

High Peak 40
17th September 2016
40 miles



A pleasant drive across the moors from Ashbourne arriving at the college for the start soon after 6:30 so plenty of time to check in, change, etc. Organiser Bill Alan recognised me and said hello – which was nice. There was a nip in the air but the forecast was good so I risked starting in short sleeves – and put my cap on at the start to keep warm. Pre-race announcements included a Wedgewood presentation to Nigel Dean who had done all previous races (29?) for which he received a warm round of applause.

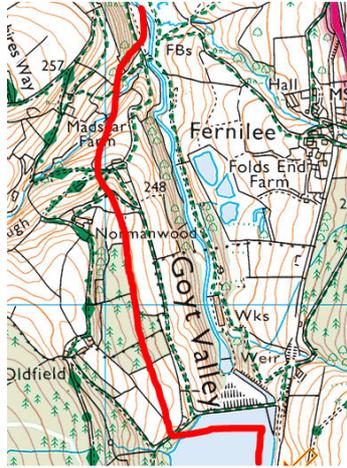


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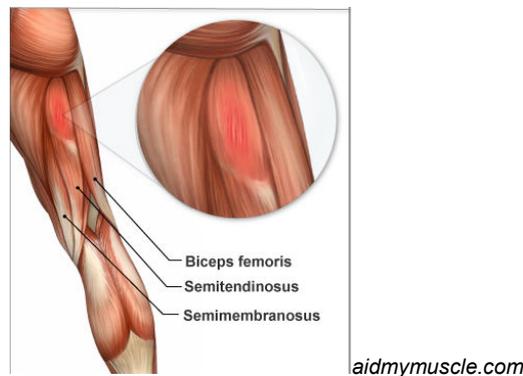
Off we jogged for 100 m before the sharp turn left and at this first decision point we had a few bodies who nearly took the wrong left turn. In no time 30 people were ahead of me as I settled into my fastest taking-it-easy opening running speed. The leaders were soon disappearing out of sight as Bishop's Lane made its incline up to Watford Moor. I did see them again as we snaked around the old railway track and was managing to keep my position and even slightly better it as we arrived at CP1 by the lake.

Down the must-run road descent my legs and shoes were working OK. The shoes, Brooks Cascadia 10, had also felt good at the Bullock Smithy downhills as they seem to have a little extra cushioning. Now Bill had mentioned that there was a diversion on the route somewhere round here. I had not noticed any maps at registration so I thought I'd better not let the runners ahead out of sight in case there was a sudden turn off. However, this is an exceptionally well-marked route with pink signs everywhere. But I did try a bit harder and found myself catching those ahead which made a change. Then I felt a niggle in my leg. A worrying niggle. One of those niggles that you just know should not be there and is not going to go away.

The niggle was at the back of the upper leg just above the knee – the lower hamstring. I slightly slowed whilst still aware of people ahead and the sudden turn off to take us around the end of Fernilee reservoir. and the West side of the Goyt valley. The diversion ended with a footbridge to take us back into the gentle fields, Shallcross Wood and CP2.



Between CP1 and CP2 I had exchanged positions a few times with Ben Brindley of Tideswell runners. He had a habit of clearing his throat frequently so I knew when it was him behind. I was slightly quicker on the uphill and he was better elsewhere. This exchanging continued through to the climb up to Eccles Pike where I made a point of keeping my running going even though the hamstring was now sore and occasionally twinging with pain. The uphill meant bent legs which produced less stress on those muscles.



As CP3 was getting close I was thinking that maybe I'd taken a wrong turn as there was no one overtaking me on the quick downhill where I had to chop my stride to not overstretch. I wondered if Ben was going to come past again. A cup of water and a Jaffa cake at the CP then continue. It wasn't long before I think it was Mark who came past and then, yes, Ben. Local knowledge of the route is not really needed for navigation because of the markings; it is unlikely today that anyone would go wrong (and a chance to overtake) but where the route knowledge helped was being prepared in advance for terrain changes and the direction of inclines. I did know that we were in for a long climb up to CP4 and thought I'd probably go past Ben again. But Ben had other ideas and the road suited him. He made good ground and was ahead at CP4 and after that gone forever (I did see him after the finish!).

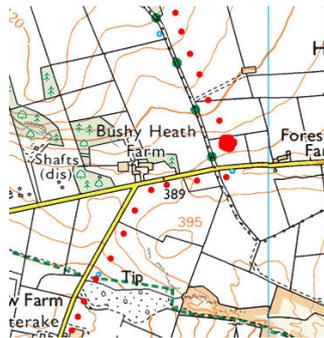


CP4 on a previous event (photo: Nick Ham)

More water and a Jaffa. The CP refills were just right today with a cup of water lasting well and no need to drink much from the carried bottle of tableted water. I took the opportunity to tighten show laces and stretch the muscles at the CP before setting off again. Not for the first time I wondered when I should retire. This is a bit silly keeping going like this with hamstring bad and likely to get worse. I wondered what would happen. Will I suddenly come to a complete halt and be reduced to limp (miles) to the next CP to retire? Again the thought was pushed to the back of my minds as I picked a good line along the rough track which is nearly all runnable over to CP5 at the start of Rushup Edge.

Still OK to continue – I'll try and get half way, which is Castleton; the gentle uphill suited me. I had to put up with the extending of legs down into the dip over the road to Mam Tor – not too bad. A chance to get some of my own food on board going up to the summit. After this I surprisingly caught up with two chaps running together near the start of the Hollins Cross descent, only because they were taking it carefully: "I have to at my age", one of them said. Two weeks ago this had been a continuous stream in the wet Bullock Smithy race. This time the dry Hollowford road section and my need to conserve muscles meant others quickly came passed. I would rather the next CP was a bit nearer Castleton – even the bottom of Cave Dale as that would provide a better excuse to stop, refresh, and then continue at walking pace. Instead, it is running, stop, then running straight away as the road is flat with ¼ mile into the village. The few people who'd come passed me a few minutes earlier I now managed to overtake again as Cave Dale climb kicked in. Walk, walk, then jog, then walk through the narrow bit of gorge and then try and get into a jog. Plenty of other walkers around, school groups perhaps. Eventually out on to the flat fields. Someone fast came past me – wow, where did he come from? I watched as he caught up with another HP40 runner in the distance and wondered why at that speed he had not come by ages ago. My answer appeared a few minutes later when the HP40 entrant continued on the HP40 route and the fast chap turned off and went elsewhere – so not an HP40 entrant.

Some easy track, a bit of road, a bit of rougher track and I'm pinged out at the CP at Bushy Heath Farm. It struck me that the table with the refreshments was on the high side here for some reason. I took the usual fair and I think I remember the marshal lady saying after the first few runners have gone through there is no change to sit down and rest as people pop up at regular intervals. Now the hamstring was not getting any worse. I had gone through half way and decided that my challenge was now to finish. A minor but not negligible thought was that this race and the Round Rotherham were my last two counters for RunFurther so I needed to finish to get in my four races. Who knows whether I'd be in any state for a RR50 after this race though.

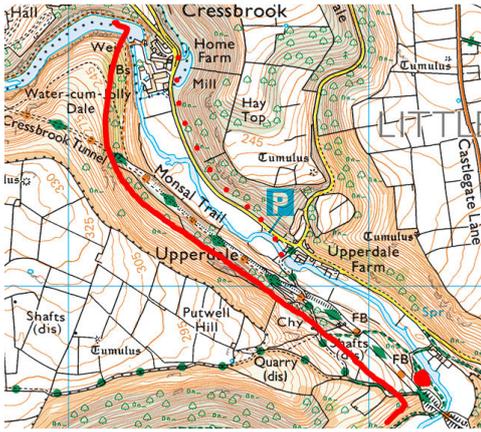


Lovely, road and more road into and through Tideswell. Strangely I did not mind. I was a bit warm though and glad of a cap to put on when the sun was out. I was also encouraged by the chap ahead who was faster than me but after a while broke into a walk, then ran, then walked and I was actually catching him. Then he picked up and opened the gap. The two runners who I'd passed at Hollins Cross descent now came by – much quicker than me. How does that happen? I'm used to it now, my mind thinks the body is moving quicker than it really is and the reality is shown by the running speed of those around. A brief, so brief, stop at the CP at the beginning of Miller's Dale and then back into the rhythm again.

About 4 people overtaken at the CP. Temporary change of position of course. This is a flat part of the route which I just have to get on with. I'm used to it. Previously I was unsure of the route along here but it is actually straightforward with few decision points. One of these comes at the end of Water-cum-Jolly. But before that we had some mud to cope with. I just ran through it. Meanwhile casual walkers were taking a tortuous deviation up the bank and into the woods. The excellent signs now in place guided us right then right. The running stops. The walking, a relief, is allowed up to the Monsal Trail and again I dip into my supplies and drink some tableted water – the warmth is probably causing some loss of salts.

So previously runners have either missed the signs or the signs have been missing and a few have continued along the road probably to Upperdale Farm where they have then turned off and climbed up to the trail route. I focussed only on my own motion. No one ahead at all – in sight – bound to be some behind chasing me down. Plenty of bikes around along here and some of these needed to be dodged. The CP here is well placed nowadays as it marks the turn off from the trail – rather than sooner and the annoying run, stop, run. At the CP I start to take the top off my bottle for a top up and the marshal kindly says he'll do it why I get a drink from a cup. This turns out to be a good move as the top is jammed on for some reason

and he has a real battle trying to undo the thread. He eventually does and I come away with a full bottle and well-watered and another Jaffa.



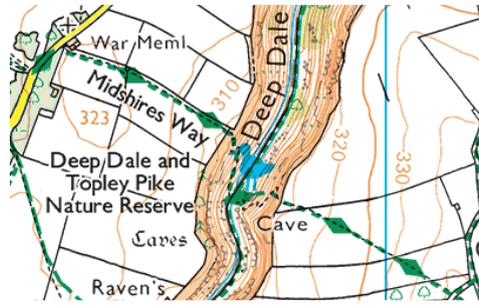
Descend down the bank into Monsal Dale. It is so pleasant along Monsal Dale and seeing people taking it easy in the sun, perhaps sitting on the river bank, or gently strolling has the effect of relaxing me a bit – why should I be running like this when others are taking it easy? Oh, I'm in a race that's why. But your leg hurts – you could stop here. No, there are challenges to be had, let's do it.

Over the A6 (some walking allowed up to the A6 and after it) and into Deep dale. As the steepness eases the jogging must start again. I do and feel quite pleased to be gently jogging uphill. And then not pleased when two chaps saunter by comfortable. Plod on. Then they walk and I begin to catch. They carry on walking all the way to the CP and I do gain on them so not too discouraged. The CP lady asks if I have done it before and I answer yes. I have been asked the same question before at this point. I think the marshals enjoy being able to tell the runners that they have a mere 4 miles of road ahead. The first time someone said it I thought they were exaggerating a bit. They weren't of course. The marshals do get excited though as the first lady approaches their CP. I guess I'll see her soon too. This time the pile of Jaffa cakes do not look appetising enough as they have begun to melt in the sun so I skip them.



It happens, the first lady, Helen Morley, soon comes past me nimbly, toe-first running rather than my heel plod. I don't recognise her though. As I'd missed the race last year I couldn't quite remember what were the significant markers along the road to indicate half way and nearly there. It wasn't until along Flagg Lane that I came to the sign post saying 'Chelmerston 1¾' I realised I was only just over half way and had to dig in quite a bit deeper to keep my slightly faster than walking pace going all the way to the village. Once the village is reached I am confident I will make it to the finish and pleased with the effort put in so far. I do get a bit of a time shock though when I see how much slower than previous year's my time is. It does not spur me into going quicker, just a slight downer.

As Deep Dale ditch approaches there are others behind and in front. From the ditch approach I can see several runners ahead, including the leading lady nearing the final CP. My descent goes OK and there is still a bit of fight in me to make the ascent. Once up I glance back to see maybe 6 runners behind, either approaching the descent to the ditch or in the ditch. Oh, that's more places to lose. No matter, I'll keep going. I even have some jog in me over the field and through the small gate to the stile and then the CP. The stile is a struggle. I ask the CP marshals if they can lower it for next year. "We'll make enquiries".



Now I do have a smile on my face as it is the shortest distance between any of the CPs to the finish. I jog everything apart from the last bit of Cowdale. On the approach to the viaduct finally one of the runners who I'd seen descending Deep dale ditch caught me and overtook – David Follett. I wondered if I had anything left in me to go a bit quicker. That was soon answered – no! So he went ahead, up Fern Lane before me. I didn't mind. I was going to finish now and this was going to be my position. Yes, the time keeper clocked me in, challenge completed.

Nick Ham took my photo. We had a chat about hamstrings and he was concerned for the possible damage that I had probably done. Oh. Cup of tea and a pork pie we sat on the grass near the finish and chatted about Bullock Smithy 'short cuts'. Nick is some aficionado of the best lines and we went through some that I had done a few weeks earlier. It took my mind off stiffening legs. The second lady, Debbie Cooper, finishes and was really excited by her position. The male winner, Robin Sanderson, had his photo taken. Runners finishing were applauded by anyone standing around and most broke into a smile when that happened.

I drove home.

I got out the car and I could still walk. I think that during any long race everything swells up and this obscures some of the minor muscle injuries and probably dampened the effect of the hamstring problem. Two days later I was badly limping around, embarrassingly so at work when moving around the office. I could however ride a bike gently.

A few more days later and the limp is diminishing. I know from previous hamstring injuries I have 3+ weeks of recovery before running again. The RR50 is in 4 weeks. There's another challenge.

Thanks to Bill Alan and all the other volunteers at marshal points, start and finish.

Nigel Aston