

'The Saddleworth Five Trig Points Walk' - A Brief History

Originally designed as an exercise for members of the Oldham Mountain Rescue Team, (long distance, arduous terrain, difficult navigation, in an area where 'call-outs' were likely to occur), the 'Saddleworth Five Trig Points Walk' was first completed by Bob Tait (at that time Rescue Team Leader) and Graham Thompson on the evening of the 19th September, 1971, in 5 hours 15 mins. The latter suffered badly from hypothermia in the latter stages of the walk, the symptoms being stumbling, falling and the use of foul and abusive language between Wessenden Reservoir and Broadstone Hill, but during later years this was found to be standard behaviour.

The next completions came on 27th February 1972, when the "Barlick Bogtrotters", of dubious Yorkshire background, challenged the "Saddleworth Fellwalkers", who were then regularly completing 30-50 mile events, to a race around the circuit, starting in opposite directions decided on the toss of a coin; times of 6 hours 10 mins (Fellwalkers) and 5 hours 20 mins ("Bogtrotters") were recorded, but following a dispute at the finish (only one of the "Bogtrotters" team had visited Broadstone Hill to retrieve the metal disc placed by the "Fellwalkers" earlier in the day - sent back by the rest of his team when they emerged from the mist near Pots and Pans !), the result was officially declared a draw.

Details of the route appeared in the 'Oldham Chronicle' in the summer of 1972 as part of the "Walks around Saddleworth" series, later published in book form in May 1979. This created interest in a 'fastest time' or 'record' for the circuit. John Jackson, of Heywood, was well up on time reaching Alphin Pike (North circuit) on 17th June 1972, but descended wrongly from the summit to Dovestone Reservoir, then by road to the Clarence Hotel, recording 5 hours 5 minutes; Brian Tomlinson, from Littleborough, who was ten minutes behind Jackson at Alphin Pike, came down to Greenfield correctly to record 5 hours exactly, a new 'fastest time'.

Later that year, in good conditions on the 24th September 1972, Bob Tait recorded 4 hours 21 mins for a Northerly circuit, via Pots and Pans and Broadstone Hill.

Up to and including this circuit, the route had always been considered a 'walk', with boots worn and rucksacks carried. On the 6th January 1973, Alan Barber of East Cheshire Harriers made the first of many circuits, completing the route in a (S) direction in 4 hours 00 minutes, "wearing running shoes and with minimum equipment." The challenge was on, and on the 27th May 1973, John Jackson, Bob Tait and Brian Tomlinson set off in a (N) direction, all lightly clad, with Bob Tait returning to the Clarence Hotel in 3 hours 51 mins, slightly ahead of the other two. This was the first completion of the route in under four hours.

The following year, in 1974, Alan Barber reduced the record on three occasions, recording 3 hours 41 mins (S) on the 11th May, 3 hours 33 mins (N) on the 24th June, and 3 hours 32 mins (S) on the 9th July.

On the 22nd February 1975, John Jackson, now with Rochdale Harriers, completed the first 'Double' circuit; setting off (N) from the Clarence Hotel, he completed the first round in 4 hours 20 mins, rested back at the Clarence for 35 minutes before completing the route in the opposite direction (S) in 4 hours 53 mins - a total of 9 hours 48 mins for the 'double'.

Following this success, John set off (S) with two other Rochdale runners on the 5th April 1975 on a record attempt; navigation, however, was never a strong point (nor still is), and the group emerged from the mists and peat groughs of Black Hill to find themselves in the village of Holme, several miles off course, and eventually recorded 4 hours 30 mins. Not to be outdone, John made another attempt on the 15th June 1975 (S) and this time finished triumphant in 3 hours 25 minutes.

The following year, on the 2nd September 1976, the fastest time for the 'double' was reduced, once again by John Jackson, to 8 hours 45 mins - the first circuit (S) in 3 hours 45 mins, and the second (N) in 4 hours 35 mins, with 20 mins rest. To date these two are the only recorded completions of the 'double'.

In 1977 Rochdale Harriers appeared on the scene (and the moors) in strength. Tony Shaw shattered the record on the 13th February 1977, when the ground was frozen, recording 2 hours 46 mins for a (S) circuit. Very few ladies had completed the walk, and on the

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