

Hardwolds 40 – Race report – Lena Conlin – 24 June 2023



Marathon 122 ...

Hardwolds 44 ... take 2 ...

Two years ago as we came out of lockdown I set off on the Hardwolds 40, a 47 mile trail race from Beverley Rugby Club to Malton Sports Centre run mainly on the National Walking Trail The wolds Way https://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/en_GB/trails/yorkshire-wolds-way/ .

That race ended at 15 miles with me in hospital following being attacked by an angry cow which charged through me and came back and trampled me. I was left with multiple injuries, some of which have only recently been fixed. I had entered that race using a voucher from sweeping the Hardwolds 80 in November.

I feel that for me to start healing the mental scars of that day, that I needed to run the race. In November I swept the Hardwolds 80 and used the voucher to by my place in the Hardwolds 40. I have a photo from before the race start 2 years ago and apart from the trainers, I wore the same clothes. (Glad I still have the top, it was brand new back then and had cost a lot so I was horrified when they wanted to cut it off at the hospital. I wriggled out of it). I have only worn the red top once since feeling it may be bad luck. That luck has changed now forever.

So after a mad month of events, I set the alarm for 03:30 for the second time in a week, (last Sunday the early alarm was to get up for The Lakesman). I had breakfast and drove to Malton, I parked more or less where I had parked 2 years ago and got the coach to Beverley. I registered and sat close to where I had sat last time. Barbara saw me and asked if I wanted a photo. She chatted to me calming my nerves.



All too soon it was race brief and start. I started close to the back because the first 8 miles are narrow but runnable. The course leaves the rugby club and enters an old railway line, its flattish. I found this section tough as the morning got warmer and it was becoming stifling in the dip of the railway.



Soon we arrived at the hills, long drags and descents, the valleys were so hot and when I was not in the valleys, any breeze felt like someone blowing a hairdryer in my face.

The first cows I came across were cows and calves sheltering from the sun under the shade of a tree, I felt they were far enough away not to feel threatened by so many people going through their field. The next were again a long way across a field, possibly behind an electric fence.





Approaching Londesborough my stress levels were rising. I passed a field where the cattle were banging at the gate. They looked similar to the herd from last time. As I passed through the quiet farmyard, I was having to force myself forwards; the gates were all open and the field empty.



I took a moment in the middle, where the incident had happened, and moved on, out of the gate unscathed. A few fields later a bunch of cows lay watching as I walked through but again were away from the path. Approaching Millington, I thought I could see cows in the field with the big hill, I hoped there was a fence.



At Millington I made use of the facilities and had a bowl of fruit cocktail whilst the fantastic marshal refilled my bottles, then off I went, clutching a handful of salted peanuts. I was drinking lots and needed full bottles at every opportunity.



Walking up the massive hill from there, I could see the cows gathered by the path; as I got closer, I could see the calves. I stopped to gather myself, Anna asked loudly if I was ok. I said cows and calves, we walked quietly by. Phew!

It was a long haul to Thixendale, broken with a marshal spot at Fridaythorpe. I had had some flapjack and it had been like wood, my water was running low. Then another close encounter of the Bovine kind where they were both sides of the path and we had to walk through them.



I was going down a lane and heard the runners behind discussing going to the garage in Fridaythorpe. Great idea. I followed them and selected an ice pop to put into my drinks flask to cool it down, a carton of squash and a calipo. I had to queue a while as I was 2 customers back and one had lots of purchases, lost time but worth it. I paid when it was my turn and headed for the checkpoint.



3.5 miles to Thixendale, the effects of the cold squash wore off too quickly and the ice pop melted. The calipo was amazing for a few minutes, it was just so hot. I was walking up a field and glistening in the grass was an ice cube, an ice cube? I did a double take, I flicked it up, it was gloriously cold as it slithered across my palm. I rolled it between my fingers and held it on my wrists, there was 2 more, I bent and grabbed them, using them to cool my burning skin and cooling my blood by holding them on plus points.

I caught up with James, he was really struggling, he had bought a bag of ice cubes from the garage, what a sensible decision, some had escaped his bag and I was so grateful. The coolness of 3 ice cubes had lasted longer than my purchases from the garage. Still I was relieved to reach Thixendale and escape the heat. I had my bottles rinsed and refilled, used the facilities, cooled my hands under the cold tap and ate cold rice pudding and a banana. This did me the world of good as I had not eaten much since the flapjack. It was a massive banana left by a competitor who had felt it too large. I drank cola, cherry ade and water, and I took more water with me for the walk up the hill. I immediately felt the weight of the heat of the day, It was a right slog now, too hot and stressed from cows I just wanted to finish, but that was about 16 miles away.



This section started with a massive hill, surprise surprise, NOT, chalky and white with the sun reflecting off it. I knew Warrm Percy abandoned village was in this section, I was looking forward to seeing it by day rather than creeping through it in the middle of the night, sweeping the Hardwolds 80. It was a nice run down to it after avoiding more cows. The ruined church stood out against the green of the fields <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/wharram-percy-deserted-medieval-village/>.

It was quiet, just a few people wandering around and a couple of dogs playing in the pond. The area was smaller than I thought but interesting. Passing by the walk up to the car park was brutal with the

whiteness of the path in the sunlight. It was good to see Chris at the top to get an extra drink. It took forever slogging up hills and jogging down to reach Settringham Beacon, I spent a lot of this time with Peter and a guy in a green top who's name I didn't get. I was dreading another horrible hill, a nasty steep one, but the green top guy said that we don't do that on the 40. I was relieved. I was looking at the floor of the overgrown lane we were walking up when I spotted 2 four leaf clovers, I gave them to my companions.

Finally we reached the cars of support crews, but the checkpoint was about another half mile away. I was done, my feet hurt, I felt sick and I was shattered. I sat at the checkpoint taking the weight off my feet and took my pack off whilst the checkpoint staff kindly ran round after me. Michael put a raspberry drink in one bottle.



I set off, 10km to go, setting off downhill. I normally love a downhill but I was too tired now, I jogged a bit and walked a bit, sipping water and raspberry drink. Downhill all the way to Settringham village, then flat. It was lovely to see the message from the school children. I met Sid the crow and his human family had sweets, I took a couple and kept moving, every step a step closer. The route went through a wood where I had to go under a log and over another at the same time, it was like Krypton Factor getting through with my pack; I emerged alongside a bean field, I followed the GPX on my watch, and it suddenly buzzed me off course. I went back to the wood and set off the other way, more wrong. I could hear voices in the wood, I went back and Chris kept me right for the rest of the route to the finish.





There were a few cheeky little hills in this section and it was uphill back to the sports centre, but I was back. I saw Sarah cheering me in and heard Billy; I looked for him and was pleasantly surprised to see him, as it was not planned for Billy to be here. This really made my day. Round the corner and UP THE STEPS to finish.

Finally, 2 years in the making, Jon came out to greet me. What a relief, the tears I had been fighting all day nearly won. But not quite.

Sarah offered to drive my van home so I enjoyed an air conditioned trip home with Billy.

Hardwolds 40 COMPLETE!

91/125 overall

23/41 female

4 FV50

