

# The Trig Challenge (60 miles/10,380ft – Peak District)

Catharine Crossley, 2020

“What did you do at the weekend?” That’s a familiar discussion heard in most workplaces on a Monday morning. My response the Monday after my Trig Challenge – “I ran 60 miles in torrential rain, whilst struggling to remain upright. It was a day I will never forget.”

To many people running any sort of distance in torrential weather conditions may seem like complete self-torture or just plain mad. I think it’s a bit of both . When people refer to ultra-runners as mad, I think of the Alice and Wonderland quote; "The Mad Hatter: Have I gone mad? Alice: I'm afraid so. You're entirely bonkers. But I'll tell you a secret. All the best people are."



## Background

2020 was the year of race cancellations. Without having something to train for, I lacked the motivation to lace up my trainers.

Last summer, I took part in the GB Ultras JOGLE challenge. I covered a lot of miles and I didn't want all that time and effort to go to waste. Restrictions lifted and I entered Pen Llyn Winter Ultra in November. You can guess what happened next, that race was also cancelled. With nothing on the horizon my motivation plummeted. Then I stumbled upon Beyond Marathon, Trig Challenge;

1. Visit as many triangulation points as you can in 24 hours.
2. Start and finish at the same trig point.
3. A round must be fully completed (back to the starting trig).
4. No minimum distance, but you’re expected to complete more than a marathon.

## Trig Point

Wikipedia - A triangulation station, also known as a trigonometrical point, and sometimes informally as a trig, is a fixed surveying station, used in geodetic surveying and other surveying projects in its vicinity.

In real life terms, a trig is one of the white pillars found (mostly, but not always) on the tops of hills.

When I was telling people about the trig challenge, I was met with a lot of blank faces and asked “What is a trig”? Unless you spend your days running up and down hills, they are probably not

something many people encounter. I must admit that before I found a love for fell/mountain running a few years ago, they are not something I was familiar with either.

### **The Route**

Once I decided to take part in the challenge the next thing I needed to do was to decide on the route. We were restricted with travel prior to the challenge; consequently I decided to concentrate on the trigs close to my home, so I could recce the route. I live in Macclesfield, just on the outskirts of the Peak District. I knew of several nearby trigs but with the help of the TrigpointingUK website I was able to locate all the trigs in my area.

The route planning commenced. I decided to visit 13 trigs on my challenge. My start and finish trig – Blakelow, was on private land. I visited the farm where the trig is located and spoke with a rather perplexed farmer who didn't understand why I wanted to do such a thing but happily agreed to me using that trig in the challenge.

Over the course of the following weeks I recced the route in sections. The route was reviewed and amended a number of times before I finally came up with the finished version. I also had the help of a member of my running club, who has expert local knowledge and was able to reduce the mileage of my initial route by 10 miles. I can tell you, when I reached the finish at mile 60, I was extremely happy I didn't have a further 10 miles to run!



### **Team Support**

I was initially going to run the route unsupported. I run a lot on my own anyway and I had covered all of the route at some point, so I wasn't worried about getting lost. A number of people then offered to run sections with me. I am so glad they did. When I thought about doing the challenge unsupported, I was thinking of my 'long' weekend runs of about 20 miles with my audiobook for company and the ultra races I had ran on my own. It was only after people offered their support that I thought, 60 miles on my own is a long way. With races you have people around you most of the way and you are in an out of checkpoints.

I divided my route into sections and allocated specific sections to those that had offered to support me. I contacted Wayne at GB Race Tracker to arrange a tracker. The tracker kept everyone updated on my progress and meant that supporters were able to get to their start point in time. Given the weather this proved invaluable as it meant that people were not waiting round on me for longer than they needed to. Marc, my partner, had also volunteered to drive to various locations with a mobile checkpoint. We stocked the car with everything – sausage rolls, sandwiches, pizza, crisps, jellies, coke . . . the list goes on and on.

Team support was arranged. The food shop was done. Everything was organised. I was set.

### **Challenge Day**

The day of the challenge finally arrived. I had put a lot of effort into my training and receiving the course. I was excited. Unfortunately 'race' day brought with it the horrendous weather. The conditions were tough; cold, rain, and wind. It was also very wet and boggy underfoot. I can honestly say it was some of the worst conditions I've ever run in. I learnt a very valuable lesson that day – don't arrange a challenge in December!

At mile 14-15 I was nearly blown off the edge of Cats Tor on the way to Shining Tor. Thank God for an Irish Granny, who taught me to always clear my plate! Around this stage I started to question my idea of 'fun'.

By mile 22, I was completely soaked through. It was at this point I will admit I considered throwing in the towel. I am not a quitter but at that stage, I thought it wouldn't be the end of the world if I pulled out and rescheduled for a nicer day. Then I thought of the people that had sacrificed part of their day to join me. Those that had got up early to run the first sections, those that had also been battered by the weather and those that had arranged child care to join me later. I didn't voice my feelings to anyone at this stage, apart from Marc. He responded by sorting me dry clothes and making sure I took on some food.



Shortly after this point the rain stopped and the weather lifted. I had visited Blakelow, Kerridge, Nab Head, Sponds Hill, Shining Tor, Burbage Edge and Axe Edge at this stage. Next up was Shutlingsloe – my favourite trig (doesn't everyone have a favourite trig?!) and then the Roaches. After the conditions of the previous section, this part of the course felt a lot easier. At the Roaches, I was joined by my friend Mark, who ran with me from there until the end – 28 miles. It started to get dark shortly after we reached Gun Hill. This part of the route was unknown to Mark and I was glad I had recce'd it several times. By this stage I had stopped taking on food. This is unheard of for me. One of the reasons I run so many miles is so I can eat all the food I want. I tried to eat several different things – all of which I usually eat on my longer runs but I felt sick. At Rushton Spencer Mark and I were joined by a few other Macclesfield Harriers. Marc also popped up again here with the mobile checkpoint. He had some emergency gels and encouraged me to take them. I am not a gel fan and would not ordinarily take these, I was thankful for them at that stage though. Energy levels restored, we headed up to Bosley Cloud and then dropped down to the Canal for the long slog back to Macclesfield. By this point my feet were sore, it felt like the wheels were starting to come off. When I hit low points like this, I remind myself of why I love to run. I also remind myself of a time when I was injured and I couldn't run.

On my return to Macclesfield several of my friends and even a few of the people that had ran with me earlier came out to see us. This was the distraction I needed to take my mind off my sore feet. They also provided the boost I needed to make it to the last two trigs, before the climb back to the finish at Blakelow trig. 60 miles later, I returned to Blakelow trig – tired and very emotional.

### **Conclusion**

The weather, my body refusing to take on food, the sore feet all made this challenge a lot harder than I expected. As we know the mind is incredibly powerful, and the body is capable of more than we think. I also had the support of the most amazing bunch of people. They lifted my spirits, made sure I was fuelling and kept me going throughout.

Would I do it again . . . of course (just not in December)!

Trigs visited;

Blakelow

Kerridge

Nab Head

Sponds Hill

Shining Tor

Burbage Edge

Axe Edge

Shutlingsloe

The Roaches

Gun Hill

Bosley Cloud

New Farm

Dalebrow