

Bullock Smithy Hike, 4th September 2021

(45th running of the event)



“Lack of training = more walking = longer time”

The build up

In June 2020 Covid was restricting activities. I was feeling good, with regular early morning runs from home so decided to go round the BS course mainly in daylight. It was a success, if a little warm. Thinking that was it for the year I then heard a few people were going to do a BS on what would have been the official start day in September if the BS2020 had not been cancelled. So come September I went round again, starting early and finishing late afternoon. So two unofficial completions in the bag. Roll on 2021 and knowing the BS was definitely on this year I had it in mind and maintained fitness from winter to spring. In April my right calf tightened during a run and then sharp pain causing me to stop. I walked home. After a few days I tried a gentle trot but almost immediately the sharp pain was there again. So switched over to cycling a bit more and then gentle walking and then jogging start to build back up again with distances of up to 4 miles. In early June out for a gentle run thinking my right calf was OK, which it was but suddenly the left calf/ankle gave out the same pain as the right one had a few months back.

Since then more cycling again and less jogging. The discomfort/pain came when the ankle was bent to less than 90 deg, which it rarely is when cycling. Heavily strapped left and right calves before any runs, and support bandage. Discomfort but no sharp pains providing I went really slow (5 mph). July. Maybe I should pull out the BS and give up; it's too much for my legs. Come August various walks and slightly longer jogs built up confidence and I felt a little more optimistic eventually getting up to one run of 16 miles two weeks before the BS. Then the confidence was dented as five days before the BS a quicker walk of four miles around local fields finished with left calf in pain and limping... seemed I was better jogging than walking. Should I pull out? Let's see how the legs feel next day ... pain had eased and hardly (!) limping. Tuesday. Let's get to the start and give it a go.

BS 2021

So I knew this year I'd do well just to get to the BS start line and if I did get going it would be all about finishing. Saturday came and I took the usual driving route to Hazel Grove and arriving at Poynton began to feel a touch of excitement. Yes, I really was going to start the BS.

I paid a brief visit to the Scout hut to collect a Runfurther spot prize (thanks guys) and then got ready. The sun appeared and things began to warm up so I put on sun cream and decided to take the cap. Ankles/calves needed maximum protection, so I just put on everything I could think might help ... KT tape around the foot/ankle, CompressSocks (with bobbles for padding and muscle massage), stretch bandage, duct tape, calf compressors/protectors, and a couple of strips of KT tape on the hamstrings. Top layer was thinnest shirt I had. That's it. Off to Devonshire Park. I sat on the grass bank and soaked up the atmosphere. Great to be back in an event again ... my first for nearly two years.



Runfurther spot prizes

Good to catch up with a few old faces, and look around to see some who had partaken previously and many who hadn't. Tally cards were as usual, being handed out from 11:15 instead of 11:45 to help with Covid queuing separation. Rob Massey gives a clear set of information over the 'new' speaker system

(rather than megaphone). This includes instructions not to go down the A523 for safety reasons and not to 'scare' drivers. Unsure whether this was obeyed by the fastest runners. The anvil strikes and we're off.



Handing out tally cards



Rob Massey info and safety address



Competitors listen to Rob Massey's info



Nick Ham



'Go'



Just after the start competitors take the housing estate roads to reach the Old Mill Lane and A555 bridge

Immediately I'm taking a different route to the past. Devonshire Rd and Mill Lane, to get to Old Mill Lane and the bridge over the A555. I jog carefully, conscious of heel striking to reduce bend in the ankle. There

are many ahead and many behind and unlike previous years I am not feeling the need to keep up near the front. I go with the flow, trotting over the dry grassy fields on to the harder track, cool through the trees, past the golf course and onto Anson Road. I continue to jog and pass a few people who already have broken into a walk. Over the Macclesfield Canal and into the open country side. The gradual incline takes us up into Lyme Park with a tiny bit of down on tarmac over the cattle grid to turn right in front of Lyme house and up the Gritstone Trail and complete the second of the advertised course changes. As I trotted past the three Gym boys one of them recognised me from the BS website photos (fame!)



Sweepers Steve Holt and Adam Gallimore ('The Great Galleymo')

I stayed with the jog until it became too much nearing Bowstones and walking was best. At CP1, Bowstones we were greeted by lots of happy marshals eager to punch the tally (maybe they had an inter-marshall competition for most tally's punched). Refilled water bottle.



CP1 Bowstones

Now it was time to test the calves/ankle on a downhill section. I really did trot down the road slowly, with many overtaking me. This was all about preservation, not bending the ankle too much. I was OK. Normally no front runners take the Dissop Head dip. However, this was not the front of the race; more the middle, so interesting that at least half a dozen around me took the recommended route down the dip. I guess being so dry it had become a viable option. Even with my slow jogging along the more level tarmac and passed the hotel/school there was little in it between the two routes.

At a slower pace than normal the grassy jog round Whaley Moor was still enjoyable; the dryness of the previous week and today meant all grassy paths were good to use. The Gym boys overtook me, quicker on the slope down to the road



The author enjoying the grassy paths



The Gym boys (at the start)

Over the wall, across the fields, through Diglee Farm gate. Lady with pink shorts is catching me and agrees to close the gate. Down the track then tarmac to the Furness Vale crossing. Cars slow and stop as a gaggle of runners cross – the Gym boys, Pink shorts lady, a few others and me. Under the gloomy railway pedestrian tunnel and into the cow-less field I leave the Gym boys and Pink behind. Up through the woods of Shedyard Clough and Farm, then Laneside Rd. Gym boys and Pink are now behind as I maintain a slow jog up the road, up the track to the main gate on to the moor ('New Allotments') where I nearly catch up to blue top who is making good progress with walking poles. He pulls ahead though. The climb is steeper now. A marshal holds a gate open for us 'hikers', then closes it, presumably to avoid any of the nearby cattle descending the track.

The steepest descent now to CP2 of Chinley Churn, wondering how my calves and ankles would fair. It's OK though, with care, no aggravations. This is good, I'm holding up and have at least made first two CPs.



CP2 Chinley Churn. Julian Brown and Jayne Lawton



The Gym boys.

Blue top gets going on the descent to Peeps and is way ahead, but presumably needs to sort a few things out as we meet up briefly again later at the bottom. My legs manage the mini traverse short cut; I take the right hand grass field to reach the gate. At Peeps there is no immediate sign of the refreshments but am quickly informed they are just round the corner this year. Its water top up, penguin biscuit and a mouthful of crisps (for salt).



Peep-O-Dale refreshments (Author leaving, blue top choosing crisps)

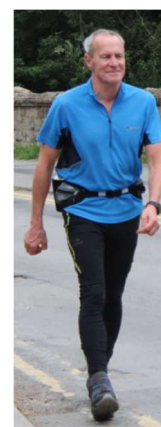


Blue top

Over the road, up the track, a few more gates then another ankle test on the tricky drop to Coldwell Clough. After the stream the path has really deteriorated here and am glad it's dry. Wet would have necessitated a climb up to avoid the mess – or get shoes caked in mud. Ease down to the foot bridge and then the climbing begins. First a little tarmac, then once through the large gate it's the rough stones. No jogging here; only a stubborn walk as the legs are already tired. Those ahead disappear into the distance and others come by me. Even when on to the moor I struggle to get any jogging done, through Oaken Clough and then the jelly babies (as advertised) of CP3 and Edale Cross. The temperature has gone up and am glad of the gentle breeze at the top.



CP3 Edale Cross



Blue shirt

As always Jacob's Ladder deserves concentration. I have little choice but to descend slowly, no pounding of quads and definitely no ankle jarring. A chap in blue shirt and lightweight boots (?) whizzes past and I'm unsure whether he's in the event. At the bridge a few people politely clap; I tell them they can cheer louder if they wish and they do ... a nice little boost. Blue shirt slows and walks whereas I move into slow jog mode and continue all the way to Edale.

At CP4, Edale, I find Paul R without rucksack on ... he's decided to retire; with recent family events taking their toll on preparations and mind. Pink shorts lady arrives just after me and says she was catching and we have a discussion about swings and roundabouts (she's faster on flat). I'm pleased to arrive as from now on there is only around 2.5 miles (back or onwards) at any point to get to a CP should I suddenly get leg

pains and have to stop, whereas the Edale Cross section it is much further (cannot retire on the top of a hill and get a lift home!). At the start Rob Massey informed us of the Covid problems with rice pudding delivery (shortage of HGV drivers) so there was none at Edale. Instead, at the CP there are small beakers containing tinned fruit cocktail only. I had some, quite refreshing on its own although I'd have preferred naked rice pudding.

On leaving Edale a father and daughter pairing arrive. They are pacing themselves well. Up we go to Hollins Cross. I hear people behind me and just keep going, unsure which people. I surprise myself with a reasonable pace down from Hollins until the road is reached. At that point a few people come past, including Pink shorts. Castleton car park is packed; I navigate round the edge, then across and beeline for the garage and CP5.



Father and daughter pairing



CP5, Castleton, at far side of garage forecourt

I wonder why the CP is not under the canopy this year. Still it's fine to be on the grass. Water top up and I take a jam sandwich of which half gets eaten. Pink shorts gets a kiss from someone (probably husband) ... is that outside assistance? Anyway, what a boost it gives her. She leaves ahead of me and shoots up Goosehill never to be seen again – both swings and roundabouts now. Runners from another race trickle past. This is steeper than I remember. We are nowhere near half way. What have I got left?

The demons pay me a visit. *Why don't you retire and take it easy? This is getting hard. You've not done enough training. You should stop. Others have stopped. Get a lift back to the start.* The demons have never been like this before. I shut them up and target one more CP.



Pink shorts lady

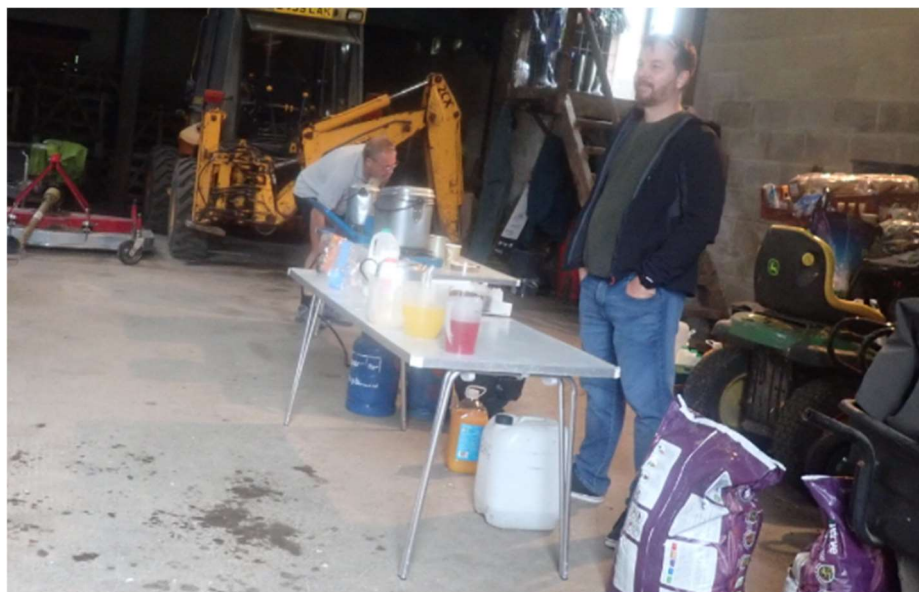
Once on the Limestone Way flat the slow jogging can continue. Runners from the other race keep coming past at regular intervals. Some look quite tired, but not shattered. This continues all the way down Oxlow Rake and into Peak Forest.



Crossing the road to CP6 at Peak Forest

Slice of orange, half a banana, a few crisps and usual water top up; then back out. Not nice alongside the A623 so am pleased to get into the field and away from traffic. Many have gone before me and squashed the dry grass down, so easier than normal to pass through the fields to Dam Cliff top, over the walls – tricky stiles on tired legs – and pop out through the gate onto the quiet lane to Wheston. Gentle jog, keep going, overtaken by one person, walk up the turn off from Wheston, and then keep going, mainly jogging all the way along the Limestone Way to Millers Dale. Runners from the other race continue to come by -one of them says it's the Limestone Way 50. *[Started 9am, winning time 9h, other distances also a 33m and a 100m].*

Just into Miller's Dale CP and another overtake by orange top. He stops for hot drink as does other person that had come past me. I'm in and out with water and a handful of salt – yuk.



CP7 Millers Dale

The little rough descent has a gate across which I cannot recall from previous times. I'm through, down, and onto B6049 and going along the Wye. It is a lovely clear fresh river at this point. The road leaves the river and ascends up Blackwell Dale (or official route bears off left up Long Lane). It could be that the two people having hot drinks at the last CP go this way as I do not see them again. A slow jog up Blackwell till the legs take no more and I have to walk. Over the A6 to Senners Lane. An abandoned Range Rover or similar with windows smashed is hidden round the corner. Strange place to leave it. Through the gate, climb up, a struggle, and then in the far distance Chelmorton CP beckons. First Pillwell Lane needs to be jogged down – a slow one as usual, all the way up some of Highstool Lane to the CP. I sit down. Marshals offering me various things. I take water, not a donut, not even half a donut, but just a custard cream biscuit – I was hoping for a ginger nut. Another chap arrives and sits down and I ask him how he's feeling. Tired. I leave.



CP8 Chelmorton (trays of biscuits and donuts)

No demons with me now. I feel dusk coming – already? Slow jog mode continues all the way to the Dowlow quarry track. At that point Tired (from last CP) comes past. This is not good as I was just about to stop jogging and eat something. Instead I keep going and try and keep him in my sights – knowing that will help with nav in the dusk across the fields. Well he's too quick. Once in the fields I catch sight of him in the distance just entering the coppice and then no more. No point in worrying about cows even if they do want to play a bit, just concentrate on the ground underfoot, down the gentle slope to the small gate and the lane. On reaching the gate I'm caught by someone else. On the road he jogs onward quicker than me. I can hardly jog now even though down to Earl Sterndale should be no problem.

A young marshal stands outside the CP door on the road to make it obvious where to go (thanks). Inside is the chap who overtook me just now, and Tired. Well, the lady marshal must have thought I'd had it. She enquired whether I had done the BS before – and I had trouble speaking, but said yes. Even so she said we like people to pair up when it's dark. So I left with the chap who'd just passed me, Neil Carter. I refused the jam sandwich offered at the CP. On reflection this was an indication that my insides were not right. There was a long way to go and I was not fuelling up.

I apologised to Neil that he'd been saddled with me going slowly. He was obviously quicker walking than me. Still, we kept each other company and agreed on the same route. The fields to Dowel Dale became trickier in the dark (even with torch). Once on the road we walked. Maybe I could have jogged a bit quicker than walking. Neil had poles and was making good use of them. Neil had completed the BS in 2018 and 19 so had some knowledge of the route; he was still glad of my extra knowledge to guide round Booth Farm and a few other places.

At Brand End the father and daughter pairing caught us and then Tired. A sit down at Brand Top. Neil explained that in 2019 he'd had a mini sleep here and felt much better afterwards. Not this year though.

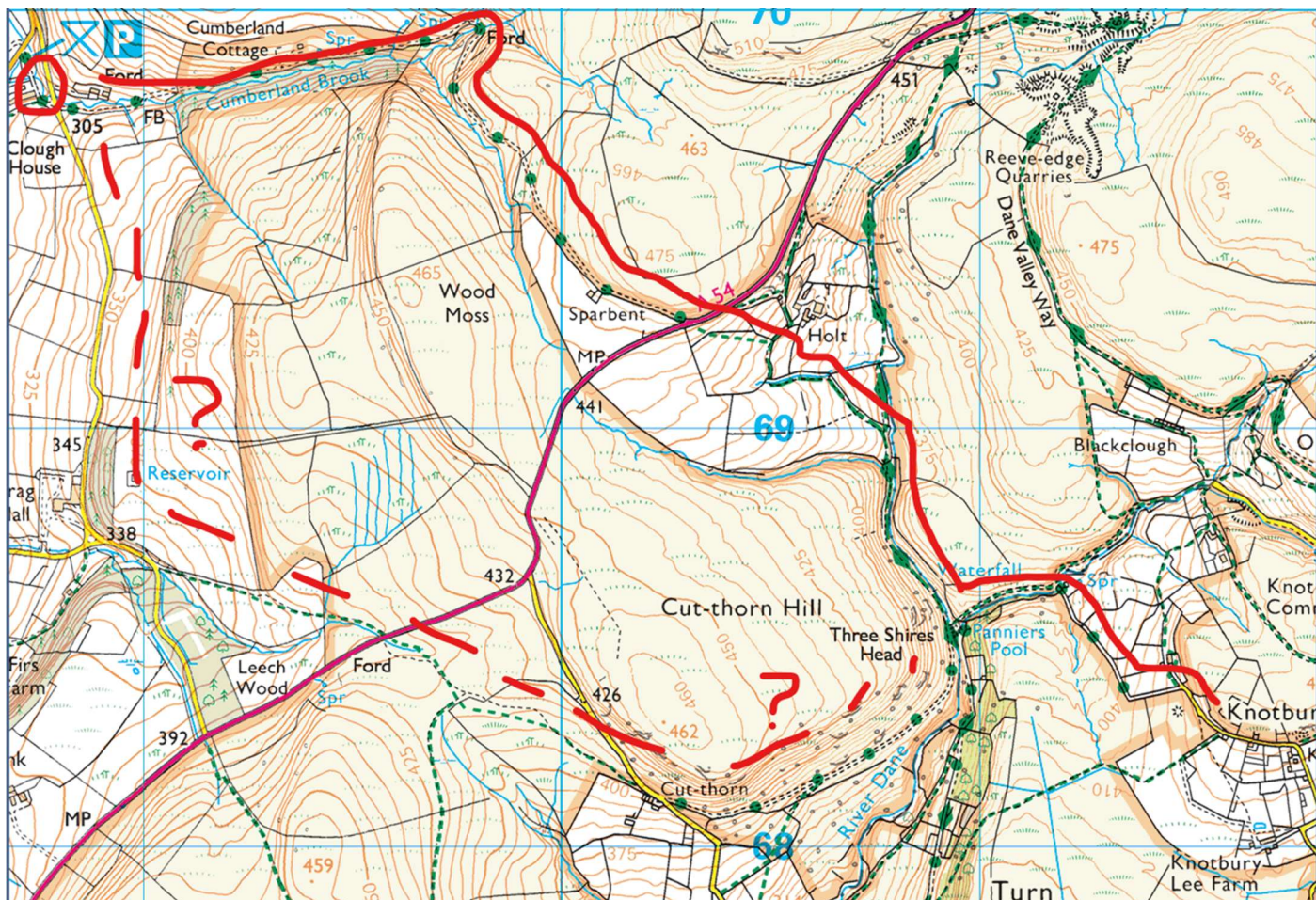


CP10 Brand Top, showing the food on offer, plus hotdogs later

The five of us left together but instantly the other four (father, daughter, Neil and Tired) jogged away from me. I wondered whether they'd go road or direct to Hilltop. They took the road, and quickly their headlights faded away. Actually I was OK being on my own again, travelling at my pace. Not much I could do going uphill though, just grind it out. Flash Stores. No one around. Over the A54 and even managing a little trot to Knotbury. Through three Shires Head and could see torch lights ascending the hill and probably a marshal at the top of the high ladder stile on the road.

No nav errors today, helped by the marshals torch I got to the high ladder and up to the road. I was surprised to find the marshal there accompanied by Paul R who had retired at Edale. Good of him to come out and help. I think he was surprised to see me (so far behind). It did seem a bit cold for shorts though which is all both of them had on. Low on energy I could do with something inside me to keep me going ... but stomach feeling a bit rough and could not eat much of anything. I set myself up for the mental challenge of the bumle down the rough descent to the ford and along the edge of Cumberland Brook. The only positive was that it would be over in one go, without a break at the old cottage CP location. There seems to be no easy way. Even descending here in 2020 a few times during my daylight completions was not much easier. And so to CP11 at the new location of Clough House Farm.

With the CP moved is there now an alternative route avoiding Cumberland Brook track to get to the new CP location?



With the cottage CP moved maybe there is a different way from Knotbury to the new CP location?



CP11 Clough House Farm, before the action started



CP11 Clough House Farm, during the event

The usual lights and bells awaited at the CP and the team had done a really good job of decorating and arranging everything. I was surprised to find Neil and Tired there. I would have liked to eat some of offerings, but topped up water, grabbed a slice of orange and got outside, round the corner out of sight of the CP, lay down on my side and was sick. Neil and Tired came passed, checked I was OK and carried on. I recovered, ate my orange slice, and set off only to catch up with Neil – unloading grit from his shoe. From that point we travelled together, walking. Tired man had gone on, jogging.

We agreed to take the Macclesfield Forest track. The ground was dry and the track not too bad. Various others passed us along here. At one point I had to stop to be sick again – there was definitely nothing left inside me now. Off the track and onto Charity Lane. Not far along and Neil stopped to be sick. Unsure if he was more noisy than me, but the violent sounds were quite distressing, causing some alarm for a man and woman pairing that arrived on the scene (Ken and Jenny Wyles?).

We continued the walk down Charity Lane – I'd have liked to have jogged - and arrived at a different looking Walker Barn. Instead of the room at the back, the CP was in the main church. The couple manning the CP were very respectful of the surroundings with nearly laid out *offerings*. Apparently this is the last time this CP will be used.



CP12 Walker Barn, inside the now disused church

I had my cag on now to keep out the chill, although overall the conditions had been really good with only light breeze and dry. Back out, along A537 to Bull-Hill Lane, short cut across the field, steep steps down to the Lane. Those steep steps always get me, care not to fall off them at the bottom into the road. Now Lidgetts Lane is closed so we are on yet another diversion from the usual route. This one was hard though,

especially coming after nearly 50 miles. We followed the diversion instructions and ended up on the top of the ridge at the trig point (was that correct?) then along before descending to the West down to Lidgetts Lane. Another pair of runners passed us. Sections were taking ages at walking pace. Still we kept going, trudging along to the canal and getting the job done. No one stirring in the berthed canal boats. Bridge 25 and CP13 at Whitely Green.

We had a brief sit down. Offered various things and I plumped for blackcurrant. I took a sip and remarked what a kick it had. I topped up water bottle (not thinking straight here as no way was I going to drink even half a bottle). Neil also had some. We both agreed this was strong stuff ... unsure whether they had actually diluted it.

Bridge 8, 9, 10 11 and finally 12 and turn off Middlewood Way. Wood Lanes. New route for Neil, but this is my usual way. Towers Road, A523 and into the hut. Completed!



Various finishers, including the final sweeper Adam Gallimore

Finishing certificate impressively printed out within a few minutes of finishing. Catering marshals attentive and soon sat down at one of the spaced out tables with some fried eggs and cups of milk to drink [other food and drink was available]. The caterers were great; no need to move really.

Wandered back to the car in the Park and Ride, quick change and then a lie down for a few hours – soon asleep. Woke refreshed, and really pleased to remember I had got round. Could hardly believe it really when I was limping only few days ago on Monday after walking a few miles.



Rory Harris and Jayne Lawton, men's and women's winners (again!)

Writing this report a week or so later, looking through pictures and results I am already thinking about entering yet again. This time getting my entry in much earlier no matter what injuries loom up (within reason). A good three months of training beforehand, injury free, and who knows, I could get back to sub-12 territory. But maybe the body is worn out and won't allow such training.

Just over 200 finished this year and a fair few dropped out part way round; I was pleased not to be one of those.

Thanks to all the organisers, marshals and many volunteers for getting the event on this year and running it so smoothly.

Nigel Aston (17 finishes, + 2 unofficial completions)

Photo credits: Various people posting on Bullock Smithy 2021 Facebook; Nick Ham, Internet, Paul Rushworth