

A Full Yorkshireman

by Joolz

Just in case I still had any minor doubts at all that I have found my true spiritual home, I am now officially classified as a Full Yorkshireman! OK, I may not quite have taken to wearing a flat cap, and punctuating my speech with lots of apostrophes, but bay 'eck lad, I've completed one of the toughest races in the local calendar. The Full Yorkshireman - 26.2 miles of footpaths, bridleways, hills and mud in and around Howarth.

When I'd entered the race at the end of 2008, I'd imagined that I'd be a super-sleek offroad running machine by the time of the race. I'd be living in the area, surrounded by fantastic countryside that I'd be out running, walking and cycling through every single day, and I'd know the route like the back of my hand. The reality was somewhat different. I'd been absorbed by the task of renovating our new house, and running had taken a bit of a back seat. As for knowing the route like the back of my hand - I didn't even plot it on a map until about 3 weeks beforehand!



I hadn't done any long runs since a couple of LDWA events in the spring, and in a panic I put in for the Belper 30k in mid August. I had a terrible run. The lack of training showed far too clearly; I was tired by 9 miles, on my last legs by 15, and had to drag myself through the last 4 or 5 miles, and I felt completely ill at the finish. There was no way I could have ran another 8 miles. I started to dread the main event fervently.

Luckily, a couple of friends at my club offered to take me on reccies, and these days out really helped me to focus on the race, and rediscover the joy of our fantastic environment. Also, it was more runnable than I'd previously thought, and I thought the terrain suited me. The day out with Chris looking at the 2nd half was a joy, and the 12 miles went by in a breeze. The day out with Sue looking at the 1st half was also a joy, until about 13 miles, when I started to get the oh so familiar prickles, nausea and dizziness that I usually only get in very hot weather. Oh dear, confidence knocked again.

After it seeming to rain every single day in August, the week leading up to race was a heatwave, with the Saturday being particularly hot. I checked the weather forecast every five minutes, praying that we would get the promised cloud cover, and 16 degree temperatures.

Race day dawned. I was up early and was well organised. It was cool. We picked Val up in Old Town, and drove to the race start. There were people there that we both knew; it was a pleasant little social interlude, and I was feeling quite relaxed (considering!). We all trooped over to the Fleece pub for the start, feeling that curious mix of excitement, anticipation and terror.

Of all the advice I'd received, the piece I took to heart was Colin's wise words that the key to this race was to arrive at Denholme Velvets feeling ok. I planned a very steady start, and

without doubt was holding Val back in these early stages. I even walked in the first mile up the hill through the car parks. But I wasn't the only one.

Sue (and Sam Dog) were waiting at Penistone Hill, and ran along with us for an hour or so, smiling and waving at everyone, seeming to know everyone there. Things were going fine, the miles were rolling by, there were some lovely people in our little group, the conditions were perfect, dry and cool, and I was really enjoying myself.

We arrived at Denholme Velvets, and I was pleased to note that I did indeed feel ok. We went past quite a few other folks here, who clearly weren't feeling ok, and were taking a lengthy break. Rich was here too, with a cheery smile and words of enthusiasm, and making sure I didn't indulge in my usual habit of thinking the checkpoints are all about chatting and being social, by encouraging us to hurry through.

It wasn't far after this that I had my greatest running comedy moment ever, trying to negotiate a particularly boggy stretch with a deep ditch running alongside. I somehow found myself slipping sideways into the mud, which sent my upper body pitching headfirst into the ditch. I'd managed to grab hold of handfuls of reeds which stopped me in my tracks, and now found myself in the curious position of being completely upside down, with my head a few inches from the boggy water in the bottom, and my feet sticking out above the reeds. Two lovely girls from Rossendale leapt to my rescue, grabbing a leg each with dramatic shouts of, "Don't worry, we won't let go, you won't fall". I was amazed to find myself in this surprising situation, but really I just wanted to get on with the race. "Just let go of my legs," I hollered, "I need to get them down, so that I can climb out". I felt a bit guilty for being ungrateful, so caught them up at the next stile to say thanks. It kept me going for the rest of the day though. Every time I thought about it, I burst out laughing.

Chris's fantastic guidance in the reccy came into it's own on Harden Moor. We took the best route perfectly, almost catching up with the group in front of us, who'd been stumbling around in the heather for a little while. Shortly afterwards I realised one of them was Val's friend from Peel. He was really struggling, and we found him a little while later taking a lie down in the weeds. We fussed around him for a little while, but he urged us to get on with it, and we were glad to see later that he did eventually make it to the finish.

Howarth was now in sight, it's little church visible in the distance. 4 miles to go, then 3, not long to go now. And then that steep steep downhill after the final checkpoint, really destroying our quads, and making our knees scream for mercy. The mile along the train track, and I was desperate to get out onto the road, for I knew we were then nearly done. Just the short run through the town. Except, of course, that the finish is all uphill up a steep cobbled street. A short walk through the town then. Such a shame to walk the last half mile of a marathon, but we still got plenty of cheers from the onlookers. We rounded the corner, still uphill. "We'll just walk til we see the finish", I said. But then we saw Rich. "No, we'd better run," I said, "otherwise we'll never hear the end of it".

5.33. Absolutely delighted. Hurting all over, but grinning from ear to ear.