

The Full Yorkshireman-Not really a fell race, more of an excuse to buy a whippet

So it's called the 'Full Yorkshireman', one of the more evocative names for races. Let's think about that...

Some of us, people brought up in the 1970's in the Yorkshire and Granada TV regions, have a faint memory of a telly programme called 'Indoor League'. It was hosted by the late, great Fred Trueman, who was not only the best fast bowler in English cricket history but also a man surely born to present obscure northern pub games on regional television.

I can still see old Freddie now, dressed in an ill fitting v necked jumper pulled taught over his bulging beer belly, smoking a pipe and supping a pint of mild as black as Grimethorpe pit. From the comfort of a saggy armchair he introduced unlikely so-called sports from equally unlikely venues around Yorkshire and Lancashire, all in an accent as thick as molasses.

"Na'then, 'ere's All Yorkshire Arm Wrestling Championships from t' Arthur Scargill Civic 'all i'Barnsley" he'd say, the air thick with apostrophise. Us small boys sat bewitched. This surely, in the name of all that's holy, was a proper Yorkshireman, a full Yorkshireman if you like. I loved it. One day that would be me. But perhaps without the sweater.

The years past and I was never convinced that I really fit the bill with my aspirations of Yorkshireman status. Firstly, Todmorden was dangerously Lancastrian, both in outlook and geography, and to make matters worse, I had at least one grandparent who hailed from Cornwall. I kept all this quiet and tried to make amends by learning how to castrate a ram by watching Joe Sugden on Emmerdale. I even tried wearing a flat cap for a while in my teens, but this phase unfortunately coincided with my mohican period. More often than not the cap would just sit on top of one of my spikes and kind of dangle over the top of my head, as if I was some sort of alternative hat stand. But the dream was still there.

Then I heard about this race during a post pack run beer sampling session. The Full Yorkshireman was 26.2 miles around the tracks, moors and bridleways of Oxenhope, Haworth, and Cullingworth. There was a Half Yorkshireman, but that wouldn't do. Fred would never have uttered a phrase like 'Half Yorkshireman', he would have rather gauged his eyes out with his pipe stem whilst commentating on bar billiards from Heckmondwike.

It seemed destiny had drawn me to this event, destiny and the FRA handbook working in unison are a powerful, almost irresistible force. For some years my stalling fell running career put obstacles in my way, injury or other races on the same date stopped me from entering but eventually, this year, it all came together. I sent off my entry form, upped my mileage a bit, and started once again to flatten my vowels to a breathtaking extent.

Soon the waiting was over and race day dawned but for some reason it failed to get light in Hebden Bridge. I didn't worry as this often happens. Low, wispy, grey clouds hung just above the treetops. The whole house was dark and shadowy. Claire and Alex were asleep as I crept down the hall to brush my teeth, pausing only to stand in a medium to large pile of cat sick that had been left there. In minutes I was out of the bathroom, toes cleaned and away.

On the way there I stopped to pick up the Richard and Judy of local fell running, Jeff Walker and Rachel Skinner. Together we sped over the tops to a claggy Penistone Hill and were instructed to park in a big puddle which I duly stepped in. I've never really believed in omens but wet socks before 9am doesn't bode well.

After registering we stood around with large groups of people with beards and varicose veins stood around and talking about compass bearings, pub fights, and football (this was only the women). Jeff and Rachel began to stretch and warm up and generally look like they were up to the task. I ate a mars bar and got toothache.

I wandered off and found a small wall to sit on away from the masses, very much like the new boy at the school gates who waiting for the big lads to nick his dinner money and flush his head down the bog.

And then... before you could say 'Is that sheep shit in your beard?' We were off.

The first bit of the route takes you up onto the high Bronte moors and follows a reservoir conduit which smelled of dead sheep, or live fell runners, in my experience it's difficult to tell one pong from the other. The pack was densely packed at this point I expect nobody anxious to shoot his or her bolt at that point. The path we were following was surprisingly well defined. This was strange as the only other people I know who visit these moors on a regular basis are that breed of strange overly hormonal women that have allowed themselves to be drawn into Charlotte Bronte's world to the point where they believe that if they look hard enough they may find the actual Heathcliff hiding behind a bilberry bush.

I plodded through this world hidden in the peleton, worrying all the while about my recurrent Achilles tendonitis. A gusty wind whipped over the bracken and sent larks spiralling into the air like falling leaves in the park woods in November.

After a few uneventful miles I started to relax. I plodded across the featureless moors, in the late summer sun, which was getting warmer by the minute. I could see runners stretched out in front of me, mostly single file, like ants heading home at the end of a hard day being filmed by David Attenborough. Nothing to report except airy emptiness and the rhythm of my feet hitting wet grass and heather. After some time the Half Yorkshiremen peeled off and headed home whilst we crossed Rocking Stone Flat. The wet cotton grass became progressively wetter until it could be classified by EU statute as bog.

I started to enjoy myself less as I was slowed down by the quagmire, but was soon cheered up in a schardenfrueder kind of way by the sight of a woman who was stalled in front of me. Perhaps not thinking that the race was difficult enough, she had obviously decided to handicap herself by wearing shoes that reverted to kit form as soon as they got wet. Her sole flapped about like a reckless halibut stranded at low tide. She stopped to walk. I knew that there was a manned checkpoint just over the moor so was excused having to stop and help. I ran past with a cheery, if hollow sounding 'well done'. I think she was crying. She also seemed to have a wind problem and let one go as I passed, the grass around her shivered. I know Tammy Wynette once told us 'Sometimes it's hard to be a woman...' Now I understood what she may have meant, but I don't think even Tammy was thinking about wading across a smelly bog, miles from home, with only one functioning shoe, whilst farting like an old dray horse.

Soon we were edging around Halifax Golf Course and then tipping our metaphorical hats to Ogden Reservoir before the route seemed to have an abrupt change of heart and left the moors for more gentle farmland.

The next few miles disappeared in a succession of stiles, gates, and photogenic sheep. Soon we were skirting around Hessenden Reservoir when I realised that the whole route could be looked at as short stretches to link any number of reservoirs in a almost completely illogical way. Water, water everywhere...I had seen about five reservoirs so far. Obviously either the recent water shortage had spurred Yorkshire water into a blitzkrieg building programme to hold the dry South East to ransom in years to come, or we could blame the Victorians again. The truth is that there was a time in these parts when sturdy Methodists with whiskers the size of yard brushes and names like Obadiah and Shadrach had persuaded all the water hereabouts to sit in huge corporation stone basins rather than fizz down cloughs or tinkle down woody glens.

As the race wore on the competitors started to spread out and the 'following someone who looks like they know where they're going' ploy was less viable. I began to suffer and stopped to check my map whilst emerging on a road in Cullingworth. I realised that I had about a third of the way to go. This wasn't good news. Call it setting off too fast, not training enough, or maybe underestimating the difficulty of the race, but I was struggling a bit. Something was happening to my lower legs that I didn't like. My old chum Achilles Tendonitis was playing silly buggers with my left ankle, this I was used to and found it almost comforting to have a bit of a twinge down there every now and again, but it was getting more now than again. The other recent development was that my right foot seemed to have come a cropper on the stony tracks and hurt like the devil in the middle of my foot. It felt like I'd been subject to the kind of interrogation that South American police forces used to specialise in using a bamboo cane. Can you imagine my delight at having two sore ankles/feet? I didn't even have the option to hop. On top of this the sun was now turning my back the colour of cooked lobster, and of course I had no sunblock. Then I got cramp and spent ten minutes sitting on the floor whilst children waved to me from passing cars. I was swearing like a drunken navy, unable to leave the side of the B6429. I was losing places big style. I was not having a good day.

Without any other real option I struggled on, gradually slowing down, to the point of embarking on conversations with locals a passed on route through the many farm yards, some were friendly and encouraging, some not. To be honest, towards the end, some were dogs and some were horses, some may have even been small shrubs on the roadside. It gave me an excuse to stop.

The last climb, from the main road up to Penistone Hill was brightened by being joined by a fellow competitor who jogged along with me through fields, where long grass seemed to loll about from side to side without the energy to hold itself up. What had it got to be bloody tired about? My new friend talked in graphic terms about losing a toenail, somewhere on Harden Moor after about 20 miles. He claimed that it was still loose in his shoe and he planned to keep it as a memento. It transpired that he, a native of Eastern Europe, was visiting relations in Yorkshire and had heard about the race. He loved it and was threatening to come back next year. The truth is, it's that kind of event.

So of course it ended. Claire and Alex had made it over and were there to cheer me over the line. I made it round in four hours and forty odd minutes, for those that are interested I was 45th from a field of about 110. And yes, despite everything it's a cracking race which I would recommend to anyone.

And of course, after all these years I can add a suffix to my name;

Colin John Tregonning Duffield-Full Yorkshireman.