

## ER Peak District trails weekend - August 2023

The 3rd Ely Runners trip away to seek out some hills saw twenty club members sign up for 1 fell race, 2 nights, 3 days and 4 runs (count 'em) in the beautiful Peak District National Park. As before, base camp and club HQ for the w/e was St Michaels Environmental Educational Centre (aka SMEEC) in the village of Hathersage.



ER's wannabe mountain goats for the weekend included four married couples, **Bethan** (Everson) & **Sam** (Russell), **Lizz** (McKiernan) & **Kristian** (Skinner), **Debbie & James** (Fisher), **Alice & Paul** (Brear Clarkson), as well as four Andy or Andrews (the ad agency of **Barber, Berrill, Brown** and **Thompson**), with **Alex** (Levantis), **Caroline** (Brown), **David** (Carnac), **Fred** (Cheung), **Graham** (Chapman), **Mike** (Bradford), **Peter** (Royle) and **Sue** Bridges making up the numbers. Plus **McAuley**, our sausage-eating, front-running, four-footed mascot who would go on to lead us astray several times.

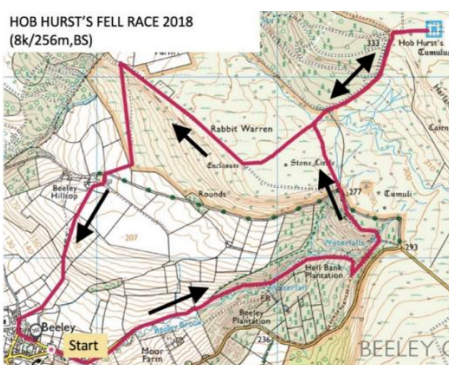
[↑ McAuley & Paul](#)

**Run 1 – Hob Hurst's Fell Race >>** (Friday evening, 8km): With many hands making light work of bringing in and stowing the mammoth Ocado delivery, attention swiftly turned to the first of four runs planned for the trip – Hob Hurst's Fell Race, billed as '8KM LONG / 256M UP, our pay-on-the-day opener to the weekend's activities.

Situated in the small village of Beeley on the edge of the Chatsworth estate and set to strict FRA rules where the mandatory kit list included such everyday items as a 'waterproof wholebody cover (with taped seams and integrated attached hood)' as well as a compass plus various other bells and whistles, the question was could any of us use our shiny new compasses to successfully navigate the 1km from the car park to the race start?

Of course not is the short answer, so it was handy that Andy (I forget which one, take your pick) elected to ask a fellow fell runner in a Steel City Striders vest who promptly pointed us in the right direction, which was we think west. Or maybe north.

With weather conditions perfect and David, Sue and Debbie choosing not to race so as to save their legs for the two runs tomorrow, they naturally assumed umpire duties for all the essential race kit that we now didn't need to carry after all.



The race itself was 4k up through narrow, twisty paths and wooded trails, with lots of roots and rocks to navigate and, in one instance if caught unawares, a leap across a deep metre-wide gap in the rocks – this tricky terrain was markedly different from our usual Tuesday and Thursday club runs.

Nearing the top but constantly aware of who was behind you as not wanting to obstruct any (proper, serious) fell runners from getting past, suddenly we had the front runners hurtling back down the same single-track path towards us, and at some speed too!

[↑ Hob Hurst's fell race route](#)

Dodging 'incoming' from this point onwards up to the turnaround, there was then no time to take in the magnificent views at the hilltop check-in point of Hob Hurst's House (a prehistoric square burial mound with an earthwork ditch and outer bank - named after a local goblin, apparently) as we were now the ones racing back downhill at top speed, trying not to career in to those still on the way up.

At this point, Alice Brear Clarkson could be seen flying off in the distance, proving that running downhill for her is as natural and easy as, well... ABC!

After a few km of varied downhill (bracken, singletrack, open meadow) and various stiles that we threw ourselves at and over, the finish line was in sight under an impressive stone archway. Everyone was spurred on for the home straight and noisily cheered home, with Ely Runners well represented at the post-race awards. Alice was 2nd lady home and so won a bottle of beer for her time of 39:57, with Graham also on the receiving end of a bottle of 'Quad Buster' for 1st MV60.

For his part, Kris was clearly fearless as he secured the highest grading in Berrill's unofficial 'Daredevil score' with the greatest ratio between ascent (30:04) and descent (22:15) times. A challenging race but really good fun and a great start to the proceedings. Only one minor injury was sustained with Andy T tumbling on some treacherous singletrack and bending a few fingers back trying to protect his fall, but nothing two big bags of petits pois couldn't sort out back at SMEEC.

As Bethan and Sam had by now arrived and settled in, we were at full quota and with the industrial oven suitably powered up and Bangers & Mash for eighteen underway with Debbie's onion gravy gently simmering, there was ample time to grab a shower and for several parties to hit the off licence or the pub. A little later than planned (due to sticking around for the prizegiving), the evening meal was quickly devoured by all, followed by Caroline's totally delicious Apple & Blackberry crumble and custard.



Caroline, Mike, Andy (#4) & crumble →

**Run 2, Endcliffe parkrun >>** (Saturday morning, 5km): The BBC team car (of Brown Barber Chapman) did have a bit of a 'Top Gear' feel about it (three blokes in a Turbo V8 droptop, one comically squeezed in the back) and was the first to depart, leading our five-car Sheffield-bound convoy.

Endcliffe Park on the western outskirts of the Steel City was only 20 minutes away. With warmup runs done, Ely Runners were duly welcomed as en-masse parkrun tourists by the marshal giving the first timer briefing who quickly pigeonholed us as parkrun alphabeteers with the question, 'But don't you have an E in Ely?' The course was nicely varied, two laps around a water feature with smaller offroad paths heading slightly downhill, essentially 'paved up / trail down', bridging Porter Brook several times and passing the atmospheric 'Mi Amigo' war memorial to a downed WWII B-17 Flying Fortress US bomber.



Sam (with some 280+ parkruns to his name) had run Endcliffe before and finished in 15th place (out of 595) with Bethan seconds behind. Graham was first MV65 but that came as no surprise, although no bottle of beer alas as parkrun is 'a run not a race'. After a quick visit to meet Tony Foulds, the octogenarian keeper of the war memorial, it's not even ten o'clock and we are already two timed, measured runs in with nobody getting lost or being led astray. So far so good...

**Run 3, The Great Ridge >>** (Saturday afternoon, 16km): The main run of the day started in the village of Hope and was a circular loop of the horseshoe ridgeline, taken clockwise and with far-reaching views guaranteed for the entire second half of the run, weather-permitting.

The initial route, meandering through fields and farmyards, was easy enough to follow and we crossed the road via the village of Castleton, to then climb up through the impressive steeply sided Cave Dale and past Peveril Castle, one of England's earliest Norman fortresses, high up on our right.

## [↑ Pete and the Peaks posse](#)

The clouds were drawing in with the odd spot of rain turning gradually into a fine mist, although actually quite welcome and cooling. After a regroup at a right turn by a farm gate, our large band of intrepid explorers set off for Mam Tor, quickly splitting into two where the pace of the front bunch was dictated by McAuley, with Paul the canine wrangler doing all he could to hold on to the pacey pup.

Heads down against the slightly heavier misty rain, it was only when the chasing pack stopped to admire a massive vertical rockface across the steep valley, formed of limestone over many millennia, and Peter's comment - *'strange, that wasn't there last time we ran this way...'* - that several pennies dropped and we realised we were some way off track with the frontrunners speeding off downhill into the distance, but too far now to hear us call.

*'Shall I blow my whistle?'* suggested Andy Brown with perfect comic timing and delivery, before issuing three short sharp but very effective blasts, Haddenham-speak for *'You've gone the wrong way!'* Way off yonder, the ears of a guilty damp cocker spaniel pricked slightly, enough to make the group look back and see Bethan in full mountain-rescue mood hoofing it down the track towards them.

With an extra mile or two run but now safely re-grouped and with Garmins re-calibrated, Andrew Berrill had done the necessary scouting and assumed the role of Bear Grylls at the head of the pack, finding a footpath along the edge of several fields that connected us with the right route. Back on track, the mother of all hills Mam Tor came into view (you know, the imposing 517m mound that we'd somehow managed to miss...) with our next stop being a team photo-call at the windy summit.

### [Mam Tor group shot →](#)



From there, it was just a question of following our noses (and McAuley's tail), descending and climbing all along the spine of the ridgeline, with magnificent views over the Upper Derwent Valley and the Vales of Edale and Hope. The quickly gathering grey crowds that we were trying to outrun inevitably caught us up at Lose Hill, where in a line we crouched down and tucked in behind a cairn to shelter from the worst of the short sharp shower.



Two minutes later, with the rain stopped and the sun out once again it was just a question of running down the steep green hillside before hitting some rocky paths and the welcome snug of the Cheshire Cheese pub for some well-earned PTSD, or *Peaks Trails* Social Drinking.

Back at SMEEC, the rain had started up and so the appeal of the planned early evening walk to the Monsal Head trail and a panoramic vista of the Headstone Viaduct was called into question. *'Will the views there be any better than what we saw earlier?'* reasoned a thirsty Andy Barber. With the answer being in the negative, that was settled and Team BBC departed for their usual table at The George

### [← Mike on the ridgeline](#)

Berrill Grylls assumed the role of head sous chef and was busy chopping onions and generally getting a head start on the evening meal for twenty. To assist Andrew, head daredevil Kris came bounding downstairs (really quickly we noticed, as was his way now) and instantly took charge and was in total control of the Pappa alle zucchini (courgette and bread soup), today's starter. Peter, having prepared the now traditional Tiramisu after hours on the Friday evening (to allow for suitable chilling time for both the dessert and himself) saw a good opportunity to duck out and join the Top Gear boys at the pub to talk Mk II Escorts, Ford Consuls and V8's.

Grub's up! →

Not to miss out on the big block action, James and Debbie broke out SMEEC's giant Jenga set, quickly joined by Sue, David and Bethan. With Baden Berrill's regrouping @pubgang bat signal text duly acted on, back at base the catering crew posed for a quick snapshot before several large trays of beef and/or aubergine lasagna (accompanied by garlic bread, salad and red wine) were quickly demolished, and tall trail tales were swapped. A fun evening all round and lights were out by midnight as – guess what? - we had *yet another* run to look forward to first thing.



**Run 4, the Stanage Struggle >>** (Sunday morning, 10km): You know what really grinds David Carnac's gears? Mediocre coffee is what, so it was no surprise that he was up early again on Sunday to run through his routine of selecting just the freshest beans, hand grinding them to perfection (with quite some ceremony) and aero-pressing his gourmet brew into action.

The rest of us, Nescafes necked, grabbed a pair of trainers from the growing pile in the hallway and gathered outside ready-to-run as today's route was a recreation of the fabled *Fat Boys Stanage Struggle*, a Sunday morning 10k fell race on a beautiful route run under FRA rules that starts and finishes just 200 yards from where we were staying.



It would have been an ideal run/race to close the ER Peaks weekend but the 2023 staging diary-clashes with the Round Norfolk Relay so at the trip planning stage it went instantly from a no-brainer to a non-starter.

← Shoes off at the door...

Not to be put off though, having made prior contact with The Fat Boys (a Hathersage-based and self-billed '*drinking club with a running problem*', not the heavyweight NY rap trio of the early 80s), they kindly provided detailed route maps so that we could recreate the race under our own terms. After a gentle jog up the High Street, we turned on to Baulk Lane which quickly gave way to a gravel track gently winding its way uphill through farmland before crossing a stile or two where, after skirting past and looking down on North Lees campsite (where some of the party had stayed before), we then encountered a significant increase in gradient with views of the imposing Stanage Edge gritstone ridgeline above us.

The rocky ground underfoot from here was hands-on-knees-steep in places and quite tricky, demanding full attention, a little like the race on Friday evening - we could understand why the Struggle was so called.

Up on the edge proper, there was time for a few photos before heading northwest for the next scheduled re-group point being the trig point at High Neb (458m), which prompted Alex to come out with another of his did-you-know 'fun facts' (that the maintaining of all trig points is undertaken by the Scout movement). Suitably informed of trig point etiquette, James then led the way and found the steep rocky crevice that doubled up as the easily overlooked race-route left turn that had us now heading back downhill – free, easy and fast - through an open forestry plantation.

Heading back to SMEEC and with regroupings abandoned, our party naturally split into two pace groups, those that could keep up with the McAuley/McPauley pairing and those who chose to not bother with the canine caper, seeing no need to hare after the hound.

Four runs done and feeling like fell runners all, it was now time to swap the trail shoes for Speedos as we had an 11am 'Family Friendly Fun' swim session booked at the picturesque Hathersage Lido, a heated Victorian pool with views of the surrounding hills. Most chose to use the dip as a way to unwind and relax tired muscles, but not so Graham or Bethan – goggles and dayglo swimming caps pulled firmly on, they both proceeded to power up and down the single lane given over to swim-for-fitness, only coming up for air after 50 lengths.

Meanwhile, everyone else put in a token length or two but mostly took in the views while bobbing about in the shallow end. Alex and Sam could be heard discussing the finer points of the Press Association's digital marketing strategy, like a couple of Budapest-bathing networking media-types. Restorative swim done, back at base with bags packed, cars loaded and 40km of trails in our legs, everyone headed home pleasingly pooped.

Several noteworthy PS's that indicate just what a great weekend of trail running was had by all:

- David and Alex realising at the end of the drive home that as they both tried get out of the car *'they basically couldn't...'*
- Lizz promptly going on to join the Fell Runners Association...
- Graham sending me a quick text the next day started off with his usual *'Hi mate'* but at the end signing off with, *'Graham the fell runner'...*

All in all, a real team effort and a resounding success of a club weekend with planning already underway for the 2024 trip.

(Peter Royle, ER SocSec)



# Ely Runners