

Haworth Hobble (Wuthering Hike)
10 March 2012
Race Report

Position: 6th out of 364 finishers (230 solo, 67 pairs)

Time: 4 hours 44 mins 13 secs

Distance: 31.5 miles, 4,519 feet of ascent

The Haworth Hobble was the first race of this year's RunFurther UK Ultra Championships. Competitors have to do at least 4 races out of 12, including 1 short (26-35 miles), 1 medium (36-45 miles) and 1 long (>45 miles) race. This was to be my first "short"(?!) race in the series.

Training had gone well, and I was hoping for a good result. I'd learnt a lot from my 48 mile Thames Trot experience and hoped to pace myself better for this one. My target was to beat 5 hours for this 32mile course, which I thought would be challenging. That time should get me inside the top 30, and if possible I hoped to squeeze inside the top 20.

It was an early morning to get over to Haworth well ahead of the 8am start. I was rather bleary eyed as I pulled up in the car park at Haworth Primary school, and thought I might still be dreaming when we were guided into our car parking space by a man wearing a pink cardigan, a dress and running shoes!?! After that bizarre start to the day we checked in and had plenty of time to prepare for the race. The weather was damp, windy and cold, and I was regretting my decision to run in a T shirt and running vest. I considered putting my waterproof on, but decided to brave the elements in the expectation that I would soon warm up.

The runners all walked up to the cobbled street where the race was due to start. It was a big field, with a combination of solo entrants and people running in pairs – there were 364 finishers so I'd guess the starting number would be close to 400. We were happily chatting away, waiting for runners to assemble when I looked up and saw people running off into the distance.....the race had already started. There were still people walking down to the start as I charged up the hill, trying to catch the leaders who had actually been aware of the start! Apparently the race organiser just said "right it's 8 o'clock, get yourselves out of here"....leaving chaos to ensue.

For the first half mile I felt awful. I like to be well prepared at the start, and I just wasn't ready when we had to start running. I did get myself up the field pretty quickly, and was soon just behind the leading few runners as we climbed steadily out of Haworth on Cemetery Road.

Soon we were off road and heading down to Bronte Bridge. Across the bridge and we were onto the Pennine Way. It was wet and windy as we started our ascent after Bronte Falls – the rain was more of a fine, spray which was actually quite refreshing. Unfortunately the mist meant that there was poor visibility. I had been looking forward to seeing the hills round here, having not been to the area before – but it was not to be today. I was enjoying the running though. This was an undulating stretch across an uneven, often muddy track – I loved bouncing along this at a good pace.

As we reached Walshaw Dean reservoir, I was joined by another couple of runners, and enjoyed chatting to them for a while, which helped the miles to go by quickly. I

was a little concerned that I was going too fast. The other 2 runners had previously run the race in 4:36 and 4:48, well ahead of my target time. I'd let the small leading pack go off early on, but I reckoned that we were still well within the top 10. However, I felt good and didn't feel as though I was pushing too hard, so I resolved to carry on at this pace but carefully watch how I was feeling.



After the Walshaw Dean we climbed up to Widdop reservoir – the first checkpoint after about 7 miles. The undulating route then took us along the Burnley Way to Hurstwood reservoir (just after checkpoint 2) and then Cants Clough reservoir, before following a track all the way to the Long Causeway (checkpoint 3). This first stretch had gone really well. We had been running into the wind for most of this first 13 mile stretch, and the general opinion was that this had added 5-10 minutes to our time. As we started to change direction along the Long Causeway, I hoped that the wind would ease, which should help as legs started to tire further into the race.

I was now running with a group of around 6 or 7 other runners – and ended up staying with this group for much of the remainder of the race. This was enjoyable, and helped me to keep up a good pace. We soon turned off the road at Stiperden House Farm, following the race instructions to take the walkers “path” rather than the better farm track. It was certainly stretching it to call this a path! More like a series of boggy fields which, coupled with numerous fences and styles, slowed the pace somewhat. I was further hampered by a barbed wire fence early in this section which I just couldn't manoeuvre myself over – I felt like I was stuck, hovering precariously for ages with one leg either side of the fence, before I eventually managed to launch myself forward and over. I pushed on quite hard and had soon caught the rest of the group, but expended unnecessary energy along the way.

After the bog fields we past checkpoint 4 and joined the Calderdale Way which would take us through to Todmorden. This was a great runnable track and I was just getting into a good rhythm when I had another mishap. We had to squeeze through a narrow gap in a wall, and I had to use both hands to lift my legs up and through the gap. As I did this I got stuck, and the ripping noise signalled that my shorts were caught on a nail. I had both hands on the wall, keeping me off the ground, and

couldn't work out how to free myself from the nail. I lost valuable time here before ripping my shorts further and eventually breaking free.

I didn't want to lose the group I had been with. Although I had studied the route closely on the OS map, I had not reccied the course and the upcoming stretch through Todmorden looked a little tricky to navigate. I therefore pushed on hard to try and catch the runners ahead, who were now out of sight. This was a great stretch of running, with a fast descent towards Todmorden. I was flying, and after a while I picked up some runners ahead. By the time I reached Todmorden I was back in the group, which pleased me although I did worry that I might suffer later for that high speed dash. However, as we crossed the main road and headed out of Todmorden I was still feeling strong, and was encouraged that we were well over half way with about 17 miles done.

After Todmorden there is a steep, but short climb up. Climbing has become one of my stronger points thanks to my fell running in the Peak District, and I pushed ahead of a couple of the runners in the group during this climb. Soon we were going through checkpoint 5 at Mankinholes YHA. Bizarrely we were offered some malt whiskey at this checkpoint! I politely declined and instead topped up my water bottle, adding a couple of electrolyte tablets to my drink.



The climb out of Todmorden. Copyright IW Charters

My eating during this run seemed to be going well. I'd had a nice mix of stuff – dried pineapple, cliff shot blocks and some blocks of fudge. The remaining miles were definitely going to be the toughest, with a series of steep climbs and descents. I reminded myself to make sure I kept eating regularly. I also moved onto my energy drink to try and ensure I didn't crash as we hit the final stages.

Soon we were into the steepest climb of the race, up to Stoodley Pike and checkpoint 6. Our group split into 2, and the group I was with definitely took the poorer line. Our route went too far along the bottom before climbing directly and

steeply up to the monument at the top. As we neared the top, we saw the other group taking a steadier diagonal ascent and looking a lot stronger than us!



*The right route up to Stoodley Pike monument (I went a steeper way!).
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I was glad to get the big Stoodley climb over with, and my legs recovered fairly quickly and I was able to enjoy the next couple of miles into Hebden Bridge. I was buoyed by the thought that we were over 20 miles down, and a couple of the toughest climbs were complete. We headed along some good tracks, dropped through Horsehold woods and then hit the steep road descent into Hebden Bridge. It was fun to let myself go down this hill, knowing that holding myself back would only hurt my legs more.

Having descended steeply, we then climbed more steeply out of Hebden Bridge and up a long winding road to the village of Heptonstall. It was during this stretch that our group started to get stretched out. Lots of runners on the forums before the race had described this as a killer hill, 23 miles into the race. But I managed to keep running (slowly) whilst some others walked much of this hill, and I established myself in a smaller group of 4 runners pushing on ahead.

We passed checkpoint 7 at the pub in Heptonstall, and then cut down through the woods to checkpoint 8 at Horsebridge, 24 miles into the race. I knew the next stretch was going to be a mental test. A 4 mile stretch of road and track lay ahead, with the first couple of miles climbing incessantly uphill. After running this distance it felt like the climb was going on forever. I mixed up the walking and running on these hills, gaining some important recovery time during short sections of walking. Two of the runners in the group started to forge on ahead. I kept them in view, but was not going to catch them. Another runner came through and past strongly, leaving me trading places with a Bingley runner. I kept getting the blocks of fudge down and drinking plenty of electrolyte drink. My legs were tightening up now, and I just focused on counting the miles down one by one.

Eventually after about 3 miles we reached the brow of the hill....27 miles down, and perhaps an end to the painful climbs which had dominated the final third of the race? Not so.....

We did get a mile of respite, descending down to checkpoint 9. During this stretch I started to build up a lead on the Bingley runner. I wasn't entirely sure of my position

but figured that it was probably about 10th or 11th. Pretty good going. I felt reasonably OK, and with only 4 miles left I felt I had a good chance of at least staying within the top 15 and possibly better. I was also well placed to finish within my 5 hour target. My average speed had slipped over 9 minutes per mile, having been around 8 ½ for the first 20 miles – those hills had taken their toll!

As we passed checkpoint 9 I looked up and saw the sting in the tail! A steep climb up to Top of Stairs! After about 28 miles this hill looked daunting, but I got stuck into it and felt fairly strong as I pushed up it. I gained some further ground on the Bingley runner behind me, and it felt good to hit the top and realised that it was largely downhill from here.

The next stretch was nice, descending for a couple of miles. I picked up a good pace and the wind (which had been in our faces on the way out from Haworth) started to get behind me and help me along. I passed Leeshaw reservoir and reached Moorside Lane. A left turn saw me having to climb again for about 500m. I knew that there was little more than a mile to go and that kept me going. During the descent to Leeshaw I could see a few runners in the distance (the ones who had broken clear after Horse Bridge). Now, as I ran up Moorside Lane, I started to gain ground on one of them. By the time I turned right to Penistone Hill I was passing him. I was pretty sure that would get me a top 10 place. This spurred me on, for a lovely fast stretch across Penistone Hill where I kept pushing hard, checking over my shoulder to make sure no one was catching me.



I then started the final drop through Haworth and back to primary school. My only problem was that I didn't know the route here. At each junction I had to ask for directions, and was helped by spectators who kept me right, while giving me great encouragement. I made one more turn and was surprised to see I was at the primary school. I dropped down the steps into the school grounds and was delighted to see my friends Darren and Juli there, cheering me on.

After another 15 yards I was crossing the finishing line. I'd done it, and was delighted to have finished in 4 hours 44 minutes. I'd felt great in those last couple of miles and had really picked up the pace in that stretch. My time averaged just over 9 minutes per mile, which was better than I could have hoped for on this long hilly course.

I checked my finishing position and was amazed to find that I had finished in 6th place! I didn't have a clue that I was so far up the field during the race. I'd thought I was 10th at best. I was over the moon. I'd only been within a couple of minutes of 3rd place as well – something to aim for next time!

This had been a great race. A very runnable course but with some tough hills, which I enjoyed getting stuck into, and lovely varied scenery throughout. Time for a quick change and then off for a nice pub lunch to celebrate with Darren & Juli, feeling very satisfied!