HALF MARATHONS SEPTEMBER 2025

I've always liked the half marathon distance, it's one that you can run hard whilst also needing some endurance.

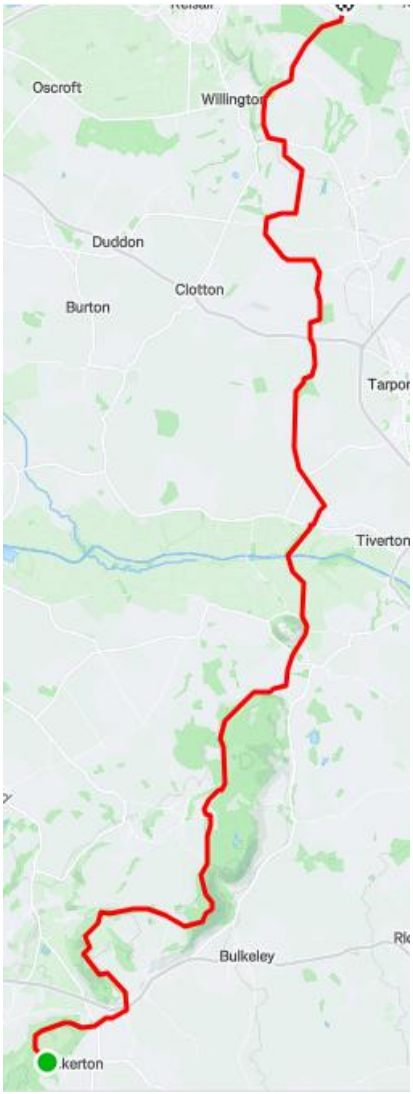
I actually don't do that many half marathons, maybe a couple a year as they are mainly r**d however this month I did Four. Three being races and one pacing Carl on the last 14 miles of the High Peak 40.

RACE 1 – 7th SEPTEMBER - SANDSTONE TRAIL.

'*The Sandstone Trail Half replaces the previous Sandstone Trail Races. The race has one start at Bickerton Hill National Trust Car Park which was the start of the previous 17 mile 'A' race. The race will finish at Kelsall Hill Equestrian Centre.*'

https://www.runcheshire.com/races/sandstone-trail-races/

The route, South to North:



Previously this race was an ‘A’ race at 17 miles alongside a ‘B’ race at 10 miles long. However due to logistics, costs and participant feedback the two A & B races were combined into one being the new half marathon. The finish is at Kelsall Hill Equestrian Centre instead of Delamere Forest and the start is pulled forward slightly.

I parked at the finish where provided buses transported us to about a mile from the start where we continued on foot.

There were a couple of friendly faces I knew and had a quick chat with. Then there was the briefing and we were off!

Strangely I'd never ran this initial section from the start where you join the SST proper, it was fantastic, defo will be back.

The start is always fast and furious on this race and I settled in towards the front, prob in top 20. This first section is the best where you run along the SST between Peckforton Escarpment and Beston. It's mainly single track and rolls nicely with some stunning views across Cheshire to the Clwydians.

I managed to pass a few runners and cruised along nicely feeling great. I even managed to pass the mighty Jez Brown who is lethal on the fells and always finishes well ahead of me.

About 15k in there is a timed crossing at the A51 where you get 90s to cross, the clock pausing until you pass the timing mat on the other side. I decided to take a tactical rest, having a gel, a good drink and made the most of the 90s. Three runners passed me here however that then put a target on the back for me to hunt them down.

The next section is mainly flat however there are a couple of climbs towards the end. I managed to reel one in after a couple of k and then the other two I was gaining ground. I managed to catch them both at Rock Farm, the penultimate climb however they were faster on the downhills and pulled away. On the final climb up Willington Corner I was closing on them, with a k of downhill left I legged it however they were faster than me and I ran out of race.

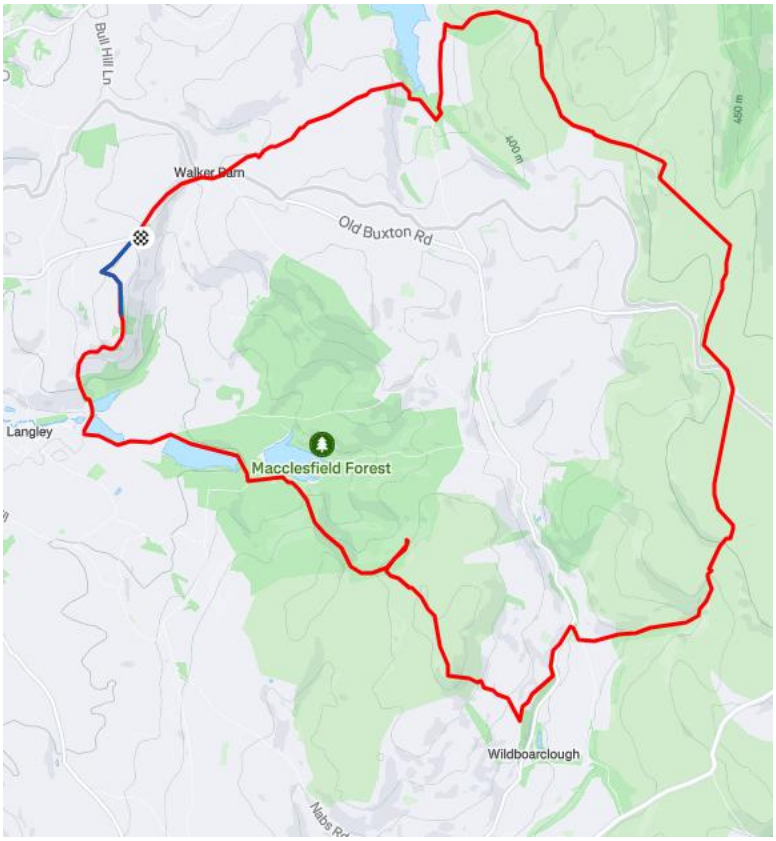
I finished 8th out of 333. 1st MV40 in 1:43:40

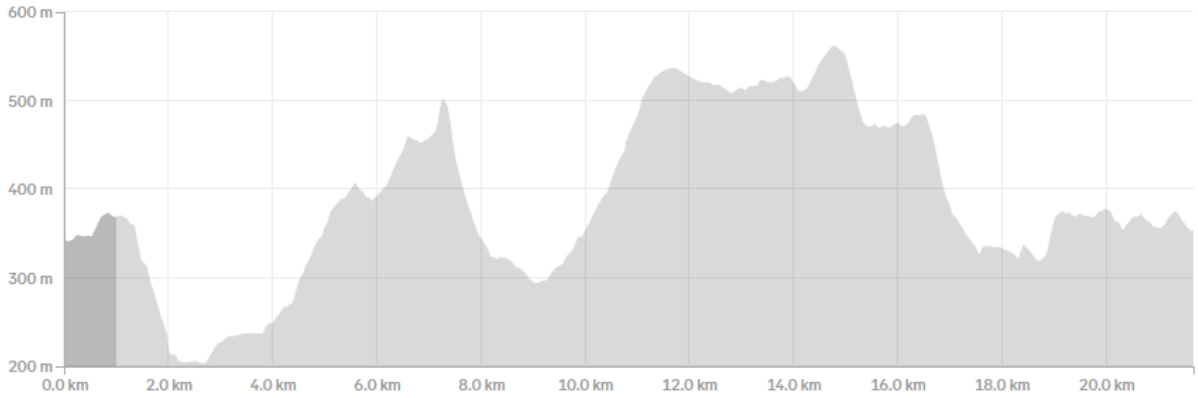
RACE 2 – 14th SEPTEMBER – CHESHIRE 3 PEAKS.

'This new event takes in some of Cheshire's finest country, and certainly its highest! As the name suggests, we take in the 3 highest tops in the county on this 13.1 mile loop - so you can be sure of a great variety of terrain on your way around this lovely loop from Tegg's Nose Country Park, above Macclesfield. The course, as its name suggests, is quite hilly, with 847m of ascent meaning that there'll certainly be some walking involved for most, but it remains inclusive with a generous 4 hour cut off for completion.'

https://out-fit.co.uk/e/cheshire-3-peaks-half-marathon-12848

The route:





This is a new event and I was keen to do it as I think it suited me quite well – long gradual climbs over a half distance. I was aiming to finish around 2 hours based on the elevation and distance.

There were two waves, one at 09:00 which was promoted for the 3hr+ runners and one at 09:15 for sub 3hr runners.

We had wrist ‘dibbers’ so effectively we could start whenever we wanted as it went off the time we dibbed in at the start.

My plan was to start in the 2nd wave and hunt down those in the 1st. The obvious problem with this is that they can hold you up on the route however it was a gamble I was willing to take.

Myself and Carl decided to be first off on the 2nd wave. We dibbed in and shot off. After only 100m 3rd place caught and passed me and Carl dropped me.

We descended Teggs Nose and after only a k I was catching the tail runners from wave 1. They were very considerate and gave me room to pass, thankyou.

I hit the road section at the bottom and could see Carl and #2 in the distance. We entered Macc Forest where there was a marshal dibbing us in. Unfortunately I got delayed as he was dibbing in runners from wave 1.

The run up through Macc forest suits me well, a gradual, undulating climb with a few steeper sections. I managed to catch up with Alex B from wave 1 and a couple of guys she was running with and passed her. Unfortunately I got over excited and missed the exit from Macc Forest up to Shuttlingsloe (the Matterhorn of Cheshire). I thought there was too much downhill here, realised and corrected myself whilst calling Alex and her chaperones back. This added 2 mins and 600m, dang it!

I cracked on and re-passed some wave 1 runners. Unfortunately I know didn't know what position I was in and what damage had been done. This made me more determined to crack on and correct the mistake.

A little walk up the steps at the final section of Shuttlingsloe and down the other side. I decided to wear my Inov-8 Mudtalon Ultras as they have 8mm lugs and I suspected the descent to be slippy. They were fantastic and I stuck to the ground like glue.

The next climb up Cumberland Clough is a longish one – 2.3k averaging 10% and semi-technical in places. I felt strong up here and managed to grab a scalp. We got to the Cat and Fiddle Inn where we headed across to the final climb of Shining Tor.

I felt great however I was struggling to reel the guy in front of me in.

On the grassy descent I passed one of my friends, Dave (MV55) who set off in wave 1.

We hit a road section and then a short climb where there were three guys now maybe 50m in front. I thought I'd have them. I pushed hard but again ran out of race and they eluded me.

I finished 7th out of 156, 2nd MV40 in 2:00:42.

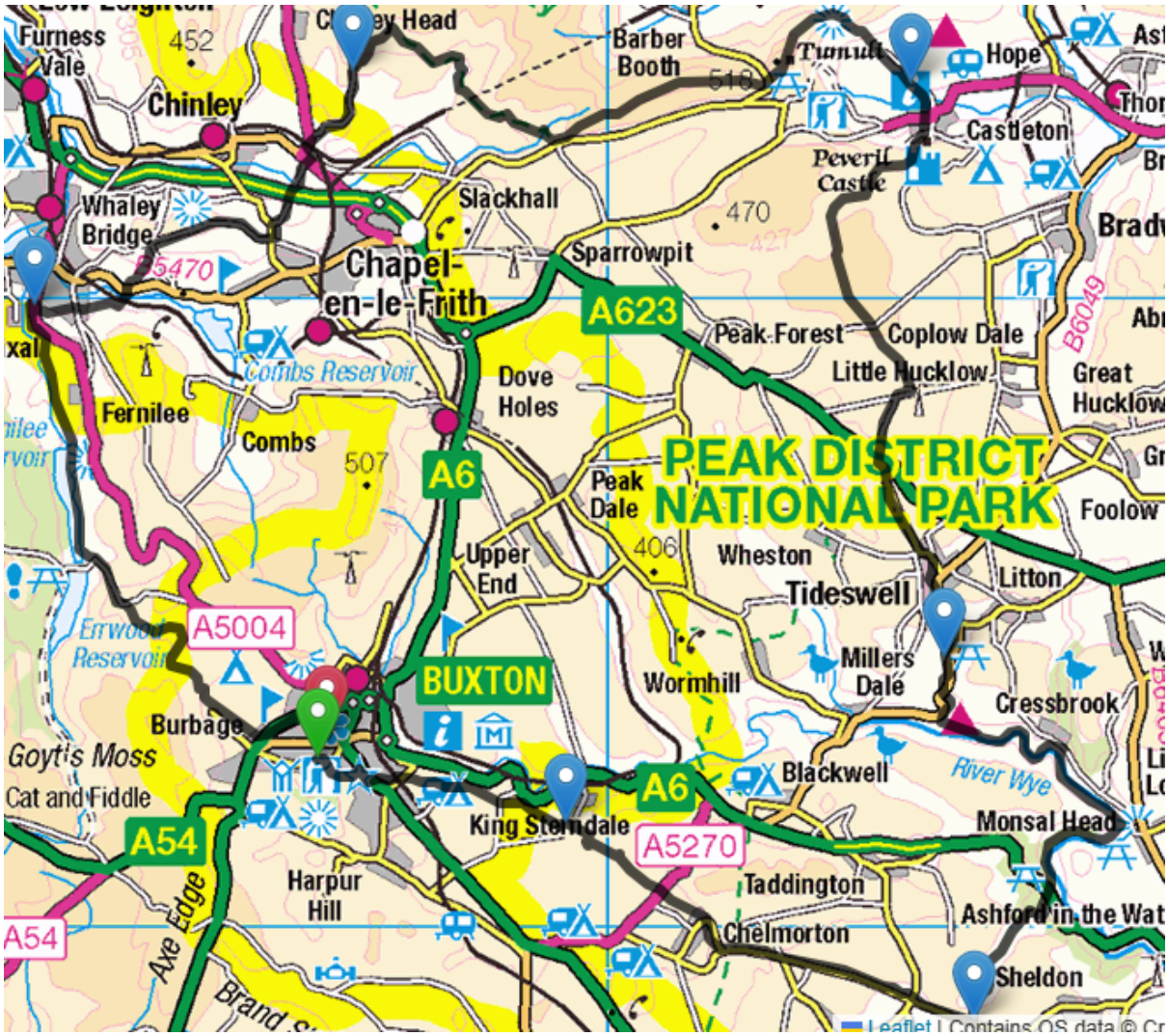
That 2 min error cost me MV40 win and sub 2hr.

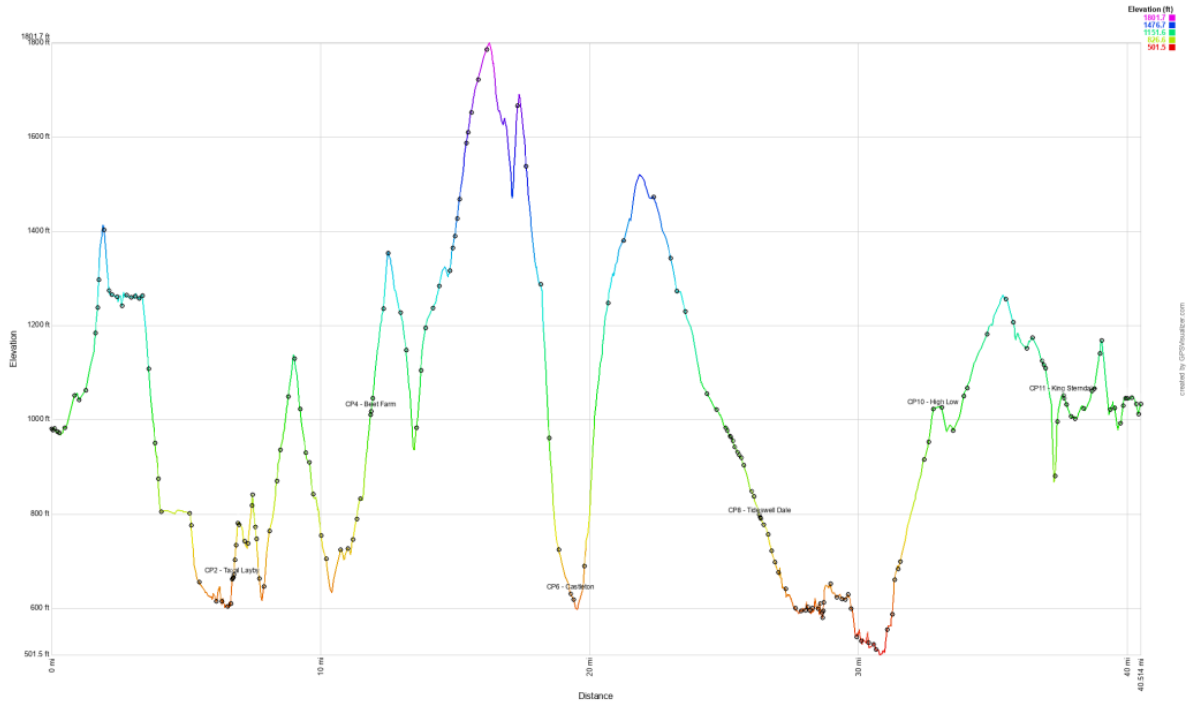
RACE 3 – 20th SEPTEMBER – HIGH PEAK 40.

'*An ultramarathon covering 40 miles of the Peak district. After an 8 year hiatus the High Peak 40 returned in 2024! Take part in an Ultramarathon run around the Peak District starting and ending in beautiful Buxton.*

Taking in some of the best trails, paths and roads around the area, the route will take you through Goyt Valley, Eccles Pike, Mam Tor, Cave Dale, Tideswell, Monsal Trail, and not one but two Deep Dales!'

https://highpeak40.co.uk/





The High Peak 40 was my first ever ultramarathon so holds a place in my heart. The 1st time I did it I was totally green to ultra running and made so many mistakes, I finished it in 8 hrs and said to Lisa, my wife – 'Never Again'. However, I kept going back and after a few corrections managed to get it down to 6:17 and 3rd overall!

They then had a hiatus until last year (when Chris Billingham resurrected it), so I returned and finished 7th out of 149 in 07:04.

After 2024 I instantly decided to volunteer for 2025 as I'd ran it 7 times and wanted to give something back. I was lead for CP2. Due to a shortage of volunteers, they'd reduced the CPs from 11 to 6 so CP2 was actually the 1st CP. Chris wants to eventually get it back upto the 11 CPs.

The night before the event Chris messaged me to say there'd be a change of route so my CP had to be moved. I knew the route so adjusted accordingly. This meant that it was 2k shorter before my CP and missed the better bits along the Goyt Valley.

I had three ladies helping me on the CP – one on dibbing, two on timing in/out and I was on drinks (there wasn't any food).

We had a few issues with runners deciding to hide their race numbers around their body or under layers and also wearing headphones which caused some to be missed.

All the runners had been through by 09:30 (we had a 08:00 start), we packed up and I dropped the CP kit back at race HQ then headed to CP8 @ Tideswell to meet Carl for the final 14 miles of the race.

The plan was to run/pace/guide/heckle him through the final 1/3 of the event which I knew very well from previous. He came into Tideswell in 1st place at 11:30ish and he was flying (and moaning!).

I joined him and we continued along the valley at Cressbrook to join Monsal Trail which is stunning, a lovely flatish and slightly downhill trail. We were moving along nicely at around 5min/k which is our 'social pace', Carl asked to drop it slightly a couple of times, I was fresh so didn't appreciate that after a marathon 5min/k is reasonably fast!

I love the next section along the river Wye, it's slightly upy/downy but stunning. We crossed the main road and started the long gradual climb up Deep Dale 1 to the penultimate CP. Alex, Carl's friend (also from Cheshire 3 Peaks) was there with fluids which Carl took. By now it was raining and getting heavier however it was warm, 15C so the rain was nice. I'd given my jacket to Alex but didn't need it as we were running strong so generating a bit of warmth.

As we left the CP we could see a runner hunting us down. A crap, we'd been moving well, not really pushing it but maybe slower than we should have.

Time to put the foot down! This section is horrible, nothing nice about it whatsoever, I hate it with a passion. It's a 4k gradual uphill/undulating r**d death slog.

All talking ceased.

Carl was uttering rubbish like 'I just want to finish', 'I'm not racing'. I sorted that out and paced him along the r**d. I kept on checking back and could occasionally see our pursuant, he wanted blood. I tried to keep Carl's mind focused – 'just another k then downhill', 'let's push this next up'.

We turned off towards Chelmorton, downhill where Carl pushed the pace. We hit a gravel farm track and no sign of our pursuant. I suggested that he should be urine sampled when we finished, there's no way anyone could catch us with this pace.

We crossed some grassy fields and unfortunately this is where I became unstuck. As we entered Deep Dale 2 I fell and twisted my ankle, I urged Carl to crack on, not to worry about me. I was luckily, I managed to save it so minimal damage. More trouble lay ahead due to my poor shoe choice. Previously I've done this in door to trail shoes and was fine which was what I was wearing albeit the tread was more r**d now than trail and I really struggled on the deep descent down Deep Dale 2.

I said to Carl that if you manage to exit Deep Dale 2 (this climb) and the guy behind isn't yet there then you've got this. As I was exiting our hunter was entering. I knew we had it.

Carl was straight through the last CP and I managed to catch up (just about). The last 4.5k had minimal elevation, just a couple of small lumps, it was mainly downhill. Again, due to my rubbish shoe choice I fell over twice on the grassy descents, it was so slippy. With the rain, wet grass and falling I was absolutely soaked.

I guided Carl towards the finish where he won in 5:38, 8 minutes ahead of 2nd (Rory Harris) where the gap was only 3 minutes at CP10. We later found out that Rory Harris has a UTMB Index of 778 and he holds the CR for the Winter Spine Challenger South Race!

Strangely enough I'd recorded a fair few Strava Segment PBs!

INTERLUDE – 27th SEPTEMBER – CHESHIRE CANAL RING ULTRA.

For Sat 27th I volunteered at GB Ultras Cheshire Canal Ring Ultra.

'Join the 1st Edition: Take on the Cheshire Ring 100 Mile, forging together the Bridgewater Canal, Macclesfield Canal, Trent & Mersey Canal, with GB Ultras support at 11 Checkpoints en route.'

https://www.gbultras.com/cheshire-ring-ultra-100/

The race follows the Cheshire Canal Ring, being slightly short of 100miles, GB Ultras have added an out and back at the start/finish to get it upto 100 miles.

I was on race HQ reg Sat am then CP2 and CP5.

The alarm went at 02:45 Sat for a 04:00 start at Media City. The plan was after CP5 to head over to Hope and squat in my RV ready for Ladybower half instead of driving home and then the opposite direction back to Ladybower. The problem with this was parking near to race HQ as my van is 2.1m high and I'd need to find a car park I could get in. The Imperial War Museum (North) had a suitable so I headed there however upon arrival it was shut. After a drive round I managed to find one and get to HQ. I didn't really need to be there as they had plenty of helpers, the organisers probably just got me there early for the LOLs!

Whilst I was HQ on T-shirt duty I was next to the tracker people and they asked one runner where his pack was (so they could attach the tracker to the shoulder strap) and he said he didn't have one. He just had a jacked with his kit in the pockets! After a mandatory kit check he was way short so a trip to the event shop and a scrabble around and he had his kit! He literally just had a pair of cargo pants, jacket and headtorch.

My next duty was road marshal 5 near Piccadilly. Me and another lad, Jamie, drove there and were in position by 06:00. There were some interesting sights in Manchester City Centre at that time with several people going places after their night out. I did feel a knob in my high viz but hey, I'd been there before. Several times.

We did our directing and headed back to HQ. I then collected the van and headed to CP2 at Stockport (15.5 mile in). I saw some familiar faces and everyone was fine at that point.

I then headed over to CP5 at North Rode (36 miles).

The field was starting to spread out a bit now however the lead runners had already been through. I had a good laugh with the rest of the volunteers and runners and helped/heckled where I could.

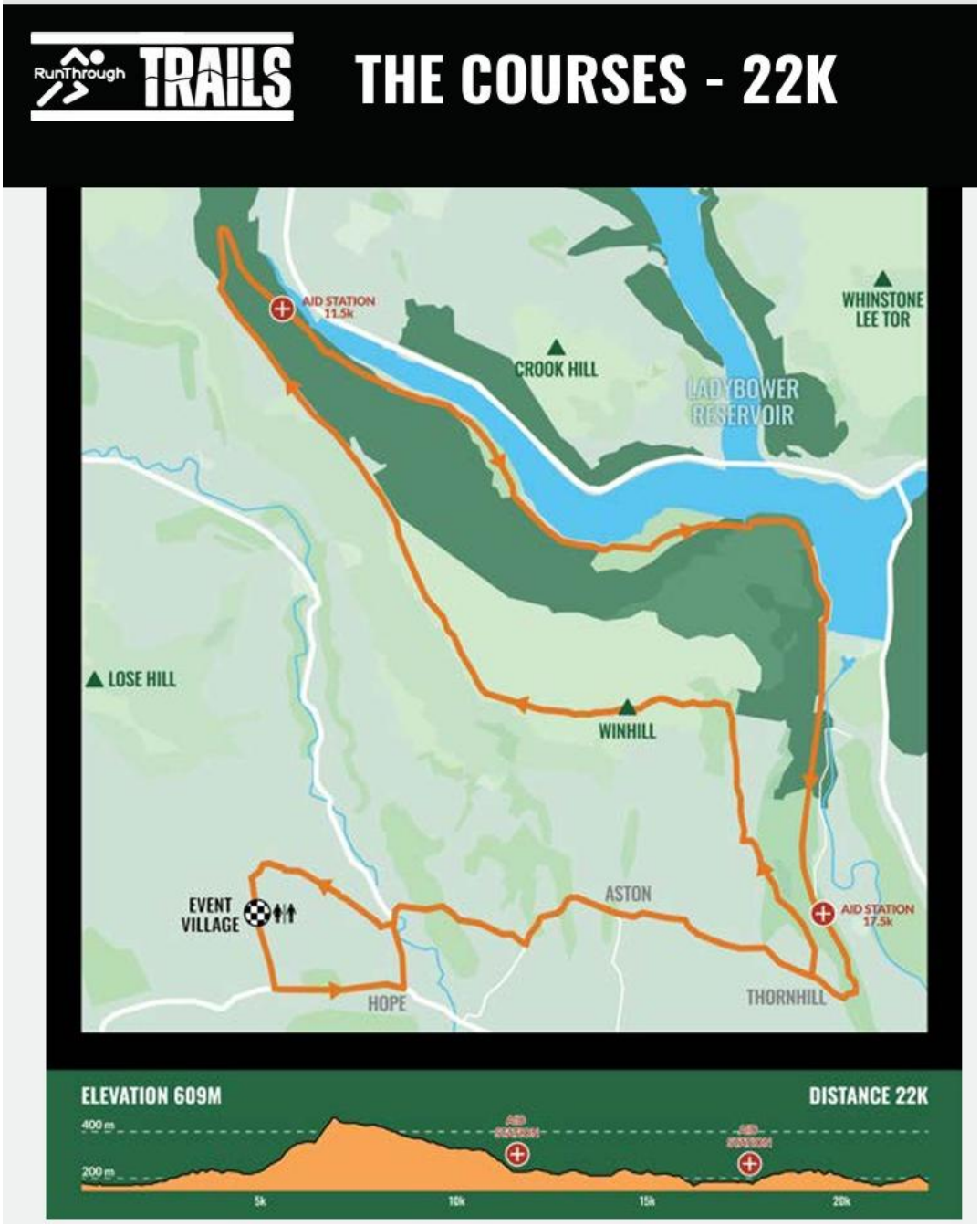
After we'd done I packed up and headed over to Hope for the Ladybower half.

I just about managed to get to 20:00 before I fell asleep, knackered.

RACE 4 – 28th SEPTEMBER – LADYBOWER 22K.

'22k - Beginning in Hope Village, this 22k route ascends onto Win Hill to experience the stunning Hope Valley. Descending into the forest to skirt the river on rolling paths to the Thornhill Trail and back through Aston to Hope.'

https://www.runthrough.co.uk/event/ladybower-reservoir-trails-22k-september-2025



I guess this is billed as a 22K, not a half marathon however as it's a trail race and I'm writing this It's a half!

I've run most of this route so had an idea of what to expect as such I chose the Inov-8 Mudtalon Ultras again, in anticipation of slippy bits.

I'd forgotten my gels and energy drinks, not really necessary, however as a half is fast and furious I like to have a little boost in the 2nd half to carry me through. A nip to be ripped off in the local Spar resulted in an energy drink but no gel. Oh well.

The car park field was deserted in the am except for a few overnight campers however it swelled substantially, there must have been 500+ runners, easy.

Whilst milling about at the start a runner from 'Ryston Runners' approached and said hello, thinking I was local as I had my Runners next-the-sea T shirt on. I was to here, not to Norfolk!

At the start pen I was about 10 rows back when the whistle blew, not ideal but I thought I'd recover it. A fast r**d section to start with levelled me with 3rd who we had a brief convo with, he was 'only' out for a training run, maybe 75% effort. I was 100%+!

We started the trail climb up Win Hill which is gradual however I felt like I was labouring, there were some steeper steeped sections towards the top which I've run up before but I ended up walking and seven runners past me. I do struggle when there is a fast r**d section and then hills, I probably push too hard too early.

We crested Win Hill and had a long gradual descent in front. The guy in front had a crew of runners coming the other way who shouted cheers of encouragement at 'Jack'. He pulled away however once we hit the semi-techie descent through the woods to the river Ashop the Mudtalons kicked in and I breezed past him.

We hit the bridleway at the bottom where the 1st CP was and Jack caught me. He asked how far it was as he hadn't started his watch, 'about half way, pretty much like this most of the way back' I replied. He pushed on and he disappeared out of sight.

I cracked on and managed to claim a scalp before I got to the next CP, there I necked a gel and picked up the road that we'd headed out on originally. A couple of runners passed me easily, where did they come from?? I asked one and he said he was one of the lead runners who had got lost and added an extra two miles on. I hadn't really lost any places then, phew!

I could see a couple of runners hunting me so upped the pace even more. Towards the end there are a lot of gates which meant braking/accelerating which slowed me and I saw my hunters getting closer. Less than 1k to go, no way, but then I saw Jack in front, walking. Happy days, I'm having him, bonus. I caught and passed him whilst shouting words of encouragement.

I finished 8th out of 592, 2nd MV45 in 1:47:06