

Race Report: The Hardmoors 160

David Allen, 26th – 28th May 2023



I made the decision to enter the 160 late last year, mainly as I felt I needed a challenge looming on my diary to keep me engaged and fit. As it turned out, that didn't work at all, as a variety of factors saw my training go down the toilet. I'd managed to keep some long-distance runs happening, but there was no structure or plan as such. That said, I felt decent and had no niggles in the race lead-up, and I was lucky enough to have a great crew lined up to support me, so I was semi-optimistic as the 160 approached.

I arrived at the race start at Sutton Bank in plenty of time to register and have a last-minute kit faff. Even in the late afternoon it was very hot. I despise running in hot weather and the forecast for the weekend predicted hot temperatures and lots of sunshine, which had me a little worried. Jon gave the race briefing with his usual flair and then we were off. It felt surreal to be starting a fifty-hour, 160-mile race, but here we were. The White Horse loop was fine, and it was quite nice to tackle those massive steps on fresh legs. I wasn't overly excited at the prospect of tackling them again a couple of days later with 150 miles in my legs! The stretch down into Helmsley was very enjoyable. I've always loved the route through Rievaulx.

After clearing the Helmsley CP, I popped into the Co-Op to try to get one of their halloumi and grilled pepper wraps (absolutely lush!), but there was a massive queue so I sacked it off and pressed on towards Fadmoor, where I would be meeting my first support team, Tom and Claire, who would crew me through the first night. I hadn't recce'd any of the Tabular Hills stretch, but I had the course on my watch, and it worked perfectly for nav. The stretch from Helmsley to Fadmoor was absolutely gorgeous, with lovely woodland trails and cooler temperatures as we moved into the evening. I got chatting with a chap whose name escapes me, and we would find ourselves playing cat and mouse for the next few hours.



I met Tom & Claire in Fadmoor, had a little bite to eat and some coffee and then off we set, with Tom joining me for the section to the Stape CP. Shortly into this stretch we happened upon a pair of horses loose in a field, and they were a little exuberant to say the least. I nervously took the path straight through and managed to get over the stile without too much attention. Tom had taken a minor diversion to give a wider berth, and got his shorts caught on the barbed wire fence. I had to help unhook him as one of the horses showed a keen interest in him... It freaked us both out a little bit!

After this frivolity, it all started to go a bit wrong. I developed a queasy feeling that grew and grew as the night drew on. I tried to push it to the back of my mind, but eventually I had to sit down for a moment to try to get myself sorted out. And with that, whoosh – I projectile vomited with some gusto! I felt better initially afterwards so hoped it was a case of ‘better out than in’ but not before long again, the queasiness returned with a vengeance, and I found myself trapped in a cycle of shuffle / vomit / shuffle / vomit ad nauseum – which really made me worry. I had no food inside of me and could not face the idea of eating anything. I was sick once again mere seconds before arriving at the Stape CP, so I took ten minutes to sit in the back of Tom’s car to try to straighten myself out. I found a bottle of Strawberry Ribena in the footwell which I duly stole, which made me feel better, but I still couldn’t face the idea of any food, so set off again with trepidation and on a completely empty stomach. Claire was running with me for the next stretch to the Hole of Horcum CP and thankfully, the queasiness gradually subsided, and I started to feel much better. Frustratingly, the queasiness was then replaced with absolute exhaustion, and I found myself having to take frequent rest moments to lie down by the trailside. None of this boded well for my chances of completing the race. Every time that I needed to take a break, I would apologise profusely to Claire as I would sit down, and would then say to her “OK, count down from thirty, then call me a **** and tell me to get back up” – which she dutifully did every time. It really worked! It was almost as if calling me nasty words came naturally to her, which I just don’t understand!?



I managed to take in a small amount of food at the Hole of Horcum CP and from there, Tom resumed support runner duty. I started to feel a lot better as daylight started to break, but I was still bloody shattered. I absolutely loved this section – the trails were gorgeous, skirting Dalby and Wykeham Forests. Also wonderful was the sunrise, which gave me a major shot in the arm. I was circa 45 miles into the race and by this time adopting a Jeffing run/walk strategy which was working well. The trail through the forest to Cockmoor Hall CP felt like a straight line for about ten miles, and I was aware that there was a fellow competitor snapping at my heels, so I checked the tracker to see who it was... and it was my mate and fellow Ripon Runner Lena!

I got into the Cockmoor CP and was greeted with a very warm welcome from the marshals (it really makes a difference) and it was nice to see my mate, Jonny, who was crewing a friend. The original plan was for Tom and Claire to crew me through the first night, with the expectation being that this would see them with me to the coast at Scalby. But my slower progress had me behind schedule, and it was already broad daylight, which meant no more support runner. Seeing as my next vehicle support crew, Jono would be meeting me at the coast anyway, we decided that Tom and Claire should leave me at Cockmoor to make their way home, having done a thoroughly sterling job of getting me through what had turned out to be a very difficult night's running. I had a really good rest and re-fuel at the CP and was enjoying a bit of jovial craic when Lena blasted through without pause, which made me feel a little sheepish, lazing around in my deck chair. I got myself back together, said my goodbyes to Tom and Claire and got back on the trail towards the next CP at Crookness. It felt a little disconcerting, going back to running on my lonesome, but I just got my head down and slowly and steadily ticked off the miles, averaging around 4mph, which was just about bang on my target for this point. I was chuffed to see Jono parked at the roadside not too far from the coast, where he instantly set about doing what he does best: taking the p*ss and force-feeding me! It was great to see him, as the plan was that he would stay with me until the bitter end, with other folks dropping in and out along the way, so I knew I was going to be well looked after. Shortly after seeing Jono, I was delighted to also meet up with my esteemed Lyke Wake friends Gerry and Julie, who had come out to gee me along. It was great to see them, and they also took the opportunity to force some food into me. From there it was a short yomp down to the coastline, where I would spend the next eleven or so hours trying to not fall off the clifftops.



Jono popped up at the Crookness CP as I had just about made it there in time to beat the support vehicle cut-off. The sun was up by now, and the temperature was already rising, so I lathered up with suncream and set off for Ravenscar. By this time, all feelings of queasiness had vanished, and I was fixated on the prospect of ice cream and lollies to keep me going through the heat. I was still absolutely shattered and was taking regular rest breaks, but I was making steady progress, so I figured it was working for me, and tried to suppress any worries. Hayburn Wyke was its usual awful self, and even worse in the bloody heat, so I had to have a little lie down once I'd reached the top of the other side to regroup. I think it was here, though it might have been a little further on, where I was busted by Lena, who caught me catching a brief moment's shut eye (photo evidence below!).



On arriving at Ravenscar, I bought myself a massive tub of chocolate ice cream and a Calippo (the first of many) and had a five-minute rest as I enjoyed them in the sun. I then made my way into the Ravenscar CP where I had a cup of hot sweet tea which was bloody lovely. I was feeling happy with my progress as even with a night of feeling very poorly and very tired, and taking so many rest breaks, I was around three hours under the cut-off.



With a spring in my step, I made my way towards Robin Hoods Bay. Boggle Hole came and went, and with that and the steep climb out of RHB I was feeling suitably knackered again. I stopped in the Post Office to buy another Calippo, where I was told there was a three quid minimum spend on cards, so I had to buy two of them. Hey-ho! They were both inhaled in rapid-fire succession.



I knew from WhatsApp that friends were close by, and I was very chuffed to bump into Hayley and Martin just before Saltwick Bay, who were going to be sticking around for a while. And after going through Saltwick, I met Jono again, who had met up with my good lady wife, Ruth and my brother and sister-in-law, Matt and Jill. It gave me such a boost seeing the gang, and after big hugs and gossip, I positively blasted my way through the crowds at Whitby towards Sandsend (note: it was probably more like a trundle than a blast, but it felt like a huge effort at the time), where I was expecting to see more friends, Jane, Ruth and Stuart. Full disclosure – I had another Calippo in Whitby!

Jane, Ruth and Stu had parked up at Kettleness and walked south to meet us at Sandsend, and the guys then joined Lena and I for a bimble as we got back on our way. Jane tried to force-feed me some of her prawn tacos, but I felt very guilty as they looked delicious and far too nice to waste on a stinky Herbert who had been vomiting all night. We then had a lovely rest stop at Runswick Bay where I devoured a Cup Noodle and whatnot, and just had a good old laugh with the various folks who had come out to say hi.



Passing through Staithes was great, as the revellers lining the streets obviously knew about the race and cheered us through. No so great was the climb out of the other side, which was its usual horrid self. We then caught up with the crew at Cowbar, where the camp was now augmented with a Ripon Runners "GO DAVEY" flag, which was hilarious and lovely in equal measure. Next stop, Skinningrove, which intrigues me every time I'm there. I reckon it would be an epic location for a gritty drama series on Netflix!



After Skinningrove, the sun began to set, and we were treated to absolutely stunning views out to sea. The last stretch of coast had felt very functional. There were plenty of people around to keep me entertained so the hours flew by, and it didn't feel like very long at all until I reached Saltburn. Ask

anybody in this race, and they'd all tell you – Saltburn is a major milestone. It's where you turn inland, away from the sea, and head west towards the finish, even though it's still sixty miles away!



Jono was waiting for me at the bottom of the steps at Saltburn with a box of chips. I could have kissed him! I smashed them down, sorted out my bits and bobs and was ready to head off. Jane, Stu and Ruth were heading home, and I'd be back out on my own. I wasn't hugely concerned about this, not even as it was getting dark, as I know this section like the back of my hand.

So, I was on my own again, and after getting through the CP at Saltburn Bandstand, I headed down through the Valley Gardens. I realised straight away that I would need my headtorch (I always delay putting it on), so I strapped it on and got yomping again. I met a couple of Boro lads who were on the 110 and said they weren't sure of their way through Gizzy Woods, so I invited them to stick with me. I was next seeing Jono at Slapewath, and I knew I would need to have a little blister surgery. I'd had some hot spots for a while, and I knew I'd finally succumbed. It wasn't awful, but it needed attention, so I explained to the lads that I'd need a bit of time at Slappers. As it happened, the long slow climb out of Skelton slowed me right down, and they were moving far too quickly for me, so I humbly allowed them to merrily jog on. Jono helped me to get my blisters popped and strapped up (crewing is a glamorous life, isn't it?) at Slapewath and I got myself moving off into the woods. It was fully dark now, so I made sure I paid close attention to the GPX, as there are one or two cheeky twists and turns in there. I was generally OK, although the entire pull up through the woods to Highcliff Nab was a right slog. I needed to take a rest break so lay down in the brush at the trailside with my headtorch turned off. After not too long, a few runners came by and checked in on me (or rudely woke me up?) so I got back on the old feet and had an enjoyable yomp down the flagstones over Gizzy Moor. I caught the runners up who had woken me up and was mildly amused to overhear one of them having a bit of a hissy fit over how unpleasant the whole affair had been and vowing to never undertake to run such a distance again. This, perversely, made me feel a little better!

Roseberry Topping was hard work and I had to take a few breathers on the way up. But I got there and coming back down I saw another Tom, who was crewing Lena. With the glare of the oncoming

head torches, I'd completely missed her – but I think it's probably fair to say that neither of us was in the mood for a natter at that time.

I always enjoy the descent from Rosie to Gribdale Gate and I opened the legs up and had a great little shuffle. When I met up with Jono, I was delighted to see that Jane and Stu had come back out. Jane was going to support run me through the rest of the night. I had a bit of food and drink and then we were off in search of Captain Cook. I had been fine on my own, but it was great to have some company again. It didn't feel like it was too long for us to reach CCM, and then we started the descent into Kildale. This is another section I love. There's something about the fact that you're re-entering civilisation (admittedly, a small one), but it's so peacefully quiet, and surrounded by the woods – it's just a place I always enjoy passing through. Of course, there's also the fact that Kildale is a major CP/cut-off point - so it's significant to reach it in good time.

I had an unexpected, lovely moment when a mate, Michelle accosted me on my way into the Village Hall. I hadn't known she was on marshalling duty, so it was a genuine surprise. Always nice to get an unexpected hug and a hiya... especially after 35 hours on your feet! As soon as I walked indoors, I was scanning the room for a suitable nap-spot. Irritatingly, the couch was taken, so I lay straight down on the hard floor. One of the wonderful marshals brought me a little pillow and I slept for a few moments. Jane woke me up and I (apparently) informed her I'd had a dream about her, in which she had voiced her dissatisfaction with a phone box! All gibberish aside, I got myself sorted and we set about the climb out of Kildale.



The pull uphill out of Kildale was arduous (as always), and I always forget just how long this stretch feels! But Jane and I chatted our way up the hill and I'd already decided I wanted to get some sleep in the car when we met Jono and Stu. I felt so bad – Stu was getting some rest in the car and Jane turfed him out to make way for me. The heated seats were still warm, and Stu gave me his blanket. I played a podcast on my phone and promptly fell sound asleep. After fifteen minutes Jane woke me up and informed me that I'd been sleeping with my mouth wide open in full fly-catching mode! Cringe! I took the opportunity here to layer up and put my warm coat on as the temperature was really dropping. And from there, it was the long march up to Bloworth Crossing. We eventually

turned right at the crossroads, and in my mind, it would only be a hop, skip and jump to the next CP at Clay Bank. Jane and I got chatting with a chap as we made our way over Round Hill, and it generally seemed that a few runners all grouped together around here.

I had some hot food at Clay Bank and then it was time for the dreaded Three Sisters! I was dreading this as any incline at all was taking its toll on my exhausted legs, never mind three (four if you count Carlton Bank) big old climbs. Once over the Wainstones and Cringle Moor we dropped down into Lord Stones where we would meet Jono and Stu again. After a discussion about how much comfort time I had around the cut-offs, I decided to get another ten minutes sleep in the car. This time, my internal clock woke me up bang on time. After some food again we set off up Carlton Bank and then back off the far side down into Huthwaite Green and Scugdale (colloquially known as "Scrambled Egg Corner" among our circle of friends, for reasons not to be divulged here (it's HM110 related)). Jane handed me off to Stu who would drag me up to Scarth Nick, through Osmotherley and up to Square Corner.



Jono intercepted us just before Square Corner with suggestions of food and clothing changes, but I was desperate to get there ASAP so hunkered straight through. As I was making my way up the hill to SQ there was a funny moment as Billy Conlin heckled me from the top for my, shall we say, slow progress! "OI! YOU IN THE BLACK! WHY AREN'T YOU MOVING???"

I think I can safely say that the long pull up from Square Corner was my least favourite section of this race. For one, I'd forgotten how steep it bloody is. And secondly, how bloody long it goes on! Matt was with me now and I had to take a couple of rests as we went. Matt ran on ahead to meet Jono to sort me some food, and while Jono wasn't there – Martin and Hayley were! They loaded me with a Pot Noodle and this gave me a little pep again. Matt and I started Jeffing and making better progress here and when we reached High Paradise Farm, it was ace to see Ruth, Jill and Nicola hanging out. Hugs and chats were had and then we headed a little further to rendezvous with Jono. I had another Pot Noodle here and then it hit me... I was running out of time!

There had been much discussion around how much time I did or didn't have over the course of the past 12 hours or so. I was taking a pessimistic view, but the crew had been relaxed about it, and the

common consensus was that I was home and dry. Somewhere around High Paradise, I had a sobering realisation: I had under five hours until the 7pm race cut-off to cover the last fifteen miles. Far too close for comfort, given that I'd probably been moving around 3mph for some time (if not slower, once you factor in the numerous rest stops). Matt was handing me over to Jill for a stretch here and we took off. I was determined to create some breathing space for myself, so somehow, and I have no idea how, I started to run. Like proper running! After 145 miles on my feet and no sleep!? Don't get me wrong, I was still Jeffing, but Jill was amazing – giving me the full Army manoeuvres sergeant major drills! Even when we'd drop to a walk it was "match my pace, move your arms, come on... COME ON!" She really helped drag me through. From High Paradise to Sutton Bank I'd got my pace back over 4mph, which is fairly good going all things considered! I still wasn't comfortable though and wanted to find a little more breathing space. I didn't even pause at Sutton Bank and headed straight over the road to run down to White Horse. I blasted through the CP and actually ran (well, jogged) up the steps! I needed to keep my pace up so overtook a couple of other runners and powered up. I kept up the pace back along the access path and actually picked off a couple more runners on my way through. I couldn't believe that I was not only running, but I was running at sub-10-minute mile pace!

The original plan was for Hayley to run me in for the last ten miles, but she was recovering from a foot injury, and there was a good chance I would still need to be running for some sections, so Jill stayed with me. Ironically, Hayley would actually end up walking in with a 110 runner and would beat me into Helmsley! After my heroic efforts to get my time back on track, I basically blew up, completely bonked, and just couldn't run anymore. I was gradually picked off by all of the runners that I had passed over the past few miles. But at least I had the breathing room I'd been obsessing over. After we had passed through Rievaulx and were making our way up to Helmsley, I was chuffed to see a few of the guys walking out in our direction, including my wife, Ruthie! It was so lovely to walk the last couple of miles in with her. A welcome distraction from the pain! My feet were absolutely mangled by this point, and every single step hurt. The last two miles of this race saw me back down to 25-minute miles! After what felt like an age, we reached Helmsley city-limits, where a few friends were waiting for me to cheer me in. Dawn and Paul from Ripon were there, as were Gerry and Julie, who I had last seen in Scalby! In my exhaustion, I became a little confused and thought I'd actually finished the race when I saw everyone! There was still the small matter of another half mile to get to the finish line at the sports centre! There was a lovely buzz as we made our way through the town, and I eventually crossed the finish line on 49 hours, 34 minutes and 11 seconds! 25 minutes and 49 seconds under the race cut-off!

