

Bullock Smithy Hike, 6th September 2025

(49th running of the event)

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



Staggering ...

Conditions: Warm, sunny intervals, clear night with a breeze

Back again for another circuit. Car parking in the Park and Ride, Scout hut, registration, helpers and Devonshire Park, all so familiar now. Karen Nash (super vet runner) says hello and mentions a small injury – somehow she can continue doing super ascents and distance events in foreign hills so Bullock Smithy should be straightforward for her – part of her Runfurther Grand Slam attempt. A chat with Paul Rushworth and Steve Jackson (both having many completions) before we set off. They are quick starters so I do not expect to see much of them after the anvil is hit.



Registration in the Scout hall



Milling outside Scout Hut before going off to Devonshire Park to start

Sun cream is on, and wearing only light gear, plus cap. As I am relatively injury free this year I go with normal shorts, not compression, and no compression gaiters either.

I have eaten all sorts of food over the previous years on this event. This year I'm going to try out Luchos Guava & Raspberry, (34g carbs per block). They are sweet and will be an alternative to the stickiness of gels.



Luchos blocks, wrapped in a compostable leaf

Start

Scout leader Rob Massey perches on the step ladder and delivers a few minutes briefing of clear information to us. The anvil this year is hit by CP volunteers who were 'retiring'. 12 o'clock and we are off.



Devonshire Park before the start



Retiring CP marshals with the honour of bashing the anvil to start the event at 12:00

To CP1 Bowstones

Out NE of Devonshire Park, and kept up reasonable pace over fields, through woods, up Anson Lane. Could feel warmth of the day. Cap on. A number of people on the canal bridge to cheer on various friends and relatives. Continuing upwards and into Lyme Park, jogging into headwind. To get a little help I duck behind a guy in orange for a while for some shelter. It helps. I take on an early Luchos and drink.

As we move out of the grounds of the Lyme Park mansion we wind our way through the pine trees on the left of the track. A newish fence has been erected around the field edge off to our right. No go there now.

Once we're through Knightslow Wood the route opens up. Walking mainly now as steeper ground. A gate, a style, drink remains of water bottle and then stop at the road gate to Bowstones CP. The marshal clips my tally and using my orange band wrist tracker activate the whizzer. I'm number 99 and expect a few remarks to be offered as each CP is reached. None at this one. Water topped up (there is only fluids on offer at this first CP), arranged on a roadside table.

To CP2 Chinley Churn

Road down. No one comes past even though I'm feeling a bit laboured. I keep up a smooth pace downhill though. There are a couple a distance ahead, one with bright green top which gives me a reference point and something to pace myself against. I do not see them again until I'm over the stile at the high point of Whaley Moor track, where they are a field ahead having made the road of Whaley Lane.

Once over the road and wobbly stile I travel well through the field and gradually gain on the pair previously spotted. Comfortable down to A6 crossing, where the pair ahead have waited for and activated the pedestrian crossing so I am able to gain a bit. I get across the A6 road without having to wait. The pair, like me, are met with the railway crossing barriers down and traffic waiting (have the train times changed over the last few years, or just me slower now? Probably the latter). For a few seconds I wonder whether the barriers are about to open but they don't so need to go right and over the foot bridge, then back down to the road and continue.

Once down the road and round the bend to the left the pair ahead make a minor error in route choice turning off too early and then overshooting the gated path. At this point we join up.



Red arrow shows minor route error

Once through the railway tunnel over the uphill field and turn off to Shedyard Clough the pair go ahead of me. Suddenly I am outpaced as they steam uphill. Eek! I thought I was going OK. They stay in front till half way up Laneside Rd, then breaking into a jog I slowly pull away and manage to keep it going up to the gate and steeper bit ('New Allotments'). That is the last I see of the pair, although I did wonder if they may come past me near the end when my speed normally becomes a crawl – maybe not this year?

A walking climb, eat and drink, another Luchos.

Steep descent down to Chinley CP which is OK on dry grass, feeling OK. Whizz. Set off along the track.



Steep descent to the CP at Chinley Churn

To CP Edale Cross

There is an orange orienteering kite up to the left – must be some long hill navigation event I think to myself. (later I discover that event was only about 5 miles). Running along the way along then down the track to near the main road and someone kindly opens the 5-bar gate so I sail through down to the refreshments just round the corner to the left. They moved to this location recently from the pull-in to the right, so if you did not know you would have a surprise when turning the corner to find them.

Top up water – necessary as none at next CP. But cross threaded my bottle top and with wet hands had to ask marshal to help get the top on again. Crisps and choc bar nibbled up whilst walking up to the Pennine Bridleway then jog along and descend towards Coldwell Clough. It's dry again which really helps to get over the stream without wet/mud interfering too much.

A couple of walkers also descending chatting away happily. Over the narrow wooden bridge, turn left. Some cows are passed, which may well have been blocking the route a short time beforehand given the fresh cowpats on the narrow grassy path by the wall. They are clear now.

OK, now long climb ahead. How will I go? In the distance is a chap in blue. I can use him to gauge my progress. There are not many people around on the track, unusual, just a few walkers and no mountain bikes that normally we see up or down the track to Edale Cross. Maybe some grass has grown between the large pebbles that make up the first part of the track as going seems slightly easier than previously. I am gaining on the blue man. I see he is using poles.

Having completed this event many times I recall the times when I was performing at my best and was able to jog up some of the higher EC track. Those days are gone now; only a plod. Still the blue man ahead is getting closer and only just reaches CP4 before me.

Four JB's taken and off.

To CP4 Edale

Blue man is ahead and another chap ahead of him. They accelerate away downhill and out of sight as I jog along to the top of Jacob's Ladder. I feel myself taking more care on such descents as age creeps up on me. I keep left on the grass/earth where possible rather than the stoney/boulder track. My pace is not too shoddy though as the two ahead come back into view and I gain on them. It is encouraging.

At the bottom of Jacob's I realise the second person ahead is Julian Brown (many BS completions). Normally he selects road shoes for this event (there are miles and miles of roads) which means steep descents need a bit more care to avoid slipping of ankle turn. Julian, blue stick man and me jog together to Upper Booth, past the ice creams, over the fields, to Barber Booth. No campers in the fields. Then road to Edale. The other two are quicker now, I take the right side of the road and they take the left. Never a

pleasant journey along this road with limited vision for motorists. No issues though and Edale CP is reached, manned outside the car park building, as weather is warm and dry. Hello to Tracey Rushworth and daughter Maizie out supporting Paul as usual. He's already gone through.



The author arriving at Edale - getting tally card out for punching

A lady marshal asks if I need anything. I say, "Some energy". She talks about steroids and drugs! I settle for a small pot of fruit and rice pudding – which seems to major more on the fruit than the rice pudding this year. Julian and blue stick man take a little more time at the CP so I overtake them as I leave first.

To CP5 Castleton

At car park, turn left and along road. A runner, not o the event, breezes past and reminds me I am only just going quicker than walking pace. Over a rare bit of wet mud at bottom of the track, through small gate and then begin climb up to Hollins. A luchos eaten. Once the broken gated wall is navigate to the left only the main hillside now remains to be ascended. I take the 'Aston line' in the grass above right of the track. Over Hollins and keep going down. Once on the road I'm pleased to find cramps are not (yet) setting in and can keep going through crowded Castleton car park, over the road and into the garage forecourt CP.

A bit cooler under the forecourt roof. Tracey and Maizie are there, so Paul would have been not much further ahead. Julian and blue stick man arrive a handful of seconds later.



The author arriving at Castleton garage CP

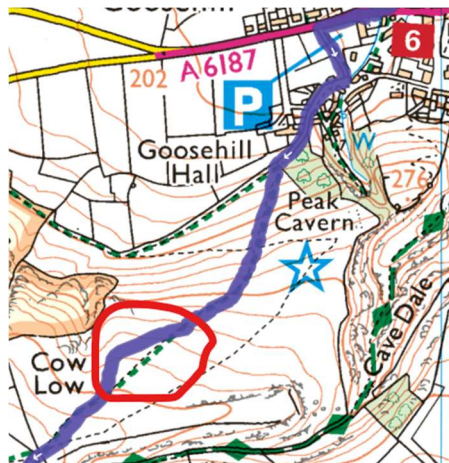
A marshal offers some of his garden's tasty red apples. I have to think about this a bit as it's unusual to have apples at a CP. I refuse his offer and instead take on the more usual fare of biscuits and Jam sandwich.

To CP6 Peak Forest

Leaving the forecourt young Maizie over takes me on the 100m to the turn off left to the car park. The Meaty bit of the jam sandwich is eaten, crust disposed of. Then biscuits nibbled and finished on the short uphill tarmac and next the limestone path is reached along with a party of descending elderly ramblers. The big one. It is Goosehill. This hill has been in my mind over the last few months of training when doing hill ascents. Will that training pay off?

Two years ago I was so exhausted at this point I had to sit down part way up. The obvious diagonal path is taken and Julian comes up and overtakes. I can use him to 'pull' me along but he slips away and I feel on my limit to keep up the pace to the wall stile at the top of Cow Low. No cramps going over, but no energy to jog either. Plodding along I see Julian in front start a jog, and then behind me blue stick man comes past. It is an indication I'm slowing.

Another Luchos. I feel like I'm eating OK so far. Time will tell.



My GPS path shows there is some improvement for route choice going up Goosehill

Once the Cave Dale path is joined and on the plateau then I can jog. The other two are way ahead already and no sign of them once I am on to Oxlow Rake. Jog gradually down, take smoothest route along a mixed farm track of small and large pebbles, ruts and smooth soil. The bottom now of the track has a new fence to the right.

Two fields ahead I do see Julian and BSM. As there are many people ahead of me one advantage is that they have partially flattened the grass where grass fields are crossed making the going easier for those coming later. Short section of road and slightly down to Peak Forest. No one this year to press the pedestrian crossing button as I approach, but no traffic so I get straight across the road. Tracey and Maizie are leaving indicating that Paul has already gone through. No entrants inside the CP. A marshal is cutting banana in half. I take an uncut one, top up with blackcurrant, some crisps and away.

To CP7 Millers Dale

Most years I have sucked on a segment of orange, offered at the CP. I decide against this year which makes it easier to get into an immediate jog along the pavement, carrying a whole banana. Pavement, road edge, grass verge. Constant stream of traffic, some lorries come closely past. I see a number of people ahead. For me this is encouraging as catching anyone indicates my pace is not too bad. The people are hard to make out, although BSM is there, presumably Julian, and others. One appears to be a white-shorted lady with pink top but no rucksack.

I notice BSM turns of Hernstone Lane into the field on the right. Either deliberately to avoid traffic or thinks that is the route. Over the wall stile and yet another place where a new fence has appeared here, with an extra new stile to cross before the mini ascent towards Dam Cliff. Opportunity to eat my banana.



Some turn off right (red arrow) and walk in the field parallel to road

Over Dam Cliff and now a few tricky stone stiles with wobbly supporting wooden frames. Some sheep but no cows to make it more interesting. Back on to the road. Some jogging, steady. In the far distance is a man with rucksack and pink lady with no rucksack. Through a quiet Wheston, except for a man in a parked car on the left (a supporter?) and a couple of lady walkers coming up the road.

The Pennine Bridleway is joined again. Some rough, some smooth and tarmac. No one around. Even when Monksdale farm is reached apart from the yellow BS signs it is not obvious we are at a CP as no one outside the barn. Inside there is another entrant – another chap in blue, no sticks. I ask him if he's OK as presumably he's been at the CP a while as I did not see him ahead of me. He's OK. it's a water top up and away – with a quick whiz too.

To CP8 Chelmorton

I need to find time to do a little recce and see where the gate and footpath off to the right go when descending down the rocky track direct from the CP. Meanwhile its along the valley, under the glorious viaduct, by the trickling stream on our left and plough up the B6049 through Blackwell Dale. Nibbling and walking, I'm OK with that. Even some jogging on the gentler slopes. Approaching the top I can see a man with rucksack and pink lady again. They are walking. My pace up the road has been OK, helped by the coolness of the tree shade.

It's always good to get off the B road as you cannot be sure what a vehicle is going to do, approaching at speed with minimal verge for us to step into. Night time – for later competitors – would be worse, and I don't envy them. The recommended route, which I used to take to start with, avoids the road and goes up Long Lane and Priestcliffe, although is slightly further.

As I cross the A6, not busy, I can see the man and pink lady topping out at Senners Lane, around 500m away. Head down and continue, feeling OK. Up to the top of the road turn right and left through the gate. Up the grassy track and top out at Pillwell Gate. Man and pink lady are still 500m ahead and jogging the downhill. When they reach Flagg Lane and the gentle uphill begins they walk. I am now wondering if it is Steve Jackson ahead. But who is the pink lady?

Down to Flagg Lane then I jog a bit more before walking and get to the familiar CP just after the two have left. A couple of biscuits and some fluids, nearly forgetting to whizz.



Chelmorton CP

To CP9 Earn Sterndale

I catch up with the two as they dallied at the CP. It is Steve J and the pink lady is his daughter. The explanation is forthcoming ... Steve is doing some of the sections with one or other of his children giving them good experience – for a future attempt themselves. His daughter is light on her feet and happily jogs along. Last year Steve took part with his son up to Earl Sterndale then his son retired. This year his son will experience the rest of the route.

We stay in touch along the track of Highstool Lane which forms part of the Midshires Way, over the A515 and into the quarry area. By the time we've reached the old turn off path to the right which went more direct across the fields, the blue chap (aka Mark Pursell), who I left at Miller's dale CP, has caught up. He ponders direction perhaps with slightly older route info thinking the fp is still possible. Unfortunately we all have to go down to the road and then 1.5km to Earl Sterndale.

For me it's not quite as dark as last year as I am a few minutes earlier and it's not so overcast. Blue man and Steve have gone into the Church CP and blue man is sitting in a pew and taking his time replenishing.

To CP10 Brand Top

Last year Paul Rushworth overtook me here. This year he is presumably some way ahead, and around this time in the evening speeds up, relatively.

Setting off with some crisps, no jam sandwich; Steve and this time his son are in company. Also not far behind the blue man has left the CP too. We remain together up after turning off onto the track on the left, over the wall stile and across the dry grass to the little gate. The steep slope down to the road is OK in dusk (not dark) and dry. Plodding begins on the mainly gentle climb up Dowel Dale. The blue man is able to jog so pulls out a lead. Over cattle grids, and at the track turn off after the newish fence I stop to get out head torch. Blue man is way ahead now. By the time torch is out and sack repacked (I should have put torch nearer the top) Steve and son Ben have overtaken me and are away in the distance their head torches bouncing around on the grassy slopes past Booth Farm and the lake. As I climb over the wall stile next to the farm cramp hits one foot and I need a 'moment' to recover. Steve and son have gone round the lake but I begin to catch by putting in a bit more of an effort. We close up going round the back of Brand End Farm, but the uphill leaves me trailing. Gates, cattle grids and track to Brand Top with its distinctive sort of out of place red telephone kiosk (no phone).

I can feel that the second half of today's event is going to be significantly slower for me than the first half.



Brand Top + marshal

To CP11 Clough House

Blue man is inside, sitting down, replenishing and taking his time again. I take a jelly baby (one), some fluid, and leave. Staying in the cosiness of an indoor nighttime CP would make it harder to get going again. Later in the evening I heard that one lady fainted because of the warmth in this building.

Outside I am suddenly unsure. There is normally an obvious downhill track round the back but now there is hedge and gate? After ten seconds I realise I need to go through the gate – which presumably in the past has been open. Steve and Ben have gone on, Blue man is somewhere behind.

Easy decision for me here, to continue on the road up to Flash stores rather than fields direct to Hilltop. The road ascent I make reasonably well. Then I'm comfortable with gentle jog down the road past Oxenstitch and on to Knotbury, with no cramps appearing. No one comes past. I guess blue man went direct (up the field to Dove Head farm) and is already well ahead.

Up past Knotbury, all quiet. I nearly overshoot the sudden left turn to the track. Care over the boulders approaching Three Sires Head bridge, then turn left and favour the gentle, longer circuit to Clough House. It seems to go on longer than I remember and some nausea is affecting me. The grassy paths should be runnable – but the will to run is not there. After Cut-thorn and the fields someone nearly comes past but turns up right, I carry on, then the person backtracks and comes past me – its blue man!. A few minutes later and I nearly catch up with Steve and Ben.

Another mini section of care over small wet boulders in the last part of the track to the road at Crag Hall. The other three pull away on the road. After 1km the road slopes down, the noise picks up and shouting starts, as Clough House and the welcoming marshals and supporters cheer the three ahead in, and then me a bit later.

I'm a little surprised that Tracey is there – indicating that her husband Paul is perhaps not that much further ahead. Clipped and whiz done, now what food should I go for. A few crisps, some fluids (the marshal seems to know my name as he helps with the drink) and ginger cake. Back out onto the road.



Clough House marshals before the party started

To CP12 Rainow

Crisps eaten, then ginger cake. I'm not going that well really as this is flat road and I should be able to manage a jog. Steve and Ben are just behind. I'm feeling sick, so I stop and rest against a wall. I really want to be sick but would rather no one is around. Steve and Ben jog up to me and ask if I am OK. I say yes and try and wait for them to go. Then a car slows and stops and the lady driver winds window down asks if I am OK, I say yes. And then I can be sick, or at least wretch. Nothing much comes up. After a few minutes I feel better and carry on. Walking.

Decision made now. I would like to avoid so much road ahead since I'm not jogging and go via Macclesfield forest. Uphill on the road – OK. Along the forest edge. Sort of OK, not great. Getting a bit cold at this high point in the breeze but I'm reluctant to put another top on as when descending starts it will gradually get warmer.

I nearly step on a vole as it scurries across the road. A few minutes later and a barn owl swoops past my head. Super! It raises my spirits.

What are all those red lights over Manchester? Maybe it is extensive building works, with lights on cranes. There are so many.

From my high point I can see below on Charity Lane a few head torch lights with people making their way along the alternative road route. The road is faster if you can maintain a decent speed, ideally jogging. Presumably Steve, Ben and blue man will have gone that way, and Paul too. It is all downhill now, and I try and keep the jog going onto A537 Buxton New Road, right and down Bull-Hill Lane until level ground is reached at Brookhouse approaching Rainow.

This time I get the CP approach correct, staying on the road to get to the entrance door and save a few metres of distance.



Julian and Blue stick man (aka David Kelly) at a quiet Rainow

To CP13 Whitely Green

Whiz, clip, fluid, a nibble, and out. The marshals appear tired – I can understand that at it's nearly midnight. Out the door, turn left and follow lanes until the turn off down the snicket, squeezing past the cottages on flag stones. On my own here with no one around, through the woods, more fields, a track and eventually it opens up into a lane and then a road to Bollington.

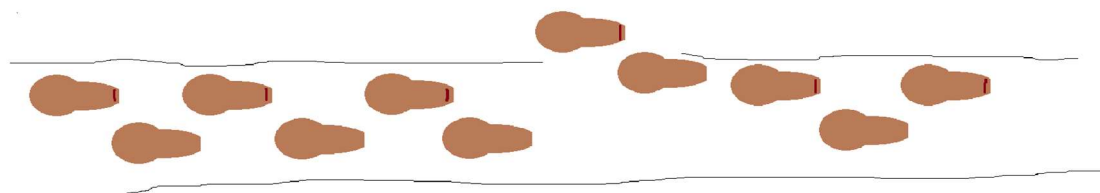
Off the B5090 there are two pubs almost opposite with loud revellers outside and I wonder if they may *comment* as entrants go past. No comments and no problems though. As I turn right up to the Mill and the canal I'm passed with someone walking faster than me. It may well have been the same person as past me at this spot last year!

So slow. I can only walk along the canal. I sip occasional fluid but don't eat anything. It's bad. I should eat. Nausea and I can't face anything and brain fuddle means I don't even try. Maybe another Luchos have worked or even a gel? Bridge 25, and the CP in the car park, at far end. The marshals must have given me the once over and decided I was fit to continue rather than pulling me in for a grouping. I'm surprised.

To Finish

Out the car park, over the bridge, down the steps, oh dear, I'm even struggling to go down steps now and hold the hand rail. Turn left at the bottom and onto the flat, smooth, disused railway track of Middlewood Way. I take the right hand side. And walk.

Plod, plod. Let's try a jog. Oh no, that's even slower and nausea hits me. Plod, plod. But I am not even walking in a straight line. After maybe fifty paces one of my legs will step out to the left or right. I have no explanation for it; maybe energy, maybe electrolytes, maybe tiredness and falling asleep, maybe cramping upper muscles. It is lucky that I am not still walking by the canal or I'd be in it.



Walking with occasional stagger

The walk continues under Bridge 9 and 10. Then I have to stop and try to be sick but nothing. Kneeling down on the grass. A minute or so later and off again, staggering along. Bridge 11, 12. I'm there at my turn off. Handrail needed again to get up the steps and it's Wood Lanes. At last. The last section now. Turn right over the cobbled track, feeling rough on the feet, the truck – still there – and back on to the road. A few more turns and then left into Trafalgar Way, the snicket and Towers Road.

How long is Towers Road? So long it seems. I should be jogging – some of it is downhill. I'm not. I seek out the route of least resistance, a bit of pavement with no pot holes, some tarmac, more rough, staggering around pot holes, over a few speed bumps, wishing the orange light at the end of the road could be reached quicker. No looking back, just focus ahead, to avoid being dispirited by anyone catching.

The end of Towers at last and I turn right onto the A523 at which point I'm over taken. One man jogging. Well there is no way I can even try and keep up although I do try a jog. Almost instantly give up as nausea hits and back to the walk. Past the various sets of traffic lights and I'm feeling a little better now as the end is so close. The last 50m I jog. And that's it. The finish at the Scout hut and Andrew to record my official time and print out yellow certificate.



The author, completely finished at the finish, with Andrew, the ever present finish marshal

Post Finish

I collapse into the single chair next to the finish marshal's table. I hardly have the energy to remove the orange whizzer watch. Tracey is there with Maizie and I ask for a cup of milk – to sooth the stomach. I join Paul and Julian in the main hall, and realise I can hardly speak.

It's good to hear some of their highlights, both finishing 1.5 hours ahead of me. No sign of Steve and Ben, or the blue man (unless he changed tops). Of course most people would have jogged much of the last two sections and so be far quicker than me. I have to be content with a finish, a similar time to last year.

I soon shuffle off to the car for a sparse wash and lovely sleep before the drive home.

Later on the same day (Sunday) I'm walking around with not much stiffness, same the day after. This is unusual and my initial thoughts are that I did not push myself as hard as I could of, and am disappointed with that. Perhaps that comes with age – unwilling to wreck yourself – or maybe the energy depletion or electrolytes meant that it was not possible to push so hard. Or maybe the good set of training I'd done meant my recovery was better.

Will I try Luchos again> - Yes. I much prefer them to gels, but they only provide energy and don't have any electrolytes – so need to provide that supplement separately. Next year – must eat more.

Many thanks to organisers and marshals for everything they do to make this event such a success.

Rory Harris and Cara Grimwade, were first male and female. The last two finishers got in at 11:59 and 12:05. Well done to the sweepers for keeping them going to the end.

Nigel Aston (21 finishes, + 2 unofficial completions in 2020)

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