

Punk Panther Harrogate Hustle (long route)



Having had to cancel this race last year due to my cataract op, I was looking forward to running it. The recent weather meant the course would be wet and muddy. I considered taking my poles, but decided that they would be annoying, so I didn't.



Harrogate was looking very atmospheric when Karen and I arrived at 6:45. Registration was quick and simple and the loo queue was kept moving by having all loos as not gender specific. The race brief warned us of wet muddy ground and the having to cross busy roads and a railway line.



We were quietly walked over the road for the race start and very quickly we were off.



The start was through a ginnel that was strewn with puddles, everyone was avoiding them, attempting to keep their feet dry for as long as possible. We ran through the streets; it was quite downhill with lots of space for people to pass before we got to Nidd Gorge.



Down in the gorge it was a grey murky atmosphere with narrow paths, broken duckboards and the start of the day's mud and puddles.



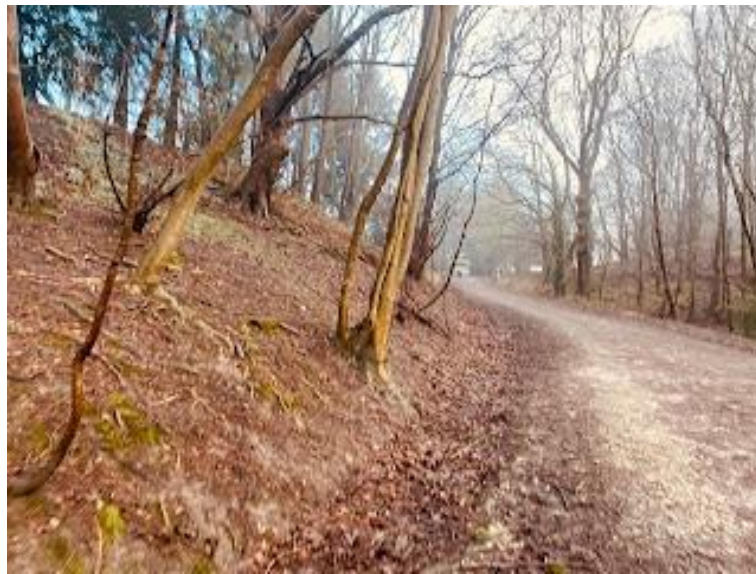


The River Nidd was roaring past, dark like the chocolate river in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Wouldn't want to drink that though.





Reaching the river crossing was a welcome sight. These long races are all about ticking off sections and this was about 5 km in.



A bit of an incline to the carpark, it was a bit of a rest for my balance to be on a firm surface for a while. The next 11 miles I had recced with Karen and friends a couple of weeks ago. It would be nice to ease off the high-level concentration for a while.

It was lovely to Julian at the top of the hill helping us to cross. At this point I was among other runners.

I was surprised at how much of the route was flooded, lanes we had trotted along, a couple of weeks ago, were now a series of deep muddy puddles of unknown depth, no dry feet now.



By Brearton there were no other runners around me, the fog was hanging around. I was quite happy running through country lanes.



Occany Beck was in fast flowing flood and the road badly deteriorating. I made it across between vehicles and as I headed to Ferrensby on the road I could see figures ahead in the mist. It would have been so nice to carry on by road but the route took me across some seriously flooded fields, ankle deep in sloppy, slippery mud.

The first checkpoint was at 11 miles on the Ferrensby Road. It was chilly, so I still had lots of fluid with me, I also had plenty of food (hot cross buns with cheese) so carried on. I left the road for a nice lane while soon became another mud fest. Popping out on to the road near Coneythorpe, a van was driving past. It stopped, I thought, don't ask me for directions, I haven't a clue. It was Andy, what are the chances of passing at that moment.



Through Coneythorpe and across more muddy fields to Flaxby and the A59 crossing for the first time. I was lucky, there was a gap so I got myself across quickly. As I was crossing the fields 2 deer shot across in front of me.



Next the rail crossing. I listened for trains, it was tricky with the mist and the A59 behind, I checked both sides, all clear, cross. As I closed the gate at the other side a train appeared, what a shock.



Into the Woods, I heard they would be messy, but the size of the puddles was a nightmare, there was no way round, no way to guess the depth and more importantly, no way of knowing what was in the water, could have been crocodiles in there.



Between each mucky puddle there was slippy, sloppy mud, what a slog.



Finally I was out of the woods, I crossed a waterlogged field where with every step a foul stench erupted. Next was some nice road, no pics as I was trying to make up some time. Checkpoint 2 was a well stocked welcome sight. I topped up my water and cracked on. Up a lane, through a farm and then, crossing a bridge over the River Nidd, I spotted this, an Archimedes Screw, a great invention for raising water that can be used to create hydroelectricity.



I carried on over the wooden bridge and headed back over the A59, It was much busier here by the St James retail park. A nice downhill side road took me along to the Watermill Cafe and the Lido.



I climbed away from the riverbank over roots and under cliffs.



Lovely view of the watermill and weir from up there. Look at the size of that tree, stuck on the weir.



Back down to river level, it was so peaceful, jogging along the riverside paths, before working up and away and back to traffic noise and civilisation.





The next section took a lot of concentration to stay upright as I worked my way up and downhill in waterlogged fields, then onto Forest Moor Road, that's more of a hill than it seems in the car. It was nice to do the downhill tarmac bit though. Through Panhandle Park towards Stonefall Park. More muddy puddles and now dogs to avoid as well.



Leaving the parks I was opposite Sainsbury's, I should have crossed the road there to the wide path at the opposite side of the road, but the yellow tape lured me down the grass verge. The traffic was busy both ways. As I started to look for a gap in the traffic, as a gap appeared one side, a kind driver let me cross. Next to aim towards Rudding Park for a bit, before turning right up a lane to the Travellers Rest and Checkpoint 3. I took a couple of Jaffa cakes and trotted on.



What!!! More mud, the field had a slight camber making it even trickier, I was glad to climb the stone stile into the woods.



Through the woods I could see a viaduct, I worked out that I was behind the Yorkshire Showground.



Next came a really muddy woodland, it was busy with dog walkers and the shrieks of children playing. Around the back of the showground, Hornbeam Park and I popped out on the A61.



After crossing the road in 2 parts using the traffic island, I headed down another road that led me to more much county trails, around Panel and Burnbridge.



I watched a kite sail above the houses and missed a turn through the churchyard, I soon got back on track though.



I saw this super bright orange jelly fungus.



I felt like I would never get to the Squinting Cat for the 4th and final checkpoint, this last 6 miles had been super challenging, muddy, hilly, lots of gates and stiles. Wish I'd brought my poles.



Finally I got through the checkpoint and could feel the end in sight, 5 miles to go.



It was good to know where I was for a while, running past Cardale Park and Harlow Carr.



Turning behind Harlow Carr, I was surprised by more woods and some Brimham Rocks style boulders, I found it hard going.





I was so glad to emerge onto Cornwall Road, I recognised where I was immediately, I have ridden this road on my bike on Zwift loads of times. I was surprised to turn downhill for a while. Turning away from the road, down a lane and then down a narrow ginnel and back into woods. These took me along the beck across from the golf course. I navigated fallen trees and broken bridges, mud, puddles and dogs to find myself, suddenly behind Bookers. I now knew I was really, nearly back. I felt very disorientated as I passed around the Hydro. I crossed the A61 and headed uphill towards the finish Bilton Methodist church where a warm welcome awaited.

There were shoe covers, hot foods and drinks, and of course a t-shirt and medal.



8:57:28 - That's how long it took me.

60/70 overall, 19/23 female, 4/5 fv50.

Would I recommend it? Yes, I would. I would hope for drier weather in the preceding weeks though.