jogging at the moment, and really they’ve turned this into just a 55 mile race”. So, we head out into the country and the pace in the warm sunshine is too hot for me. My ‘pacemakers’ in the early stages of many Bullock Smithies, Paul R and Julian B, are disappearing into the distance, a sure sign of lack of pace from me.



Leaving the bustling town and busy roads behind as we get into open country [photo Nick Ham]

Drink plenty is always good advice. As I pushed on towards CP2 I drain my water bottle knowing that there is a downhill jog after CP2 and then the tables by the road to replenish water supplies and perhaps a couple of crisps. But, puzzled, the usual Bullock Smithy signs were not displayed at Chinley Churn escarpment top. I wonder why. The CP was there, 30m down as usual with a single forlorn looking marshal. Strange. On arriving the marshal explained. There had been a bad crash on the nearby road and it was blocked so the staff were struggling to get to the marshal point. He said conserve your water as the refreshment point might not be there. Oh! I have no water. This could be a problem as the next water point is Edale – two CPs further on. I am going to struggle. Maybe I'll ask some random walker for some, or perhaps there's a farm I can ask. These thoughts rattle around in my head, at the same time the blocked road and 5 or more police cars were in sight. Must be bad. And then also coming in to sight at the bottom of the hill was the tables and people manning the refreshments; the boys had made it; a relief. So, I filled up my bottle and was also offered *bags* of crisps – not just a few individuals.



CP2: Looking sparse [photo Nick Ham]



Refreshments had made it despite blocked road. Note police car blocking main road [photo Nick Ham]

I keep my pace as high as I can manage as I think Paul and Julian and a few others might still be catchable. It is an incentive. In the drop to Coldwell Clough I do see people ahead, in fact Julian is surprisingly slow at this point. It is only much later that he explains the reason for this is his road shoes have little grip so he takes extra care on the slippery grass. He pulls away after the descent, but at least I do get a glimpse of a few others some way ahead on the long slow climb to Edale Cross. After this I try to preserve quads descending the rocky footpath and Jacobs ladder and do a smooth run along the track, having to avoid walkers 'rambling' along, through the fields and along the road to Edale car park. A small shrew minds its own business by the side of the road, a different world.



CP3: Happy marshals at Edale Cross. Jelly beans available [photo Nick Ham]

Last year at Edale I preferred rice pudding without fruit but the twenty or so prepared cups of the combination did not have a 'rice only' option. So, I had to wait a little while for someone to prepare one. This year I asked Tracy, via Paul, to have one ready. And to my delight she had. So, I sat down for 30 secs and tucked in to my cup of just rice.



CP4 Tally card clipped [photo Rushworths]

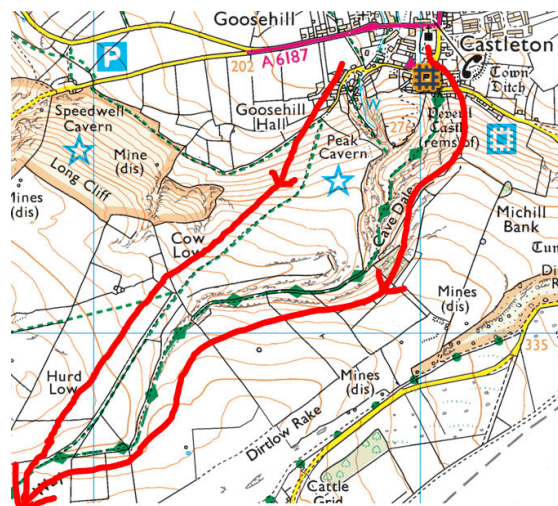


Scoffing rice and fruit at Edale. [photo Nick Ham]

After leaving Edale I could see Paul climbing up to Hollins Cross so he was not pulling away much, if anything I was gaining. "Keep going" I said to myself. I could only walk though and made the trudge to the ridge where I pushed through a large group of Japanese (?) girl tourists who were standing around oblivious to the occasional runner wanting to get by. Once on the road to Castleton the leg cramps hit me – as often they do. I stretched one leg – pain; I stretched the other leg – pain. I did not stretch any more. Into a packed Castleton car park. A jam butty from the Castleton CP – the lady said you can take a few bites and then feed it to the crows in Cave Dale. How right she was.

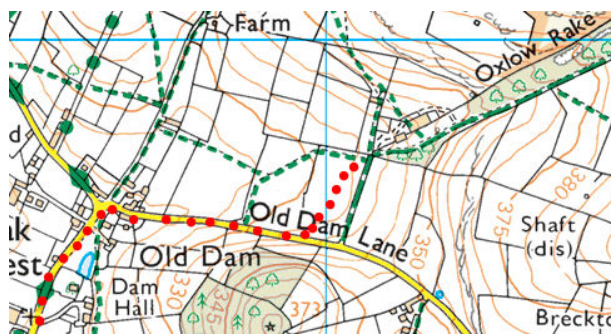


CP5: More happy marshals at Castleton. Jam butty time. [photo Nick Ham]



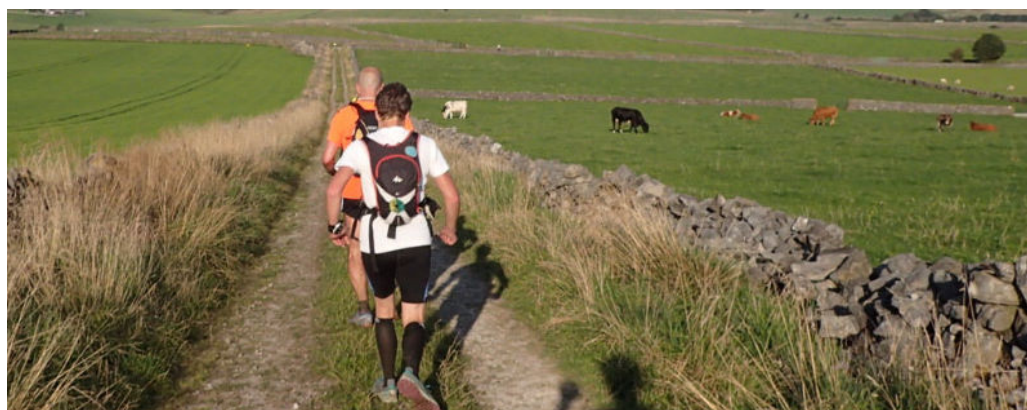
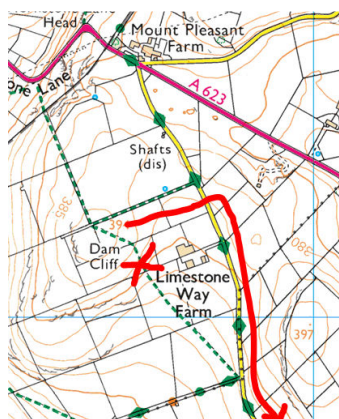
Two ways out of Castleton

Thronging Castleton basking in the sun left behind into an equally warm Cave Dale. No energy to run here and no sight of Paul so plod on upwards. A few weeks ago, it had been a careful run down Cave Dale on the Long Tour of Bradwell, wary of the slippery limestone in the wet. Now much safer going up. Just about. There is an alternative to Cave Dale, slightly to the West, Cow Low. This was the route Paul took I found when he happened to pop out the top just as I reached the same point via Cave Dale, so maybe that climb is a bit harder as I had now gained a few minutes. A mini moral boost immediately dented as Paul jogged away disappearing towards Peak Forest. At the bottom of Oxlow Rake the shortest path takes us across a couple of fields. I could see Paul ahead at this point, and as the cows hogged the optimal route Paul tried out an alternative. Later we discussed that maybe this was possibly a good route anyway since you benefit from a slight downhill once the road is reached. [we are only talking about a few seconds!]



Paul's cow diversion route. I took the fp.

At CP6 Peak Forest I took a slice of orange and *whole* banana, no half measures here. Head down and jog as much as possible to get up and off the A623 road side. Paul walked it and so I managed to catch him at Dam Cliff. We exchanged some words. He was feeling the heat too and looking forward to the sun dropping and cooler temperatures. We negotiated the Dam Cliff diversion – Paul reckoned it added 20 secs and wondered if we could claim it back at the end! At least we avoided the frisky bullocks that often inhabit the next few fields. Paul's wife, Tracy, was out here to offer encouragement and grab a photo – hence I have evidence of how I looked jogging the 2.5km road – struggling!



A rare diversion from the recommended route; to avoid damaging a newly sewn field. [photo Nick Ham]



Heading towards Wheston, already feeling the pace, reduced knee lift (i.e. a shuffle) [photo Rushworths]

A couple of chaps passed me on the road and I last saw sight of them disappearing up the long climb out of Millers Dale. Keep going, I said to myself, eventually you'll reach the finish. Another chap also passed me – with light green top and I repassed him at CP7. He remained just behind, all the way up the Blackwell Dale climb and to the top of Pillwell Gate. He then came past, quickly. Chelmonton CP is visible from 1.5 km away and I could see Paul reach it, then the chap in green and eventually I made it there too. The marshal's opened up the goody box to reveal the ever-present donuts. Even half a donut was too much, but a ginger biscuit was more tempting and went down easily – should have had two. The food at the CPs has hardly changed at all in all the time I have been doing this event so you can be pretty sure what will be on offer.



CP8 Chelmonton tent and the donut box. I opted for ginger biscuit [photo Nick Ham]

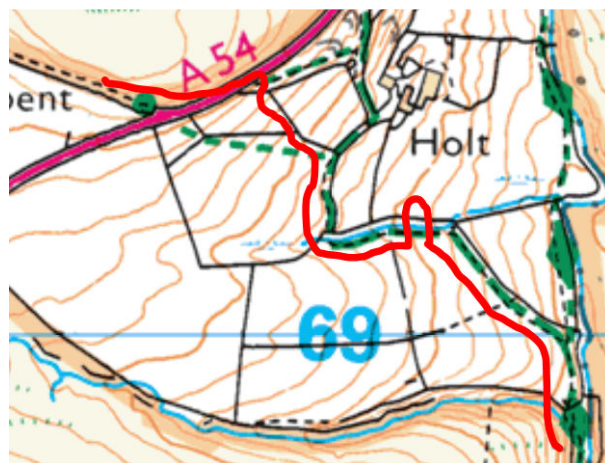
Now green top chap was maybe 100 m ahead and perhaps I could catch him again. I jogged; he jogged, walked, stopped, jogged, walked, stopped, jogged, I continued to jog. No matter I still could not catch him. He jogged, walked, stopped, jogged, walked, stopped, jogged, I was still jogging and not getting any closer. I could not figure out why he was doing any walking, I can only think he was checking either map or GPS. This continued along Highstool Lane, past the Dowlow quarries, through the fields and onto the road into Earl Sterndale. He was out CP9 before I got in. This year the jam butties were beyond me, just a few crisps. On my exit from the CP a couple more people were coming in.



CP9: More jam butties available at Earl Sterndale. Just a few crisps for me this year. [photo Nick Ham]

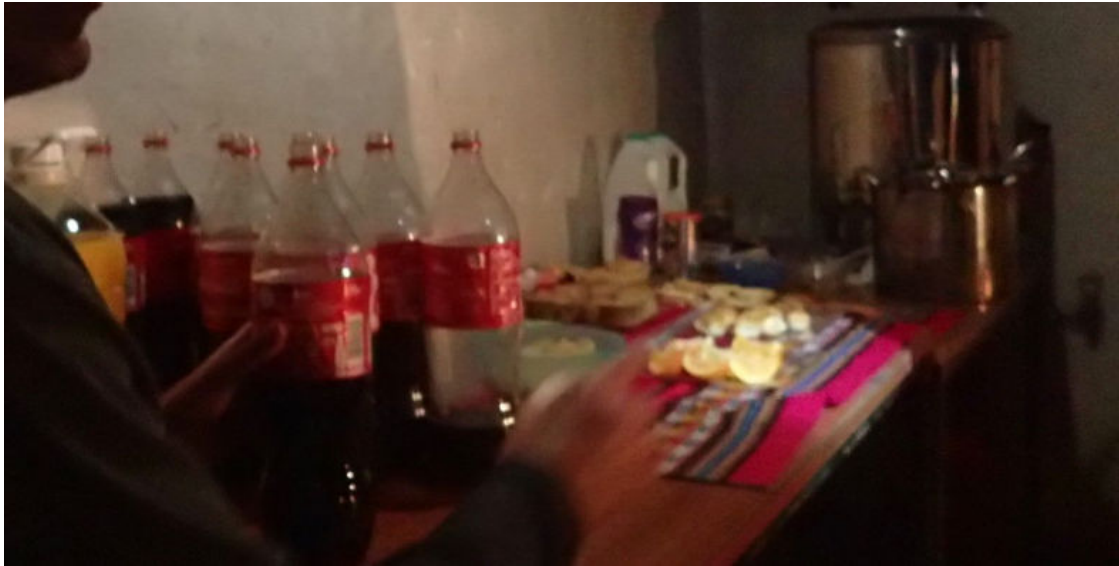
By the time I'd reached Dowel Dale road the couple – man and woman – had caught me. They walked up the shallow incline and I jogged – they still caught me. On boy! I gave up and walked. This was getting tougher for me. Keep going though. I think the woman finished first lady, she certainly had plenty of bounce and general energy. We stayed fairly close all the way to the 409m high point, past Booth farm and the gentle down sloping run by the lake to the Booth farm bypass, green top also not far ahead. My quick in-out of CP10 at Brand Top meant that this couple and green top man were within 100m. At the bottom of the road the group of three all opted for the field route to Hilltop whereas I went for the more straightforward road. It was dusk.

There was no chance this year of getting to Cumberland cottage without needing headtorch. At least the quiet road to Hilltop and then on to Knotbury meant I could delay getting the headtorch out. It was now dark. After Knotbury I nearly missed the obvious track on the left to Three Shire Heads as previous years I had got here within daylight. Time to get torch out and put an extra layer on. Some torch lights flashes in the fields way ahead approaching the tall stiles, must have been the group of three. My going slowed even more now, carefully picking my way over the rocks on the path. An unusual amount of dust/dirt covered some rocks. Round the edge of the first field and ascend to the stiles. Yet again they gave me difficulty. Very wet feet, and a patch of nettles should not have been encountered but I found them. I ended up at the wrong stile and had an extra bit on the road to do too. Not good.



I think this was my tortuous route towards Cumberland Cottage. Not exactly direct.

Taking care down the track with rough rocks and tree roots towards Cumberland Cottage CP. Another couple of chaps past me at this point, going well. They got the noisy shouting, bell ringing welcome from the cottage marshals and this was repeated for me a short time later. One of the chaps had some foot attention – blister? I gulped down the flat coke offered and was quickly away. It's warm in the cottage and cool outside so a quick in and out lessens the shock of continuing in the cool. Temperature not too bad though and not getting any cooler. Reaching the tarmac, a marshal/helper is there to greet me and other people – "Are you alright? Nice long tarmac section for you now". I know anyway so the welcome and information is noted but not significant or too off-putting.



CP11 Cumberland cottage – plenty of flat coke on offer which went down nicely. [photo Nick Ham]

Torch is off now as the moon is bright and easy going on the road. Just put the torch on if a car comes. It is a slog, keep going. I take the road all the way. Past Bottom of the Oven to the A537 at Turnshawflat. Given my slow speed maybe I should have just gone direct via Macclesfield Forest. I mull this over when the exit road, Charity Lane, from the Forest route is reached on the A537. Too late now. I should have done it though. It means an extra 50m of climb and a rough track. Still, let's look ahead. It's Walker Barn CP. I approach without torch on, surprising them. The marshals are outside for clipping and others inside for rest and food. I only need to clip so quickly turn around and head back to the A537 – pavement now – and descend mainly without torch to Kerridge end. The field short cut is lined by a row of huge black plastic guards. On closer inspection, these are wrapped 'bales' of grass.

Bollington. Canal. Bridge 26, bridge 25 and then directed to the remaining CP. The temperature has increased a bit so I sit down at this CP, and change tops. "No stripping" the marshals say jokingly. I take a half mug of orange – looked strong – it was, so the marshal weakens it. There appears to be a few extra fences at the canal side of the car park. "Do you know where you are going next", the marshal says. "Home", I reply. Over the bridge, turn left and left and on to Midshires Way. Bridge 9 (long section). Bridge 10. Bridge 11. Bridge 12. Yes, there at last. Last bit of climbing – the few steps up to the top and Wood Lanes. Onto Wardsend. Very quiet around here now since gone midnight. No one around, the odd car maybe, no parties or rowdy pubs.

Given my lack of any sort of pace I wonder if there is anything I could do or anything that would happen which would cause me to go quicker. I have a try to go quicker but there is no knee lift and I am happy to mainly walk. Towers Road entered. Over the three speed bumps, out of Towers Road. I can feel an inner smile. I am going to finish. No one around behind, I can relax to the finish about 1km now. A slightly drunk couple point out to me a dodgy kerb that I should avoid tripping over. I cross the road and take a last look behind – Oh no! Another runner is not far behind. A few seconds thought- can I keep in front? Let's try. From somewhere I feel that I can go a bit quicker – adrenalin maybe. I hold my quicker pace, cross the traffic lights – I can hold this pace to the finish, keep going ... but to no avail. "Well done", he says overtaking me. A few more strides and I break into a walk again. Demoralised.

Quickly the sense of achievement returns and replaces the disappointment of being overtaken with 300m to go. The welcoming scout hut is there and I've finished, more than 13h since starting; I did keep going. Tally card removed. Time to sit down. Paul and Julian are both there. The man and woman who overtook me are also there. Soon Nick Ham comes in too. I don't feel too bad. Maybe my much slower pace this year has actually taken less out of me. One chap who finished in 10:15 (his PB) has had time to go back home, change, shower, and come back again to see other finishers.

Before my body stiffens up too much I leave the scout hut and go for a nap in the car. I sleep without much problem and wake perhaps an hour later with sudden cramp; ouch! After 10 mins this settles down and more sleep is possible.

I wonder whether I am up to doing another BS. More than 10% slower the last year when the weather was poor, I should have been quicker this year. Maybe a 4-week gap in training – no running in June/July - took more out of me than I expected. Or maybe I am too old for this lark now. The sense of achievement is as much as it has ever been and something to live off for a good few weeks afterwards.

A big thank you as always to the organisers, marshals, volunteers who helped and encouraged us throughout the day.



Finished. It is always good to get to the end, no matter how slow [*photo Rushworths*]

Nigel Aston (14 finishes)