

Dark Peak 15 Trigs – Simon Bourne

I'd been tempted by the Dark Peak 15 Trigs for several years, but there was always a reason that stopped me from giving it a go. However 2009 was the year when I finally committed myself and decided to focus on it as my main objective for the autumn. For those not from Dark Peak, this is a classic 55 mile route around the 15 trig points that appear on the 1984 KIMM map of the Dark Peak. Invented by Dark Peak back in the mid 1980s, Andy Harmer's record of 10 hours 4 mins had stood since 1987 and never been seriously threatened (which made the challenge all the more attractive...).

Lack of time due to family commitments is always my biggest challenge; so I decided to make do with a single recce two weeks before the actual attempt, supplemented by what I could remember from all those Peak District runs I'd done before moving from Manchester to Hebden Bridge in 2003. The recce involved a six hour stint from the start at The Sportsman to Alport Trig (though missing out Back Tor and Margery Hill), then back via Win Hill & High Neb. I'd rather crudely calculated a 10 hour schedule by multiplying the 15 hour schedule I'd found on the internet by two-thirds. My recce splits seemed pretty much on a par with this, which gave me a good feeling that targeting a sub 10 hour attempt was realistic.

I couldn't believe my luck as September turned out to be the driest month of the year, with practically no rain for the preceding two weeks. Having been cursed on two failed Paddy Buckley attempts, it was nice of the weather gods to smile on me for once. However fate paid me back as I went down with a stinking head cold on the Wednesday before, but I had no other free weekends so I just crossed my fingers that 4 days was enough to be over the worse of it (which just turned out to be the case).

After the usual restless night I left home in Hebden Bridge at 5, and was ready to start from The Sportsman on the western fringe of Sheffield at 7. The rules state you have to be self-sufficient, so the rucsac was full of bottles, gels, flapjack and Clif Shot Bloks (a new product I'd discovered whilst supporting a friend's Bob Graham in July – a jelly-like substance with added electrolytes). I also had a small container of table salt as an insurance policy against a repeat of last year's Paddy Buckley attempt - when I came round in Bangor Hospital the next morning following a nearly terminal case of hyponatraemia!

The run out to Rod Moor and then Emlin was an absolute pleasure – fresh legs, a beautiful morning and all the direct lines I'd found on the FRA forum working a treat (many thanks to IanDarkpeak!). Being 3 minutes up on schedule at Emlin was a great feeling, however looking across to the west all I could see was a sea of low cloud. The compass came out and it took a very stressful 28 minutes before the rocks at Cartledge Bents magically appeared out of the cloud just in front of me. I dumped the rucsac for the dogleg back along the slabs to Back Tor, where a peregrine falcon appeared out of the cloud to welcome me to trig number 3.

The ground across to Margery Hill and then Outer Edge was in pretty much perfect condition after all the dry weather and this allowed me to steal a few more minutes back, even though the visibility still wasn't great. Dropping down from Outer Edge I got stuck in some man-eating bracken, which served me right for not recceing this bit....Running along the reservoir track/road was pretty tedious, but it was nice to see the first folk of the day and exchange greetings with all the mountain bikers and joggers coming the other direction. I then took a direct line through the plantation and through the tussocks up to Alport trig which was pretty slow going and seemed to take for ever.

The rest of the outward leg all went to plan despite the continuing low cloud and a head wind from the west, with my legs still feeling pretty good all the way to Cock Hill. I was now ten minutes up on schedule, feeling relaxed and pretty confident. However crossing the A57 in Glossop, after almost 5 hours exactly, marked the turning point in more ways than one. I wasn't sure which way to approach Harry Hut and made a last minute decision to go via the shooting cabin, hoping it would save 30 metres of climb compared to the direct route. With hindsight this was probably the wrong decision, as I lost the direct trod and ended up walking up through the heather to the cabin. By the time I eventually got to Harry Hut I was five minutes down on schedule, starting to feel a bit weary and feeling under pressure for the first time.

Every leg now became a race against time to claw a minute or two back from schedule. It was good to get onto the Kinder plateau, bringing back good memories of all those training runs from years gone by. The weather forecast had predicted that the wind would be from the west all day, but stronger in the afternoon than the morning. Amazingly enough this seemed to be the case, and by the time I'd reached Brown Knoll I was back on schedule. I was definitely in racing mode now – pushing hard on every step and focussing on getting the best lines through the rocks to save every possible second. Breaking ten hours was dominating every thought and had become a total obsession!

The run along the south edge of the Kinder plateau to Blackden trig took longer than I'd allowed, despite the fact I was still moving pretty well. I was gutted to be 5 minutes down on schedule again, with just over 2 hours to pull it back. I knew I'd been deliberately generous with my last two splits (a psychological ploy in case of exactly this scenario), so I just kept on flogging myself and promised myself I wouldn't give up the chase. Running down past Crookstone Barn the phone went with Mark Chapman calling to check how I was doing and when he should turn up to give me a cheer. I wasn't particularly chatty but just about managed to make myself understood.

The 3k gradual uphill grind to Win Hill was painful– not steep enough to walk but pretty tough to run after 8 hours. I got to Win Hill after 8h33m, now six minutes down on schedule, and launched myself down the hill through the woods, calling out to the bemused walkers to clear the path. Mark was at the bottom to give me a cheer and it was nice to see the first familiar face of the day. I persuaded my stomach to accept a final couple of gels and grovelled up the road towards Stanage, trying to keep running all the way. I eventually got to the cattle grid and climbed up through the rocks to High Neb, getting there after 9h24m, having pulled three minutes back on schedule exactly as hoped.

I then took a really neat direct line back to Redmires Road – along the grouse butts, found a trod through most of the tussocks, cut the corner of the woods and then picked up the track down to the car park. I threw my rucsac under a bush and hit the road at 9h46m. I knew I'd taken 13 minutes to get back from here in my recce, so it was definitely game on!

The adrenaline was really flowing now and I gave it everything I had along the road. Mark came past in the car to give me another shout. I still wasn't sure whether I'd make it in time or not, until the Three Merry Lads came into view with three minutes to spare and I knew it was only a few hundred yards back to The Sportsman. I then floated down to The Sportsman on a huge wave of achievement and stopped the watch after 9h58m42s – 78 seconds to spare!

So all in all a fantastic day out in the hills and an amazing sense of satisfaction to achieve something I'd had in my sights for several years. I realise I was phenomenally lucky with the dry conditions, but then I'd deliberately chosen September to maximise the chances of this. I could

maybe have shaved a few minutes off if I'd checked the lines off Margery Hill and up to Harry Hut, but apart from that the day had gone to perfection.

I'm hoping that reading this will inspire a few others to give it a go - you can't beat the 15 Trigs route for a classic day out in the Peak District.

Simon

ROD MOOR	263884	0h 22
EMLIN	240934	1h 04
BACK TOR	198910	1h 44
MARGERY HILL	189957	2h 21
OUTER EDGE	177970	2h 33
ALPORT	129933	3h 35
SHELF MOOR	089948	4h 13
COCK HILL	059962	4h 39
HARRY HUT	045908	5h 40
KINDER WEST	077894	6h 11
KINDER LOW	079871	6h 33
BROWN KNOLL	084851	6h 47
BLACKDEN	129878	7h 43
WIN HILL	187851	8h 33
HIGH NEB	228853	9h 24
THE SPORTSMAN	283863	9h 58