

## Bullock Smithy Route+, 24<sup>th</sup> July and 5<sup>th</sup> September 2020

I've reported on my two attempts in 2020 going round the Bullock Smithy Route.

### Bullock Smithy Route+, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 (solo)

*"A quiet day out"*



*Posted on the Bullock Smithy web site.*

As for many people their favourite event/s of the year have been cancelled because of Covid-19, their training targets disappeared. The organisers of the BS waited until mid-July, as long as they could, before deciding to cancel. A few people have decided they will have a go at the route on previous planned race day (5 Sept), include George who has done a BS every year. I decided to go earlier, even if not quite in trim, it was an opportunity to make the first visit of the year to some hills.

My first thoughts were to start about two thirds of the way round the route. This would mean I could pick up refreshments at Hazel Grove and Castleton shops. After a few days contemplation I switched over to taking on the classic BS starting in Hazel Grove since that way round the longest climbs are tackled whilst relatively fresh.

I was going to need hydration during the course of the day and did not want to carry 13h+ of water with me. 24th July was the day that mask wearing in shops was compulsory. So to avoid shops, and that only Castleton was now going to be on route, I put out three stashes – Chinley, Peak Forest and Flash. After a poor sleep the night before in the car parked near normal race HQ, I was up 3:15am, had a couple of flapjacks for breakfast and made my way to Devonshire Park to start, ready to tackle the 14 CPs.

I had my Lezyne bike GPS with its 23h battery and a new Garmin watch (F 45) with its 13h GPS battery. After waiting a while for satellite connection I was off around 4am. My pack was minimal, although I carried 1.5L water, and I wore the thinnest of tops. It was still dark as I trotted up Towers road and a dampness around from the overnight rain. To preserve dry feet I avoided the fields and took the 'Incline' track, and then another track to get to the road crossing – all seemed a bit messy in the dark as I picked my way round possible pot holes. Into Lyme Park felt like I was now underway and dawn arrived.

The wall crossing has been removed. I did not find this out until I got there so went along a path between wood and wall to get to the main track, turn right and head upwards (Gritstone Trail). I'd guess that the official route will now be to stay on the tracks and do not go direct to the wall [the Steve Temple route].



*Lyme Park – wall crossing has disappeared. Need to take track instead*

Out of the woods, through the gate into open country. A herd of thirty deer greeted my arrival in the park, the first of a few sights that are not normally seen when starting midday in the normal event. CP1, Bowstones. No one there of course so I just carried on down the road, taking a relaxed nibble going downhill something I'd never do during the BS as the pace is quickest here and not wanting to get left behind. By the time I was round to the grassy climb on Whaley Moor there was no need to eat (the normal routine).

Furness Vale station signal box was occupied (5 – 5:30am) which surprised me, firstly that it was a bit early and secondly that signal boxes were still in use. No one on the platform yet. Down the road and then through the tunnel and into the first cow field. The cows docile at this time in the morning, a nice advantage of being early. Gate and another gate brings out a difference to being solo – no one to share the gate opening/closing with. CP2 arrived at. The drop seems steeper when confronted with time to think rather than follow or be chased down to the manned tent.

At Peep-O-Day farm I stop for my first stash. I could have gone for quite a bit longer given the water I had not drunk yet in my pack – really I should have drunk much more though. After topping up my supplies and carrying an extra bottle I now had 2L on board. My rubbish (empty bottles from the stash) neatly thrown away in the bins of the farm. No crisps though, the normal offering at this CP. Up, down, and up the track to Edale Cross. No one. No bikes. I mainly walked as the sun's warmth was now beginning to be felt and that warmth had the effect of either mentally or physically slowing me down. CP3 passed, no jelly beans to be had.

A pleasant decent of Jacob's ladder with no ramblers to dodge. And an equally relaxed jog along the valley to Upper Booth and even the road to Edale had minimal traffic on it. Edale CP was the first one that was not exactly on route, so a minor deviation was made up to the building in the car park where the CP has nearly always been situated. I noted that the toilets were locked (open at 8am). A few people around now, beginning their hike into the hills perhaps. Still, I see no one on the climb up to Hollins Cross and only one lady and dog on the descent down. The little pull-in for the refreshment van directly at the end of the hill track unoccupied for now.

At a slower jogging pace my legs were not suffering any usual cramps on the road to Castleton, through the car park (toilets closed here, no sign of opening), past CP4 new location and eventually breaking into a walk once Goose hill is reached. Last year I recall a few people on the BS being ahead and behind which spurred me on, up the steep incline. This time it became a bit of a trudge and no incentive to jog until all the climbing was over. Soon at Peak Forest and my second stash [24 miles]. I sat on the pavement edge and topped up water supplies (to 2L), and carried a banana from my stash. The rubbish again being deposited in a bin outside the PF shop, all nicely convenient. Cross over the road to CP5 and then jog along the pavement/road carrying my banana, similar to what normally happens from this CP.

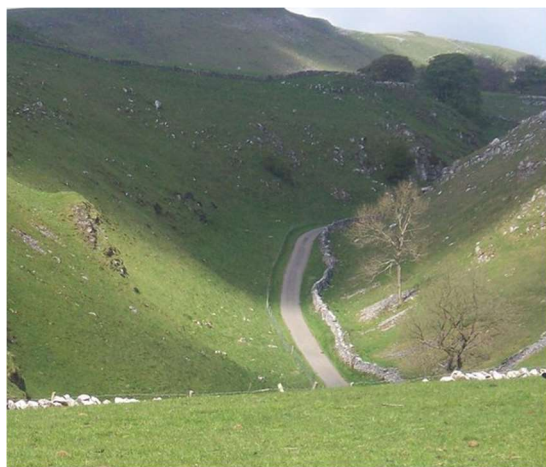
At Dam Cliff I contemplated taking the track NW (a diversion about 3y ago) to avoid damp and long grass. But for some reason cows were loose along the track so I went the traditional route over the fields and pleased to find the grass not over long. Although cows are not too much of an issue it is good to avoid them. Approaching Wheston I thought I would have no issue with the 3pm milking and the associated cow movement. However, I had not counted on the morning milking and just escaped through Wheston as the cows were coming out of the farm and on to the

road to get into the fields. The trot to Millers Dale was really pleasant with many wild flowers in full bloom, blues, yellows, whites. I did however need to do some blister repairs. First I tried a simple swapping of left and right sock. No joy. So after another mile changed to a spare sock and added a blister plaster. This seemed to help and lasted me, although some blister rubbing nagged. At CP7, half way. Along Backwell Dale with some jogging and much walking, pleased to be sheltered from the sun's warmth by the trees; not so pleased with a higher volume of traffic passing than during a BS Saturday. At Chelmorton CP8 the lack of anyone was more noticeable than most as normally the CP is visible from nearly a mile away. This time my focus was on a tree at the CP site. Uneventful section now, down and up the quarry road and another few fields of cows to pass through. It seems like a whole herd of Fresian cows was scattered in the lowest field before reaching the road near Braemar House; thankfully they were not too active.

Earl Sterndale was busy. People and cars, pub open, walkers, cyclists. I guess the surrounding hills are attractive for everyone. The CP9 building was open and I was almost tempted to go in. On the track turning off the road towards Dowel Dale a few signs indicated that the track was not the right route and instead people should take to the field – which avoids opening/climbing a few gates, something I must have missed on all previous occurrences.



*Earl Sterndale*



*Dowel Dale – the road section appearing to Booth Farm*

A new wooden structure was appearing at Booth farm with builders in action otherwise the valley remained quiet until, you guess it, the barking dogs at Brand End. No issues though. At Brand Top, CP10, some new concrete has been laid outside the door. Off we go downhill, no hint of dusk this time though so visibility not an issue. As my stash is near Flash stores I take the road up to Flash rather than fields and boy is this tiring in the warmth of the sun. Its busy at the stores – normally no one here, closed. People having breakfast or lunch, motorbikes, cars, chatter. I sat on the verge and sorted out my final stash, again binning my rubbish and setting off with 2L and a banana.

Descending the road to Knotbury there are numerous signs and bollards: "No Parking", "No turning along this road", "Do not come any further", No motorised access to Three Shires Head". I wonder what is happening as this is all unusual. As instructed by the signs there are no cars or people around. All seems quiet until I reach the main bridge of Three Shires Head. At this point suddenly it's full of life. Picnicking, swimming, bikinis, wet suites, paddling, sunbathing; not rowdy, not young children, just people enjoying lovely surroundings. As I leave the honey pot more people are approaching from the direction of Holt. I am impressed. People are parking on the top road (the A54) and walking down the steep hill to get to the area; what is impressive is these people – some unsurprisingly not particular fit looking, will have to ascend the hill after their stay to get back to their car.

At last, I get the change to locate the high stile over the wall to the top road in the light. It's easy when you can see a long way in front. Normally for me it's now dusk or more likely dark. Across the road and down to Cumberland cottage,



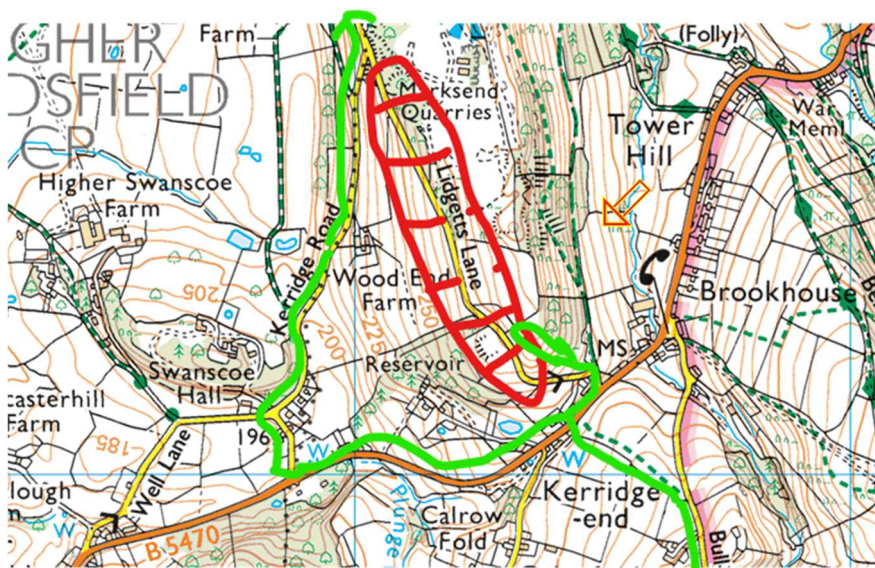
CP11. Apparently this may no longer be the CP in future as the building is not safe. Easier to judge the rutted, tree-rooted, bouldered track in the light, but still needs concentration. I go up to the cottage, padlocked door, and pass by, popping out at the footbridge where more picnickers relax next to the trickling stream.



*Cumberland Cottage and rough track*

The start of the road. No need for head torch as only mid-afternoon. The road is less busy than I expected and my passage goes quicker in the light than the dark, or so it seems. Enough road for me though. I turn left and then something new, taking the footpath diagonally, then road uphill eventually to the Macclesfield forest track. In the daylight the rocky uneven surface is easier to travel along. However, what's better, is the grassy track to the left. It is still uphill though, with a little shade from the forest trees. The expansive views open out towards the Cat 'n Fiddle and beyond as the summit is reached. Down Charity Lane and CP12 requiring a deviation to get there. Looks completely different in daylight and without cars/vans/gazebo. Back along Buxton Old Rd for 100 metres to pick up the Buxton New Rd (A537) and then turn off at Bull-Hill Lane. I did contemplate having a go at the footpath route but unsure exactly where this went, and nothing obvious to see from the road. Looking at the map back home it still seems the road is the much easier route.

I can see in the distance some road works on Lidgetts Lane and wonder what might be happening there. As I get on to the lane a problem appears. The road is completely closed to anybody, 'Do not cross walls to get past the barriers'. I go through a gate and explore the fields to see if a footpath will take me round the road works. All I find is the road covered in huge long blue pipes (for water presumably) and the footpath I am on goes nowhere except gorse/bracken/nettles/brambles. I retreat and take the B5470 down hill and pick up the car diversion along Kerridge Road, up hill again to join Lidgetts Lane after the section of road closure.



*Red – closed section of road. Green – my route.*

Hardly any jogging now. That diversion has demoralised me a little as any final time is no longer a true representation of the BS route. Down to the canal now. Not just a few canal boats with their night lights on, this is activity. Walkers, joggers, bikers, people at the café, boats moving along. Plenty to occupy the mind, which is good, as I am now dawdling along. CP13 at Whiteley car park, which is full. Over the bridge, descend the steps and switch to auto pilot. I'm still not jogging though, only a walk. Cyclists whiz past me in both directions, a tinkle on a bell lets me know one is approaching. Bridge, bridge bridge ... I carry on past the Wood End turn off for a change and join the top of Coppice Rd. A few slow wiggles of road and eventually Tower Rd is reached. All day light. No headtorch needed. The pot holes are easily avoided and the sleeping policemen no problem. Out on to the A523, traffic, people, although the garden centre has closed for the day. Finally the scout HQ compound door [closed] marks the end and all watches are stopped. Yes. Finished. Made It.

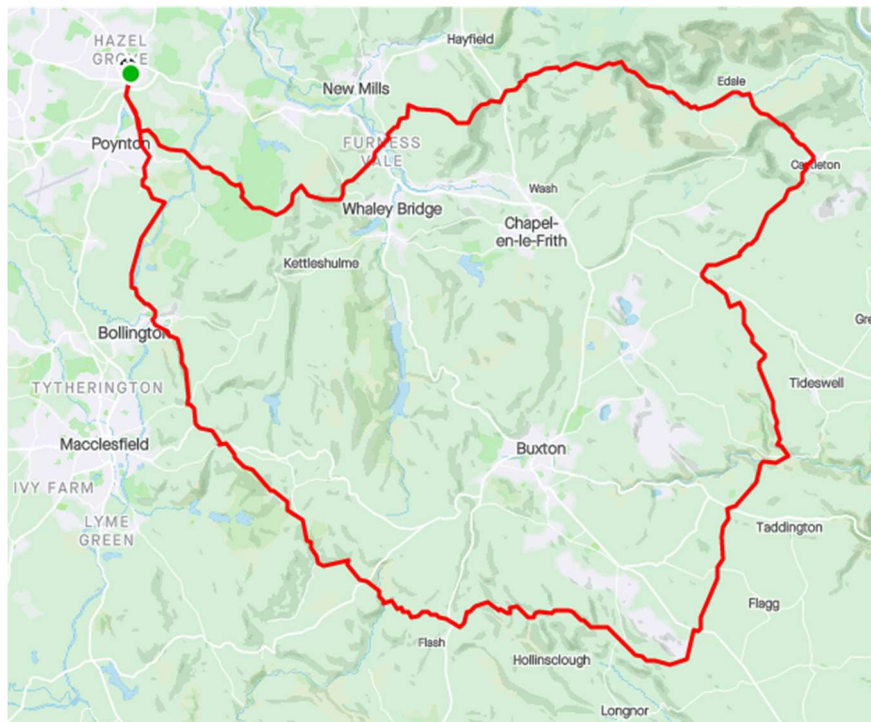
Back home, later on, I'd like to analyse my time segments but I am unable to upload my Lezyne route details – only the map appears with a start and end time of 00.00. My Garmin watch stopped after 12h but even that cannot be uploaded as the Garmin site has 'crashed' (the talk of a \$10 million ransom that Garmin have to pay). No matter. I know I got round and a rough time. I've seen some different things and enjoyed easily my longest day out of the year and actually one of my longest solo runs outside of Leicestershire Round attempts and Bob Graham Round attempts.

Lesson learnt ..., well on a cooler day I could miss out one of the water stashes, perhaps I only needed Peak Forest [CP6]. Earl Sterndale pub would be a possible easy quick fill of a water bottle if the timing was right. Different socks – and throw away the ones giving blisters, or only use on shorter runs. Drink more.

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## Bullock Smithy Route+, 5<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 (solo)

*“Improving”*



There was never an intention to go round the route again after completing on 24<sup>th</sup> July. However, once I'd filed my report and started to get feedback, various people said they were planning to do the route on 5<sup>th</sup> September, the official race day. So the seed was set and once into August I decided that I would also plan to have a go. Everyone I knew was avoiding the official midday start time and going much earlier – so maximising the daylight for running/walking. I would do the same, as last time in July. As the weather was going to be much cooler than in July, I thought I could get away with laying two stashes instead of three which would save me some motoring beforehand. Also I'd travel up from home early morning and make the most of sleeping at home for a while. So good, logistics arranged. Quentin B had offered to provide some support if needed so I let him know I was going round and maybe we'd meet up somewhere – it was just good to know I could be 'rescued' if needed.



I left home around 12:15am on the Saturday, left my stashes, parked near BS HQ and set off from Devonshire Park around 2:45am with 2L water in rucksack and carrying 0.5L bottle in hand. I forced myself to drink the whole bottle before the canal so I could dispose of the bottle in the last bin before the track up to Lyme Park. Of course at this time in the morning it was definitely headtorch on, even with a near full moon. The breeze was generally behind to give a little boost.

Lyme Park road/track, gates unlocked so no problem, up to Bowstones, jog down the road in moonlight and past the well-lit High Peak School. No trains yet at Furness Vale. Up to Chinley Churn, care on the descent to where the CP would be and gentle jog down to Peeps. No stopping, over main road and the next climb. When going solo the climbs are far more noticeable; nearly every section between check points entails a climb apart from the last two.

Cloud descended, wind increased, then rain came. Time for cag. Even hood up at one point. Cag/hood I cannot remember using in any previous BS. Stayed on through the CP position and not off until at the bottom of Jacobs and the bridge. Jacobs descent is somewhat easier when you have it to yourself. So cag off now, breeze still favourable, so easy going to Edale, watching out for a few early morning quick motorists on the road. Touched the CP building in the car park and turned round for Hollins. Feeling good, although not jogging up at all, the coolness really helped on this and other climbs. A few other people around now (7-8 am) – serious walkers! Through Castleton and grind up Goose Hill. No easy line, just get to the top. Over the wall step stile and still a bit more uphill to go. I risked a few jogging steps and then managed a few more, pleased I had something left.

The route direction now turned into wind and I felt it. Not until partway down Oxlow Rake did the headwind ease. Some new gravel to level the track had just been laid which meant for a more pleasant 100 m or so. Across the fields, through Old Dam hamlet and the first stop as my stash is reached. Fluid bottles topped up, swigs taken, banana in hand and off again, depositing my rubbish into a nearby bin. I touched the PF CP door then trotted off up the A623. The grass was shortish but I decided once on top of the fields to go down the Dam Cliff lane and then road. Maybe it was worth it, maybe not. Soon at Wheston even with a head breeze. And again, soon at Millers Dale with pleasant running as it is level or down all the way from Wheston really and the enclosing walls provided a bit of shelter.

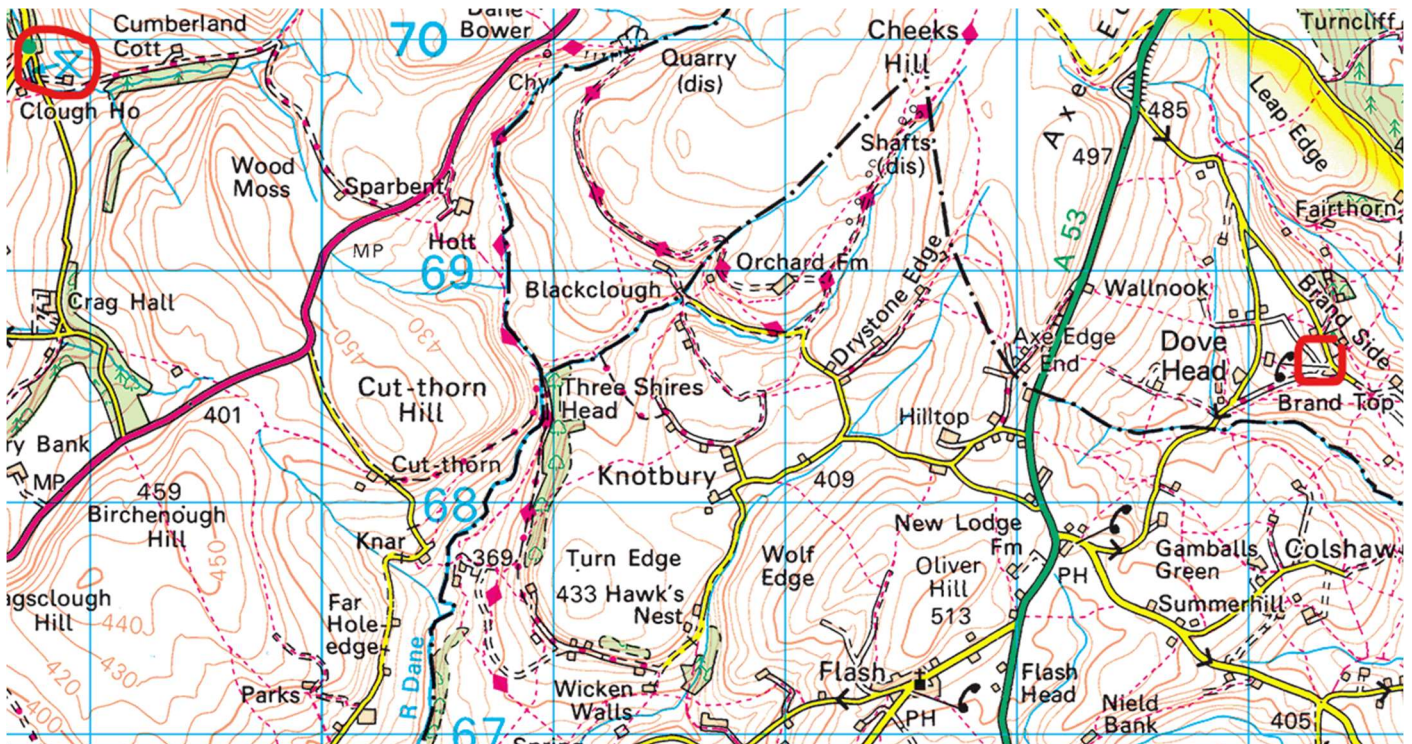
So, onto the B6049 through Millers Dale, and I thought I'd make a good start on the hill by jogging up the first bit. Once that was done I wondered how far I could keep jogging, and then challenged myself to jog all the way up to the A6. Wow, that felt like I had achieved something. Good to get off the road anyway. The temperature was still good, just cool, and I was happy to jog along with a little walk here and there. This continued past the donut check point at Chelmorton along the track then road until I ground to a walk up the quarry track.

I had used my phone a few times to send texts to give an indication as to where I was to a few people including Quentin. The phone had beeped a few times as messages came back; as it was buried in my rucksack I did not get it out until a convenient time. When I look I noticed that Quentin had said he'd meet me at Chelmorton – which I had gone through 15 mins ago. Oh well, I'll see him later no doubt. The grass was long over to Earl Sterndale, and I did not benefit from a ready made flattening from any faster runners as would have happened in the race. ES was busy, cars parked along the road. I realised that if Quentin had come to ES I had no idea what he looked like or what car he might be in. But he knew what he was doing and had parked just on the outskirts and so I stopped for a chat.

Quentin had tea on the boil and various snack items. Well, there was much to take in. I was completely self-sufficient, did not really want to stop, aware of both of us having no face masks on. I did not want to stop to drink hot tea because of the time it would take and the affects of milk in a jumbled up stomach. I took a small packet of biscuits at Quentin's insistence and left, feeling really guilty that he'd made a big effort driving round and being there and I was not able to appreciate it.

My legs were beginning to be less interested in jogging and I could feel slow coming on going past Booth Farm Lake. Then a funny thing. At Brand End I went my normal way, aiming for the farm gate and it said on a new sign 'No Public Right Of Way'. So I skirted round the outside to the right through the small gate, the makeshift grid gate and back on to the track. Not a sound. Not a whimper. No pulling on a chain. The dogs had gone! I surmised that there were new owners of Brand End (without any dogs). The track to Brand Top has new cattle grids and pot holes filled in. Even Brand Top has been refurbished on the outside. All good. As was the case a few months ago, now was the time to appreciate the light, as in the race dusk would now have been falling for me.

Up the road to get to my Flash stash, behind the wall near Flash Stores. Bikers and others using the café. Off down to Knotbury carrying my banana and full fluid bottles, Three Shires, and a direct aim for the A54 high stile. Nearly a trip on tree routes going past Cumberland Cottage. If the CP is moved to the end of the track then maybe there is another way to reach it that avoids this track?



*Brand Top CP to possible new CP location near Cumberland Cottage – alternative routes?*

Some road jogging and a bit of walking. Up the road, across the field, up the small road again to the Mac Forest track. Time for a sock change. My socks were damp and no padding for the feet and a blister developing. So sock change and blister plaster put on. Quick photo.

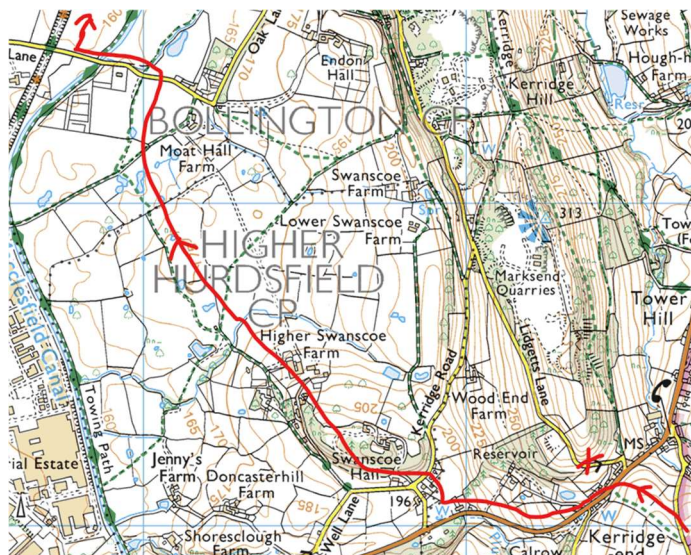
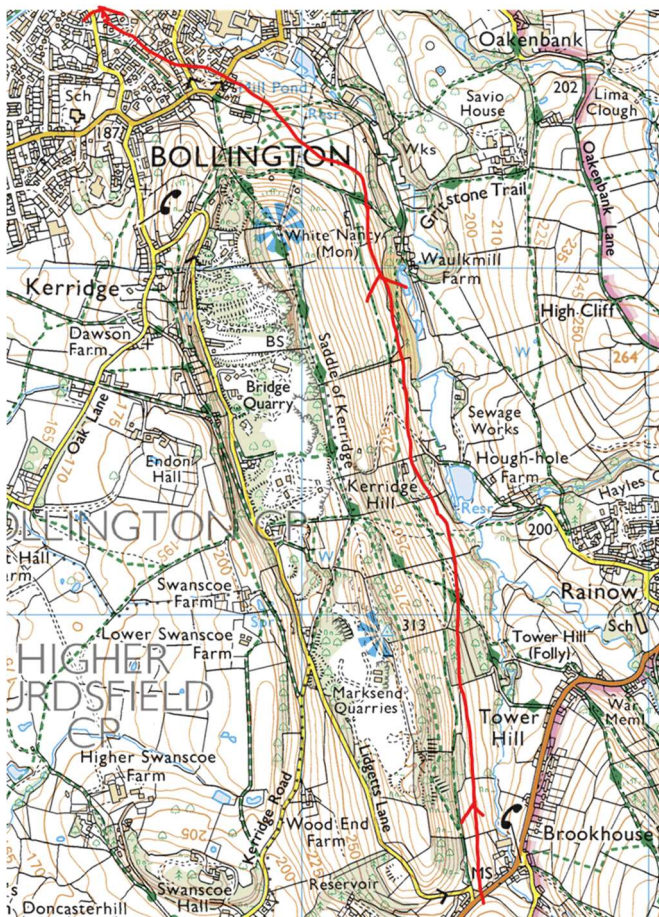


*The author after a sock change, ready for the Mac Forest track*

Track was fine (well the grassy bit to the left anyway). Down to Walkers Barn where I met Tony Audenshaw (Emmerdale) out for a run [he's been round the BS a few times, and manned his own intermediate refreshment stop]. Down to the hall CP and back and then along the road there is Quentin's car. I wander over. But he's not in it and nowhere to be seen? Oh well, I carry on down Kerridge-end and the fun of the diversion.

So Lidgetts Lane remains closed until May 2021. A diversion is required and I wish to improve on road down and road up that I did in July and got remoralised. After some email/Facebook discussions with various people I have chosen the White Nancy East side route. An alternative, which Steve H took, is to go down the road and then the flatter easier to navigate path to Middlewood. So out with the map (rare on the BS event) and carefully pick out the track over field, field, contoured round and eventually dropping down to Bollington, picking up a residential footpath and reaching the canal. Glad to be doing it in the light as that would not have been easy in the dark with footpaths going off at all angles and the route through the houses not easy to locate. Of course Bullock Smithy 2021 will not have to be concerned about such diversions as the road will be open.





*The route taken to the East of 'White Nancy', and the lower route taken by Steve H to Middlewood Way.*

Feeling much better than two months ago I jog to bridge 25 and Whitley Green CP location. I even jog some of Middlewood Way. I should point out that 'jog' is little more than a quick walk, but at least my legs are capable of the right movement. I wonder now whether any of the Stockport fast runners on their 11h schedule might come past. Although I am not racing it would be demoralising to have started 3h ahead of them and be overtaken. No one does come past and I reach the scout HQ to finish. Yipee!

I sit on the edge of the boot of my car, text that I've finished and creakily make a few clothes changes before driving off to the Tesco Express to get some refreshments before setting off for home. I've felt much better than when I went round in July. The cooler weather really helped and perhaps I was a little fitter too. I drank plenty – which must have helped too.

Next day I get to hear that Steve H has got round in about 18h, finishing the right side of midnight, which is pretty good for walking mainly solo.

Nigel Aston

*16 official finishes and 2 unofficial completions*