

Magnificent 7

28 miles 3160 ft ascent

29th May 2014

by Andy Hirst

After being laid up with a virus since the Old County Tops, I was chomping at the bit to get out for a run, and after browsing the Gofar website, www.gofar.org.uk, over a glass of night nurse or two (always a bad idea) I came across a route in the 'Be Inspired' section, under Training Runs cum Challenges, called the Six Trigs Challenge (South Pennines). Ideal I thought!

This was a route first mentioned in an article in the Outdoor magazine TGO by Andrew Bibby way back in 1999 which at the time pointed out the route crossed private land and would have to wait for those not wanting to trespass. Since the introduction of the CROW act in 2000 this has changed and the route is now available to all.

If you look at the OS South Pennines map you will see there is a horseshoe of high land around the 1500ft contour north of Hebden Bridge. Within this area are streams and tributaries which make up the Hebden and Colden waters which eventually flow into the Calder.

Around this Horseshoe are six of our old friends, the Ordnance Survey trig points: Bride Stones (GR 932268), Hoof Stones Height (Great Hameldon, GR 913291), Boulsworth Hill (GR 930357), Stanbury Moor (Alcomdon Stones, GR 978357), High Brown Knoll (GR 009303) and Sheepstones (GR 014278). Starting from Hebden Bridge the task is to link them all together.

Anyway after another glass of Night nurse I came across another challenge on the same page called the Magnificent 7 (South Pennines). I discovered that this is an extension of the Six trigs, 28 miles, devised by some local CVFR members, starting at the White Lion in Heptonstall and taking in an extra trig at Standing Stone Hill (GR951303) en route to Bride Stones. Even better I thought, it starts and finishes at a pub!!!!

So last Thursday morning I got up early and prepared for the run. Fuel for the day was found by rummaging around in my rucksack where I found discarded sustenance left over from the OCT. Comfy running shoes were donned, my £19.99 More Miles mk2. A tatty 35 year old pre-metric OS South Pennines map, and trusty compass of the same age would see me finding the right lines. Windproof trousers without taped seams (no over-bearing Nanny state rules today) would be quite sufficient should the weather turn bad. Here I can carry and wear what I feel appropriate, even go bare-chested if I want, true fell running. Chucked it all into the car boot and off I went.

And so I set off for Heptonstall. To say I didn't pick the best of days is an understatement. The clag was down and a steady cold drizzle persisted all day, "looks like I will have to leave the old chest covered up". And as I hadn't recce'd the route it looked like my navigational skills would be put to the test.

A quick check of the map outside the White Lion, Heptonstall showed me the direction to head for. To the

pub bar would have been the sensible option, but instead I tottled off up the road, through Slack to Mount Pleasant Farm where I picked up the Pennine Way over Clough Head Hill towards my first objective; Standing Stone Hill. I should have followed a line of Shooting butts here but carried on a bit too far and ended up trudging through rough, pathless moorland to gain the trig, something I was going to get used to by the end of the day.

From the trig I found a trod which headed down into the head of the Colden Valley. After negotiating a few farms, and paths overgrown with nettles, and having to double back on myself after coming to a bridge stating PRIVATE NO ACCESS, I located the correct crossing point further upstream via a narrow wooden bridge. Heading up fields, losing the path again and having to climb an old electric fence to gain Moor Lane, which climbs out of the valley and meets up with Dukes Cut track, which directs you straight across Redmires, past the air traffic control Beacon at Pole Hill to Keb Cotes, I reached the second trig of the day at the gritstone outcrop of Bride Stones.

My Barlick Fellrunners' team-mate Chewy would have liked this section as there was a bit of road to run on, but having got bored after a mile of the black stuff I decided to cut off through a gate onto open moor and head off on a compass bearing over featureless, boggy, trackless moor towards Hoof Stones Height. After a couple of checks of the map, and rechecking the bearing, I eventually came across the welcoming site of the boundary fence which would lead to the summit trig. Another check of the compass to make sure I followed the correct fence line, I set off heading across Black Hameldon towards the Gorple Road with just the sound of the Curlew for company.

Having crossed the summit of the Gorple Road I followed the boundary fence as the clag was still down and navigation was an issue. Instead of a careful study of the map, which would have told me to head down Birkin Clough to the summit of the Thursden-Widdop road, I decided to continue following the fence line on a quad bike track which eventually brought me down into a clough which didn't seem right. A proper look at the map, and still not quite sure where I was, I decided to take a bearing, which meant climbing back out, where I eventually came to the Pennine Bridleway (which I must add isn't on my 35 year old map). A Pennine Bridleway sign showed three routes I could take from here, so I took a punt on the one that said Thursden. Dropping out of the mist I realised that my one-in-three-choice was the wrong one. Another back-track, which must have added at least a mile on the route, plus a few expletives, and eventually I reached the road summit between Thursden and Widdop feeling relieved that I'd rectified my mistakes.

The next section from here to Boulsworth, the 4th objective, I was more confident about, and set off up the Old Oil Road, built in 1962 by the Continental Oil Company of Texas when they were given permission to drill for oil in the area. At the end of the road a trod takes you directly to the summit trig on Lad Law.

Setting off from the trig, with the clag still well and truly down, I made a bee line towards Crow Hill following spasmodic boggy trods til eventually even they ran out leaving me in what can only be described as one of the most featureless boggy sh*t holes I have ever come across.

Out with the map and compass again, waddling through bogs, tussock, heather, and dodging hidden water courses, I eventually located the outline of what I hoped was Crow Hill looming out of the mist, where I could take another bearing to head off and pick up the boundary line towards Alcomden Stones and the 5th trig at Stanbury Moor.

From here it was a short way on a runnable track for a change, around Delf Hill to the ruin of Top Withins. After a quick break I picked up the Pennine Way, the next section to the finish familiar to anyone who has done any of the Woodhead races or the Wadsworth trog.

After the short luxury of the slabbed Pennine Way section you are soon back to reality, dragging yourself out of knee-deep bogs to make your way across Dick Delf Hill and the appropriately named Stoops The Waste, Stairs Swamp, Red Dyke Swamp and Cock Hill Swamp, to reach the mast at Cock Hill. A brief respite as you cross the A6033, then another bog trot til picking up a trod which takes you to the sixth trig at High Brown Knoll. From here it's a fairly straightforward trot to the 7th and last trig at Sheepstones. A steep descent via paths and roads to Hebden Bridge, a final steep climb to Heptonstall, and back to where I started at the White Lion.

The route took me 7hrs 20mins, but in more accommodating weather, and with better route choice and less navigational errors, it could easily be done in just over 6.

If you fancy doing a long, marathon distance run, just on your doorstep, with relatively little climbing involved, if you revel in miles of bleak, rough, very boggy and trackless terrain, like to be up to your armpits in mud, and not see a soul all day, then this is the chappie for you.

Now I know why I spend so much time and money travelling up to the Lake District!

Andy