

The Six Trigs by Jeff Walker

Studying the route of The Six Trigs on a map after the event, the task looks mammoth. Had I looked prior to running it, I'm not sure I would have turned up. Rather than equipping myself with the hard facts in advance, I'd chosen to live in relative ignorance, trusting to the "Oh you'll be alright." of those wishing to swell numbers, and ignoring the talk of, "Neck deep bogs" and "Pleurisy" from the softies.

So at 8.00am, outside Lane Ends, a belly full of porridge and a backpack full of cake and skittles, I apprehensively wait to see which loonies will turn out, most of them do.

The weather doesn't look promising, low cloud is clinging to the moor just above the pub, but my first surprise is that we head off down the hill to Hebden Bridge. Instead of up it to High Brown Knoll, which I had supposed would be first trig on the tick list. We are actually heading for Bride Stones and as we start the climb up the valley I tuck in behind Mandy Goth and her experience of Mountain Marathons and curse Rhys Watkins as he strides out in front at 3h 30m pace, the confidence of road marathons in his legs. Pretty soon Bride Stones loom out of the mist and Richard Leonard instigates a race for the first trig, I half-heartedly join in, but really want to conserve every drop of energy for the unknown ahead.

The going gets boggier and foggier as we climb higher onto the moor in search of Hoof Stones Height trig. A point where on a recent pack run we could see as far as Blackpool Tower, now we could barely see each other. At the trig point, it's cold and blowing a gale, wind jackets are donned and my legs put away, before we press on undeterred, heading out across Black Hameldon. It's grim and extremely wet underfoot and I wonder at the wisdom of allowing Neil Hodgkinson to set the pace, who grinning tells me, "This is real fell running now." But I know he is rushing to meet Helen at Widdop, where she has a car waiting to whisk him away to his Dads 60th birthday and a 3-course lunch.

Leaving Neil and Widdop after a mere 3hrs running, my jolly companions inform me how this is the point of no return, and how since I've previously not ran for much over two and a half hours, this is all new territory for me. I watch the goat Blakeley bound off up Boulsworth Hill, as Richard O'Sullivan tells me how he dropped out at Widdop last year, believing he wasn't fit enough to go all the way and I start to worry.

Boulsworth hill is large and featureless, so having bagged the 3rd trig at its summit, we take advantage of the new right to roam legislation and have a good look around it in the thick clag. The Six Trig connoisseurs ruminate on the unfamiliarity of the landscape as we wade Bronte like through knee deep heather, before miraculously another of John Crummetts faultless compass bearings brings us within yards of our target, the trig point above Top Withins. Strangely this one has a mini mars bar on top, which we take as a sign of Sue Roberts presence and now absence, and assume her wish for us not to wait for her as planned.

I'm now on familiar ground as this is the route of the Withins Skyline Race and I sense the end, if not near, is now almost worth daring to consider. So imagine my surprise when Cock Hill radar station appears in front of me, the joy that I'm still so far from home almost brings a tear to my eye. We run on towards High Brown Knoll and Andrew Bibby, the trig creator, asks me if I'd write a Six Trigs report for the Torrier, "A page, 800 words, that sort of thing." A page! On this! I'm thinking that, 'We trot bogs, wade heather and fall over in thick clag, for twenty odd miles, before beating Andrew with sticks. The End.' Probably won't do.

As we push on the cloud finally starts to lift, and the welcome sight of our valley comes into view. The 5th trig at High Brown Knoll brings talk of the final trig and ultimately the pub, being within about 45 minutes running. Spirits soar as we up the pace to the final trig and my definitive memory of the day, chasing Phil Hodgson, at full tilt up Wadsworth moor, his favourite climb of the Wadsworth Trog route. I am amazed, that after 6 hours running, my legs have so much energy left. That after 12 months with the club I'm now capable of this, fantastic.

Dropping down to the pub in 6hrs 10min the weather gives up the classic view of Heptonstall and the distant pike. I've had a cracking day and next year I'll be part of the, "Oh! You'll be alright crowd." Hoping for good weather or maybe snow.

Race The Train

21st August 2004-08-30

I was struggling with the concept of 'Race The Train'. How do you race a train ?

A bit like a clever label on a bottle of wine – it catches the eye but you are not too sure what you're getting. I did know, though, that it was going to be different. It might even make a good article.

The course is rural, i.e. fields, with only the beginning and end sections being on road. Generally one big loop of 14.7 miles and not hilly in Toddy terms.

It starts in Tywyn (on the coast of west Wales) with the hoot of the steam train. The start is a bit of a dog leg as you weave in and out of the town roads. Into the open countryside and I was surprised that there was no sign of the train. We crossed the track and ran along side it. Surely the train must be in front but no as I could see for miles. There was not even any smoke.

A few miles later and still no sign. This wasn't much of Race The Train – more like 'Imagine The Train'. And then a little toot, from behind. I heard it again. This time more distinctive, but worryingly it was getting closer. Not fast - just creeping up. Was it a mile behind or was it a few hundred feet ?

Don't look behind, I told myself, just keep running. I was nowhere near the turning point when I heard the unmistakable cries and shouts from the train. The fan club was approaching. It chugged along side and quickly rushed ahead. Nobody could beat this train.

But no, runners were turning just ahead of me. I'm halfway and train has just overtaken me. It has to go further to turn around. I might just have a chance. It spurred me on.

Just then the route goes up hill and follows along the hillside. Best described as a Haggis trail where one leg needs to be shorter than the other . It was becoming like a school cross-country run where everyone is in one line. The guy in front slows down like a pile up on the motorway. Overtaking wasn't really an option – not without potentially making a tit of yourself.

Time was ticking by. I was getting frustrated as I was being forced to slow down, but it gave me time to catch my breath. I started taking in the beautiful scenery. The rolling hills sloping towards the sea, the deep blue sky. Slip.....Christ another bl..dy cowpat. Time to concentrate on the job in hand.

A short bit of track followed by a good path. Forget pacing myself – just get past as many people as possible, I thought. It ended as a sprint as everyone else had the same idea. Another slippery bit causing people to spread out. Back to my correct speed.

Just as things were getting good, the toots are heard again. I'm roughly at the 9.5 mile mark when it passes by. Whilst trying to wave I stumble in the thick smoke. Still the crowd wailed more as I correct my fall.

That's it, I've been beaten by the train. I eventually finished in 2 hours 7 minutes which is a good 10-15 minutes slower than expected, but clearly this wasn't so much of a race than a fun run. Interestingly about 100 of the 800 (or so) runners do actually beat the train. I would do it again. Maybe next time I'll have someone ready to pull the stop chain.

The race was extremely well presented, with loads of water stations and marshals – all that you would expect for a race that's being going for 21 years.