

Hardwolds 80 – Victoria Morris

[N.B. please excuse any places where the computer has auto-corrected Wolds to either Words or Worlds]



If the weather is interesting enough to be given a name, then it's probably not a good idea to go for a run. Nevertheless, having secured a place for the Hardwolds 80, I wasn't going to let Storm Bert put me off.

This was my first Hard-[insert-place-name-here] event, so I was excited to find out what it is that everyone seems to love about this race series.

Being my usual organised self (!) I left it until the morning of the day before the race to pack my rucksack, mark the route on the map, work out how to get to the start point, and so on. To my relief I discovered that I'd booked a place on the coach to transport me from the end in Filey to the start in Hessle. To my dismay, I discovered that the coach left Filey at 5.30am.

Filey was still very icy and snowy when I parked the van on Friday night, and I began to wonder whether I should have brought crampons. By the time the coach arrived at Hessle, however, the thaw had begun. Something that I don't think was mentioned in pre-race information, but which future participants may find useful to know, is that free tea and coffee was available at registration.

The start was very atmospheric – in the sense that there was a lot of atmosphere happening, most of it damp and falling down around us. I set off in full waterproofs and two pairs of trousers, but once the Wolds Way left the riverside we began to get a bit more sheltered, and I quickly warmed up to the point where I could dispense with the second pair of trousers. Given that I usually run in vest and shorts even through the winter, two pairs of trousers are a good indication of the temperature.

The route follows the Wolds Way, with a few minor diversions, around three sides of a rectangle, heading clockwise from the bottom right-hand corner. The south-to-north side of the rectangle is by far the longest, and fortunately the wind was coming from the south, so was actually an aid to momentum for a lot of the route. Had we been running into the wind, I think the whole thing would have taken about twice as long.

I adopted my usual race strategy of:

1. Never run uphill
2. Don't run if it's going to make you much more tired than walking

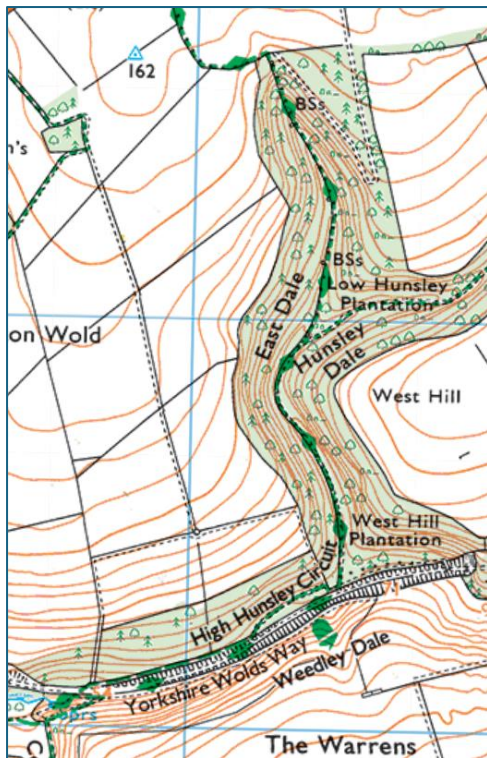
which meant that I ran as much as I could of the first 40 miles, and walked the second 40.

The paths were extremely icy, especially on the Saturday morning, so I wasn't able to run as fast downhill as I usually would. There was a lot of slipping and sliding, particularly in places where the ice wasn't visible and you only found out about it when it was already too late. I heard "Bambi on ice" being used as a comparison.



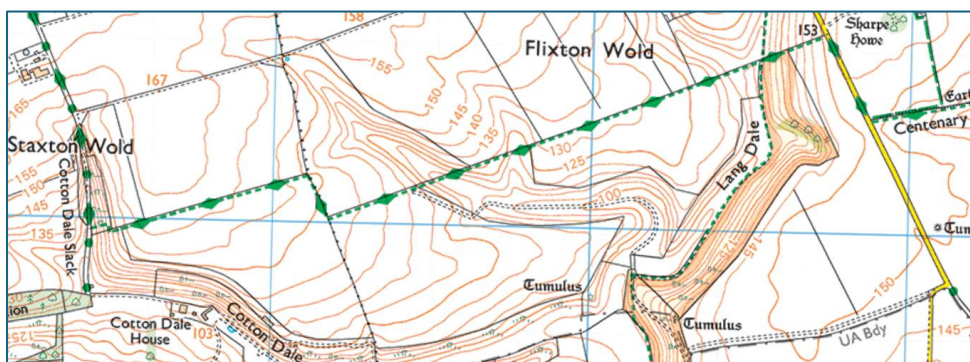
Checkpoints were spaced roughly every 10 miles, which felt about right – never too far to go until a friendly marshal to cheer you up and top up your water bottle. That said, I would have liked to see more choice of savoury snacks at checkpoints. The options were cakes and biscuits, with soup on offer at the three indoor checkpoints, and pizza at the final indoor checkpoint.

I prefer to eat only savoury things while running, but also didn't want to have too much soup sloshing around inside me, so by the time I reached the 65-mile checkpoint I was ready to polish off 4 slices of pizza. It was possible to use drop-bags for snacks at the 30- and 65-mile checkpoints, so had I been more organised I could have sent myself some sandwiches in the drop-bag 'post'.



For the first two-thirds-ish of its length, the Wolds Way takes a lovely winding route, following the natural curves of whatever the steep valleys in between the Wolds are called.

Later on, though, it felt as though the path was as tired as we were, and decided to stop messing around following nice curves and make a beeline for Filey to get things over with as quickly as possible. This meant going straight across the valleys, with some astonishingly steep gradients.





In one place, the signpost has even been placed at a 'jaunty' angle to indicate the gradient ahead. There was a rope alongside this bit of path, so I could haul myself up.

Although I walked the entire second half of the route, I was surprised not to be overtaken by many people. I think of the 4 people who overtook me, two were part of relay teams, and one had missed a checkpoint, thereby saving a lot of time while I was eating pizza. The other person who overtook me was running at a very impressive pace for someone who had already covered 60-odd miles. However, he was completely relying on his watch. I don't just mean for navigation – as well as beeping at him whenever he needed to turn a corner, the watch was also somehow programmed to beep whenever he ought to drink or eat/drink an energy gel. His watch had decided to do a 'factory reset', and although he had been able to recover the route information, he no longer knew when to eat and drink. I later learnt that he retired and didn't complete the course. I realise I'm something of a luddite, but I'm also strongly of the opinion that a lot of this technology is unnecessary. I just have a drink if I feel thirsty. I don't generally use gels (though I sometimes carry them as an emergency extra); instead, if I feel a bit tired I will have some jelly babies, and if I feel hungry then I'll have a bread roll or a cereal bar. I used a paper map for the entire route (Harvey's maps are surprisingly weather-resistant), and didn't have a GPS device with me. I had marked 5-mile intervals on the paper map, and had a vague idea that I should probably eat something at least every 10 miles or 2 hours. I'm not trying to imply that everyone should follow my example, but I also feel it's important to demonstrate that it's possible to enjoy running without all the expensive technology. One of the great merits of running as a hobby is that it's very cheap, and should therefore be accessible to everyone; I think there's a risk that people will feel 'priced-out' of running if they can't afford the latest smartwatch, GPS-enabled socks, or whatever it is.

Anyway, enough of that ... everyone should be allowed to do whatever works for them.

The end of the route was cut short due to the weather – I understand that the race organisers didn't want to leave marshals standing out on Filey seafront, which seems like a sensible decision – so it will have been the Hardwolds-not-quite-80. I finished at about 1am, so must have taken about 17 hours, if my adding up is correct.

Pre-race information stated that there would be a full kit-check at the start, as well as the check of a random item of kit somewhere along the route. In reality, we were asked to show gloves and spare gloves at registration, and my kit certainly wasn't checked anywhere along the way. Perhaps this was because everyone was wearing all of their kit so the marshals could see plainly that we had everything needed.

Navigation was mostly simple, as the Wolds Way is well signposted. There were just one or two places where I began to wonder whether I was following a sheep track instead of a National Trail, but I held my nerve until the next reassuring acorn sign appeared. I think it would be

possible to complete the whole route (apart from those places where the race deviates from the Wolds Way) without map or GPS, provided you had a decent sense of direction and kept your eyes open for signposts.

The finish venue had hot showers, which are always a lovely treat after a cold run. If the same venue is used for the finish in previous years, be aware that it's a sea cadet headquarters, so although the showers are good for washing mud off, you will probably collect a lot of sand.

Overall, a very enjoyable day (and night) out. I'll certainly do other Hard-whatsit events in future, though might look for slightly more sensible distance options.