

## One Mans Challenge. A History of the Bullock Smithy Hike.

56 miles up hill and down dale, and all for a certificate! To some people, it's just another Challenge Walk, to others it's the most important date in the calendar. Why? What makes people from all over the U.K., come back year after year, to spend up to 24 hours slogging round the Peak District? One man has the answer, but to really understand what it's all about, we have to go back to 1975.

John Corfield had a dream. A committed long distance walker/runner, he could see the potential of a tough and challenging event based in the Peak District. At the time, he was a parent / helper, at 3rd Hazel Grove Scout Group. Some of the countries most famous Challenge Walks were being run by Scout Groups, the Fellsman and Long Mynd Hike being 2 of his favourites. The Manchester area had no really long events at this time, and John was determined to put that right. He was fortunate, in that the Scout Group was then amongst the largest and best supported in the North, as is still the case. The HQ was well equipped, and there was a large and in the main willing, group of supporters who could be called on. Those that were unwilling, quickly found that John wasn't one to take no for an answer!

Having established that the Group, under Chairman the late Wilf Connor, and Group Scout Leader Peter Cheslett, was willing to put its name to the proposed event, the most pressing job was to find a route. Fortunately, John knew the Peak District almost as well as his home patch of Shropshire. Anyone who has been on one of his walks around his current home in Church Stretton, tucked in under the Long Mynd, will know what I mean. There is an old saying 'he knows every blade of grass ' and in this case it is true. More importantly, he knows every pub and is on first name terms with the majority of landlords, hardly surprising when you see how much he drinks! (I digress). The route was planned to accommodate both walkers and runners and here an old friend Roy Marlow proved invaluable. John Feist, at that time Membership Secretary of the Long Distance Walkers Association, was another who was closely involved with the establishment of the event (and is still very much involved today). The route was sketched out and walked and slowly a 56-mile circuit was formed. Why 56? I asked John this question. He set out with the aim of merely being over 50 miles, to make it a true, Long Distance Walk. Eventually, when everything was buttoned down, it came out as 55, and on being measured accurately with a trundle wheel (the things people do for fun!) finally stopped at 56. Sure, there were plenty of difficulties, with resistance from farmers and landowners, being the main one. However, with persistence and a fair bit of nerve, most came round, and in fact have been strong supporters of the event to date. Another problem was finding sufficient buildings for nighttime checkpoints, an important point on a walk going through the night. A large number of marshals were needed, and as already mentioned, many people found themselves signed up without even realising it! It's still going on today, with Pete Wood proving to be as devious and persistent as John, I am sure you all know what I mean. Mentioning names is very difficult and horribly dangerous; from past event details, I have drawn up a List of long serving helpers, but I would be bound to miss one or two if I published it. Let me just say that the event has been fortunate to have so many willing people who have come forward year after year. You all know who you are, as do the organisers and regular entrants, and everyone's gratitude is hereby recorded.

The route for the initial hike, was overall very similar to the route used for the last 15 years. Accompanying this history, is an interest report on the route, prepared by Robert Wilkes of the local Scout Fellowship. Rob has not only walked the route and photographed it, but has also done some amazing detective work to discover the secrets of the whole area that the event covers. I am sure you will enjoy this fascinating history of the area. Rob and I will be presenting both the route and history, to a number of groups as a slide show. If you are

interested, please contact either one of us for details. Initially, the route took in Glutton Bridge and Chelmorton Village, with a wild and windy checkpoint on the top of Shining Tor. Due to some minor problems from landowners, these legs, together with some checkpoints, were changed, and the route evolved to become the one used up until last year.

By the time this is read, we will have moved to a new route, involving changes to the last 20 miles. Some people have asked us, why change what has been a successful and enjoyable route. There were a number of reasons. Whilst the course was greatly enjoyed by the majority, we always had a few grumbles over the road sections, which came mainly in the second half from Millersdale. We had always planned to do something special, for both the 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> events, with John planning something extra special, for the year of the 21<sup>st</sup> in 1996. More of that later. Anyway, for the 21<sup>st</sup>, we had a very enjoyable Marshals Walk, organised by P.W. finishing with a B.B.Q. at the home of Derek Hesketh, then Group Scout Leader at 3<sup>rd</sup>. I know he will not want it recording, but Pete was the only one to cover the entire route; the rest of us wimps merely escorted non-walkers around the more popular legs, the ones with pubs along the way being especially popular. Pete arrived sore and weary as things were coming to a close; however being reasonable people we had saved him a sausage! In addition, every entrant to that years Hike, received a special commemorative Bullock Smithy Anvil. If you have one of these, please treat it with care; P.W. had people up all night for many weeks finishing them off! They are collectors' items. That led to thoughts of the 25<sup>th</sup>, and the new route was floated. After the '99 event, a small group was set up to look into things, and slowly, a completely new second half was mapped out and walked. Steve Holt, the Venture Unit Leader at 3<sup>rd</sup> was heavily involved, but quickly realised that the proposed section from Millers Dale, was not feasible and would not allow us to maintain the same 56 mile distance. As a result, the route to Earl Sterndale remained unchanged, with the last 20 miles from there, being totally new. The road sections were largely done away with, and a quiet and enjoyable final leg, put the finishing touch to things. This led to the event being renamed in 2000, The New Bullock Smithy Hike was born. Again, by the time this is read, the new route will have been sampled and hopefully enjoyed. Come back again next year and be absolutely sure you approve.

There are 14 checkpoints in total along the route. A few are worthy of mention. The Chinley Churn point has been featured many times in Strider; a cartoon showing lost walkers virtually standing on the heads of the Marshals. Edale Cross, stuck high up on Kinder, is the only point not to have water, it being a virtual impossibility to get it up there. Peak Forest was always a popular spot, especially with Marshals, as it was in the pub car park. Your current event Organiser commandeered this spot for many years; however a change of ownership led to us being ejected, with the local Reading Room owners coming to the rescue. The Chapel at E.S. became special for 2 reasons. For many years Mike Jackson and his Team, turned it into a haven for weary walkers and runners, complete with Football Results and all mod cons. The tradition has continued under the new Team, but with the same old problem; it is so comfy that it's hard to leave! The Chapel has been in use for the last 22 events and this summer had a display depicting the village history; the Bullock Smithy Hike was included, fame indeed. One of our regular entrants, Bob Wade, had a house in Earl Sterndale, in fact it was between the Chapel and the village pub, The Quiet Woman. I have never asked him whether or not he used to nip indoors for perhaps a cup of tea or a pint when passing, I am sure he will let me know. Axe Edge could be the coldest place on earth, with only the roof of the Bus Shelter to keep the Marshals dry. The Cat and Fiddle, a simple hours walk from Axe Edge, always brought mixed reactions from staff. Some loved it, being fairly warm and dry with the bonus of the Pub next door; others hated it complaining of rats and mucky pigeons. Pym Chair, like Axe Edge, could be bitterly cold through the night. The last 20 miles of the new route, includes 3 new indoor checkpoints at Brand

Top, Cumberland Cottage and Walker Barn. We trust you found them warm and accommodating.

For many years, the local A.T.C section has provided us with invaluable support, having groups positioned at strategic points around the course. As well as helping us keep tabs on where people are, it has also given young men and women, practical experience out on the hills at night. The new Hike in 2000, will see us using mobile phones instead of the ATC, and our sincere thanks are recorded to the section for their help over the years.

Back to the changes. We decided that the menu needed refreshing. No, don't worry, the famous All Day Breakfast is still there, we are still not sure on how to tackle Little Chef on their pinching of our idea! Further good news is that the Penguins are still on, albeit in reduced quantities! Note we were never sure that the events nickname 'the Penguin Marathon' was totally relevant. True, there were one or two Penguin Biscuits floating around (complaints / praise / observations to Alan Marsh at McVities) but in the main they were most welcome, and a damn sight easier to eat (and much cheaper!) than Mars Bars. So this year, competitors will enjoy a selection of desserts and fruit as well as the standard fare (of Penguins, no only joking) for which Challenge Walks are famous. Perhaps the last word on catering should be the paraffin tea. Back in '92, Castleton was manned by Pete and Pam Jordan, then parent helpers with 3rd. On the way out, Pete somehow managed to tip a bottle of paraffin into a 5 gallon water container. The resultant pots of tea, tasted like a liquid Vindaloo Curry, with competitors breathing fire and brimstone up Cavedale. There must have been no smokers that year as everyone was checked in safely, albeit not all in the best of health!

An event like the BSH needs many people to enable it to run smoothly, and here John Corfield had an ace up his sleeve. Scouting, like many other old established Organisations, produces many loyal supporters and we have some that were involved with the first event in '76 still with us today. Again it would be potentially dangerous to try to list everyone, but a couple of people should be noted. As mentioned previously, the event was Johns' brainchild, but in '83 his career as a Trading Standards Officer took him "darn sarf", to Southend on Sea. Day to day organisation was duly handed to Pete Wood, and today, Pete and John together with John Feist, have formed a highly efficient Organisation Team. JF, a confirmed Computer Boffin, has always been responsible for producing the split times on the finish booklet. Nowadays his laptop takes the strain, but the early events were marathon labours of love produced manually. Many competitors have remarked on the informative finish list, showing the various timings. I think John has plans to continue this element for many years yet.

Publicity is vital for all successful events, and the BSH has had its fair share. The very name, Bullock Smithy has always evoked interest, and perhaps some further background information is relevant here. Bullock Smithy was in a fact the old name for what is today, Hazel Grove. There was a Smithy, in the centre of the village, situated where the Red Lion Pub once stood. Tesco now own this site, and have promised to develop it into a new Village Information centre, as long as they are allowed to develop a Superstore on derelict land next to Carpetworld. The Village was on the main London to Carlisle coaching route, and became a main stop over point. The Hike publicity sheet mentions that the Village became, according to John Wesley, 'famous for all manner of wickedness'. Perhaps John Corfield is a reincarnation of one of the old Village lags, but what is certain is that he has continued this evil trend by devising his own 56 mile torture and calling it the Bullock Smithy Hike. The village has grown dramatically since the first event, and is now almost a small town. Scouting has always been very strong, and we still have 4 healthy Groups offering Scouting to all ages. 3<sup>rd</sup> Hazel Grove, the event Organisers, has produced its own Walking Group, the Bullock Smithy Walkers, and the distinctive yellow T-shirts and Sweatshirts are seen at many Challenge

events. We have always had excellent media cover, and over the years have been featured in all the local papers with regular slots on BBC Radio Manchester, Radio Piccadilly and even on the Ken Bruce show in '93. John Feist and Henry Hallworth have provided the front covers on all the finish booklets and I am sure that this years will be as good as all the others. Some of these same covers have found their way into Strider, so they must be good. There are rumours that one entrant will be filming this years event. He is known to your scribe and I can assure both George Lucas and Steven Spielberg that they have nothing to worry about!

The first event back in '76 attracted some 120 entries. I have spent a little time to try and identify those people, who were there early on, and are still entering today. As with marshals, this is a dangerous area, as there are bound to be people who get missed. However, I did want it to be a part of this story, and I will therefore take a chance. If I have missed you, please forgive me, let me know, and I will try somehow to make amends. I have taken as the start point, those people who have entered and started 10 or more events. I thought originally that there were a couple of dozen, in the end it came down to just 4, so I will list them here.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>First</u>	<u>Last</u>
Steve Jackson	16	1983	1999
Pete Cooke	14	1977	1996
Geoff Pettengell	13	1977	1997
Jertz (George) Matuszewski	24	1976	1999

Close behind comes Ivan Waghorn and Alan Ireland both regular supporters from the early days with 9 together with your correspondent.. Whilst on statistics, perhaps the following table might be useful for this one off report

<u>Year</u>	<u>Starters</u>	<u>Finishers</u>
76	124	79
77	180	124
78	182	136
79	194	118
80	231	158
81	232	158
82	207	141
83	248	162
84	256	168
85	287	185
86	307	199
87	223	163
88	224	160
89	224	190
90	172	123
91	189	160
92	215	149
93	245	177
94	218	134
95	235	172
96	253	195
97	195	117
98	135	94
99	152	111

There is one more statistic I feel should be added here. Many entrants come back on a regular basis, and I hope you will all forgive me for not mentioning you personally, I just don't have the room. As can be seen from the above table, there is one person who has done the lot, George Matuszewski. Here I must tell the truth and reveal that he actually

missed one, in 1988! So how come the 100% then? Read on. He was poorly in hospital, and his wife Margaret says that he had to be held down as the start approached, otherwise he would have done a runner to the start and been off. Let me quote Tom Waghorn of the Manchester Evening News 12.9.93. 'If the history of the Bullock Smithy Hike is ever written, jet heeled George should have a chapter to himself.' Well it is written and I feel a few notes are in order. His first event was completed in 20 hrs 43 minutes. He averaged this time until '86 when he decided to try harder and came home in 11hrs 17 mins. As reported, in '88 he was missing and perhaps the plan was hatched about that time. For the record, he was later presented with a certificate showing 0 miles completed out of 56! In '90, there was another problem. There was a double Silver Wedding on the Saturday night that he had to get to. No problem, a lift from Earl Sterndale to the bash, a few hours celebration and then a return lift, to start again from the same spot and finish in just under 18hrs. However, that missing year was clearly bugging, so here is what happened. In 92, he did it twice, back to back! Here are the details. He started at 10.16 on the Friday night, and supported by Margaret and his Stockport Harriers clubmates, went round in 17hrs. An hour and a half later, after a shower and change of clothes, he was back on the line and went round again in 22hrs. The aim of this remarkable feat was to regain his 100 % entry record, and he was duly accorded a special certificate to record the event. Since that time, he has decided to be a wimp and only do it once at a time, achieving a fastest time of 9hrs 43 minutes in '93. I asked George for some thoughts on the way the event had changed. Mainly, his thoughts were on the changes to the checkpoints, erosion throughout the Peak District, and his favourite grub. Yes, he likes Penguins! Please note, if you want to enter the event early in order to be given no.1, hard luck, it is his forever. Final note, he also mentioned that this year, he planned to do a route, taking a totally new and untrodden line between checkpoints. So, if you saw a bearded 6 footer climbing the railway line at the finish in the dead of night, don't worry, it was only George and he had probably just achieved another ambition.

The very name Bullock Smithy Hike, means just that to most people, a heck of a long walk in the Peak District. Whilst the majority of entrants have always been walkers, some casual, others committed long distance walkers; there has always been a strong runner support. Indeed some of our most regular and long-standing entrants are runners, and I thought it might be useful to try to document the way the times for the event have altered.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Men / time</u>	<u>Women / time</u>
76	A.C.Lewsley. 12.22	Nil.
77	A.C. Lewsley. 10.09	Miss G. Burgess. 20.49
79.	D.Calder. 9.26	No change
81	S.Parr. 8.48	No change
83	D.Cunningham.8.38.	Pauline Calder. 13.40
84	Frank Yates. 8.17	Pauline Calder. 12.09
85	No change	Pauline Shore. 11.21
89	No change	Marilyn Wade. 10.39
90	No change	Eleanor Adams. 9.52
91	Mark McDermott. 8.12	No change
96	Tony O'Kell. 7.59	No change
97	No change	No change
98	No change	No change
99	No change	Helen Diamantides. 9.21

Some very interesting times, and again I hope my research has proved to be correct. Coming right up to date, I know that Tony and Helen would agree that a few minutes have been saved by the improvements to the section from the Cat and Fiddle over the top of Shining Tor. Being even handed, they would probably say that the installation of boarding/ steps on the descent from Hollins Cross has slowed things up. Whatever, most of us can only marvel at the achievements of these athletes, whilst dreaming of knocking a couple of minutes off our own times next year. It must only

be fair to finish this paragraph by stating that anyone who gets round is a hero. I have personally witnessed entrants, suffering from blisters, sunstroke, mild hypothermia, the runs and other horrors, but all with the same burning ambition, to finish. Being held in early autumn, the event has had all sorts of weathers, steaming hot, freezing cold, monsoon downpours, hailstones, tree bending winds, you name it, we have had it! To see competitors struggling through the night, with another 28 miles to go, clearly suffering, and probably thinking about the early finishers sat at base having breakfast, makes you realise that we outdoor lot are a bit special. Or a bit mad!

To record every event / happening that has taken place, since the event began 25 years ago, would probably take up too much space, be pretty boring, and more importantly I don't have them all! Instead, I will record the main items gleaned from the finish booklets, thereby hopefully keeping the readers interest and saving myself a lot of time.

- '76) The first event, and the first bash on the famous anvil.
- '77) Father Sidoli, Priest at St Peters Church, finished the event, as did Joey the dog. Forerunners of many of their ilk who were to follow.
- '83) John Corfield moves to Southend to further his career. Day to day running is handed over to Pete Wood. The ATC is introduced to take over the communications side of things.
- '86) The Windgather Trophy is missing! Awarded to the fastest 3 Club finishers, holder Ted Amanski has taken it to the USA where he has been seconded. Strong cross Atlantic words from John see it safely dispatched back home.
- '87) John Feist, tireless worker for the event, is awarded the 'Thanks Badge' one of scoutings highest awards for ongoing service.
- '88) The Andrew Simcock Trophy is introduced. This is to the entrant who gains the most sponsorship money from the event. Andrew was a keen mountain climber and ex. Venture Scout at 3<sup>rd</sup>. He lost his life in an avalanche, with his parents wanting to have a Trophy linking their son to the Hike.
- '90) George does his Silver wedding stunt and Eleanor Adams takes over 1.5 hours off the Ladies fastest time. A dry summer means Shining Tor is bearable!
- '91) The first missing entrant. One lady retires after 7 miles and goes home without informing anyone. A hunt around the Peak District is organised. The Organisers were not amused. Roy Batchelor, together with his dog scrap, comes in exactly on the 24-hour deadline after a pleasant day out visiting the pubs of Derbyshire. Both have to be woken from their slumbers on the top of a Scout equipment box some 4 hours later.
- '92) George does the double.
- '93) Colin Wood, son of Pete the Organiser, goes round in 11.36, claiming he didn't want to be late for his paper round next morning. Steve Shaw of the promoting Scout Group, sets a Scout fastest of 14.49 at the age of 14. National acclaim as entrants are mentioned on the Ken Bruce Saturday Show.
- '94) Kaja Desjatnokova from Estonia completes the route. Monsoon conditions don't stop Karl Booth going round with his Mum Beryl. He was 11 at the time!
- '95) Following a particularly dry summer, the moors are considered dangerous and the event only gets the go ahead at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Pete Wood in his pre start pep talk, bans all smoking. There are no reports of anyone being caught and admonished! John Corfield decides to celebrate being 60 by having a go and gets round comfortably. Your correspondent is caught holding hands with a young lady coming down from Pym Chair checkpoint, by the same Pete Wood. It was weeks before his story was believed, namely that it was the only way he could get her to carry on. Her longest event prior was a 10k run and from the halfway point I had been kicked, swore at, and generally abused, in order to help her achieve her aim of finishing as fastest Lady. She achieved her aim. However there are those that still don't believe the story!
- '96) The 21st event and a marshals walk is arranged. A pleasant day out finished with a B.B.Q. organised by Group Scout Leader Derek Hesketh. PW

puts his best feet forward and completes the full route, but was late for the Barbie. As reported, we saved him a sausage. John Corfield was not there. He had decided to walk the End to End, raising funds for his local Church Stretton Scout Group. Starting in Cornwall in May, he finished in Caithness in July. He will not mind me mentioning that many publicans along the way, saw their takings rise considerably; Johns liking for a glass or 2 is well known and those of us who walked with him for a while, can testify to this. Tony O'Kell took the fastest time under 8hrs, recording 7.59, a time which may stand for a little while!

'97) The event start was the same day as the Funeral of Princess Diana. Nick Sykes, Band Leader with local Scout Group 1<sup>st</sup> Hazel Grove, played the Last Post, before the field set off for what was to become the worst weather conditions ever. Brothers Eddie and James Dooley, both Scouts with 3<sup>rd</sup> HG, completed the course and at 12 and 14 proved just what is possible. The local Bramhall and Woodford ATC section, were called on to do more than provide event communication when a Hang Glider crashed on the Moors near the Cat and Fiddle Inn. The section provided First Aid and guided both Ambulance and Emergency Helicopter to the scene before continuing with the event cover. Pascal Fell came over from France but decided that once was enough and had not been seen since!

'98) 2 Clerics complete the event, one of them Dave Sargent, Curate at the local Norbury Church, coming home in second place in just over 9 hrs. The Reverend Phil Burrows from Cheadle Hulme, took a little longer, but managed to raise £3500 for his local Emmanuel Church. The support for Phil included a box of chocolates at the start and well wishers all around the course. The Organisers took an enlightened and Christian approach to this assistance and no formal complaints were received. I am informed that both men made morning Service on the Sunday!

'99) The hottest weekend. of the year with support crews desperately ferrying water around. Group Scout Leader Brian Dooley, decided to throw 30 years Scout Training out of the door by completing the event in a pair of boots he had bought the day before. He wasn't going to let anyone know, but was caught in the act by your correspondent. We forgave him and allowed him to present the awards at the finish. Helen Diamantedes ignored the heat to take half an hour off the ladies record and finish second fastest overall. Also at the awards presentation, Dave Berry, who had completed the walk, gave a short talk on the efforts being made to bring peace to Bosnia, and presented all present, with a Peace Candle, originally lit in Bosnia. Thank you Dave.

So there you have it. Just another Challenge Walk, or something more? I suppose that it is both. Those people involved, not only in organising Long Distance events, but in any sort of organisation, will know the satisfaction of seeing an event come to pass with the minimum of problems. Each year, since 1976, John Corfield, Pete Wood and John Feist, have had this satisfaction, as the regular army of helpers swing into action. Indeed, Pete has had many people advise him that the only time he needs to query checkpoint availability, is when he reads of their demise in the local paper! By the time these notes are read, competitors will have run, jogged, walked, crawled, and hobbled their way round 56 miles of the Peak Districts finest. On behalf of all at 3<sup>rd</sup> Hazel Grove Scout Group, and the Bullock Smithy Walkers, we hope you enjoyed yourselves and more importantly, will be back for more. One Mans Challenge started with a dream 25 years ago; in 2025, some of us will be a little frail and elderly, but I am sure that the event will still be going as strong as ever.

Quentin Blagg. August 2000.