

Craig's Story – 2007.

Back in September 2006 the annual election took place to select the recipients for 2007. On this occasion the winners were Whitwell Scouts and Guides. A long established organisation but with a building in desperate need of upgrading. Whitwell, being a close knit community, has several organisations many of which are patronised by the same people....not entirely, but, a significant amount. It is quite often the case that “if you want support for your group – you must be prepared to support others”. This is very true in many cases in Whitwell. In this case the local brass band would love to have our support but, to gain this, knew it would be very wise to support the scouts in 2007 in the hope of being elected as beneficiaries in 2008. In actual fact, many “band members” had already been involved for many years. Some however hadn't and decided to get involved this year. One of these was a guy called **Craig Bramford**.

I was very pleased when Craig and several other younger band members decided to “take on the walk” as I thought this is the right thing to do. The problems is..... Craig isn't exactly a whippet! However, he was prepared to go for it and I take my hat off to him.

Over the next 3 or 4 months I regularly saw the guys on quiz nights and all were determined to succeed. To do this, however, you must train. It is no “gimme” to walk 40 miles. You need to prepare yourself putting in the hours training. This I explained to all on a number of occasions. So, January 2007 I put together a training plan and Craig is raring to go.

I decided that over a 4 week period, we would cover the entire route. Let them know what they are in for. After that we would do a number of walks that got longer each week and would get increasingly difficult. By the end of week 4 Craig was having doubts. “This is sodding hard. Didn't know how hilly this is. “Piece of piss in a car”. You see he is not exactly built for walking and the hills were “killing him”. As I explained you have to go through the tough stuff to prepare yourself for this type of event....he was still “on board”. Mind, he wasn't on his own. Some of the others were having doubts also. Now knowing the route, they couldn't see how they would do all this in one day. But, with a little coaxing, I persuaded them that it was possible. They all duly posted their applications and were accepted. COMMITTED!

Thursday night is quiz night and I attended regularly and, every week I heard the same thing. Some of the band lads were totally convinced Craig would fail. He is simply too big and there was more chance of Mansfield winning the cup. They ribbed him about this relentlessly. Trouble is.....Craig was putting in the hours and although he also thought he would fail, was still willing to give it a go. After a number of weeks of this I turned on some of the lads....” He will fucking do it....he is working....not like you arrogant twats.....working half-heartedly he WILL do because I will walk with him and make sure he does it”. Stunned, the gang apologised and promised to “give it a rest”. Not only that, but get training as well. I thanked them.

Saturday June 23rd 2007

02.00 – Walkers gathering at the Royal Oak in Whitwell. Badges collected, route descriptions issued. Queues forming as the walkers arrive and prepare themselves for the 3am. departure. A total of 78 walkers check in (6 non-starters) and we shuffle them onto the double decker bus and we set off for Monsal head at 2.35 (early).

03.35 – We arrive at Monsal Head. This is a beautiful part of the Peak District. The iconic view of Monsal Viaduct adorns many a postcard, tea towel, book etc. This is our starting point. After a short period of people visiting the toilets etc., I blow the whistle for our 1 minute silence to remember absent friends. On the second “blow” we are off.....41.3 miles to Whitwell.

03.45m – Start time – I am in a small group consisting on Tony Draper, Craig Edson, Craig Bamford and myself. This is not an easy start. 2 big hills to conquer on our 8.1 mile journey to Stoney Middleton. Now, 2007 is the year of the floods – remember Meadowhall being flooded? What about the panic over Ulley reservoir “bursting”? So we were expecting bad weather all day. But, at the start, dry and would remain so for most of the day. We pass through sleeping villages, over dry stone walls and through history (Eyam) on our first stretch all very pleasant....Craig B is going OK – adrenalin me thinks. We arrive at Stoney Middleton at 6.30am. Time for a drink.....give Craig a rest. 2hr45mins.... A little slow but just what I expected.

06.43 – I want to keep the breaks down to around 10 minutes but we overshoot a little. Never mind. Next destination is Haywood car park. Only 3.2 miles but culminates in a serious climb from riverside to the fault line which is Froggatt Edge. You can never see the top of the climb as we are in dense woodland. This Climb is a killer, especially for Craig B. Sweat dripping down as he tries to power himself up. 1hr 9mins later we arrive at the checkpoint. Craig B can barely breathe and I express my concern to Tony. Has he bit off more than he can chew? Probably. Time for a drink.....give Craig B a rest. We were very slow on that last section barely reaching 2.8 miles an hour.

08.08 – Next destination is Shillito Wood. We are going to traverse the Froggat/Calver/Baslow edges offering magnificent views even down to Chatsworth. This must gee them up a bit....no chance....we are slower than ever and Tony and I are getting increasingly frustrated with the slow pace. Tony and I are approx 300 metres ahead of the “Craigs” and, just for a moment, we look at each other, both with the same thought in our heads. Without a word we sit on a boulder and wait for them. When they catch up we tell them to speed up a bit. This is too slow and they reluctantly agree. We reach Shillito Wood at 9.59am. Time for a drink.....give Craig B a rest. Sat in silence I dare bet Craig B is planning his escape!

10.14 – Next destination is Brindwoodgate near Barlow. Some rough walking underfoot to start with. We go gently downhill before running flat through a wood to meet the road from Barlow to Owl Bar. This pace we are walking at is crap and, on reaching the road I am shocked to hear that Craig Edson plans to be back for 5.30pm. “What?” I exclaim. “No fucking chance. It’s 11am already and we have another hour to the next checkpoint. That is the halfway point. You do the maths! 8 hours for the first half – 5.5 hours for the second. No way. But if you want to try I suggest you get going. Full steam ahead otherwise you will not make it”. Tony decides to go with him. So, It’s just me and Craig B. He looks worried. I reassure him and onwards we trudge. A climb up to Cartledge is

followed by a steady downhill to the checkpoint. Our pace has quickened and we arrive at Brindwoodgate not too far behind the other pair at 11.53am. If only we could keep that pace up we would make a good finish time. Craig B promised to try his best.

12.09 – Next destination is Apperknowle 4.9 miles away. I warn Craig that this is the toughest part. He remembers this well from training and is not looking forward to it. Alas we set off again going up a steep climb, thankfully only a short climb before we head through the woods near Barlow Fisheries. In our way is the Dronfield by-pass. There is only one way over that. We climb steadily for a half a mile before reaching the one and only bridge over the road. Craig keeps falling back. Mentally, this stretch might just break him. I wait on the bridge and he slowly reaches me. “Knackered!” he exclaims. “Come on pal, steady as she goes and we’ll make it” I said. Slowly we wind our way up to the golf course before a flat crossing over some fields. Apperknowle is perched on top of a serious hill. Whilst crossing the field we are nearly level with. Only problem is we have to drop down into the Unstone valley first. Craig is constantly dropping back and I am constantly having to wait for him. We drop down into the valley then prepare for the climb up to Apperknowle. We swallow food and swig water from our bottles. Now time for this climb. Up past the 6 cottages. Up along the edge of a copse before we finally level off along a track. This track crosses the fields on your way to Apperknowle. At this point Craig announces “I’ve had it Joe. I’m going to call it a day at the next checkpoint”. “Ok” I reply. “No problem. Let’s get there first though”. 300 metres on he tells me of his intentions again. “OK Midduck. I’ve got it”. You reach Apperknowle about a third of the way up the steep hill. Our checkpoint is at a pub on the highest part of the village. Craig tells me for the third time of his intention to retire. “I’ve bloody heard you” I say with more than a little annoyance in my voice. We climb the last part of the hill then walk across the top of the village from one end to the other in silence as we make our way to the checkpoint. On arrival and with a “wink” to Hillary I announce “fat bastard thinks he’s fucking stopping. Get him watered and fed were off in 5 minutes. Stopping my arse. Not after all this effort”.

14.11 – We stopped a lot longer than I expected – 24 minutes – Before Craig knew it we were on our way to Eckington trudging up the bridleway. The roasting appears to have made him forget about retiring.....I wonder why. Actually the rest has done him good. There is only 1 hard bit on the next stretch and that is up a very rough field to get to Marsh Lane. However, on our way up we catch up with two friends (Ryan and Sarah) who appear to be struggling. Craig offers them encouragement. Times have changed! We walk with them for the next 2 miles or so until we reach a lane that runs round the back of a housing estate at Eckington. I take to opportunity to stretch my legs and walk with pace to the end of the lane before waiting for them to catch up. The lane bends sharply right before reaching the road. I wait here. Who will come round the bend first I wonder. It’s Craig and he joins me to wander the last 200 meters to the checkpoint at Eckington CO-OP. We meet two more friends here (Danny and Jess) and Craig is visibly cheered..

16.40 – Next destination is Spinkhill 2 miles away. We set off with Danny and Jess for company + 2 other chaps that I don’t know. This section is split into two! A flat section through the small town then our usual LSW trudge across a golf course. In this case Renishaw GC. We cross a bridge over a rail line then BANG..... rain...not just a shower either.....serious stuff. We all take cover. 15 minutes later it has stopped and we set off again. Now it’s the second half which is an awkward climb up to Spinkhill along a track. Good pace is being made and Craig seems to be cruising buoyed by having Danny and

Jess around. Once through the village we cross to a lane leading to Park Hall farm...and a checkpoint.

17.44 – Next destination is Harthill 3.8 miles away. The 2 chaps have gone ahead and it's just the four of us. Flat fields to cross (an uninspiring area) to meet a bridge over the M1 motorway. Silently we cross and I notice that Danny and Jess seem to be constantly holding hands (young love). This must make crossing stiles awkward! We reach the bridge and over we go. Craig is visibly wilting as we head for the lakes near Harthill. The pace is slowing and the weather is closing in. Please don't let this be an excuse to stop. Having got so far it would be tragic. Good news is Craig shows no intentions of stopping. We finally reach the checkpoint to be greeted by Paul Wood. Paul pulled out of the walk due to an odd accident in his garden resulting in a left leg "Tib and Fib" break. There he is. Sat in his wheelchair, cheering us in. "Bugger me!" he exclaims "Craig's still going then". We all laugh. Truth is, Paul never thought he would get past halfway never mind here. Disaster! Rain. Not just a little shower.....pissing down! We take shelter under the gazebo. "We're not going anywhere in this" I exclaim. The rain only lasts for 10 minutes but has drenched everywhere. "Craig? You ready?" I ask. "Come on. Let's do it" is the reply.

19.43 – next destination is the END at Whitwell 4.5 miles away. This section starts with a steep climb to get out of the village and it hurts. We then have a series of fields to cross. This should be fun after the rain. A mile and a half later we finally reach Packman Lane. We are soaked to the skin. The fields are full of wheat that was just at the right height to soak everywhere. My boots are full of water and my undercrackers are wet through. This will make the last 3 miles interesting. Now.....Packman Lane.....let me explain. On arriving here everyone thinks "great...last bit...we're nearly there....positive vibes!". Sadly, this is not true. You have to endure 2 whole miles of this road. Flat it is not. It undulates and, at one point, dips very steeply before an equally steep climb back up. You reach the entrance to Bondhay Golf Club. Great, we must be close to the end now....wrong...you're only halfway along.....keep trudging. Craig "eyes" a horizon of the road. On reaching this he burst into tears. "Now what?" I ask. "I thought I would see the village from here" he replies. Poor old Craig he really is on his last legs. He didn't realise that this was a "false horizon" and was gutted so desperate he is to finish. 100 yards later and the village is in view...relief for Craig. Danny and Jess are 200 metres ahead of us and miss the turning into the fields. I shout them and they wait for us. We all agree to ignore the fields and stay on the road back into the village. Relief as we have only just dried off from the previous lot! This cheers everyone up and we slowly walk down the Lanes into the village chatting as we go ... except Craig. I don't think he has the energy to talk! We reach the church and pop into the cemetery to say hello to Louise. "We made it sweetheart...even big bugger here". "Come on. Lets get this bloody walk finished" I say. Down Scotland Street and then one last climb up Bakestone Moor to reach the finish. Craig whimpers as he still takes its toll. I notice that it's getting dark. I, too, am knackered. This slow pace has killed me. However, we've made it. We reach the apex of the hill and walk slowly down the last 150 metres to the Royal Oak and the finish line. Lots of people cover the road to cheer us in. Craig spots his girlfriend Sally and burst into tears again. "Fucking hell" says Danny "she's not that bad!".

21.40 – The end. Big Craig has made it as I promised he would. Craig feels knackered but as tall as a building, bursting with pride. He never thought he would achieve anything like this. He may meet academic challenges with ease but physical ones are somewhat different to him. As a bonus...we are not last! There are still 4 walkers yet to come in.

a whole hour passes and in come Ryan and Sarah. This is the couple we passed just after Apperknowle so it's nice to see that they are OK.

Sunday June 24th 2007.

Sat at the "Oak". Minibuses cleared and sent away. Beer is being drunk and the celebrations begin. Walkers turning up to collect belongings left behind from the previous day. Complete crap is talked by many who now claim that "it was easier than I thought". Right....OK then. Most are not walking normally and they are as stiff as boards...nursing the odd blister or 2.

Craig arrives. The inevitable shout of "who's nicked yer "oss?" comes flying across the pub. He is still emotional and drinks his pint with glee. "Thanks Joe. I could never have made it without you even though you called me a fat bastard" he says. "I told you that you would make it. Never said it was easy. Anyway shut up moaning and drink your beer you fat bastard. Up for next year?" I ask. "Not a chance in hell" comes the reply. Cheers!

Craig has never donned walking boots again....still, he has 1 LSW under his belt. That's more than many others I can think of.....well done mate.

Joe Mason