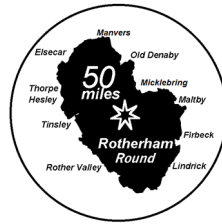


Round Rotherham
18th October 2014
50 miles



This was the last race in the 12 race Runfurther series for 2014. A number of the front runners in the series needed a good finish in order to claim a top three spot. For me, I just needed to finish to complete the Grand Slam of all 12 races; same for Emma David who was also on for the Runfurther Grand Slam. The previous race in the series, the High Peak 40, was a month ago. I had done not much since so had hoped to be feeling relatively fresh, itching to go and even a bit bouncy. I arrived on the start line feeling a mixture of excitement of the last race, nervous about what the result was going to be, but not bouncy or raring to go. My hamstrings seem to be permanently tight and I run trying to avoid any overstretching and that dreaded pull.

6am and the slightly slower runners and all the walkers set off from Dearne Valley Leisure Centre, Mexborough, head torches on as it was still dark. An hour later the remaining slightly quicker runners (e.g. me) and the much faster runners gather for a briefing (“...this is not a point to point race, you must follow the route...”) and a ten second countdown and then set off. I’d had a chance in the few minutes before the start to catch up with various runners from previous events this year – Kate, Andy, Nick, Dick and to wish Emma well. RR is a flattish course, ideally suited to road runners and cross country with hardly any significant climbing or descending. Last year I started too quickly, tried to maintain my pace and keep up with a small bunch and then paid for it for the last part, ending up walking too much and getting overtaken. So as we set off this year after jogging along with Kate for about 0.5km I made no effort to keep up and dropped back. Julian Brown came past mentioning that he preferred it when the event was in December, well it would certainly have been cooler; today we had a starting temperature of 15C rising to 20C.

The route to Elescar seems straightforward but there are a few points that care is required to stay on the right route and I was glad to follow a few that knew the way, including David Thompson who set a good pace for me. At the finish he said that he went off much too quick and arrived at CP2 50 mins ahead of schedule. As we climbed through King’s Wood above Elescar we had to negotiate probably the worst mud on the whole course. A runner ahead took a slip, others took it carefully. A succession of fields, and villages followed always heading towards the distinctive Keppel’s Column. Behind me in the distance I heard voices, laughter, and an occasional yelp/scream. It was hard to believe than anyone could be running an endurance event like this and be so effervescent. The source of the sounds eventually caught up with me. It was two girls in bright pink tops with a slogan on the back, ‘Only follow me if you’re hard enough’ and a chap (Lizzie Hutson, Susan Keens, Tim James). They seems to know the course well although apparently their longest run to date was 30 miles. I managed to keep up with them as we dropped down to CP1 at Grange Park. This CP was outside, with a table full of goodies and plenty of fluids.



I left the CP before the Hard Enough Pink girls. After the CP I met up with Andy Robinson who assumed I was going quickly and that he was going quicker than he should. I said that I was holding something back for 40 miles onwards and Andy pointed out that for most races that would be pointless (not long enough). Anyway we jogged together for a little bit and missed the turn off in the woods to Droppingwell Road. The Pink girls shouted us back; only a few seconds lost. By the time the canal was reached the girls and chaperone were way ahead; a strong little group. Some main road and other roads provided the route through Tinsley, to Catcliffe and a more rural environment. A section along the River Rother and then we turned off and reached CP2 at Treeton where I found the Pink girls still refuelling. They explained later that they took their time with toilets, refreshments and chatting to family members.

We now headed into the Rother Valley Country Park. I recalled that last year this was hard work for me, trying to keep pace with others as they gradually faded into the distance. This year I stuck to my own pace,

certainly not trying to keep up with the Pink girls who again passed me and faded into the distance. I tried to drink frequently; although overcast the day was warm and even with minimal gear I was feeling it. Harthill CP was welcomed, and yet again the Pink girls were taking the time and still there. Yet another fast pit stop and off again along the back lane and into the open fields.

After ten minutes the Pink ladies and their chaperone came past again. We joked about them having a meal at each CP; whatever they were doing they were certainly going well although the laughter and yelps were not so evident now. I was now joined by runner man 199. He had started at 6am and after a bit of a struggle was now coming back into form and easily kept up with me. Field after field. Thankfully the warm wind was drying out the recently seeded fields and although claggy underfoot it could have been much worse after the showers the previous day. We crossed Lindrick common and I was pleased that the organisers had put some helpful arrows to mark the route across the golf course. A relay runner came past and that helped too. The relay runners started at 8am and after about half way their faster pace meant they were coming past us occasionally, right up to the finish. CP4 at Woodsetts. I recall that last year Karen had caught me here and was drinking soup. Unlikely that many would want soup today. I did take a jam sandwich and congratulated myself on hydration that I was feeling up to eating something like that as by this time I'm normally only good for a few sweets and liquid.

Now into Langold Country Park. Another relay runner came past and a competitor catches up with 199 and myself. Although I'd like to chase I try instead to keep to my plod. This is interesting as 199 who was still with me is finding my jogging pace too slow for his liking so instead he replaced the continual jog with a quick run then a walk. He keeps up this tactic for ages. As he had recently reced the whole route there are a few spots where his knowledge proves useful. We pass through Dyscarr Wood, feeling much better than I did last year when by now I was reduced to walk and jog. It was also round here that Karen N had come past me going well, but not this year – not yet anyway.

CP5 at Firbeck with various relay runners outside waiting for their compatriots to come through, there did seem to be many people with Clowne red stops on – so presumably they had multiple teams out. That said we did see the same Clowne runner comes past us twice. Now onto Maltby. Should have been straightforward but 199 and myself were both jaded and in Nor Wood on reaching the railway we went right instead of left ending up at the main road. After realising our mistake did a bit of a detour to rejoin the route. Through the church and yet another CP with a set up outside, now enjoying the sun. The CP lady commented on that it was probably too warm for us, but at least the weather suited all the helpers. Up the steep steps to get out of Maltby and then lane and paths as the route opens out with good views all around. 199 thought that this section was 4 miles. I had forgotten from last year and assumed he was right. Unfortunately it's seven miles and so by Frisby Hall Farm I was feeling jaded and wondering where the CP was. Three competitors now caught up with us an indication of how much we were slowing as the occasional walk had now crept in, including over the seeded field from Frisby farm.

Two of the runners came past happily chatting to each other. I think I heard one of them say he was doing a dusk/dawn 50m run next weekend. My admiration went out to him as back to back 50m events is not a trivial undertaking. I did manage to stay with these two runners as they slowed to a walk on uphill bits. Once through Hooton Roberts there is a long climbing section. Last year this was walking territory for me. This year I was able to jog all the way to the gate – saying hello to the audience of cows, and down to the CP where I caught up with a chap in blue. A few chocolate bits consumed at the CP, half a water bottle top up – did I need any? – and then off.

It needed a shout at another competitor who had overshot the Old Denaby turn off down the track. I was pleased to help, map in my hand, and ready to carefully follow the last section. I knew now that my time was going to be slower than last year, but still I put in an effort and kept going at what felt like a good pace – but to an onlooker was probably not. The last section can be split into a number of mini sections – rather than miles of fields. So the River Don, Swinton Bridge, canal cul-de-sac before finally arriving at the last path up to the College. Again, last year I'd been overtaken here – some drunks on a bench shouting encouragement to a lady as she came past me. Not this year, no over-taking.

The finish. Done, complete. 10 mins slower than last year. I think the results presentations had already taken place as trophy carriers were leaving the building. I was pleased to have executed my race plan – medium pace start and save something for the last part, just a pity it hadn't resulted in a quicker time. The chap in blue was not far behind me. A little later Karen came in, then Emma and then Andy. We ended up

with a little gathering hogging the chairs at the finish, enjoying not standing up and the warmth of the afternoon sun.

The CPs in this race offer a good selection of food. We were lucky with the weather – perhaps a bit warm – but much more pleasant than cold wind and rain. I guess the CPs move indoors when the weather worsens. A good set of helpers all round the route and overall a most enjoyable event.

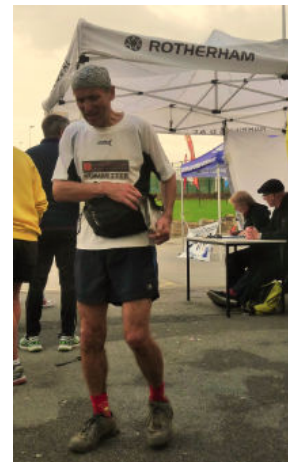
At the finish:



Karen Nash and David Thompson



Emma David finishing



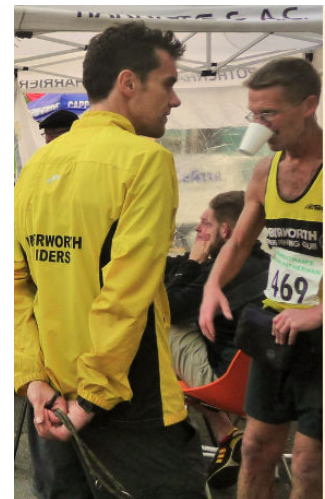
Andy Robinson finishing



199 finishing



Andy, Karen and Emma chilling



Eric Morecambe impression

Nigel Aston