

Tan Hill Inn to the Cat and Fiddle 200+km, 5,800m Elevation

Rob Gittins, 19-21 Sept 2020



The Rucksack Club's Golden Jubilee in 1952 was marked by a new long-distance walk linking the two highest pubs in England; the Tan Hill in the Yorkshire Dales and Cat and Fiddle in Cheshire, covering the 120 miles over the highest ground between them. Several Harriers have been involved over the years, Julie Gardner supported several attempts and Geoff Pettengell completed a winter crossing in December 2011.

I had been looking at the route options for a couple of months and raising money for Macc Run Fest provided a worthwhile excuse to have some 'fun'.

Tom Whittington provided transport and we arrived at the windswept oasis of Tan Hill on Friday night, pitched an unfamiliar tent in a gale and retired to the bar for three pints of Old Peculier (perfect pre-adventure hydration).

A dawn start across the moor towards Keld and Thwaite and then the first climb up Great Shunner Fell in perfect conditions. Tom W kept me company for the first 10 miles before returning to collect his car at Tan Hill. A long gentle descent to Hadraw and Hawes then away from the Pennine Way to Wether Fell and Cragdale Moor still in perfect conditions.

A steady descent towards Cray where Tom had the kettle on for a morale boosting brew, then up towards Buckden Pike where I tucked in behind a couple of local fell runners for a lift to the top. I overheard a conversation referring to a 'true Fellsman' from Macc Harriers so introduced myself and asked if they were talking about Julian Brown. They were and the next hour passed quickly as they took me along the somewhat boggy Fellsman line to Great Whernside.

Solo again and a direct descent along the fence over peat bogs to Conistone Moor and then the picturesque karst, walls and field systems above Grassington, where I had welcome support from Angela, the boys, Tom and Zow. Ice cream, coffee and a supply of warm clothes for the night then off up to Cracoe Fell and Watt Crag followed by a beautiful run down the escarpment edge to Embsay accompanied by the setting sun.

Skipton, Lothersdale then back on the Pennine Way to Cowling and up on to Ickornshaw Moor where I missed the trod to Wolf Stones and had to back track a few hundred meters. A rough fence line down towards Watersheddles Reservoir to pick up the Pendle Way to the base of Boulsworth Hill.

Two o'clock, 100km (halfway there) and a little tired. It was a beautiful, clear night. I wrapped up and hunkered down between a wall and a rock out of the wind and set my alarm for 5am. I gazed at the stars, watched a shadowy figure walk along the track (? first hallucination) turned over and went to sleep.

Woken by the alarm I pressed the snooze button for another 10 mins then set off up Boulsworth Hill to Lad Law to be greeted by the dawn and a proper trod down to Widdop Reservoir. The route briefly picked up the Haworth Hobble before diverting across the moors to Black Hameldon and Hoof Stones and then a gentle descent along the Hobble into Todmorden.

Ange was waiting in Todmorden outside the Golden Lion with camping chair, tea and a perfect bacon sandwich. After blister surgery I dumped my night kit and limped steeply out of town as my feet adjusted to a change of shoes.

The route re-joined the Pennine Way along the side of Warland Reservoir, with easier running past the White House, over Blackstone Edge and down to the M62. The ice cream van was in the lay-by! A large '99' and a couple cans fuelled me over Standedge, the relatively pathless trudge up the back of Black Hill and the long jog down to Crowden.

The footpath round the top of Torside Reservoir was closed so I forded the river and climbed a bank just in time to rendezvous with Ange. Tea, food and night kit then off on the last 40km on paths I knew (!) to the finish. It was dark before I summited Bleaklow and I had started hallucinating. Stone blocks were morphing into moulded plastic camping pods and other surreal objects. Amusing at first but navigationally challenging. As I got to the top the fog came down. I stopped to eat and layer up, looked at the directional arrow on the PW marker stone and headed down. It was 15 mins before I realised that I was on my way back to Crowden and 30 mins back to the top and on the correct line.

I opted for a change of route, straight over the flagstones on Featherbed Moss to Mill Hill then round the edge to Kinder Low. The night views were amazing when it was clear but nav was tricky when the fog rolled in. Kinder Low wasn't visible until I was within touching distance but it was a welcome sight, now just down to Jacob's Ladder and across to Brown Knoll and Chapel Gate.

20km to go. A good run down to Dove Holes and then an untried route (which I wouldn't try again) up to Black Edge Trig on Combs. My headtorch failed as I started to cross Combs Moss but iPhone and battery pack lit the way and dawn broke on the way down to The White Hall Centre.

I stood still and literally fell asleep on my feet, headed down across the fields as the mist lifted off the reservoirs and then the last climb on to the ridge, where I met Tom, for the run in to the Cat (I ran but he walked at the same pace).

I arrived at 7:20, 49 hours after leaving the Tan Hill Inn and Ange presented me with a breakfast beer - it was a pub crawl. It took a bit longer than planned but extra time equalled extra adventure.

Thanks to Ange, the boys, Tom and Zow for support along the way, Andy Llewellyn for a large bundle of Rucksack Club maps and Julie Gardner and Geoff Pettengel for advice on the route.

Thank you to everyone who has sponsored me and helped Macclesfield Harriers raise much needed funds for Rossendale, Cre8 and Just Drop In.