

# Bullock Smithy Hike, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019

(44<sup>th</sup> running of the event)



## “Some changes”



*Posted on the Bullock Smithy web site.*

A change from the last two years, the forecast was for a temperature of up to only 13C; quite different from previous two years of 20C+ and the overheating that came with it. Light winds too meant conditions were ideal – although it would be cold in the clear night sky. I ummed and arred over my shirt layer, whether it should be thin or very thin; I went for very thin. Extra layer + cag was carried so I could always swap or add if needed. With an hour to go before start, the sun when out was warm enough to prompt me to add a splash of sun cream.

One reason for liking the Bullock Smithy is very little changes, so I know what to expect. This year there were a variety of changes. For example, we were emailed with two weeks to go about three route changes.

Today was all about whether my legs were going to hold up. They have in the past, which I have been grateful for. This year the preparation was quite different with a long layoff and a rush to get in some miles into the legs. In May I was doing a long run and after a few hours my right calf was hurting a bit. After 12h I could hardly walk and needed rescuing by Katherine. Later a self-diagnosis suggested grade 2 muscle damage. Expecting a few days rest to heal the soreness I took it easy... It was 8 weeks – end of July before I finally started to jog lightly again. Around that point an entry to Bullock Smithy 2019 had almost receded out of my thinking. OK, so now I could jog lightly, perhaps if I build up using the text book 10% increase per week I could be ready. Not really. Starting from say 10 miles per week that would leave me covering around 16 miles per week after 5 weeks which seemed hugely insufficient. So instead I went for an all or bust approach with mileage and would make a decision the day before the closing date of 1<sup>st</sup> Sep. I figured a target of up to around 50 miles in a week was needed before having enough confidence to enter. So it was almost couch to 50m in 5 weeks. I enlisted the help of KT tape and perhaps it was beneficial; it certainly did not make anything worse. But I had to make an earlier decision on entering than expected as this year the entries were being snapped up and might even be full [they were full in the end]. Once entered I focussed on being on the start line. I got my mileage up to 50 miles per week and with one week to go managed my longest run for over three months of just 15 miles.



*Checkin and kit check*

So with five weeks training I was off to the start line. A change in the Scout hall for registration was yet another improvement to the checkin system – which seemed to do the job as there was no paperwork to complete. There was even a change to the checkin desk location position to the other side of the hall. The previous evening I had applied KT tape to my legs to provide some ‘support’ – both calves and also on a hamstring too as this has often been a weak

point. On the day I added compression shorts for good measure. At the start in Devonshire Park in a relaxed atmosphere most of the regulars were there that I know by name and many others who I recognise too – Kevin Houl, Paul & Tracy Rushworth & youngster, Julian Brown, Nick Ham. Also Rory Harris who was hoping for a super-fast time, maybe even break his own record. A change this year was the anvil and announcements were on the far side of the park – mainly because we were strongly advised to leave the exits at that side of the park and head down Devonshire Rd or Chatsworth Rd to Old Mill Lane in order to cross the new A555 more safely than via the pedestrian crossing lights. The consensus among the faster runners was that they would still leave by the front exit and head down the A523 (pavement).



*Announcements before the start in Devonshire park*

So, when the chairman of The Long Mynd organisation [making a guest appearance whilst on holiday in Hazel Grove] struck the anvil to get us started, it was the usual jog down the side of the main road heading off for the garden centre. Various marshals, knowing this would be the case, were positioned at the major crossing points which was a good idea. Past years I have enjoyed the buzz of being nearish the front, able to see the leaders, and even been at the front whilst the pack settled (on only one occasion). This year, with no particular person or people around me who I could measure my pace against, I went slower. Ahead were the likes of Rory, Kevin, Jayne [no big bunch of Stockport Harriers this year] and many others, not Julian or Paul though. Both were accompanying slower entrants to help them round - Julian with Steph Watts (now Wood I think) first lady in 2018, and Paul with his cousin.



*Back route out of Devonshire Park, coming into Mill Lane*

Towers Road, golf course, Anson Road, track into Lyme Park. A mental check on the body and the legs – OK so far. The lower temperature really helping and conducive to keeping jogging uphill. The wall crossing was partially fenced off – not very friendly – still possible to get across though. Probably the whole field would go this way.



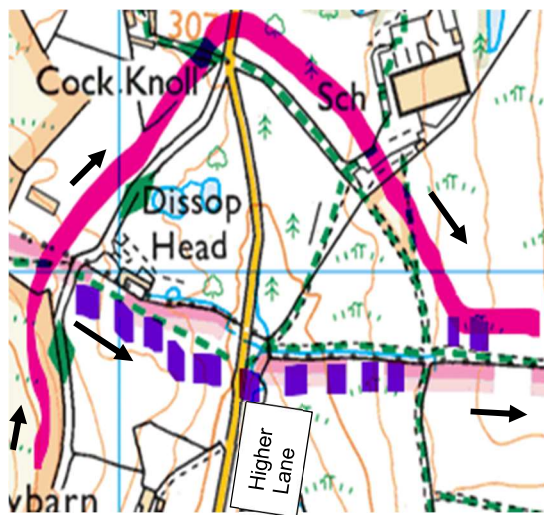
*Wall crossing in Lyme Park*





*Nick Ham – retired at CP1 with vertigo*

My fluid supply this year was only a single 500 ml bottle so on reaching CP1, Bowstones, I topped up before jogging off down Bowstonegate Road. Very occasionally the odd competitor has taken the seemingly shorter route on the field footpath over Higher Lane, such as Mark Hartell in 2004. It cuts off some of Dissop Head but entails descent and climb. A change this year with no less than four people, in a group, taking this route.



*Uncommon - dashed route*

Behind me was Rick Steckles, dressed in black with black cap, black hair and black glasses. He was not behind me for long and eased past over Higher Lane and Whaley Moor. Ahead of him was orange top Lance Hamilton-Griffiths and descending down to Whaley Lane a few others could be seen in the distance. I let my stride lengthen a bit in the field then track then road down to Furness Vale and caught back up to Rick as we crossed the A6 with no hold up from passing cars.



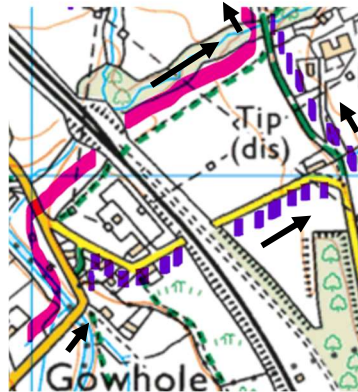
*Rick Steckles examining map of CP locations in the Scout hall before starting*

The jog down Station Road over the level crossing is straightforward – unless a train is coming. A change for me this year, it was the first time I have encountered such an event; with the barriers closed across the road. Thankfully there is a foot bridge, which was taken. I wonder if there is any ‘bonus time’ to be had for this -maybe 30 sec?



*Furness Vale level crossing closed for a train. Footbridge provides an alternative.*

Now, Rick and I were together (both of us keeping ourselves to ourselves) and ahead was orange top Lance. It's at such points that route knowledge shows. I think this may have been Lance's first attempt – because, after taking the first FP, he then disappeared. Only when reaching the top track did Lance appear again, so I can only conclude he took the Ladypit road up to the track. He did say something about a 'long cut'!



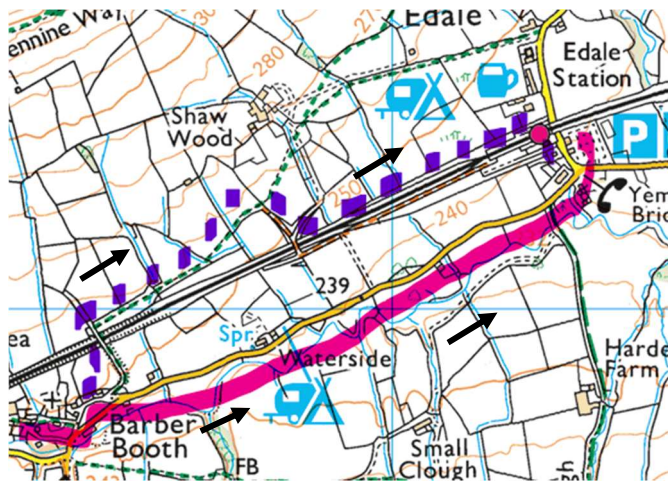
*Uncommon - dashed route*

At the top of Laneside Road, before the moor track, is a smiling friendly Tony Audenshaw sitting at his own sweet stall providing refreshments. Great support. Pity he cannot take part – which he has done off and on for the last eight years with a creditable best of 10:51 in 2014. I recall his audio blog from 2014, recorded as he went round the route. In between sections there was a chant of 'Bullock Smithy; Bullock Smithy'. Up the damp track and then overtaking the four chaps who took the Dissop Head cross country route – presumably they started a little too quick. Over the top – feeling strong – drop down to CP2 at Chinley, extra cautious this year to avoid tweaking anything. Rick has a small slip and a marshal urges caution. A few more competitors around as Lance comes past and one of his supporters congratulates him on a 'Nice Line' as he cuts the track corner before the final descent to Peep-O-Day refreshment point. Also ahead is white capped Martin Terry.

After Peeps there are no refreshments until Edale – eight or so miles. So I make sure my water is topped up and also bring out a plastic bag and stuff it with crisps which I will eat a bit later on. At the descent to Coldwell Clough a chap in blue has slipped and has a gashed leg and some pain. I ask if there is anything I can do to help, and he replies gruffly, 'I'll just have to put up with it'. Rick also offers to help. A bit of extra care to make sure no issues then along tarmac and the gate to the Edale Cross ascent track. Another chap is coming up behind me – who I assume is in the Bullock Smithy although thinking back maybe he wasn't. He seems tough, tattoos, compact, reasonable size rucksack and jogging with an energy-sapping high cadence and slow speed. I push the gate wide open as I go through so it will still be open for him as he reaches it – but he complains that I made him 'run'. He inches past me as I walk and he jogs and gradually fades away into the distance. My guess is that he will burn out – if he is in the event that is. That's the last I see of him. I munch through most of my crisps from Peeps. Rick pulls ahead of me. Lance and Martin (orange top and white cap, both quite recognisable in the distance) are some way ahead. I do manage something of a jog on part of the climb and reach CP3 Edale Cross in reasonable spirits but beginning to flag. I stop to tighten shoe laces before Jacobs Ladder and then pick my way carefully down the steep track, through the DoE trains and the many hikers on what has turned out to be a pleasant weather day. This is highlighted by the throng at the Ford/Bridge.

Continuing to keep a smooth measured pace and not overstretch I actually enjoy the jog to Upper Booth, the fields to Barber Booth and even the road to Edale car park and CP4. This is mainly because I can see no one ahead and 'feel' no one behind. No cramping this time which is a relief. Lance is leaving the car park as I arrive. Tally card punched I am then recalled for a photo (another 10 second bonus to claim) before I can sit and enjoy rice pudding – handed to me by the thoughtful Tracey. She remembers my request from two years ago to have rice pudding and no fruit – all of the pots at that time had both. This is the only time I sit down for the entire day – apart from crawling on the road [see *later*]. Tracey is supporting Paul who is a little way behind with his slower first timer cousin. I leave the CP and Rick appears. Presumably he has taken the FP route rather than road.





*Dashed route - slightly slower but safer*

I am feeling good. My body is warmed up, legs are stronger than expected, the temperature is pleasant, possibly a little warm. The choice of the thinnest of tops was a good one. I recall one year when Paul for part of the route went naked (top half) as it was so warm – although a rubbing rucksack caused him to abandon that method of cooling and get his kit back on, or maybe Tracey had a word. Good progress up to Hollins Cross, again care on the descent. As the road is reached another change from what I know is normal – a public refreshment stall is set up. Good idea I suppose as both motivation for going up and reward for coming down is needed for the many shapes and sizes of strollers in this tourist area. Take it easy jogging to Castleton, Rick comes past and is through the packed car park (devoid of CP) and out to the disused garage and the new CP5 location, a change for this year, where I join him.



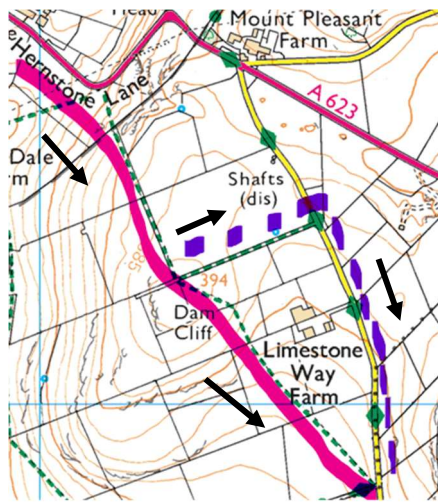
*Location for CP5 at Castleton garage*

It is a good location. We still had to navigate through the busy main car park, but the CP has shelter – from sun and inclement weather. I wonder if any public passers-by called in to buy things? No jam butty for me this year, just fluids then away whilst Rick has a more lengthy process of filling his narrow top bottle. Round the back to get to the track and then up Goose Hill, my first time in the Bullock Smithy of going this way. It is steep. Eventually the Limestone way is intercepted. Amazingly Martin and Lance – in the distance – and Rick and me are all travelling about the same pace as no big gaps have appeared. Down Oxlow Rake – another descent not to go flat out on, then the fields with short grass, no cows and even the gate is open all making for a smooth passage before the final road to CP6 at Peak Forest, Lance just leaving.



*Goose hill*

Top up fluids, salt, orange segment, banana and out. The orange is sucked dry and discarded, the banana saved for later. Jog. I feel good. Lance is walking the A623 and Martin has disappeared, last seen on the Limestone Way. So I overtake Lance and lead the way over the grassy fields after the hairpin. Not quite runnable for my liking. At the track crossing I contemplate taking the track to the road and avoiding possibly long grass in the three fields to be crossed on the normal shorter route. A few years ago we were all forced to take this route because the fields were being re-seeded. I take the traditional recommended three-field route and find the grass is on the long side; on the positive side the cows are non-plussed. Martin appears again in the field (coming from behind) and leads the way onto the road with Lance joining him and they jog off away from me. Rick remains just behind me.



*Dashed route avoids possible long grass (and cows)*

The jog to Wheston is uneventful. No cows on the road – probably because nowadays I am too slow to get to this point at milking time. In my earlier years the cows have been gathered from nearby fields and shepherded along this road to Wheston. On one occasion the farmer (!) told me to jump over the wall to avoid the cows. On another occasion the cows were on the Pennine bridleway out of Wheston and Julian and I waded through them to make progress. A few supporters (+ their dogs?) are on the last approaches to Miller’s Dale CP7 to issue words of encouragement.

Lance and Terry were just leaving the CP in the barn. Only fluids here. I came out as Rick came in. Down the track and then unexpectedly encountering and overtaking a walking Lance and Martin. What was expected and happened was Lance and Martin overtook me on the road up to the beginnings of the hill. Lance said “This is the bit I’ve been dreading”. Feeling good I began a jog up the hill, buoyed by actually going ahead of both Martin and Lance. Martin stuck to my heels. I jogged up to the first slight change in steepness. Walked a bit then jogged again. My spirits were lifted further when another competitor with bright green/yellow top came in sight ahead, walking. I recalculated my position in the race, based on a snippet from a photographer some time back who said something about 13<sup>th</sup> position that must mean I’m now into the top 10. The B6049 incline continued, but with cooler weather than last few years, and perhaps by taking it easier earlier in the day, I kept up the jog. Green top was passed and then further ahead another competitor – blue top – came in sight. Martin commented that the hill had been ‘a drag’. He then overtook me and caught and chatted to blue top who was saying that he was over an hour behind his schedule (impressive schedule I thought). Lance also overtook me.



*Chelmorton’s refreshment tin was arranged much better than in this picture*

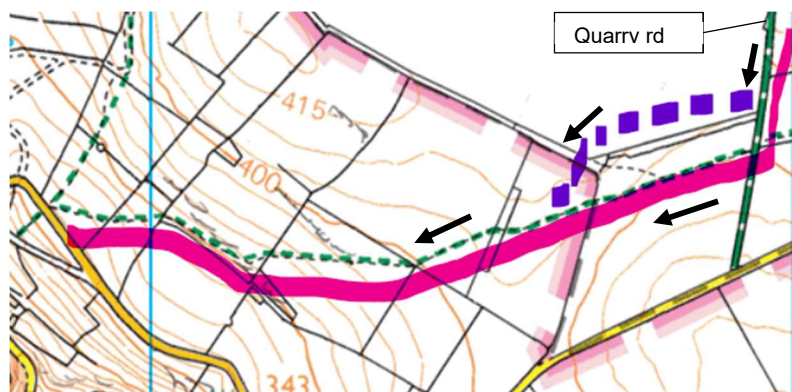
So coming into Chelmorton CP8 I could see ahead Martin, Lance and blue top. Rick a little way behind. The speed which Lance and co had left me indicated I was slowing down and they still had plenty in the tank. CP9 refreshment box was opened to reveal an incredible neat array of biscuits and donuts. I admired and did not touch, only fluids here. I dug in for a long jog and kept going up to the A515. Crossed, walk a bit, then more jogging along the quarry road.



*Quarry road*

I could see Martin’s white cap and Lance’s orange top in the distance. When I reached near the top of the quarry track I saw to the right that they had turned off before the recognised FP. Oh! I took the FP and catching up to me was

green top. We took the ideal line across the field/field/field/field with green top playing rear guard to the cow enquiries. Where had Martin and Lance gone?



*Dashed route is a mistake*

At Earl Sterndale CP9 Lance and Martin were emerging – Oh! How had they got ahead? Maybe they got back onto the official fields route and had been just out of sight. Some salt and fluids for me. Rapidly out and off down the road; not wrestling with nibbling at (and wasting) a jam butty as in previous years.

So, for almost the whole of the route so far the four of us (Lance, Martin, Rick, me) had more or less maintained our closeness, with green top joining us from previous CP. At times Martin and Lance had seemed like they had the legs to run off into the distance – but had not. Rick was doggedly behind and sometimes slightly in front – so he perhaps had more to give – or was he hanging on? No matter, I was enjoying being competitive in our small group. The weather had been good and now the sun was beginning to say goodbye and the air getting cooler. Into Dowel Dale and all I could see ahead was Lance and blue top so presumably Martin had broken free and making his move. I kept up my jog and nearly, nearly, got to Lance. But the top of the gentle climb had arrived and he was off with blue top. Once over the first few fields Martin appeared! Maybe he had just missed the FP turn off. After passing the four pipe ‘sculpture’, and turning off the road onto the FPs past the farm, Rick, green top and I began to lose contact as the other three seemed to be skipping along over the fields by the Lake to the dip. No short cuts in operation here.

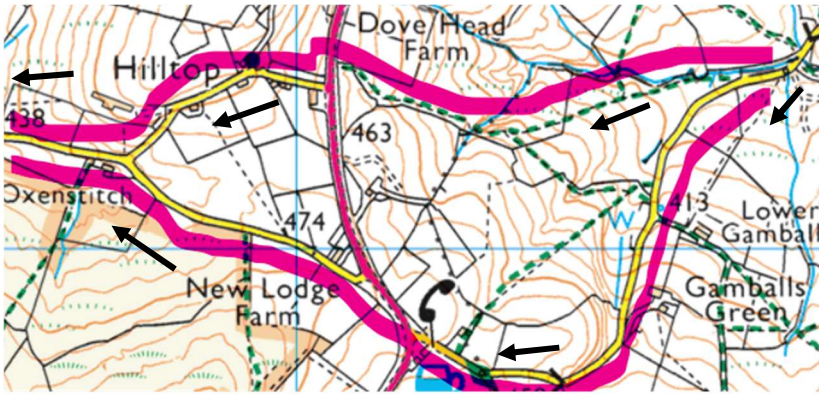


*Orange top - Lance Hamilton-Griffiths before starting*

Brand End. A change here. We were back on the 2017 direct route. Although steep – and I really felt it – it was straightforward and simply onto the main track to Brand Top. The Brand End dogs were quieter than normal – perhaps one was now missing? At CP10 Brand Top a bit more salt, fluids, a couple of pieces of KMC as a carry out. A young helper kindly pointing me to the exit to the track. No torch just yet although gloomy and the sun had gone. On the steep descent I could see the three ahead had opted for fields. Well, it’s dry, maybe I’ll go fields rather than the road up through the Gamballs as I usually do. The fields were a good choice I think, as the grass had been recently cut. I make out the others not that far ahead as they complete the climb in the top field. When I reach the same point and look behind there is no sign of Rick, but green top is off the road and coming up the bottom field. Where was Rick?

Once over the A53 at Hilltop it’s gently downhill tarmac. But there is a problem. Because I had skimmed on nutrition for the last few hours and had been travelling near my limit – rather than keeping something back, my legs were at the point of cramping. I could not run as my legs wanted to remain straight and not bend. At this point I saw Rick on the lower road at Oxenstitch (do oxen get stitches?). He must have taken the road route and been quick about it.





*Field (direct) and road (easier?) routes*

The leg stiffness eased a bit so I could jog. My target was finding the high stile over the A54 before pitch black. At Knotbury I saw the last of Rick, even in black he was still silhouetted against the night sky. I thought I might spot a torch light somewhere going up, but nothing, although there were multiple lights at the high stile. So I wound my way through the fields, now dark, without torch on so I could see into the distance and keep my bearings. At last, this year, I got the route right, avoiding getting into a walled cul-de-sac or nettle marsh. At the high stile was a marshal with torch on, so presumably it was his and one other person's torch light that I'd seen. Once over the road I put on my head torch and made my way down the rough unforgiving track to Cumberland Cottage and CP11. No sign of green top coming up behind.

Already the first finisher was home. Rory Harris had smashed his own record and probably already changed, eaten, refreshed, and off back home. In my early days I recall Tony Okell trying to get under 9h for the 'new' course and getting so close at 9:01 in 2006. Today Rory went round in an astonishing 8:10.



*Rory Harris receiving his winners award.*



*At the start, Rory (1<sup>st</sup>), Kevin Hoults (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Martin Terry (7<sup>th</sup>)*

Back out on the course ... Once close to the cottage the bells and whistles sounded and welcomed me, as with other competitors, onto the fairy light lit grass path to the front door. Earlier competitors get to have their tally card clipped outside; once dark everyone goes indoors and the back room with roaring fire feels roasting to me after the cool of the evening. So, no hanging around, a little bit of madeira cake, no flat coke (I was sick immediately after that last year), then out before the heat of the room has too much effect.

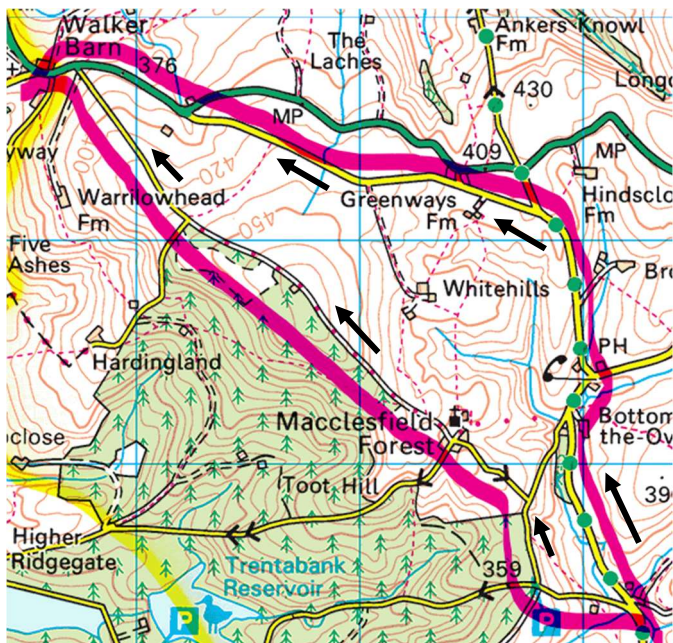




*Kevin Hault and later Jayne Lawton arriving early enough at the cottage to top up outside*

There remains more of the tricky track to navigate after leaving the cottage until it eventually improves once over the bridge and a short distance later it's the road near Clough House. I switch off the head torch and travel in the darkness and quiet of the evening, punctuated by only a couple of cars (one whose passengers shout good luck) and an owl. I think back to my earliest events when headtorches were not so common and some of my fellow competitors had simple hand torches, if that!

On to the next decision point. It arrives. I make the decision to go on the forest track along the edge of Macclesfield Forest. This is the recommended route although many take the more straightforward road. The beauty of the forest route is the lack of cars making it less stressful; it is also more sheltered. The disadvantages include the extra climb and the state of the track making it un-runnable for me on this occasion. I'm in my own world on the track, not much to see either side because of hedges or ahead because of the rising track. Eventually the high point is reached and Manchester's lights come into view down the other side. The track gives way to tarmac road – the top part of which is covered in sandy-gravel, presumably washed there from some recent heavy rain. This route also has only a few hundred metres of A537 before turning off to CP12 and Walker Barn. I have no idea how many people might have overtaken me by going the road route. I'll have to wait to find that out. Maybe top 20 is still possible?



*Route choices: road v track*

A change this year, the CP staff are all inside. At the doorway step it becomes a bit of an effort to get up the step. Once in I down more salt, top up fluids. I'm asked if I am feeling cold and respond that I am. "Have you any extra clothing?", "Yes", I say. Surely they know that the kit requirement is for extra top layer amongst other things? However, I choose not to add the extra layer yet. Back out into the night. No sign of anyone else here. Sometimes competitors closing in will be charging down the road. The lack of people meant my spirits remained high. Downhill now and it would get a bit warmer lower down which I needed.

I must be slowing as even with jogging the turn off for Kerridge could not come soon enough. Over the field, up the steep hairpin and walk along the road under Kerridge Hill. A badger scurries off down the road. I'm low on energy that is for sure. I take a gel. This time there is no satisfying feeling as the gel takes effect, instead my stomach does not like it. I decide rather than persevere with a dodgy stomach I'll be sick now rather than later. So I am, multiple times. It leaves me crouched down in the road on my knees., possibly not unlike others in Manchester's centre on a Saturday

night. Only the second time I've been off my feet for the whole day. A light approaches – another competitor (probably Mark Eastman) – I get to my feet before he is close and start walking. He urges me to “Keep going”. I do get into a jog – the stomach emptying has helped.

Road, trees, track to house. I keep to the paved side of the loose gravel to minimise noise for the houses' occupants. Down to the canal. Jog, no one around, no competitors. It's quiet, only my own water bottle contents bouncing around make any significant sound. Bridge 25 approaches. There is talking from behind, then headtorches then two competitors almost catch up to me. Just as I am about to jog under bridge 25 they shout and ask whether I'm in the Bullock Smithy and tell me I need to turn off and go to the bridge – which they do. A little upset by someone shouting out the (wrong) route to me ... meanwhile I jog ten more steps, go under the bridge and turn into the car park and CP13, Whiteley Green. The other two have somehow got on top of the bridge!?! I'm away out the car park when they eventually make it to the CP presumably realising their mistake.



*Dashes show a non-optimal route!*

I wonder if anyone enjoys the last section of the route [CP13 to finish]? It certainly drags when you're tired and it's dark. After five minutes on Middlewood Way, jogging slowly, the two mis-guided competitors come past and moving quickly leave me well behind. It's quiet again, a little pub noise floating on the air. A bridge is reached so I allow myself to walk a bit. Around this point last year a small group came past, including Julian and his partner. I am assuming Julian is not far behind and partly expect the same thing may happen again. I jog to the next bridge and then walk a bit. Repeat. The gap between the CP and the first bridge is probably the longest, between first and second bridge the shortest then the next two slightly longer. I was going to go Coppice and have a change, but I've had enough and decide this time on 'no change' and choose my regular route of Wood Lane. I jog to the cobbles, walk the cobbles, but at Moggie Lane I'm empty and have to walk, not jog. Since being sick I've just had a few sips of liquid. It is surprising what the body can pull out from its reserves. Waterloo Road, Trafalgar Avenue, crossing Nelson Avenue (quite a historic set of roads).

Finally its Towers Road. Jog, walk, whatever it takes, keep going. Is that the light at the end of the tunnel (the A523)? No, not yet, head down, jog/walk, look up – the end? No, not yet, keep going. Should I look behind to see if anyone is catching? No. Keep going. Plod, jog, plod. Navigate the pot holes. Look up – is that the end? No. I hear cars going past, must be close now. Yes. A slight bend and on to London Rd. The new dual A555 is quiet and its possible to go straight across without the need for an assisted crossing from the pedestrian lights. I keep up a slow jog, over the next set of lights, onto the left pavement. Still not looking behind. This is it now, jog all the way to the finish, through the gate, up the path, open the double doors and hand tally card to the regular finish official and make sure time is recorded. Yes!

There are no cheers and claps, a bit solemn really. I make my way to the tables and chairs and slump down. I have a couple of cups of milk brought to me (protein drink). I see that Rick has finished – he is at the other end of the room and also looking like he's shattered. It is by far his best time, beating his previous in 2017 by over 2h. One or two other competitors are around which I don't recognise. Lance and Martin and probably blue top had finished way ahead and not in the hall. Kevin Hault beats his best time by 4 minutes to be third.

One of the helpers says to me, “I'm not joking, are you alright because you looked terrible when you came in?”. I assure him that I'm “OK”. I certainly feel much better now that I've finished. However, I don't fancy trying to eat anything so without further delay I finish the milk, put my cag on for a top layer and go back outside into the cooling evening (dropping to 1C eventually) to get to my car. Tracey is waiting for Paul in her car and calls out “Well done”.

It's over for another year. It has actually gone well for me. My body, and in particular my legs, have survived.



The provisional results have 236 finishers (only 150 last year) out of around 300 starters (220 last year). I will look closely at the official results when they come out with the individual CP section times to see exactly who was who.

Again thanks to all the organisers and many other volunteers for keeping the event going and manning the checkpoints etc (often five or more people marshalling at a check point which is great).

Nigel Aston (16 finishes)

*Photo credits: Various people posting on Bullock Smithy 2019 Facebook; Nick Ham, Internet*