

Bullock Smithy Hike, 2nd September 2023

(48th running of the event)



“Overly warm”

Trackers

A change for this year, with previous (unreliable) trackers from last year replaced by check point timing trackers from Felltrack. These were worn as a simple watch and placed near an orange detection device at the check point – giving off a whiz/screech to let you know you had been recorded. All seemed to work well with people back home able to follow check point arrival progress and leader board position via the tracking website.

FellTrack	
Available events	
Tracking link	Event website
The Bullock Smithy Hike 2023	The Bullock Smithy Hike
The Oxenhope Straw Race 2023	The Oxenhope Straw Race
The Fellsman 2023	The Fellsman



Pre-start

Registration appeared to be simpler this year with just two officials recording participants using tablets and then handing out an orange ‘watch’ tracker. Tally cards were handed out at Devonshire Park as usual. These were to be punched at each check point ...on completion of the event the participant keeps the tally card – there is no checking for correct punching – although that could be done if an ‘anomaly’ was known before the entrant finished.



Entrants gather in a sunny Devonshire Park ready for 12 noon start

Training

Hardly any. In June a calf strain – probably from over use – meant I couldn't run, or even walk quickly. This lasted for over a month until late July when eventually I could manage a few miles of run/walk with ankle and calf area covered in multiple stretch bandages to provide support. For a few weeks in mid-August I increased the runs to every other day but only 5-8 miles and finished with a longer 14 miler which gave me confidence that maybe the legs would last.

So again this year lots of KT tape on lower and upper legs and calf supports were worn.



Author + Paul Rushworth ready to go

As always good to meet long time acquaintances – Julian Brown and Paul Rushworth who normally take part in the Bullock Smythies, and I see Nick Ham.



Rob Massey does the pre-race announcements

Start

Anvil bashed. Out the back of the park turn left then right into Chatsworth Rd. No need to push at this point, let the field go ahead and slowly get the body used to jogging. Over 20 go past on the first road, and then others go past who had taken the turn right option. Apparently a few still go out the front of the park and take A523 main road (shortest route, more dangerous and advised against nowadays).

Already the warmth has an effect and just getting into the trees after the first few fields is a relief, as is the shade on Anson road. Into Lyme Park – the car park for the NT house is packed. However, the track up to Bowstones is only occupied by BS competitors, now strung out as walking kicks in on this first ascent. We arrive at the first CP and it's time to try out the tracking watch on the large orange receptical after tally card has been clipped. A whizz/whoosh sound indicates the watch has registered, letting the wearer and those around know. A water refill is taken.



First CP at Bowstones



Descending the road from the first CP

Down the road and not for the first time I contemplate the Dissop Head ditch. I monitor the position of the chap just ahead of me who goes ditch and by the time we join up again no time has been lost or gained. Take on board a flapjack and water up the grassy slope and then some gentle running on the soft track, punctuated by a frisky cow that goes to headbutt the chap ahead of me, who breaks into a walk and takes evasive action. I am now with Zain Karim and we remain together through to Edale. A short delay at Furness Vale waiting to cross the busy road (seems to get busier each year). This is Zain's first long event as he's more of a climber with some walking (to get to/from the climbs). His walking poles are in/out depending on the incline; he's going well.

After exiting the railway tunnel I see Paul R ahead. Eventually I catch up with him on Laneside Rd, similar to last year. He's wary of the heat and expecting to kick on when the temp cools – as last year. I chat for a while and Zain moves ahead. On the steep section Paul drops behind. Once through the top gate Zain tries a 'short cut' to the left. It works out poorly due to bog and he ends up slightly behind. It's refreshing to see someone try new things – for which Zain has receded in advance as this is his first attempt. Drop down to CP2, watch registered and on to Peeps for refreshments. The leading lady is just ahead. Crisps eaten, water taken. No choc taken this year – I'm thinking to avoid a likely warm mess given the sun beaming down on the goods.



Orla, the first lady to make it to Chinley Churn CP

The warm dry grass and lack of water in the stream makes the descent towards Coldwell Clough easier. But not so the plod up to Edale Cross. I nibble one of my various types of ginger biscuit. No chance of a jog from me this year. I do take on a whole family of JB's at the CP though.



Edale cross JB families

Careful on the legs down Jacob's. Once down I notice the track has been 'improved' by levelling out and resurfacing. Zain catches up and we carry on together. He's surprised when I turn left at Upper Booth, but follows anyway, and I show him the road-avoiding route. We discuss nutrition, or my lack of. Normally I'd have some electrolyte in my water and possible a gel. This year I was trying without, mainly to see if it helped with appetite and sickness. Instead the focus was on ginger biscuits – with the ginger helping sickness – maybe? I'd find out.

Over the railway and then just before the methodist church we break into a walk, except I break into a fall. Knee, arm, hands damaged. Zain is concerned as I lie flat; I'm annoyed. Soon up and going and jog along the road to Edale CP.

This is the second time that I have had a fall after descending Jacobs. My legs cramp and don't function correctly. Once at Edale, I know it's unfair to rely on someone to provide a little first aid to my knee graze. So self-service. I use the liquid in the bowl collecting the overspill from the dispensers of water and blackcurrant to wash my knee. Then I rub in a liberal dose of salt for antiseptic. Tracy, Paul's wife, recognises I've had a fall and that it's all part and parcel of the madness that is ultra running! I eat fruit and rice pudding, breaking with my tradition of just rice. Julian B comes into the CP and I leave.

Leading lady Orla, and Zain are just ahead.

From last year's heat I know Hollins will be a challenge and that proves to be the case, feeling slower and slower making the ascent. Over the top and more path improvements which carry on right the way down to Hollowford Road. This makes a big difference where the stream used to run along the path. The road brings on leg cramps; manageable by going slower. Four come past including Julian B. At Castleton CP next to the garage I immediately sit down. Then tally punch and watch registered. An older BS organiser comments, "You'll have something to write about this year!". There always is! This is the last year that the CP will be managed by this couple (thanks for your year's of service). I partake of a jam sandwich and surprise myself by eating most of it.

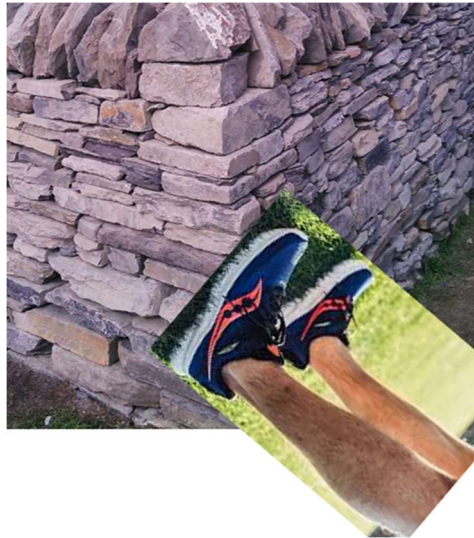
Castleton is really busy today with cars parked everywhere. A walk across the rough car park, and up the road to the track and then the Goosehill ascent begins. Zain said he was going to go via Cave Dale as that was better from his reccy. He may have a point.



Track up to Goosehill

Goosehill. This nearly did me in. I got so slow on the ascent. Another chap, Chris Ramsay, was also struggling and kept stopping. Eventually I just had to sit down for a minute. My calves were aching and I was probably overheating. Maybe it's time to retire, just go back down and stop? Let's try to go on. I get up and keep going, eventually reaching the near level and then onto the gate and the wall stile steps to the left of it. I tried to climb the wall steps and got a cramp attack and had to go back down. I stretched a bit and waited, then tentatively retried and got over. I did not feel like going on so lay down for a few minutes. A little chat inside my head: I either go back to Castleton and retire (that would be nice) or I see what happens on the way to the next CP and retire there. The course has immediately shortened – just reach the next CP, my spirits have lifted.

A few hundred metres of walking and cramp hits back again. Arghh! Both calves affected. I lie down next to a dry stone wall and try to stretch out using the wall as a brace. In this position various competitors from our event and some from the Limestone Way event go past in both directions no doubt puzzled ... some asking if I needed any help. Definitely. However, I decline.



Lying down with feet up the wall trying to relieve cramp

NHS website on leg cramps:

Leg cramps can sometimes be caused by:

1. *ageing*
2. *putting too much strain on muscles during exercise, which can be worse in hot or humid weather*
3. *pregnancy (usually in the later stage)*
4. *certain medicines, for example medicine for lowering cholesterol ([statins](#)) or high blood pressure (diuretics)*
5. *not drinking enough fluids (dehydration)*
6. *liver disease because of too much alcohol*
7. *The reason for some cramps is unknown.*

I think 1,2,5 applied.

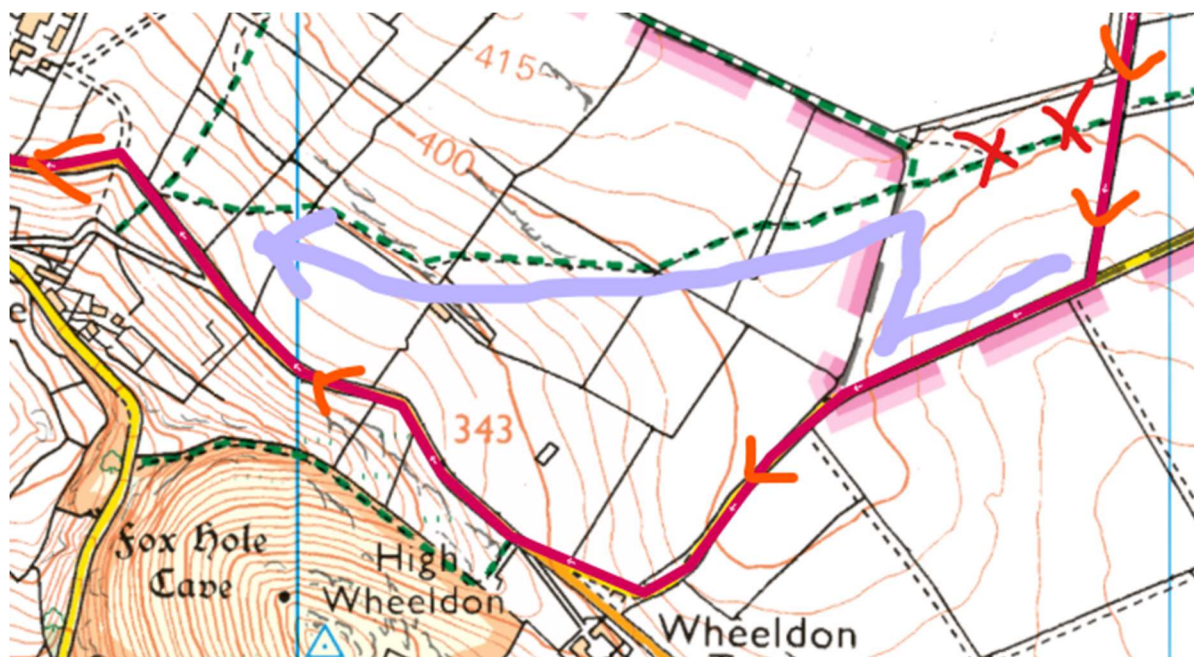
Trying to relax I cautiously got to my feet and was thankfully able to walk again but well aware cramp might hit again any moment. A relief it did not and the lying around maybe gave me a bit more energy to continue and once across the Cave Dale path was able to jog a little. Nicola Massey was ahead a few hundred metres and I could use her as a target to keep pace with. This worked and carried me along the Limestone Way and all the way to Peak Forest CP with Nicola arriving first.

I forgot about retiring and got back into competitive mode. Water, crisps, orange, banana (a whole one) was taken onboard and gradually eaten travelling ... walking up the road to the corner path. Nicola remained ahead, she used the left side of the road/verge which is something to bear in mind for future as it avoids the oncoming cars especially at the bend. She stayed ahead across the lush grass fields, more stiles, fields and on to the road. At this point Nicola stopped for some foot remedial work – possible a blister appearing.

I jogged on along the road, happy to go at my own pace and not worry about chasing or being caught as no one around. Nibble on a ginger biscuit. Feeling OK, whilst allowing my shortened course to finish at the next CP if cramps returned. On through Wheston. A thought at this point, with it being later on, was that maybe the cows would be out on the road going to milking. They weren't thankfully. Jogging continued until nearly at Millers Dale but I had to stop and walk for a breather. Then down to the CP, passed the farm's garden where a BBQ was being set up – not for our event I may add. At the CP I took a chair and placed it next to the tracker machine so I could have a brief rest whilst going through the usual routines of registering tracker, punching tally card and filling water bottle. The only take away food on offer for immediate consumption was bread (goes with soup). I declined. Nicola came into the CP as I was there and Chris R just after.

No, not retiring yet. A competitive urge to get going pushed out any thoughts of retiring and I was off again down to Millers Dale road, under the viaduct and begin the Blackwell Dale road climb. Definitely no attempt to jog this year. A paced walk all the way. Seemed to be less cars than normal probably because it was a bit later. A couple of chaps were bouldering on the rocky outcrops next to the road, and falling off on to their crash mats, oblivious to the occasional 'walker' coming by their quiet spot. The walk took me all the way to the top of Pillwell Gate from which point the Chelmorton CP comes in sight. Some jogging again, almost to the CP but the final small incline put paid to that. Sit down on the bench under the gazebo (disco lights not on yet), water filled, and off again with two ginger biscuits to nibble. In previous events this was the only CP I can recall having ginger biscuits, now various CPs have them.

Nicola arrives at the CP just after I left. Again, retirement thoughts are pushed back, the weather is good – cooler, no wind, dry, which is a big help, and almost on my own with no one rushing past which can be demoralising. Jogging along to the road and then down the quarry track slope. I wonder whether there is any path through the Dowlow quarry now? There was not, just as the organisers had warned, so I took road all the way round. Maybe there is an opportunity to go round the quarry on the inner track, ascend a bit, then take the diagonal across the fields. Something to look into.



Quarry: Red road route is recommended. Purple is possible alternative to cut the corner

Dusk. Earl Sterndale marshals were waving lighted discs to signal the CP location – although I know it well. Water, crisps and jam sandwich. Another chap came into the CP just after me but I did not see Nicola [later retired at ES]. I must have looked OK as marshals did not ask me to group up. Walk down the road eating the sandwich wishing I'd got my headtorch out at the CP. Before the path off to the left whilst still on the road the headtorch is pulled out of the rucksack (one of the few times it has been taken off my back) and torch switched on. Occasional flashes of torches can be in the distance as the darkness settles in. The temperature has dropped now and at times there are pockets of coolness and then warmth with the air being so still. The lack of wind also added to the quietness which I felt especially going into dusk and darkness.

Across fields and tracks there seems to be many slugs, out on the now damp grass. I'm careful not to squash any; a few might have copped it. They appear to be bigger at night. The moon, nearly full, is welcome and helpful, so torch not needed on most of the road sections.



Slug slalom

The road winds its way up Dowel Dale and then path off to the right where it becomes mostly across fields, past Stoop farm where there's an opportunity to play slug slalom again. Then the lake and the previously noisy-dog farm at Brand End. I'm gaining on the few torches ahead, which surprises me. Past lots of strange rubbish at the farm buildings, over new cattle grids, and to the Brand Top CP. On entering there are three chaps tucking into rice pudding etc. I sit down to checkin, then take on the usual water, crisps and I think ginger biscuits and leave, with the chaps still noshing. Still not retired I'm now of mind to think I can just keep plodding on to the end. As I descend the rough track I contemplate which way to go and wonder what the three chaps behind me at the CP will do. (Dave Kelly, Jonatan Pinkse, Phil Ramsey).



Flash Stores still available for rent

I take the lane up to Flash Stores, my preferred route, especially in the dark, and pleasingly the climb up to the main road goes well. Then descend towards Knotbury and the main new route bit for me comes when Three Shires Head is reached. The three chaps from the last CP are now close behind .. will they go same way as me? Prompted by Nick Ham going 'left' last year I also turn left and take the longer route which traverses West of the main hill on a rough track, and then a grassy field track that goes on much longer than I expected. Eventually popping out with a gush onto the road. Some ascent is necessary up the road before able to jog downwards to the Clough House CP with its bright lights, cow bells, and noisy welcome.



Clough House Farm team ready for the first arrival

As I arrive the three chaps are still descending the rutted track via Cumberland Cottage (came in 9 mins after me at the CP) so all in all I think the new route is better. Strava indicates 0.2 miles longer and 30m less climb. However, the going is easier. It is potentially boggy, so after rain could be the poorer choice. At Clough House I do not sit down, just checkin, water top up and food sample done quickly. Only crisps. There is so much other food to choose from but no ginger biscuits. It is a magnificent spread and so neat. My psychological problem here is that for previous two years I've been badly sick at this point so wanted to get out the CP in case it happened again. A relief, it did not.



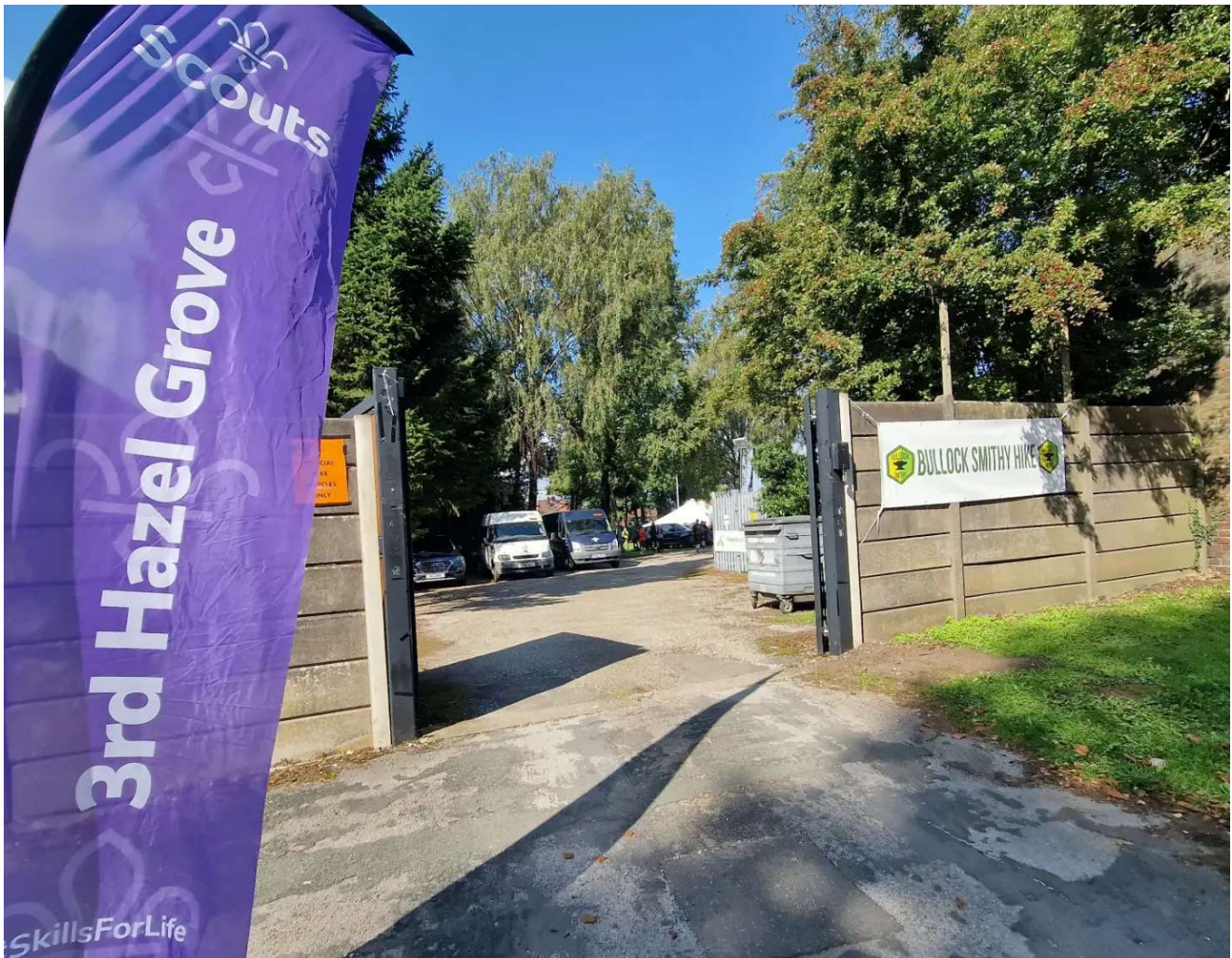
First runner to arrive at Clough House ... taking on refreshments

I am not going to retire. So a long plod followed. Feeling a bit cool but sticking to short sleeve top only. I take the road all the way round, passed a quiet Stanley Arms, and now disused Walker Barn CP, and on the descent of Bull-Hill Lane the three chaps passed me. As did a badger, chuntering and skuttling along the road wondering what's happening as did I at first. More chaps over took me. In Rainow I was mentally ready this year for the short climb up to the CP at the Rainow Institute. I should have followed another competitor on the last bit along the road as that makes for easier access to the entrance than going round the back. A brief sit during checkin and water – no food here, although Pringles were offered which I should have partaken of I thought after leaving.

Briefly with another competitor now, Matt Hutchinson, down Sugar Lane. He overshoots slightly and turns back and we go down the narrow alley way which appears to be someone's back yard, over the dewy fields and through some thin slate bordered field entrances/exits that needed a shimmy. The track through a couple of woods emerges onto Ingersley Vale road into Bollington. Once on Palmerston Street Matt goes ahead with a faster walking speed. Up Clarence road, over canal bridge – the steps are some effort – and off down the canal. I have no speed. So only walking. Near Bridge 25 a voice shouts come under the bridge, which I do, and then to CP 13 at Whitely Green. The camper van is parked on the left this year. So checkin, no water needed, and without any ginger biscuits on offer I take a shortbread biscuit. Last year I gambled on half cup of tea but it did not stay down. This year I'm away with just the biscuit.

I wonder if anyone back home will still be watching the online tracking – possibly Katherine. At least she'll know I am going to finish as there is no retiring now. Middlewood Way here we come. Count those bridges. I do. Various people come past, walking and jogging their voice and torches approach and then disappear (quickly!) into the darkness ahead. No turning off at Wood Lanes this year as I stay on MW through to Coppice road for a change. On the road I should be jogging as slightly downhill but I stay walking. An old man at 2am is out walking his dog and I barely keep up with him. Still at least I am moving and the finish is getting closer.

Towers Road; at last! No one around now. A quiet plod along the road dodging pot holes left and right and the odd speed bump. Past the footpath turnoff which was (and still is) used for the most direct starting mile or so and maybe by some on the return. Onto A523 and then a casual walk across the new dual carriage way with no traffic in sight. And there it is; the scout hut finish. In through the side entrance, checkin with a final whizzer and done.



The welcome sight of the finish gate

No sickness and even some hunger which is a good sign. I'm sure looking forward to just lying down though so I forgo the 'full breakfast' on offer and head out to the car before the body stiffens up. A fitful sleep is had for a few hours before heading for home. I feel very satisfied to have got round in a 'reasonable' time with only a small amount of training. Something to build on for next year!

Trackers – did they work?

Yes. Much more reliable than last year from what I know. The simple CP times were adequate for knowing where someone was on the route and their approx position. Also easy to put on a watch strap rather than figuring out where on rucksack or bumbag to attach the GPS trackers and worry about battery level.

Marshals, Organisers and all Helpers
Thanks to everyone



Winners

154 finishers out of 217 starters, with many retiring early because of the heat. James Chapman and Orla Haigh were the fastest man and lady. No fast times this year.

What next? Good question. Possibly nothing until 2024. Maybe try a second park run.

Nigel Aston (19 finishes, + 2 unofficial completions in 2021)

Photo credits: Various people posting on Bullock Smithy Facebook; Nick Ham, Internet, Paul Rushworth