

Bullock Smithy Hike, 5th & 6th September 2026

50th running of the event)

A 56 mile circuit (or 57) in the glorious Peak District

Running on memories ...



Conditions: Warm, sunny intervals, clear, calm night



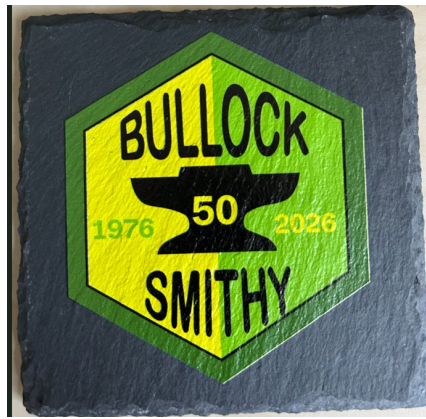
The Bullock Smithy was started 50 years ago by John Corfield (seen here at Edale CP)

Soon after finishing 'The 49th Bullock Smithy' in 2025 I was keen to get into the big 50th event so I entered early. Just as well as this running of the event was very popular with more than 100 more people entering than normal and the maximum limit was extended to 400. Surprising that at the start there were only 353 ready to go, and that included some last minute entrants who got a cancellation. I was expecting closer to the limit of 400. Maybe organisers can allow for this in future with a 'buffer' of 10% extra on the limit (allow 440)? On the plus side the entrants who did not attend had all paid so still good for the Scout funds.

My preparation was going as planned up to mid-June with a satisfactory solo around the local Charnwood Round route. A few weeks later and right hip area suddenly hurt during a run which I curtailed after 3 miles. The sharp pain when jogging/running meant I could not, so had to only walk for a few weeks, and after that only short jogs. Self-diagnosis appeared to be tendonitis or GTPS (from overuse). I needed to keep runs short and stride length short. On advice I used static wall-sits to build up collagen in the damaged area.

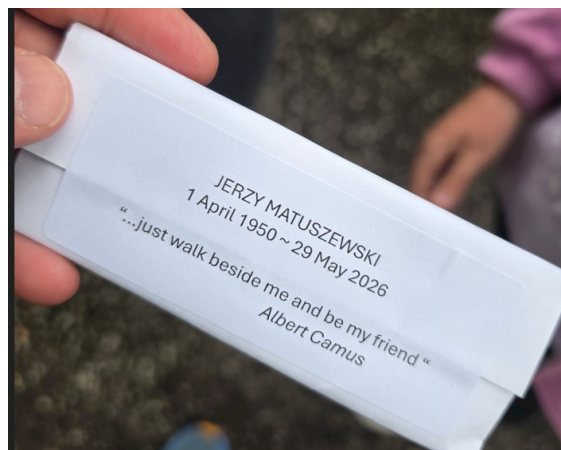
So my training involved a fair bit of walking rather than running and only local, no long day out in the Peaks to build up endurance. Eventually able to 'run' by mid-August but no time to build up the endurance. There weren't any thoughts of not taking part, only that I was in for more walking than normal in this year's Bullock and it would really test my ability to finish this time. I noticed at home that bouncing up 2 stairs at a time was far more effort than a few months ago; so went up one at a time!

Saturday. The pre-race routine was similar for me as previous years – set off from home 7am, car into Park & Ride, check-in – all done at 9:30 with very efficient team, orange tracker watch obtained and a nice slate coaster for everyone. Off back to car to doze till 10:45 – good job I'd set the alarm as I was nicely asleep when it went off. Kit on. I need to make a decision on whether my calf compression/protectors should be inside my Falke socks or on top? I went for the latter so socks were visible. One advantage of calf protectors is after race finish your legs are not so dirty; but main point for me is some support around calf area. Sun cream applied since day was looking warmer than I'd expected. Then it's make your way to Devonshire Park with many people, earlier than normal, so in good time to meet a few friends and catch Rob Massey's slightly longer event briefing.



Slate coaster memento that all starters got

Steve Temple is making a return to the event since last taking part in 2012 (he is curator of ALL Bullock Smithy results on the web site) so was good to see him looking lean and fit. Rob's briefing is loud and clear so everyone heard the various messages and the info on the recent passing of Jerzy (A huge 48 completions) and Janice 'Mole' Gibson (long-standing supporter of 3rd Hazel Grove scout group). A number of people had been given a small envelope with some of Jerzy's ashes – the intention being to scatter them somewhere around the course in memory of the larger than life fella. I already have an idea where I think will be appropriate.



Back of everyone's tally card showing Jerzy. A few of Jerzy's ashes were carried by some people to scatter on the course

Nick Ham is ready to go, although I suggest that maybe he should have more complete shoes, as one of them has the outer layer peeling off, showing the thinnest lining only. He insists they are really comfortable and all will be fine.



Nick Ham's rather dodgy shoe with flapping outer (amazingly it survived)

Steve Jackson (30 completions) is again being accompanied by each of his children for portions of the route, starting with Jo for the first 18 miles. I meet his wife who says she was pleased to have got a mention

in my last year's report as she had encountered me when she was cheering on her husband in Middlewood Way - where I was being sick in the grass! I hope not to meet her in similar circumstances again.



About to start - Nigel A, Paul R, Steve J



Gathering for the start in Devonshire Park



Rob Massey gives pre-event briefing. Note: Golden Anvil for this 50th event

I'm going to be navigating from memory which normally is sufficient. However, I do have the route on my watch and phone and am carrying a few bits of map too. The latter is to comply with the event rules which are a bit inconsistent ...

BS Website and SiEntries:

Each entrant takes responsibility ... to carry the kit requirements below:

- ...
- OL1 and OL24 maps. Digital alternatives are not a replacement for physical maps

And in final instructions:

- 'Maps covering the route (OL1 and OL24) or alternative reliable navigation'

I think the BS will move with the times on this in future and fully allow digital nav with suitable battery backup (like LDWA do in their long events).

To CP1 Bowstones

Setting off – knew I could not run as quick as I'd like and kept my pace down and realistic, walking on the early slopes. Must have been 70 ahead of me in the fields after we crossed first bridge over the newish A555.



The author moving OK near to CP1 but already feeling the uphill effort

Jogging and walking up Anson Rd, recalling when I could manage a jog almost into Lyme Park. That was definitely not happening today. Warming up with the effort. Low level chat from people around, and then louder chat from a lady coming up behind – with Julian B in a little group. Julian reveals he's started with two layers on, and too warm. So at the canal bridge he stops to undress, and his group also stops. So I overtake the chatty lady and things get a bit quieter.

Good to get out onto the open moor on the Gritstone Trail after passing through Lyme Park and Knightslow Wood. Photographer Nancy is snapping hikers on their way up.



Near CP1: Jayne L, Kate & Chris Davies, Nick H



Near CP1: Paul R, Steve T

First CP reached. Try tracker watch on the whizzer machine – all good – and get tally card punched. Top up fluid bottles – I'm sticking with blackcurrant. I check timings on watch and note I'm 10 mins slower than last year – which was also a slow time. Hmmm! This is going to be a long day ... and night.

To CP2 Chinley Churn

I set off jogging down the tarmac road and, as normal in recent years, others come jogging past being quicker than me. All keep on road around Dissop Head, although by the time I've done the half loop, a few others are noticed using the direct ditch route. A chance for some refuelling whilst climbing the grassy slope.

A few clouds, warm, and lovely views were all around. A nice day to be out in the Peak District.



Peak District - lovely day

At the top of the grassy slope it's over the wall stile. A bit of an effort to get jogging but this is a lovely section so I relaxed into it and made reasonable pace down to the road, over the still wobbly stile and across the field and enjoy the gentle downhill. Why are those people not going down to Brownough farm and instead going up into next field? My first thought was they didn't know the route. So I continued down the track towards the farm only to find it jammed with sheep and angry farmers/herders. I backtracked up again and went round as everyone else had done.

Last few years I've been slow at Furness Vale station and bumped into the train coming along the railway – which meant the level crossing was closed and caused hikers to divert and have to go up and over the bridge. This year I am even slower and so the train had already gone through, a plus as that meant straight across the railway and no bridge diversion.

Down the road and turn off left at Gowhole. After Gowhole I catch the vastly experienced Chris Davies who is running with his daughter Kate. Unfortunately he's tweaked a hamstring and is planning to retire at the next CP; his daughter continuing.



Minor route optimisation opportunity at Gowhole

Up through Shedyard Clough, through the farm - no free bottles of water (which happened a few years ago) then its uphill for a few km which I'm content walking. We arrive at the top of this gritstone hill, not quite the actual 'top' as this is at the Chinley Churn trig point half a km to the South. Steep descent on grass – no problem for most, as grass is dry. A few marshals, a tent, a whizzer machine is all that exists at this CP. So quickly pass through.

To CP3 Edale Cross

It's an easy track from the CP down to Peep-O-Day causeway . So jog along and notice PaulR is about 100m ahead and I may catch him. Strange, as he's much quicker than me especially early on. I don't catch him. Lots of activity at the refreshment spot as this is the first point to get food items, as well as drink. More blackcurrant, some crisps and choc bar.



Refreshments at Peep-O-Day: John Corfield watching; eventual winning lady going through

Cross the road and up the track. Through the gate after crossing the Pennine Bridleway then carefully descend the field, stream and field to Coldwell Clough. At this point I do catch PaulR and find he's taking things carefully with his previously injured ankle (in January). I don't see him again until the morning presentations.

Settle in. It is a long climb, possibly the longest of the event. Road, then track with large pebbles as we make our way up the Western flanks of Kinder Scout. The enclosed track gives way to open moorland near Oaken Clough. It remains a slog. I recall being able to jog some of this. Not any more. I'm with a chap in blue top, walking poles and we do some chatting. He's done Ultras, not the BS though. Recently the Manchester marathon. He's taking things leisurely, photographing some of the Peak District path signs.

As we near the CP at Edale Cross I go past a tall chap in yellow. Maybe I was being a bit rude as it was close to the CP. This CP is marshals, tent and Jelly babies. I take the typical family of four and set off.



We ascended up to Edale Cross together

To CP4 Edale

Immediately the chap in yellow comes back past me and looks like he moves quickly downhill. I eat the babies- but there is a sharp unpleasant taste – maybe acid/alkali clash with my juice.

I pick my way carefully down Jacob's, and arriving at the bottom and the footbridge, yellow top is dipping his necker in the river to get some 'cool'. Now on the sandy flat path I'm easily overtaken, including by yellow top with his refreshed neck. Half way along SteveT catches me. After a while he says he's going to take the road to Upper Booth and I say I'm going fields. He wavers. Then decides it will be a good experiment on route optimisation – there are no gates on the road section.



Footbridge at bottom of Jacobs Ladder

So at Upper Booth I take the sharp left past the ice cream store and right into the fields with the small pedestrian gates. I jog some and walk some. I recall when I could run the whole section. Over the railway bridge and into Barber Booth, then to the Edale Road. There is no sign of SteveT– so he's either slower, or more likely, much quicker. Good news for me is that I've avoided any falling over injuries – which I have previously suffered on the sandy track and outside the Methodist church at Barber Booth – primarily caused by some cramping and unable to properly lift legs when running – so tripped. Hence I arrive at Edale car park, after an uneventful jog along the road, without a bleeding knee/leg.

Tracey (PaulR's wife) and daughter Maisey are there and waiting for Paul to come in – he's probably only a few mins behind. SteveT is just leaving – indicating that maybe the road was quicker, but I feel more likely it was just that he was quicker anyway. I had the provided cup of fruit with some rice pud at bottom, topped up fluids – still blackcurrant – and away.

To CP5 Castleton

It does feel that there are more competitors around than normal. That's probably because there is, and also I am much further down the field where people are not so spread out.

So leave the car park, along the road then dive right to begin the Hollins ascent. The track is dry and up past Peter Barn we have no mud to contend with. Plenty of public around but they are not in the way. I take the Aston line up to the right of the gorged path and even try going a little higher, then it's a shallow ascent to Hollins Cross. People come past and my 'line' is either no benefit or I'm weak on the uphill climbs or both!

Descend down the much improved and maintained path from HC emerging onto Hollowford Rd and then Castleton Car Park. Busy. I don't really take notice of anyone, just zone in on the CP which is over the road, outside, at the entrance to the disused garage.

"Can I get you anything?" asks a lady marshal at the CP's table. I reply "A ginger biscuit". But the assorted biscuit packet does not have any. She offers to get another variety pack and I say not to worry. Further

along the table is a large pile of bread. I ask another lady marshal for a jam sandwich. She offers me two; one is sufficient (two halves of a slice).

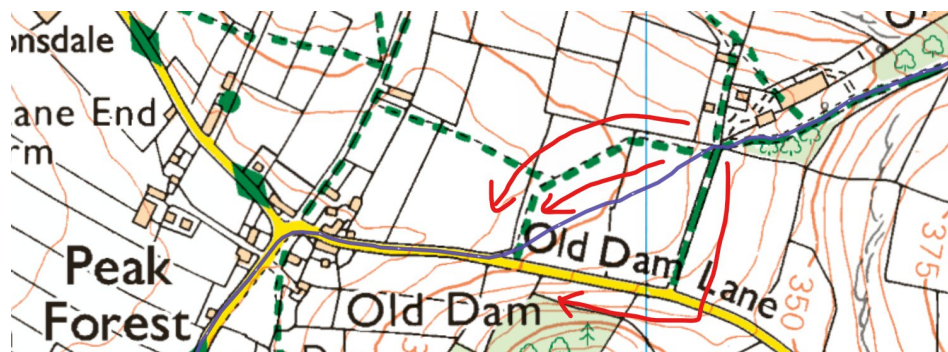
To CP6 Peak Forest

I set off nibbling the sandwich and have completed this activity by the time the rough car park is crossed. Onto Goosehill road then Goosehill itself. How will I go up this steep section where I have flagged in the past? A few years ago, when hot, I'd had to sit down part way up.

A few come past; it's so dispiriting there is no way I can keep up their pace. A slow plod only. I was expecting it though. Head down, keep plodding. I dip into my pocket to bring out the envelope containing a few of Jerzy's ashes and scatter them across the hillside. I think this is appropriate as for me it's one of the toughest sections.

The wall stile is reached. I get across without cramping and see no one ahead. So along the grassy slightly ascending track I go at my own pace. On the Limestone Way I'm overtaken and the chap is moving well. By the time I'm at the Oxlow Rake turn off he's out of sight over the top.

At the bottom of Oxlow there are fields to cross. With many ahead of me there is no problem seeing the optimal route across the two fields with the grass being flattened. A few others are around and between us various routes are taken, showing that the direct fields are not the only way to go with some taking the track, others Old Dam Lane. No matter, they all get ahead of me!



At least three possible routes from end of Oxlow Rake to Old Dam Lane

The Peak Forest CP is at the other side of the A623, accessed via a pedestrian crossing. There is a long queue of cars travelling East and West waiting at the crossing's red lights so I nip across. That avoids a bit of a wait for the next green man as there was no way across without it.



The author entering PF CP (the chap in red was ahead of me all the way along the road to Wheston)



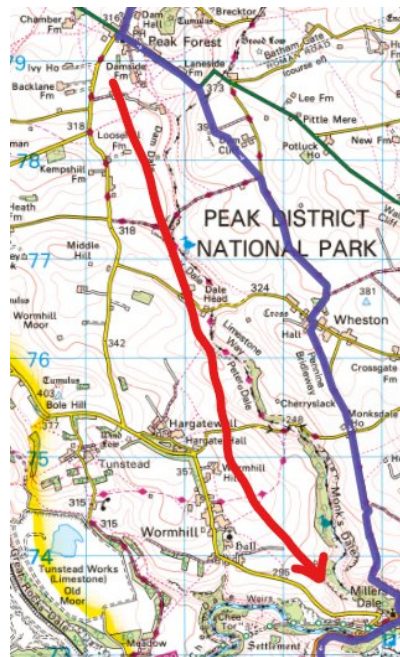
Peak Forest CP in action (note orange tracker machine on desk next to happy marshals)

To CP7 Millers Dale

In the CP I have one of my gels (leaving wrapper in bin). I also take half banana (there is a pile of half bananas). This is eaten whilst walking along the pavement of the A623 heading South West. In a few hundred metres a convenient litter bin consumes my skin. No doubt this bin will be full of fruit skins by tomorrow.

There were so many people coming past me I stopped worrying about it. Ten years ago I would push on and try to keep up, retaining my position. It didn't used to last though as I always seem to tire more than most.

Although a few of us have suggested some minor route changes to the organisers, this year's event remains the same route as previous four years. Maybe after 50th there could be a change. One such change is to avoid this A623 trudge, so close to traffic, especially at the hairpin. For example, the route could travel a little West of the A623, still arriving at Miller Dale.



Possible alternative route to avoid dangerous A623

Turn off the A623 on to the FP at the hairpin. A few fields, wall stile, a few tricky wall stiles, a larger field then road for over a km to Whetton. Surprised myself by maintaining a slow jog to Whetton, spurred on by keeping a chap in red in view. This area always brings back memories of cows. One year cows were being herded near Water Lane to the left and a few of us got past them just before they hit the road. Another year the cows were on the road into Whetton and farmer told us to hop over the wall to get round. Another year the cows were on the track leaving Whetton and the farmer said that its up to you whether you walk through them – which I did with JulianB.

More people pass me as I made my way on track, road, track of the Limestone Way to Miller Dale CP, in the barn of Monksdale Farm.

This is geared up for evening/night refreshments with soup/bread. So I have one of my gels, top up fluids – still blackcurrant, and am out quickly.

To CP8 Chelmorton

Out of the barn and descend. I actually catch a couple of people on the rough track but they soon come past once we are on the B road travelling under the spectacular viaduct which now carries the Monsal Trail. Along by the river Wye then the B6049 begins its ascent along Blackwell Dale. I'm with a couple of chaps one is strong and one not so. He swears about the horrible road section. I'm a little quicker than him – amazingly – but his mate is much quicker. So up the road, walk, and walk, and walk, dodging oncoming traffic when necessary. Over A6 and up the tarmac track to Senners Lane.

I can hear noisy chatter behind – without looking I'm sure it will be Julian and ladies. Up to Pillwell Gate and the chatting gets louder. Once over the top the slower chap that had dropped behind me on the 'horrible' road ascent breaks into a jog and is away with his mate. I could manage a jog, just. Meanwhile Julian and the ladies chatting away gradually come up behind me. One lady says 'they are high quality socks'. Strange thing to say to somebody I thought. She then overtook me and said she was referring to my socks (Falke). Fair enough. My decision to wear them outside my calf protectors had a positive effect on somebody!

Julian's group on reaching Highstool Lane met a supporter and there was discussion on what goodies she had in her bag, possibly Red Bull someone asks.



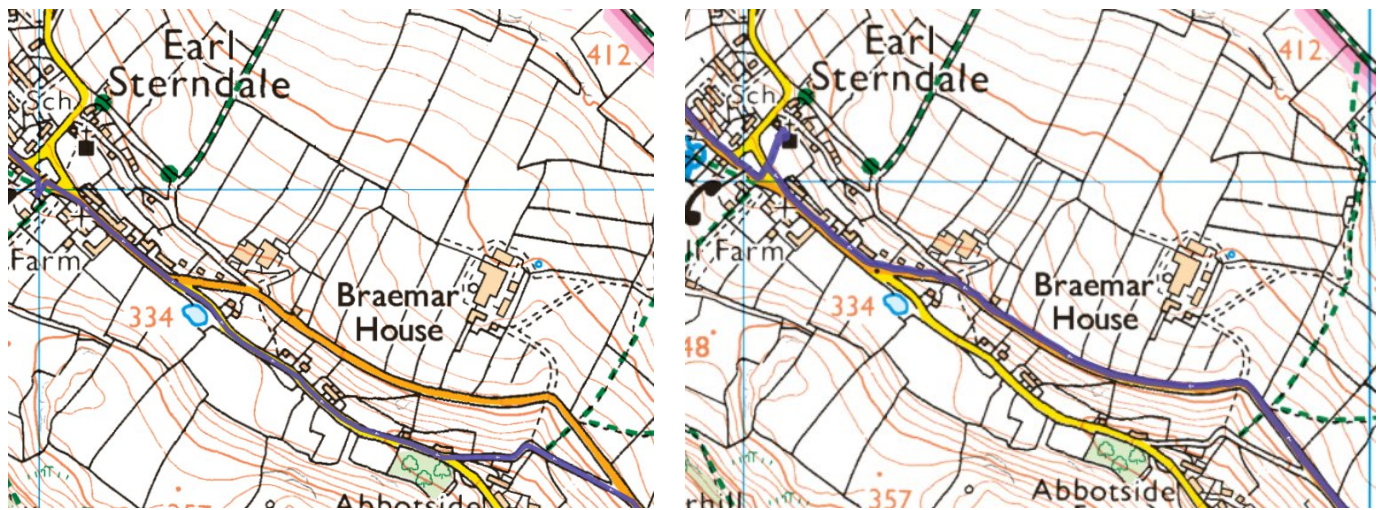
Julian Brown and team mates: Sophie Kirk, Steph Wood, Patrick Swallow (going to CP1)

I make the most of a brief sit down at the CP under the gazebo. A different group are manning the CP this year. However, the food on offer remains the same – doughnuts, biscuits. I take two choc biscuits.

To CP9 Earl Sterndale

I would previously have been able to jog along the slightly rough track. Now I walk almost all of it. To start with I work on digesting the choc biscuits – they end up as a paste in my mouth before I swallow them. I've a bit more energy to jog once on the road ... More people pass me. I see Julian's group disappearing down the quarry road. And a few others.

Past the quarry and turn right onto tarmac. There's some uphill, so still walking. Then I manage jogging on the down as Earl Sterndale is approached. I am caught by DexterM. He says his watch is telling him to turn off left, drop to the valley track, to get to the CP. I have never gone that way, sticking to the main road. It is something I will investigate once home. I say this to him and he agrees to continue with me along the top road to the CP at the church.



Route choices approaching Earl Sterndale

There have been a number of places where supporters helped out hikers – with food/drink and kit. I thought that entrants were to be self-sufficient but there is nothing in the 2026 rules that stipulates this, so help with kit, food and drink is possible. Of course entrants do need to be carrying the required kit, but I suppose they could supplement this with clothing changes or extra refreshments from their supporter/s. There were a few entrants carrying hardly anything; e.g. A bum bag and walking poles. Maybe a spot kit check round the route like LDWA do on long events would make things safer/fairer.

Dusk had settled and we'll need head torches on from now on. Temperature has dropped but there's really no breeze so evening/night conditions are good.

My right lower hamstring is a bit tight making it even less attractive to go faster than a walk.

Into the church. I put on an extra top layer and head torch. Tracey is there and grabs a photo before I leave. I'm feeling so ropery with regards food and drink. I take a few crisps.



The author looking surprisingly cheerful about to leave the ES CP

To CP10 Brand Top

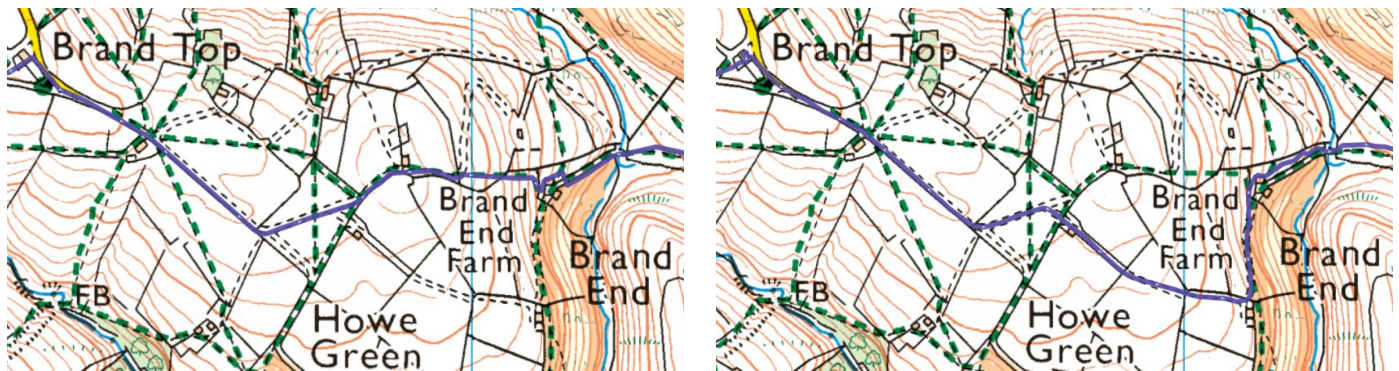
The extra layer is something I have never needed until much later – another two CPs further – another indication of my slow speed - not enough to keep warm.

Memories of leaving this CP eating a jam sandwich, with crust disposed of in the grass on ES outskirts. I eat the crisps no problem.

The warmer top helps and I perk up a little along the tarmac to the FP turn off left. On the way there are oncoming cars to keep out of the way of. Maybe ten come past along the small road – strange that it's so busy.

I see hikers head torches ahead. I made my own way across fields and carefully descended the steep slope to Dowel Dale. A small group was behind and a shout goes up – apparently from a lady who slipped on the descent [Siobhan?]. Dexter catches me and explains the slip – which the people behind will help with. Up the road we go and Dexter asks to stay with me for the next sections as his energy was waning and his route finding lacking (his 5th BS but none recently; his watch giving him misinfo for the turn off points).

A third man joins us. We walk through the pop-up campsite at Booth Farm, finding gates through the wall now, whereas last year it had been wall stiles to cross. Then we trotted together past the lake to the climb at Brand End Farm. I had nothing to give at this point and the other two whooshed up and away. Maybe I need to go the slightly longer but less steep 'old' route now the dogs are no longer barking mad.



Route choice at Brand End Farm (left map is the steep ascent)

Over to the right there are many lights and a noise of cars racing. It's Buxton Raceway on the top of the hill which appears to have many weekend events. A bit surreal in the middle of glorious hilly countryside.



Buxton Raceway – an event was taking place late on Saturday

Approaching Brand Top CP and there are half a dozen cars from marshals and supporters and it feels busy. Inside there is only one or two hikers although I didn't take much notice. "Hot dog?" – I declined. Normally there are a few other things to eat/nibble but seemed to be just bread and sausage + drinks and some biscuits.

I change tack on eating and drinking and try cold milk in my collapsible mug. I sip slowly and it slithers down nicely, and stays down. After a few minutes I leave with one round plain biscuit and nibble.

To CP11 Clough House

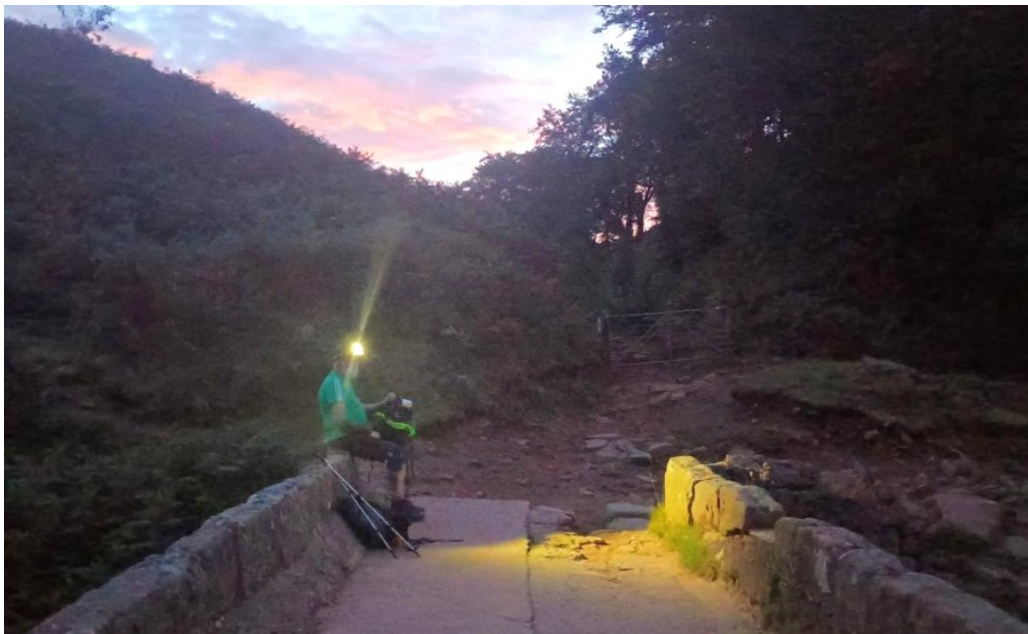
There is a helpful line of small green flags to follow across the grass to the gate then it's down the track. Dexter catches up with me (must have been elsewhere inside the CP as I didn't notice him) and we descended together. Walking then getting into a trot only on the lower bit of track to reach the tarmac road. Dexter is content to take my route choice of the longer, less steep and easier going road option, rather than what most ahead were doing as could be seen by the torch lights going up the field directly to Hilltop.

Some long time ago I was ascending this road hill with the legendary Nicky Spinks (she later went ahead). Dexter has pace up the road hill; I am on my limit. In fact I have reached my limit. Suddenly on the steepest bit I have to stop by the right side of the road and collapse into a field gateway and be sick. I told Dexter to continue and he was going to, then decided he can't leave me like that. Good of him really, but this is a normal occurrence for me so I would be OK. There isn't really anything that anyone can do; I just had to hope that once emptied my stomach would settle and I could refuel. I did at least feel a little better and continued at a slightly faster pace.

Another chap tags on to us two. Past the old Flash stores, cross the road past the bus stop and head to Knotbury. The new chap storms ahead. I have memories of trotting all the way to Knotbury and beyond. Now we walk and do a little trotting on some of the downhill then shift to low gear on the right turn to Knotbury.

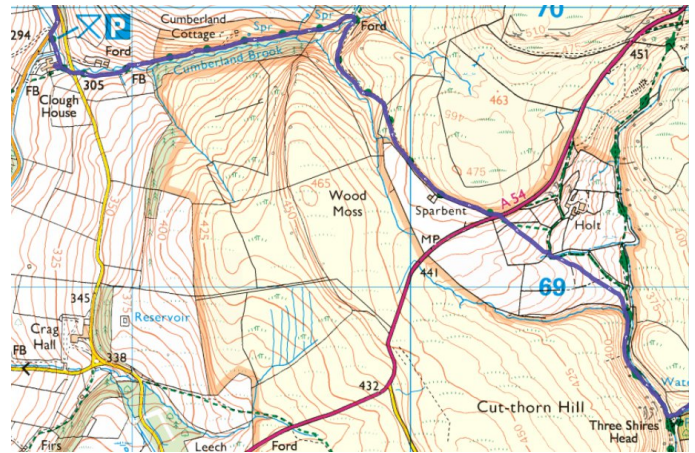
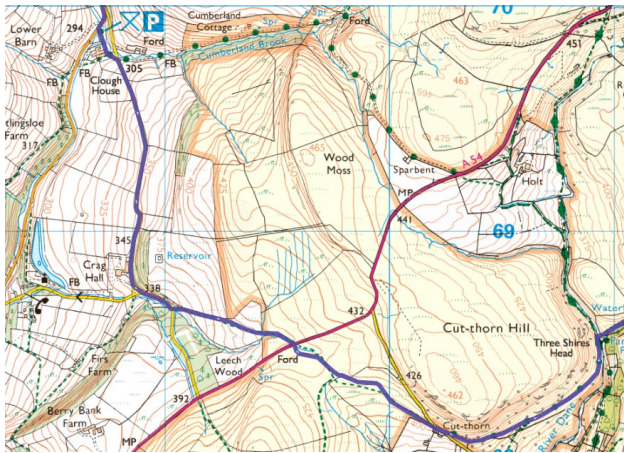
Dexter has done the Bullock a few times many years ago, but nothing else long and not much recently apart from some Tough Mudders with his firemen mates. He's doing well so obviously has a decent base level fitness.

Dexter is announcing each passing mile and total time taken. It is getting a bit demoralising and he agrees to keep quiet. I put up with his panting as good to have something different to focus on! He is stronger uphill than me and we are about even on the flat. He's not so sure about the downhill on the rough track to Three Shires Head though so I move slightly ahead.



Early morning at Three Shires Head where sweepers stopped to remember Jerzy and others

At Three Shires Head Dexter is again content with my route choice which is to turn left for an anti-clockwise route around Cut-thorn Hill to avoid the climb which I would have really struggled with.



Two route choices at Three Shires Head: Round or Up and over past Cumberland Cottage

Part way round I have to stop and sit down in the grass (not sick) for a minute. Another hiker approaches with some concern; Dexter says to him that he is waiting for me. I carry on. Some grassy tracks and dry, we should be running, at least on the descending slopes. More people come past. Down the large stony watery last bit at the end of Leech Wood to the road and then on to Clough House. Less noisy than I recall previously – maybe because we are slower, and later.

I have many memories of the alternative route past Cumberland Cottage along a rocky, tree-root infested track that was always tricky to negotiate with tired legs and tired mind. At least the anti-clockwise route is less tiring on the mind.

At the CP I see Tracey but not Paul. I sit down – nothing to drink or eat, although I would have tried ginger cake if there was some. A few minutes at most is sufficient. Dexter is hovering; I think he's been OK with his food/drink intake.



CP 'staff'

To CP12 Rainow

Dexter and I set off again together. Only walking on the road, head torch on for Dexter but I keep mine off. I prefer off when underfoot is known as can then be more aware of what's around – including traffic. However, when on my own along this road it can be too dark to even see the road edge, so HT is then needed.

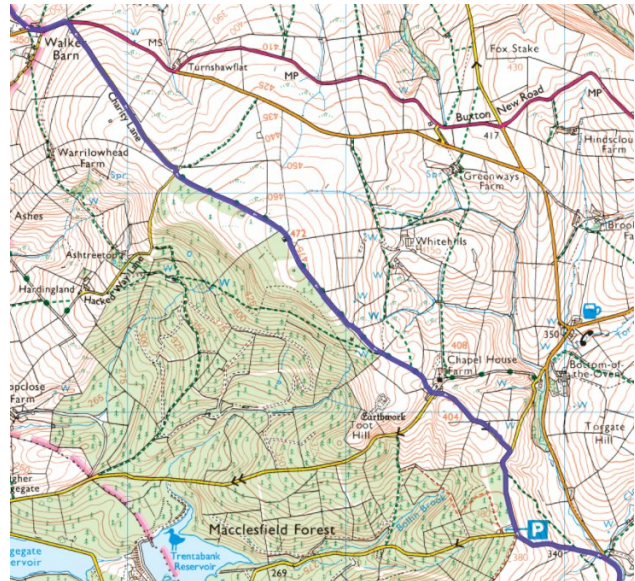
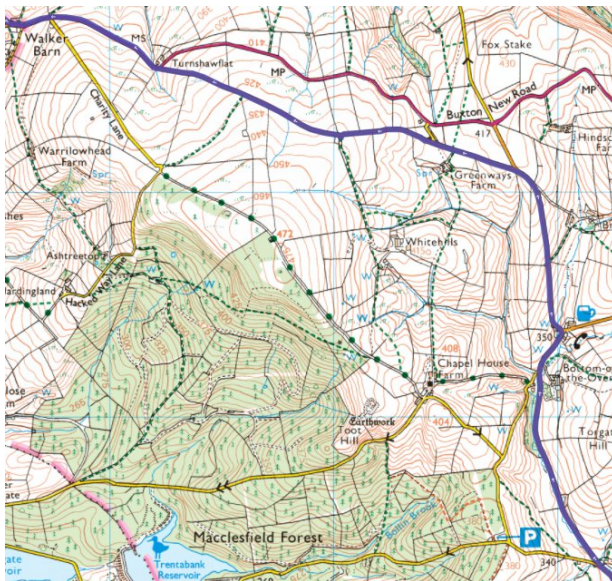
Dexter's HT goes out. Oh! The kit rules say carry a spare HT or batteries. Thankfully Dexter says "No worries", and proceeds to get another HT out his sack. I hold his walking poles and since I'm holding them I

might as well give them a try. This is a level road and I don't find any obvious benefit. Dexter's replacement HT is working, if a bit smaller. He retakes the walking poles.

I am feeling tired and keep yawning.

Another decision point. Yet again Dexter is OK with my choice of taking the longer route of road all the way to Walker Barn, rather than up and over via Mac Forest. I have nearly always gone Mac Forest mainly to have a rest from all the road. This year, with so much walking, the hard road surface is more preferable to going up on some road and then lots of track. We can see other hiker's HT ascending to Mac Forest.

Dexter offers me some of his food such as an oat bar, which I decline as I do have food but don't want to risk eating anything. Since Chelmorton CP I've had three biscuits and few crisps, a mug of milk and a few sips of my fluids. I'm running on low. Dexter (and me) is surprised I am keeping going.



Route choice to Walker Barn, taking road, or via Mac Forest

The road takes us past 'Bottom-of-the-Oven', The Stanley Arms and Greenways Fm where gradually we ascend. I can recall jogging part of this ascent on of the few times I have gone road – that was many years ago. Today it is a real plod but my limit is not reached so keep going. A chance for a little bit of jogging now as there is some downhill; Dexter reluctant as even downhill is taxing him. We join the A537 which thankfully is almost traffic free at this late time of night. Charity Lane joins this a bit later, carrying hikers whose HTs we see descending the Mac Forest route.

A chunk of downhill on tarmac now. I fall into a shuffling jog. Dexter unable to increase speed and says to me to continue without him. I do. However, there is a tinge of guilt since we had been more or less together for the last 4h. Nav is reasonably straightforward from here, so I do continue.

Again more people overtook me on Bull-Hill Ln descent. I had to select first gear again on the chug up to Rainow CP. Eat? Drink? Let's see. Once in the warm CP I sit down and wait till I've enough energy to get out my tally and go across to the orange whizzer. Then sit down again. "Can I get you anything?" says a lady marshal. I pull out my collapsible mug and ask for milk, since this worked last time.

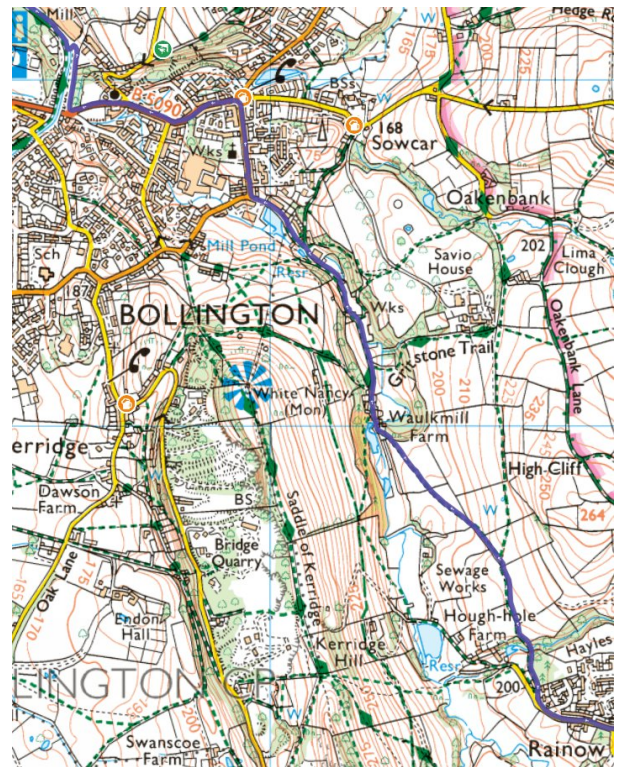
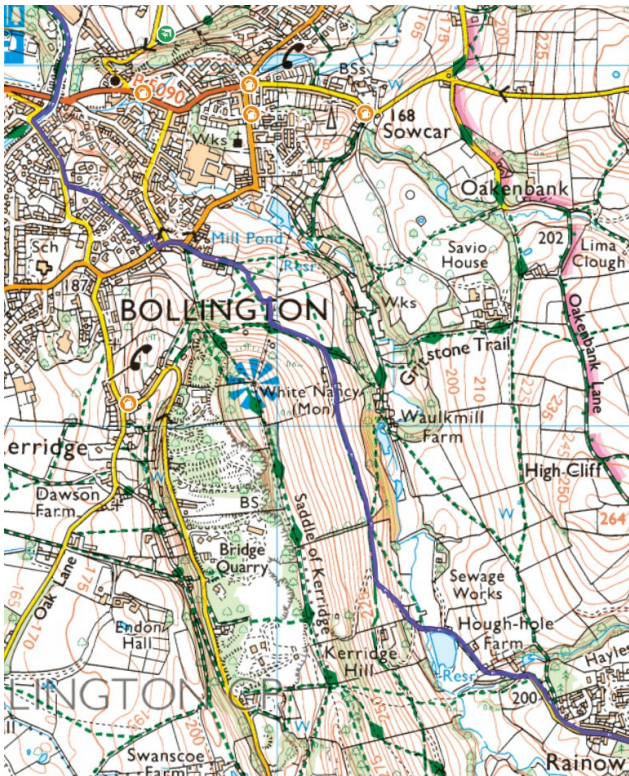
This time the milk is a bit warm, so not quite as refreshing. I sip it down gently, then move off.



Rainow CP ready for customers

To CP13 Whiteley Green

Turn left out the CP into the side road along the building. Oh no – I find an obscured point away from the building and the milk comes up. No one around thankfully. I soon continue. Down Sugar Ln. Before the FP turn off to the right, two chaps come past me. I tag on behind and aim to stick with them over the fields to the outskirts of Bolly. One says to the other ('Frenchy'?) about keeping going at just over 4mph. Presumably that would mean they finish within some 'hour' target. I do manage to hang on to their coat tails but they pull away before Bolly is reached and I last see them in the distance turning right up to the canal.



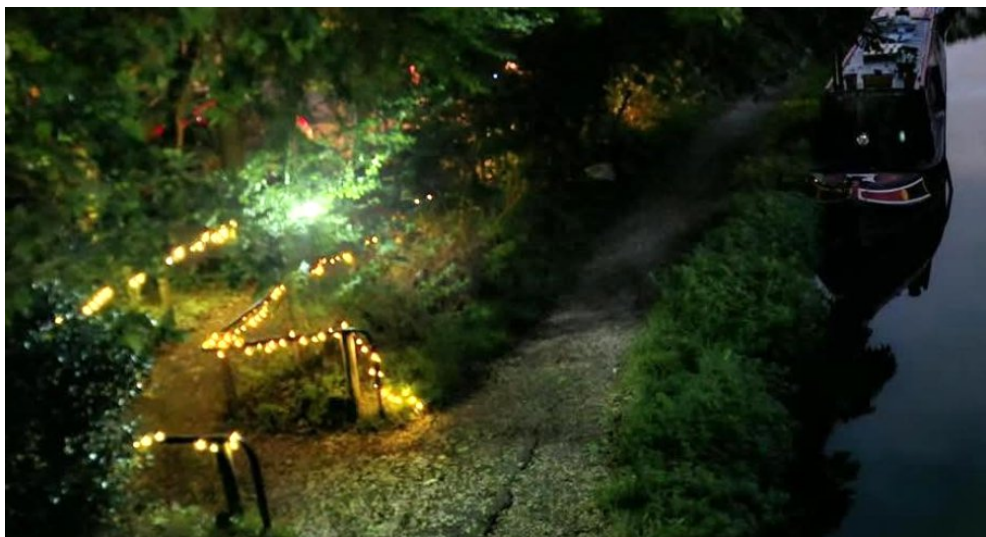
A couple of possible routes between Rainow and Bollington

Eventually I get to the point where I last saw the lads and make my way up to the canal and face the bridge to get to other side. Amazingly I find myself contemplating whether to haul myself up the steps or take the gentle ramp. I get a grip and go up the steps.



Canal bridge: Up the steps or the gentle ramp?

The canal is quiet; I like that. It's walking only along here for me. I can recall being with Steve J here on several occasions and he always cajoled me into jogging. First bridge passes (Sugar Ln overhead), then bridge 25 must be ahead as there are many lights. When close I see that fairy lights are lining the short path from canal to car park where the CP is situated with table of food and drink and some chairs and three marshals. I plonk into a chair. "Would you like something to eat?". "Can we get you a drink?". "How are you feeling?". "You probably know this, but the remainder of the route is now flat". I replied "No thanks" and remained in the chair probably looking ropey. A minute or so was enough recovery, so got up and shifted off with wishes of "Good luck". I dare say they were a bit concerned.



Fairy lights guide hikers from canal to the CP in the car park



Whiteley Green CP receiving customers

A few years ago I'd stopped at this CP for half a cup of tea – as an experiment on the stomach. It only lasted inside me until the far end of the Car Park.

To Finish at Hazel Grove Scout HQ



Entrance and exit to the Whiteley Green CP in the car park, leaving down onto Middlewood Way

Through the car park, onto the road and over the bridge, down the steps – using banister to steady – turning back under the bridge. I recall being a bit puzzled by directions for my first few Bullock Smithy following an OS map and getting disorientated. Imagine how demoralising that could be heading the wrong way down Middlewood Way back the way you came.

The short sit down at the CP had cooled me, and once under the bridge I give a number of loud sneezes that were amplified by the bridge overhead. The sneezing continues in bursts for a few minutes as I trudged down the track. Unsure what the marshals would have made of that.

There is nothing for it now except one foot in front of the other and keep going, starting at Bridge 8. Bridge 9 reached. Soon after that I had to have a sit down on a railing; regain some energy. No one coming past. Plod on. Bridge 10. Another rest on the railings in the middle of the 'dual carriage way' path.

In the distance a light, hopefully that is bridge 12. Yes; the light is being waved by a marshal. Arriving at bridge 12 someone behind catches me and asks the light holder if this was the turn off point, reply is "Yes". I knew to turn left up steps. Oh boy. I had to use the hand rail to haul myself up the few steps to Wood Lane. My overtaker who is ahead by 20m turns and shouts back to me whether this is the way to 'The Coppice'. I guess he knew where to turn off, so I said "Yes" which was about all I could manage to say. He disappeared. Further down the road the cobble turn off to the right arrived and three came past me. Again I ask myself why do I do the painful cobbles and not avoid them and go a tiny bit longer on the road as just a different side of a 'square' as those cobbles feel rough on my sore feet.



Along Wood Lane West: Cobble route shown ... or avoid cobbles and take the road?

Down Waterloo and turn into Trafalgar Avenue; I'm nearly caught by more people and a question comes from behind – "Is that Nigel?". It was Dexter and another chap (Joe Turner) who'd caught up with me again. I'd forgotten I'd left Dexter a while back, and actually surprised he had not caught up with me again already given my super slow pace from Rainow and Whiteley Green. I stay a little way ahead and begin to lengthen

my stride. I just needed to grind it out now, Towers Rd started. Momentum increasing I continue ploughing on with a good stride. Adrenalin and knowing completion was close keeps me motivated. Crossing each speed bump on Towers road reminds me of SteveJ's story of falling over one year on one such bump.

The joy of turning right onto London Rd is always so satisfying. Keep going, keep going. Past the miniature railway, over the dual carriage way (no cars), past the garage, keep going, over the last set of traffic lights. Past the shops on the left and the bus shelter and Five Ways pub. No one else around. My phone rings. I'm not going to stop when so close to finishing and get it out my rucksack; perhaps my wife is ringing – but why? Keep going. Devonshire park on the right. Nearly there. Phone rings again. Oh boy, this might be serious. I'll answer once I stop.

Speed cameras, Haddon Rd, then left to HQ. Through the car park and there are bright lights over the finish door – I'm through and finished.



A welcoming special finish at HQ

Finish

I collapse into the chair next to Andrew, the finish marshal. Just sitting still is bliss. I remove the orange watch tracker and let a wave of satisfaction sweep over me. One of the other finish marshals pops up to check who I am. He then explains that it was him who had made the phone calls. Because of my ropery and dodgy state at the last CP (Whiteley Green) and that a number of others had over taken me since that CP the marshals were concerned that I had not appeared. "Can we get you some food or drink?".

Julian pops up to say hello with his plate of food.

Ideally I'd have like to rest with something to nibble and drink. Would my stomach take anything I wondered. I decided to decline and not risk it and instead left the HQ and waddled back to car (yet to stiffen up).

Dexter comes into the finish and we shake hands and I thank him for his company. He's 4 minutes behind me I later find out from the results. That 4 minutes is significant and pleasing for me as it is time gained since the top of Towers Rd when Dexter had caught me.

At the car a quick change and minimum wash. I decide to freshen up my dry mouth and clean my teeth. No good – once the tooth paste was in my mouth I was sick again. So I just lie down in the back of the car and am soon asleep.

On my first few events I can recall being sick but only after finishing and being back at my car. Seems like my body has not been able to harden up; I have tried all sorts of different drink and food combinations and occasionally get through a complete Bullock Smithy.

Presentations

Eventually I wake at 9am. I risk some sips of water and my stomach at last appears to have settled down (so could now try out HQ breakfast food). I waddle (now stiff) back to HQ for some breakfast and then the presentation at 10am.

One plus is that this year I've no blisters. Perhaps because less running, and also helped that it was dry (as damp/wet more likely to cause a problem).

Also having breakfast is Geoff Pettengell (many completions) and Julian (again) with partner Jo M. Also Paul R drops in too. Good to see all these people and recount our event activities.



Pre-presentation 'breakfast' and relaxing

Steve Holt helps with the presentation. This year he was sweeping from Castleton to Clough House. He presents trophies to the category winners, then Rob Massey presents certificates to everyone (who was present), in order of finishing. During the outdoor presentation there are still hikers coming in to finish and each one gets a round of applause from the presentation audience. Nice.

Rory Harris was first back again (7 firsts). A previous winner, Tony Okell (8 firsts), was in the audience as well as others who had previously taken part.

There were 353 starting and 290 finishing. Possibly the highest ever percentage of finishers. .

The event has many volunteers to make it work so smoothly as well as all the CP marshals. Many thanks to them all.



Rory Harris - on the way to another 'First' and first lady Jennifer Parker



John Corfield. Steve H and Rob M presenting trophies and certificates to Rory H and Jennifer P

Nigel Aston (22 finishes, + 2 unofficial completions in 2020)

Photo credits: Various people posting on Bullock Smithy Facebook; Internet, Tracey Rushworth

The inserted maps with route choices are from various different people's routes (shown as blue on the maps).