

**Howarth Hobble**  
**14<sup>th</sup> March 2015**  
**32 miles**



*The start line*

Start 'line' is on the cobbles in Howarth. We assemble there after registration in the school. I thought I'd got my timing slightly late this time as I arrived at registration around 7:15 to find quite a queue and also a queue building up for the toilets, and still needing time to get back down to the car park and change. However things moved quickly and even had a chance to catch up with John Minta in the toilet queue and discuss the forthcoming Fellsman. Casually waiting for the start, I moved from near the back of the assembly chatting to Dick Scroop to about half way saying hello to Kate Whitfield (Runfurther winner 2014). Suddenly people were running and we were off.

I was pleased with my 10 minute warm up before the race and this year was able to feel good leaving Howarth rather than a struggle. Nicky Spinks came past, not too fast, carrying what seemed like a rather large rucksack considering many had just a small bumbag – I think that's her normal style. A little while later I overtook her only for her to re-overtake me once the climbing started.



*Photo Dave Woodhead*

Straight through CP1 and over the dam wall, with a calm Widdop reservoir on the right. Pace was consistent in terms of people around, I made an overtake of Bonnie Van Wilgenburg, one of the three women ahead. Good pace continued round to CP2, water top up and out on to the road. The cool breeze was now against us and I was glad of a bit of slip streaming. The private track to Bank Top was this year accessible so we avoided the meaningless detour through the fields on the right. However, the gloopy mud at the bottom of the track remained.

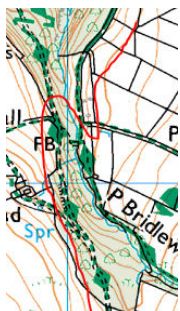


*Widdop. Photo Nick Ham*

At the intermediate refreshment point an Italian flag was flying – I wonder who for? Straight through and along the Calderdale Way. Navigation went well as I led a small group down to Todmorden. Bonnie came

past me on the steep climb up to Mankinholes and moved away quickly. Oh! At least it gave me a target to aim for. Perhaps my pace was slowing now. My feet were feeling cold after all the puddles splashed through and despite the up hills I wasn't warming up much. The cool breeze was keeping my temperature down.

A water top up at Mankinholes CP and on to Stoodley. I gobbled down some sweets and something went down the wrong way as I found myself gulping a bit. An instant state of panic which thankfully passed quickly and I could carry on. The breeze at the pike was stronger and colder and seemed to be against us whichever way we were now heading. Bonnie and others were moving much faster than me and were disappearing into the distance as it was all I could do to jog the gentle peaty downhill. I allowed myself a brief wee stop and hoped for some shelter on the descent into Todmorden.



*Don't forget to turn off*

The track goes through the woods at Edge End Moor and a turn off the main Pennine Way that drops to the right needs to be looked out for. I was amused to see that as I descended to the FB, the group containing Bonnie were coming back from the other direction having missed the turning. Steep road descent – not too bad for me this year. Steep road ascent to Heptonstall – I walked more than in the past as I realised that in this race my jogging speed uphill was even slower than my walking speed. It was good enough to keep up with Bonnie who half jogged and walked.

Bonnie missed the right turn in Heptonstall so again had to double back and follow me down to Horse Bridge. Last water top up for me and soon going again. 3.5 km along Crimsworth, again the cool breeze against us. I was pleased to be wearing double thin gloves and perhaps should have added a few other items – hat, buff – to warm up a bit more although it was my feet and lower legs – both covered – that were cold. Bonnie now moved away not to be seen again.

I was accompanied by another chap (James Godfrey?) who stayed behind and just kept pace. As we passed through the various gates along Crimsworth he got the benefit of me opening the gates for him. Last CP, no need to do the 20m detour right for water, and a walk up the steep road climb. Coming up past us here was a lady who was letting it all hang out – Mary Girlie. She was really going for it. Bent over, arms flailing left and right in Nordic ski fashion, charging up the road on a mission. We were passed by another chap, in shorts, who casually jogged past looking extremely comfortable; hard to believe he was even on the race.



*Over Sun Hill. Photo Nick Ham*

Over the top of Sun Hill – still waiting for a change in wind direction and some warmth. There wasn't any, until we turned NW at Moor Side for the last slow jogging climb of the day. Just the chap behind and myself. One more overtake occurred from a fast finisher, Ben Sheppard, as we approached the church; I didn't trust my wobbly legs to go any faster on the descent and let him go. Nearly there now. Past the church, nearly being overtaken by another chap who had appeared but a quick last burst across the road to

the school and finished. I do wonder if anyone has come a cropper overdoing it on the last flight of concrete steps down to the school?

With warm casserole in hand it was a chance to catch up with Bonnie (originally Dutch) who had made it to first lady position having overtaken Nicky near the end, Mary Girlie was 3<sup>rd</sup> lady. I see results showing John Minta had finished about 6 minutes ahead of me – pity I didn't see him somewhere on the route. Kate hadn't finished yet – surprising as she was quicker than me in all races last year.

I needed to warm up, so didn't hang around and descended to the car park to get cold gear off and something warmer on – including the car heater.

Apart from the cold I was pleased with my performance in the race and quite enjoyed it throughout. A good season opener.

Some familiar names occupied the top of the men's leader board: Chris Singleton, Tom Gomersal, Kevin Hoult, Ian Simmington, Shaun Livesey, Marcus Scotney, Jez Bragg.

Nigel Aston