

THE 39 TRIGS CHALLENGE

Distance: At least 135 miles

Total climb: Approx 20000ft

Objective: To bag all 39 trig points on the 1984 South Pennines O.S. map 1:25000 in one attempt

Start and finish: Mytholmroyd Community Centre

Second successful attempt: JR Clay 13th & 14th June, 2014

46 hours 30 Minutes

The story begins in November 2013, when with a number of my older scouts from the 12th Halifax Sea Scouts we had just completed a triple loop of the Brow Hike route. This was some 60 miles in 21 hours. With everyone from the troop absolutely sick to death circumnavigating the old Sowerby Bridge parish boundary, I was told I must come up with some different routes. This was when I stumbled across the Go-Far website. I emailed the three South Pennines 'trigs' routes out with little response, unsurprisingly. The discovery of the routes sadly coincided with my sister Sarah being diagnosed with breast cancer. Feeling somewhat helpless about the whole situation I decided I would do a small challenge to raise some money for Yorkshire Cancer Research. Having considered my options a marathon, triathlon or possibly the ultimate hooray Henry's trip to the Inca Trail, my mind kept going back to the South Pennines 39 trigs. This is due to a number of factors, it looked tough, the most that I'd ever walked before was 70 miles and one of the first men to complete the route was Peter White. As a 16-year-old Peter had been the man to inspire me to win my first Calderdale Hikes and do my first Fellsman and I've got a huge amount to thank him for. It quickly dawned on me that this was the Challenge from me.

I quickly emailed John 'Bod' Riley of Calder Valley fell runners who devised the route back in 1989, surprised when he informed me that to his knowledge no second attempt was ever made. This just added to my desire to complete the route. At this point I must thank John for his advice in the period leading up to 13 June. I was overwhelmed when every week in my inbox three or four little maps would arrive, in the end he produced around 90. These proved invaluable. I started training in late January, Castle Carr steps and Stoodley Pike being the favourite venue's under torchlight, with three of the best training partners any athlete could wish to have. MR Butler, GP King and TA Vaughan. Training went very well with regular trips to Leeds University swimming pool just adding to my cardiovascular strength. Winning the Calderdale hike in April gave me confidence to really believe that I could get this job done.

It is at this point that I must explain that as an athlete I'm something of a 'hybrid'. A serious knee injury eight years ago means I'm not fully a fell runner, but more of a superfast long-distance walker who runs off the hills. I also tend to train more like a triathlete opposed to a runner, spending vast quantities of time in the pool and on the bike.

I did not take this challenge on in order to try to beat the 91 time set by Peter and Rhys. My motivation behind the challenge was to raise some money for cancer research and raise awareness of it. I make no apologies for the way in which I organised the event as having a small number of

pacers for each section was for me the logical way to run things. I'm sure I could have completed the event in a more discreet 'pure' fashion, with one man, a rucksack and a dog with a small amount of roadside assistance. Again I make no apology for not doing this. Can I just make it abundantly clear that on all sections of private land and golf courses the number of personnel was kept to an absolute minimum.

Sector 1

M.C.C. - Sheepstones Edge - High Brown Knoll - Cross Hill - Standing Stone Hill - Bridestones - StoodleyPike - Little Holder Stones - Light Hazzles Edge - Blackstone Edge - Lydgate.

We left MCC bang on time at 06:30, I was quite surprised by the number of people who had made the effort to attend the start. I apologise if I wasn't in the most talkative of moods however I was 'in the zone'. It also meant a great deal that 'Bod' came to see me off and was great to finally put a face to a name.

The weather was perfect me and GP King flew up the first hill onto Midgley Moor and was soon at the first trig point bang on time. Everything seemed perfect as a sedately jogged across the top to High Brown Knoll, ironically finally sheep track which took us to the trig point faster than we had expected. We jogged off the moor meeting John Clay senior at Pecket Well. Much to his disgust we didn't want to drink or anything at the back of his car and we carried on down to Hardcastle Crags and up to Heptonstall, reaching Cross Hill in good time.

The road and track onto Standing Stone Hill seemed to last an eternity. The final run-up to the trig was made more problematic by nettles. GP King remarking that these were not just nettles these were 'super-nettles'. We jogged off the hill both feeling great and making good time and were quickly on Dukes Cut, again this seemed to go on forever but on arriving at Bride Stones we were rewarded with a fabulous view over to Stoodley Pike. We jogged off the hill happy in the knowledge that we would soon be at our first rendezvous point and having some food. Inadvertently we managed to miss the turnoff on the Calderdale near to cross Stones golf club and this probably cost us 10 minutes. By this point GP King's knees were causing him some discomfort so the decision was made that from the rendezvous he would drive up to Lumbutts and meet me at Stoodley Pike. This was the only section of the route that I did solo.

I arrived at Stoodley Pike 15 min behind schedule with the heat beginning to intensify. Still feeling fresh we jogged and walked on the Pennine Way but by this stage George's troublesome knees were playing up again. I ran up to Little Holder Stones meeting George again at Warland reservoir. We rang ahead to tell the support crew to have another pacer ready at the White House. After a quick bite to eat and saying goodbye to George who had to nip back to college to hand coursework in at 16:15 me and GJ Baigent flew upon to Blackstone edge and then ran off to Lydgate. We were now somewhat behind schedule.

It was while sitting and having some food at Lydgate that I realised this route may possibly be further than 105 miles. Although when rekeying the route I had measured sections, a lot of these training days were simply driving as close to the trig point as I could, running up locating it and then running back to the van. At Lydgate my Strava was reading 27 miles not the 20 as specified on the 1991 sheet. I was also travelling much faster than the 3.5 miles an hour I allocated for myself. This was

quite a strange time and all I could hear was voices in my head saying 'if you don't finish, do we still get our money back'? I had no option but to carry on, but I did still feel fresh and fit.

Sector 2

East Hill - Rusby Hill - Hunger Hill - Brown Wardle Hill – Freeholds Top - Small Shaw Height - Thieveley Pike - Holme Chapel

Myself and GJ Baigent left Lydgate and before long we were at the track from Shore up to East Hill. By now the temperature was reaching 26° with little breeze. We crossed a small reservoir at the dam wall, negotiating a herd of cows and headed straight up the wall to the summit. We jogged off down to water Grove reservoir meeting my girlfriend Kathryn who was taking over pacing duties. After a brief argument over the fact she was meant to bring me some water to tip over my head we carried on and was soon jogging across the golf course and up to Rushy Hill. The next phase of the route is by far the worst having to nip across the valley to Hunger Hill which is always visible in the distance. We did however reach it in good time and jogged down into Whitworth meeting the support crew at Whitworth Square. After a brief stop and having to sneak into the pub to empty my bowels, Kathryn and I carried on up to Brown Wardle Hill. Kathryn was dismayed to find that an hour and 30 minutes earlier we'd been within three quarters of a mile of the summit. She cursed 'Bod'. The section from Brown Wardle Hill to Slate Pit Hill was possibly my favourite of the whole route, I was moving well in the heat of the day which was starting to disperse and the views were magnificent. As we jogged along the track from Trough Edge End to Slate Pit Hill I remember thinking perhaps this isn't going to be too bad after all.

After a quick bite to eat at Slate Pit Hill we had a change of pacers; Molly Meek and Joshua Chilvers. It was great to see them. As we descended into the Bacup Valley and up to Small Shaw Height we moved quickly and giggled incessantly about the mess I now found myself in. The run onto the Deerplay pub was boggy and wet but I still felt great, and the conversation flowed up and over Thieveley Pike and down to Holme Chapel. We were now however two hours behind schedule and had clocked 52 miles opposed to the 38 stipulated.

Sector 3

Merrill Head - Hoof Stones Height - Delf Hill - Extwistle Hill - Marsden Height - Waltons Monument - Lad Law - Little Wolf Stones – Withins Heights - Penistone Car Park.

As I sat at Holme Chapel it dawned on me that I probably only had two hours of good-quality daylight left. It was imperative that I got past Gorple Stones in the light. Me and Molly set off up the hill from Holme Chapel and were soon at Merrill Head, the walk on the road to the turning to HSH seemed to take forever. We were still moving well and talked about kayaking exploits from the summer of 2013, meeting Josh at the turnoff for Hoof Stones Heights. We found the summit quickly and with the sun just beginning to set, we all agreed that this was a magical place to be. We jogged along the fence and made it to Gorple Stones with about 10 min to spare. We could see in the far distance the walls we were aiming for. On a compass bearing we headed over the moor in failing light. In hindsight if I were to do it again I may head straight for the road above Widdop reservoir, and then double back on the path at Rapes Clough. The moor was horrifically boggy in places and very tussocky. We did however find the trig point relatively easily once with ascertained there was a

second wall not marked on the map. Heading over this moor in the dark however had cost us quite a lot of time. We ran off Delf Hill feeling great with Molly and Josh amazed at how well I was running, meeting the support crew at a pub on the Extwistle Road.

We met the support crew to find mum, dad and Kathryn had gone home, and Simon Fleet or 'Mole' as he is known had now taken over. It was time to swap pacers once again with MR Butler and WEC Rushworth taking over, and what job they did! Extwistle Hill was simple enough although covered in thistles. The run onto the golf course and Marsden Heights will be remembered for only one thing passing a number of drunks staggering up the hill. MRB remarked 'this is far too steep to be staggering up drunk'. We got across the golf course with relative ease and met up with the support crew who had been rudely awakened by a police officer asking what they were to. It would appear that 39 Trigs is the best alibi in the world and should be used often.

It was at this point that we had our only real navigational error. In an attempt to avoid a field of Allah Packers near to Walverden Reservoir we got completely disorientated and ended up near to the Chapel at Lane Bottom. The Night Brigade were absolute fantastic, there wasn't a cross word was spoken and we got on with the job soon finding the road to Crawshaw Lane. It seemed to take an age to get Waltons Monument and then down to lower Coldwell reservoir where we were meeting the support crew. This was the first point that I was starting to feel a little sick and although the legs were fine, mentally I was starting to feel it.

My only real memory of this checkpoint was sitting in a deckchair eating pasta with no sauce on it out of a large mixing bowl, simply trying to get some calories in me. The support crew who had been fantastic all day were now also starting to get tired. By this point the schedule had gone out of the window and it was simply about finishing. I have no idea how far behind we were at this stage but do recall 'Mole' saying 'this should have been my first checkpoint, and it would appear it may be my last'.

As we set off up the track towards Lad Law the sun which are starting to come up and I can honestly say that it was one of the most beautiful, surreal experiences of my life. As we walked up the track with the mist settling in the valley bottom we noticed a small deer just going about its business and looking up at us. It is impossible to convey into words just how beautiful a moment this was, and I thought long and hard as to whether to include it within this report, or whether it should remain private.

Lad Law was as expected steep and boggy, but really not that bad the only real incident on the way up was MRB thinking he lost his phone. Sadly the summit was shrouded in mist, but I was feeling fine again, that was until one of the night Brigade remarked 'don't worry only the equivalent of a Calderdale Way to go'. In my heart of hearts I knew that it was further than a Calderdale Way. Coming off Lad Law was simple enough and although the track to the bottom of little Wolf Stones was long the conversation flowed, and we all seemed in high spirits.

The plan was to meet the support crew at the end of the track on the main road, however when we arrived they were nowhere to be seen. This is where WEC Rushworth was fabulous 'let's just carry on then' he said, much to MRB's disgust. So we ploughed on up to the top of Little Wolf Stones following the fence to the summit. The conversation varied from copious amounts of vulgarity to the West Indian fast bowlers of the 1970s and 80s, it was great. As we ran down the Pennine Way

towards Ponden Mill all the night Brigade talked about was bed, you so-and-so's I thought. We were meant to meet the support crew including mum, dad and Kathryn where the Pennine Way meets the country lane. Again they were not there. After a quick rant down the phone from my good self they arrived, I had some food and we swapped pacers again. In hindsight we should have waited for the fresh pacers arriving at Penistone Hill at 07:00. However me and Josh who had slept in the back of GJ Baigent's car got the onerous task of pacing me up to Withins Height, we were both done in. We virtually walked in silence the entire way. It should be noted that the route is now far better than that encountered by Peter and Rhys in 91 as the gamekeepers have constructed a proper path up to Blue Scar Clough. I knew to take a bearing from number nine grouse butt, it seemed to take an age to get there. As we sat by the trig point chatting I knew a long day lay ahead.

I don't really remember a great deal about the run-off down to Penistone Hill, all though I do recall seeing someone in the far distance being dragged through bogs by an unruly Labrador. 'Look at that fool', I thought to myself, 'posh idiot'. It wasn't until I got closer than I could see it was my best friend Matthew who'd come out to offer his support. It really was great to see him and gave me the require lift.

I had a bacon sandwich at Penistone Hill which was the first warm thing I had consumed in 28 hours, it didn't have the desired effect I was starting to feel very sick.

Sector 4

Penistone Hill - Branshaw Moor - Catstones Hill - Nab Hill - Soil Hill East - Soil Hill West - Delph Hill - Mount Tabor

It always amazes me how on endurance events you always discount a section as easy. I once did this on a Lakeland 3000s going up to Raise. The section to Branshaw Moor and Catstones Hill I'd looked at in the car, this was a big mistake, it was awful. I did have fresh pacers and Cath, James, Joseph and Patrick were fabulous, however I was really starting to suffer now. In the 1991 report Peter and Rhys both said this was the worst sector and had that in the back of my mind as I headed up to Branshaw Moor. On arriving at the golf course it was very busy and I had to wait as 4 old chaps played up the first fairway. One of them hitting his ball over the wall three times, I was incandescent with rage. I sat at the trig point for 2 minutes alone to gather my thoughts. I was in bits 'I've no idea how we can finish this' I thought to myself.

The section up to Catstones was tricky to find and in hindsight going on the Worth Way was an error. The road would have been a much better option. Cath was brilliant talking to me all the way up the hill and telling me 'you'll turn for home soon, just keep going'. I don't really remember a great deal about Catstones, only that I re-taped my feet, only to find both little toes now heavily blistered. I hobbled out of the checkpoint at about 1 mile an hour, wondering how I was going to explain to people that the 'Warrior' had failed. That thought kept me hobbling down the road and soon my legs loosened up again, we all started chatting, Molly was back on form and brilliant, which was a huge help and I dragged myself to the Five Flags. Trough Lane seemed to go on forever but I was starting to feel fresh again and my mood had changed. Perhaps I could get this job done!

On the walk up to the Five Flags I decided to have an hours sleep at the Dog and Gun, but I felt better now and was unsure whether I required it. Molly gave me the best advice ever '30 minutes ago you were dead, and going to sleep. Have an hour and if people refuse to wake you I'll throw a cup of water over you'. I really wanted to do the event 'clean' with no sleep. However at this point I was at around 100 miles in and would not have completed the remaining 35 without some sleep.

I awoke after an hours sleep feeling a tad ratty but fresh and ready to go. In the period whilst asleep three of my scouts Oliver, Freya and Seth had arrived as well as the famous Sowerby Bridge Dentist, Liz Bolton. With GJ Baigent also in tow the six of us headed for Nab Hill with relative ease, I was back up at 4 mph now and felt fresh. We flew up to the trig point meeting Baigent senior, Molly and Josh there. For once the moor across to Soil Hill was not too boggy and I was starting to enjoy myself again. The weather was fabulous and the sun beating down as we got to the Ogden Road in no time.

On approaching Soil Hill we were berated by an irate woman accusing us of trespassing. This did happen when I looked at this section. All I can suggest is a simple signpost directing the visitor on foot to the funnel into the footpath. Luckily Liz gave her both barrels back as I was in no position to argue. The run down to Delph Hill was simple enough meeting the Calderdale Way and then one little hill which did 'sting' a tad up to the road. We marched down the road popped over the barbed wire fence finding the trig in a very poor state of disrepair. We met the support crew at Wainstalls had a quick bite to eat and were on our way through Pellon to Wainhouse Tower. This seemed to take an age with GJ Baigent having the audacity to tell me to pick the pace up. I was not happy but he was right.

Sector 5

Wainhouse Tower - Greetland Moor - Norland Moor -Wholestone Moor - Rishworth Lodge

I was amazed by the number of people including my grandmother who were at Wainhouse Tower. After a brief chat with people and having been caught emptying my bowels by a dog walker around the back of the tower, I changed road shoes for fell shoes and was back on my way. The night brigade of MR Butler and WEC Rushworth had also returned, in addition to this my old adversary CL Atkinson had also arrived to pace over to Outlane. I remarked that my feet were quite sore and CL simply replied 'this sounds like whingeing; you got yourself into this mess. Let's move'. The pace up to Norland was great and we were soon at Clough Moor Bridge and bumped into Philip and Ian Whitaker. I popped round to Greetland Moor following Ian on his bicycle. The pair then followed us over Norland and up to the trig, this had been a nice unexpected surprise.

Coming off the moor I was overwhelmed by the number of people that had come out to see me. I think they were hoping sadistically that I would be in absolute bits, but I was fine and after a brief chat we carried on to Krumlin and eventually Wholestone Moor. We'd also picked up more pacers along the way. TC Hammond a great giant of a man was now with us as well as Molly's mum Colette (complete with 1980s leggings), LR Robbins and Cath would return just before the steepest road section. We seemed to reach the M62 in no time with me beating most of the pacers to the top of the hill which felt great. Only 4 of us headed to the actual trig point which seemed to take an age, but it was like a football pitch on top of the hill and the views over to Holme Moss were fabulous as the sun was just starting to set.

The walk down to Rishworth Lodge was fabulous conversation flowed and as we walked along the dam wall at Scammonden it was gleaming under the lights of the M62. It was properly dark now and I made the error of thinking this was done. The final three hills were my territory that I trained on all the time, from here on in I thought it was simply a lap of honour.

By Rishworth Lodge I was starting to feel sick again but pizzas kindly supplied by the support crew lifted all our spirits. Although mum did think they would make me feel ill.

Sector 6

Dog Hill - Manshead End - Crow Hill - Mytholmroyd Community Centre.

GJ Baigent would pace the final section, Dog Hill in the dark seemed to go on for eternity, and I was just starting to panic when we arrived at the trig. I knew the route down to Baitings Dam would be tussocky until we hit the track down. By this point my pace had slowed again and for the first time in my life I understood what it was like to be the slowest member of a group. On arriving at the bridge at the back of Baitings it was completely fenced off. This was not good, however TC Hammond proved invaluable lifting up a temporary fence as we all crawled underneath. We met the support crew at the layby and after 5 minutes finishing off our pizzas were back on our way. We'd also kindly been joined once again by Liz Bolton who had been home, watched England's demise against the Italians in the World Cup and then came back out.

TC Hammond did a fabulous job pacing up to Manshead and even though I'd been dreading it for an hour we seemed to fly up the hill. Panic then ensued when we couldn't find a trig due to fog. I ended up having to take a bearing from our last point of reference and luckily this was accurate with Josh being first to the trig. I couldn't have imagined the indignation of missing the 38th trig.

The walk onto Crow Hill will not live long in the memory everyone had hit a low point some of the boys were singing, badly and everyone else was just trudging along in silence. Soon after the sun was beginning to come up and this lifted everyone's spirits and it was a long before we popped up onto the 39th trig, Crow Hill! I have to confess that at this point I was pretty tired and it was somewhat of an anti-climax. In the weeks leading up to the event I envisaged standing on the trig making a Churchillian speech about belief in one's own ability. This didn't happen, 'thank you' was about all my usually so eloquent tongue could muster. The run down to the finish seemed to take an age, I really wasn't bothered about what I'd achieved, whose footsteps I was following in, I simply wanted to go to bed. Eventually we popped out at the end of Stake Lane and headed down to the Shoulder of Mutton. Much to the support crew's disgust we went over the footbridge, passed Mytholmroyd Scouts and headed in to the Community Centre car park via the back. FINISHED!!!! To say it was 05:00 there were still a great many people who came to see me finish, and this meant a great deal. "Beer or bed?" asked dad 'Bed' I replied!

I'd done it.....miles in 46 hours 30.

I'd been to every trig on the map in one trip, it took a bit longer than expected, but I'd done it. No doubt somebody else will try it, I hope they do. It's a fantastic route, visiting places you'd never think of going to (extract from 1991 report).

Closing Remarks

This route is definitely longer than the 105 miles advertised on the website. I guess that if a group of moronic runners (Rhys's 1991 phrase not mine) had attempted the challenge 'Bod' may have got a strongly worded email over the inaccuracy. Having now had a number of days to consider whether the length of the route is an issue, I've very much come to the conclusion that it is not. The challenge was never to run and walk for 105 miles it was to link the 39 trigs on a South Pennines map. Length is irrelevant. How far is it? I guess it to be around 135 miles but my Strava died with 92 miles on the clock around the Haworth area.

How tough is it? It is very tough, compared to Fellsman, Four Inns or a Lakeland 3000s, it's in a different league. I would urge any long-distance athlete wanting to challenge themselves both mentally and physically to give it a go. Maybe it doesn't have the prestige of a Bob Graham or Paddy Buckley, but it is the unique nature of the landscape that makes it so challenging. I felt to be going up and down all day, like all great routes when you think you've finally cracked it, it has one final surprise left in store for you. Remember only 3 people in 23 years have completed it! It has however got a 100% completion rate!

What would be a good time? I think for a serious endurance athlete running most of it, between 28 and 33 hours would be a fine achievement, if you walk 85% of the route as I did then anything sub 48 hours is more than acceptable. I would have liked to have run more of the route and for vast portions I felt I was strong enough to do so. However with the intervention of modern technology and knowing how far I travelled in comparison to the 91 sheet, I felt it unwise to do so.

Would I do it again? Probably not, not because of how tough it was but mainly because I wouldn't want the memories of such a fabulous experience to be diluted, as they inevitably would be by a second attempt. Long-distance running, mountaineering, climbing and kayaking have given me some fabulous and amazing memories and allowed me to meet some unbelievable people. I have to say that doing this challenge quite possibly eclipses everything. OK it did hurt, it was always going to but the positives definitely outweigh the negatives 10 to 1.

A Few Thank You's

Could I firstly thank mum, dad, my girlfriend Kathryn, Sarah, Grace, 'Mole' and the rest of the support crew you were all absolutely fabulous and did a great job in trying circumstances. I apologise for being a tad ratty at times, but I guess you had to be in my head to fully understand how in the zone you've got to be to complete this challenge. GJ Baigent also did a fabulous job not just pacing, but also holding the whole thing together, whilst running the social media stuff (who says men can't multitask)!

Pacers: GP King, KI Merrick, GJ Baigent, M Meek, JC Chilvers, MR Butler, WEC Rushworth, J Greenwood, J Fearnley, P Hyatt, C Whitaker, L Bolton, F Bolton, S Bolton, O Hornsby, CL Atkinson, JL Bruce, TC Hammond, C Meek and LR Robbins.

Many thanks to all pacers, who kept me going when times got tough, though I'm absolutely certain that I made you all howl with laughter in the good times. You all did a fabulous job. To complete this event with so many young people that I've helped nurture at the Sea Scouts from 11 years old, made

the whole experience even more special. Many thanks also to Horse and Hound for their coverage of the event.

And one final thank you must go to 'Bod' for taking the time and energy to devise such a fabulous route. To say it had everything simply doesn't do it justice. I would hope that it doesn't take another 23 years for someone to make a third attempt on it.

JR Clay June 2014