

A Christmas Carol in Howarth by Doc Bryan

After months of anticipation, the BFR Christmas "banter" pub run day finally arrived. 15 miles from Barnoldswick to Howarth and no cafe stops. Cafe stops had been ruled out as Rob is "not a fairy". The route was from Barnoldswick starting at Silentnigh,t through to Salterforth, then to Kelbrook following the Pennine Bridleway/Pendle way to Laneshaw Bridge, then joining the Bronte way at Wycoller to get to Howarth.

Jock had dropped our bags off at the Fleece in Howarth the night before and we met at the canal for a 9.30am start. The forecast was pretty bad as storm Desmond swept in with torrential winds and gale force winds predicted, but this didn't put off the hard core runners who were Mick Keegan, Ben Hoyle, Swell, Glen, Dave Halliday, Pete Jackson, Jock Boothman, Sat nav Boothman, Andy Collins, Nick Kendall, James Fent, Rob Hodgkinson and finally Screw. For some reason Andrew turned up in fancy dress in a bobble hat and his wife's bright yellow raincoat, only to find out the fancy dress run was later on in the month. The plan was to pick up Sam Watson at Wycoller, but as the BFR are such an elite bunch of athletes, our 5 minute mile pace meant we missed Sam, who eventually caught us up in Howarth.

The weather, as predicted, was bad and as Chewy wasn't there to moan, we had Screw step in. Despite having quite a few runners with a somewhat sketchy history of navigational blunders, the first and only error was on the moors a mile or so before Laneshaw Bridge. Not having done much running at all this last 6 months, I have to say I suffered in the last few miles, but an energy gel from Dave gave me an extra spring in my step.

17 miles and over 3 hours later a rather bedraggled bunch of runners arrived on the cobbled streets of Howarth and our destination, the Fleece Inn. The reason for the slow progress wasn't so much the weather but the need to stop every mile for James to sort out his chaffing problem. We were greeted by Chewy, Isabelle and Seb, and after a intimate 20 minutes in a small side room, nearly 20 muddy runners had changed into dry gear and the drinking began. Ben and Swell had to leave early as they had a date with TV chef James Martin in Manchester, but the rest of the crew ate at a more leisurely rate.

Having tasted most of the different beverages on offer at the Fleece and saying goodbye to the Chews, we then went on to the Kings Arms. After a quick trip to powder my nose I returned only to find none other than James Fent taking orders and pulling pints behind the bar with his new found friend Carol. Michael the owner of the bar was asleep upstairs, but when he eventually awoke and came down, there was an uncomfortable silence as he found Carol and Fenty. We then thought it wise to move on, although Screw had eventually started to enjoy the day at this point.

The next pub, unlike the Kings Arms had a full complement of bar staff so Fenty was able to enjoy his pint without distraction. Rather than going to the cash machine to get some funds, he decided to take his chances and gamble away his hard earned cash by popping a pound coin into the machine by the bar. Confused why he had a choice of artists with no actual musical question to answer, he then realised he'd put his money in a jukebox. . As if things couldn't get any more embarrassing, his new buddy Carol then turned up for a drink.

After a quick photo opportunity outside Perve Corner for Rob and Andy, we then all met up for a last round back at the Fleece. Being the festive season John and I fancied a couple of mulled wines only to find Jock had supped the last one. Our carriage home arrived at 4.30 and the long trip home began. Events became quite blurry at this point as the next thing I remember was waking up locked in the back of a van with no windows, with none other than Pete Jackson and a rope. After an uncomfortable bumpy few miles, the van came to a halt, and assuming we were about to be murdered the door slid open only to find Glen popping his head in to get his bag. We were in the back of Halliday's brewery wagon outside Castle Whittaker.

As the more senior members of the club decided to head home, the more junior members and Jock decided carry on festivities at the cellar bar and at the time of writing that was where Jock, Nick, Sam, James and possibly Carol.. Screw had gone home.

So there we go, despite the bad weather, a great time was has by all.

Thanks to Jock for organising and Merry Christmas to all.

Stu