

High Peak 40
20th September 2014
40 miles



Buxton Community School hosted this race. Providing registration, changing, showers, room for refreshments, car parking and the finish. The start however is in Buxton Pavilion Gardens, a 500m walk down the road. I jog round a bit to loosen up and take part in a photo call along with Kate and Emma for top photographer Nick Ham.

Bill balanced on the bench seat and delivered his usual measured address, waited for the atomic clock to reach 8am then off we went. I wore gloves and a cap to start as there was a chill in the air. Easing back just a bit during the fast start through the park I let my leg muscles warm up; Nick came passed me briefly. However, once we'd knocked off the first road section at the end of Bishop's Lane and were ascending onto Watford Moor the body was warm so the gloves and cap were tucked away into the bum bag. Normally round the huge horseshoe curve of the dismantled railway it's possible to see as far ahead as the leaders. This year the mist meant I couldn't really make them out – which was probably a good thing as it was a little dispiriting to see them so far ahead already.

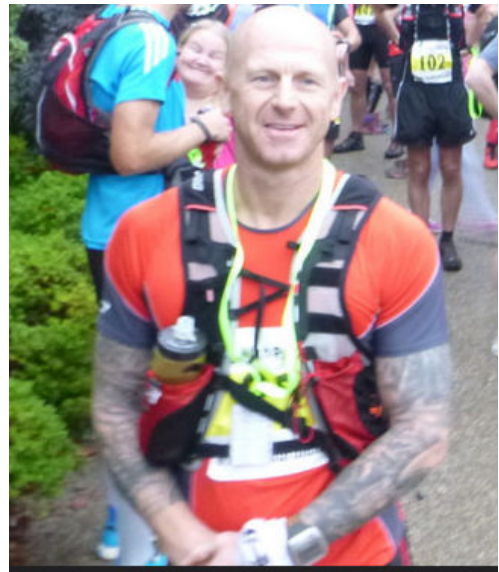
However, I felt my pace was good, I was keeping a few people in sight whose normal pace I knew – such as Kate Whitfield and John Minta. No time to drink or eat anything up to CP1 (top of Bunsal Incline), so on arrival there took a water cup after passing the lead marshal who stood shouting out arrival times.



Bill Allen briefs the racers



Marcus Scotney warming up



John Minta at the start

Down the incline and along passed a flat Fernilee reservoir – water level low. The dismantled railway track took us into the Goyt valley and unsurprisingly along the River Goyt over the gated fields. I decided to put in a bit of a spurt passed a group of 6 or so to avoid being the straggler at the various gates in this section. I think John also followed me. Soon through the next CP and again spurted on to avoid trailing up the ascending track, and found time to eat a bit.



My first time doing the 'normal' route rather than the temporary diversion and was not expecting it, so a little disorientated, especially as it appeared to go through someone's back garden near Ollerenshaw Hall. Once on to the familiar Milton Lane I had my bearings. Although I was continuously jogging I was surprised that I hadn't pulled away a bit – in fact people were coming passed me. Oh well.

As usual no one to do a passage control check at Eccles Pike so down to Digleach CP. A drink and some great flapjack. Worth commenting that the standard of flapjack at this event was top notch – either homemade or perhaps M&S, moist, easy to eat and sultanas in some bits. The pink 'High Peak 40' way point signs were everywhere and guided us on our way. The only place that I think was missing was the turn off to Charley Lane.

I managed a jog all the way up to CP3, Beet Farm. This time I added an electrolyte tablet to my drink. Off jogging again up to the edge of the High Peak. Kate and John caught me up and we travelled together now for the next two sections. 'Kate the gate' got to close most of the gates. A chap in a blue top had caught us and went ahead arriving before us at CP4 in the layby by the road.

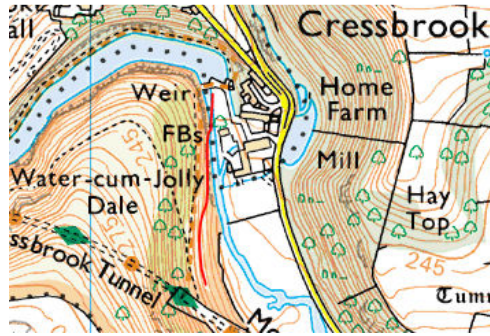
After the checkpoint we then overtook blue top as we jogged over the mist bound Rushup Edge. In previous HP40 races this section has been obvious as we head for Mam Tor. However today the mist was down and occasional yellow signs with black arrows were pointing us in the right direction – except these were not HP40 signs. So when a yellow sign directed us to Dalehead, Kate, John and blue top who were all first timers all showed some concern when I ignored it and carried straight on. Kate shouted me back, I kept going. A few minutes later Kate and John questioned my knowledge of the route, I kept going. A few minutes more and Kate thought she'd marked this way on her map so was OK to continue; a few minutes later John said that he trusted me; I kept going. Eventually we arrived at Mam Nick, a pink HP40 sign and relief was felt. We pondered as to whether anyone had actually taken the yellow sign and gone off course.

A group of stationary Mountain Bikers parted to funnel us onto the Mam Tor path and up we went. Unsure as to whether anyone was a passage control here as there was various photos, clapping and talking amongst the throng on the top. Care on the descent using a mixture of grass and rough track rather than the flag stones took us to Hollins Cross and then extra care as we slid and picked our way down. Not surprisingly at this slower pace various people caught us, including blue top.

At the Castleton CP we bunched up and whilst there a shout went up – someone was being called back after setting off down the track to Losehill Hall rather than towards Castleton centre. Sometimes it's just too easy to go the wrong way. Walk the steep bits of Cave Dale and jog the rest, eventually coming out onto the grassy slopes of Bradwell Moor, dripping (it was muggy). Three guys came passed now, they'd been pacing themselves, starting slowly and getting into the race, they were going well.

A cow was in our path, I jogged by, but Kate let out a scream – she doesn't like cows. She edged past it. John and blue top were a little way behind but caught us up at the next CP. Kate had been talking about her (normal) rice pudding stop, and decided to wait until Tideswell. At the CP the marshals could not supply John with his request for Vaseline, however blue top was able to help out – which was good of him as it delayed his progress.

I hadn't realised but from the top of Huxlow Moor it is nearly downhill all the way for two sections – downhill to the CP at the road, downhill to Tideswell, along the river, a bit of flat and then downhill again along the river to Lees Bottom. Huxlow Moor is 450m, the CP is 390m, Tideswell is 300m, Tideswell CP is 250m, and Lees Bottom is 150m. The only uphill is a short 60m climb in the middle (180m to 250m).



A short 60m climb punctuates almost continuous downhill and flat

Normally the road gets to my legs and the cramp sets in. Possibly because it is overcast and slightly cooler I'm able to keep at a reasonable pace – Kate and blue top with me. At the Tideswell CP Kate does in fact stop, sit on a chair and eat her rice pud outside the caravan. I say "See you later", thoroughly expecting that she'll catch me with her superior speed over the good running territory ahead. Blue top goes ahead now.

Now it's time for some dales. Tideswell Dale, Miller's Dale, Water-cum-Jolly Dale (the uphill is a chance to walk, eat and drink), Monsal Trail in Upperdale, Monsal Dale and onto Lees Bottom and ascend Deep Dale. Later on we go down another Deep Dale and through Cowdale.

I feel my pace slackening a bit. No one else in sight in front along the Monsal Trail so I continue at a steady jog, welcoming the CP. I take water and turn around to see shirtless and red top approaching. However it takes the whole of the next river section and the beginning of the steep ascent after Lees Bottom before I get caught by them both. At the same time I overtook someone so a net loss of one place. Shirtless is really putting in an effort and puffing like a steam train – I make a comment and he says that I'll know next time it's him coming up behind me – true enough.

Able to jog all the way up Deep Dale to the CP at the road apart from the last bit of track. The cows in the field were well away from the path so Kate should have no problems. Refreshed from the two ladies servicing me at the CP the 4m of road now beckons. Shirtless and red top are in the distance.

My plodding was working well and off I went jogging the whole road section all the way to Chelmorton. I tried not to give in to the two roads signs along the way saying 'Flagg'. Unsure as to whether this was any quicker than previous years when I'd have jog-walked. Anyway, despite this continuous jogging along Flagg Lane red top and no shirt were way ahead, although red shirt was beginning to slow as he did a bit of walking. Kate however is much quicker than me – as many are – when it comes to running speed and she catches me and overtakes. At least that gave me someone to chase a bit and eventually I caught her up at the Deep Dale descent. If the rain had come this descent would have been Yuk, in the end, taking some care it was not too bad, and the climb up the other side tested muscles that did not want to be used having been worn out on the road. We passed a chap whose knee was giving him gip. Over the stile, and a gentle uphill then flat to the last CP and gazebo. Kate and I left here together onto Midshires Way and soon got overtaken by a chap going well.

One field crossed. The next had cows. Kate stood still and used a torrent of swear words to indicate she did not want to progress. After a bit of coaxing she made it passed the one or two friendly cows. The finish was not as quick as I had hoped, so my combination of slow continuous jogging was not as quick as walk and fast jogging. Not overly concerned with being overtaken perhaps I lacked a bit of adrenalin to push me to the finish. I certainly remember being pushed by the likes of Phil Hodgson and Julian Brown along this stretch. Today the gentle ups and downs came and went, passed the fairground house, passed the caravans, weaving through the viaduct, down to the road where a marshal kindly provided directions and safety advice. Over the main road, across the field, along the passage way knowing that it was gently down now, no one coming past, and the satisfaction of being about to finish.



There comes a point in all races when you know you will finish, the end is in sight – perhaps ¼ mile or perhaps a bit less. The body relaxes, you might even start smiling contentedly to yourself, and you might even smile at the people clapping. At that time you can forget the pain and the aches. Then you do finish. HP40 has a good little finish with the 100m uphill drive that is the school entrance to the waiting table of officials and onlookers and those already finished.

I polished off a few cups of water, not realising how thirsty I had become. It wasn't long before John M came in – looking strong, and soon followed by blue top. Hurt knee also came in.

After changing, time for refreshments, pork pie, cakes, tea. A chat with Andy Robinson – chief organiser of Runfurther who was most pleased to have finished and in a good time, especially as before the race he thought he might not even make it to CP1 with a dodgy knee.

I stayed for the presentations. Awards for 1-2-3 in men, women, and veterans too – which meant I sneaked in with the last award of the day - O50 3rd – quite rare for me. Kate got first lady. The men's winner was a semi-professional chap with a descent beard – Marcus Scotney and a really quick time. Lisa Heath did well with 3rd in the women's veterans – she was only running to join in with her husband.

Thanks to all the HP40 folk who marshalled, sign posted, time-kept, made the flapjack etc. and made the event run like clockwork.

And at the presentation ceremony here's some of the people that collected awards:



Marcus Scotney (1st)



Ken Suter (2nd) with organiser Bill Alan



Lisa Heath (3rd O50)

Nigel Aston

Some photos courtesy of Nick Ham