

Start Location

We hadn't used the areas around Norland, Stainland and North Dean Woods before, so I thought it would be a good new challenge. It did mean that we would have to cross the conurbation of Sowerby Bridge to get back, but it's only a short stretch and would be worth it to experiment with a new area. I was also confident that no-one would guess the start location!

So I had a few trips out, parking up near Dave Culpan's house at Holywell Green, then the Murgatroyds between Stainland and Sowood Green, then Tim & Claire's in Greetland, without any of them knowing, and exploring the routes away from those places. I'd also viewed Garry Traviss's and Helen Buchan's houses as possibilities.

Holywell Green and Stainland, being just a bit further away, would have meant most routes would have to just head straight back, so Greetland offered the most options. Having checked that it was possible to get out of the estate to the north OK, I asked Tim & Claire and they kindly agreed to offer their house as the start location. They did a great job of keeping it secret. 😊

Explorations

Every year I have enjoyed finding new areas that I didn't realise were there, let alone run through before, and this year was no exception. I hardly knew the Stainland areas at all, the Rough Hey Wood to the west of Norland was completely new to me and I was only slightly familiar with North Dean Wood (to the north of Greetland) through running past it on the Calderdale Way!

I spent 15 days in November running over the area with a map in hand looking for good control features (fortunately without any of our local runners seeing me!) And at least that number of days poring over a map at home searching for new bits to go and look at the next day.

There are lots of features that may look good to use on the map, but have to be discarded in practice for a number of reasons: the layout on the ground doesn't match the map, or the map is not specific enough to be able to pinpoint the location – either of which would mean it's not fair to expect the competitor to find the control; or the location is too obvious to a passer-by – I always worry that someone will remove, or possibly even worse: move the kite to somewhere else!

Stainland: controls 19 – 23

If they wanted to win, the fast runners would probably have to get all these and then get back for as many of the Norland and North Dean ones that they could.

The layout of 20 – 23 was intended to give a slight dilemma about what order to do them: 22 first or 20 first, especially for someone who might otherwise rush off too quickly.

I loved finding the little footbridges of 22 and 23. I think hardly anyone uses the one at 22, it was well hidden.

#20 gave me concern that novice navigators might find it difficult – partly because if you head straight there the golf course have not made the path very clear, and also because there is a much more prominent re-entrant below it to the north-east. Someone who wasn't sure might wrongly think is where it should be and give up. Also, the continuation of the re-entrant into the field above and the wall there no longer exist.

That's not ideal for a potential first control – it would be better to make the first control an easy one. But on the other hand it's likely to be the faster runners going this way, so tough! Still, I made it easier by being detailed in the control description: 'upper' re-entrant and 'no path on ground'.

At control 21, the stile and path has changed on the ground compared to what is marked on the OS map, so I put the control at the new stile location and manually marked on where the path goes now.

North Dean Woods: controls 10 – 13

Although there would have been some good re-entrants, ridges and depressions to use as control features in these woods if the map was smaller-scale and more detailed, on the 1:25000 map the detail is not good enough.

Again, the layout of these is intended to force a decision of what order to take them in. Heading out on the Calderdale Way, #12 is the closest – but of course it would probably be a mistake to get this before #13 because an extra climb would be involved.

To those who descended to it from above, #13 seemed to be too far down; while to those who came at it from below it seemed to be too high up! I was very careful placing it to be certain it was right (although it was further from the crag edge than I first intended, partly for safety and partly because it was too obvious to someone below). When you go to this control from either above or below there is a big change from level running to the steep slope, which slows you down more than you realise and makes you think you are going further than you actually are.

Norland Moor: controls 14 – 17

With the paths on this moor seeing a lot more people than the previous areas, it's harder to find control features that are challenging, not obvious but at the same time can be pinpointed from the map.

I wanted to have a split between the controls, so that you would have to run right across the moor to pick up all the controls in one go, and to give a number of options of how to do that so that you would have to think about it.

I also had in my mind a cunning route choice of doing the Stainland set (22-23-20-21-19), then only half of the Norland Moor ones (17-16), visiting 13-12-11-10 and coming back for the second half of Norland Moor (14-15) before heading down to 18 and the route home.

I thought #16 might cause the unwary to lose time since a glance at the map looks as though the path goes straight past it; but it is only the green dashed right-of-way that goes past, the actual path (black dashed line) does not go so close to the control.

Highlee Clough: control 18

This is the area that I mentioned on Facebook where I spent several hours trying to decide on the control location. Originally I wanted to use a stream bend or one of the walls just to the south of the eventual location. But the wood is so difficult to get through, and making your way down the stream very awkward. I think hardly anyone uses the paths through this wood!

It would have been a good challenge but quite possibly disheartening for many. So eventually I decided to locate the control on the path/wall junction, to provide two handrails leading to it. Even so it was not at all easy to find: the path is very indistinct and the area choked with holly.

Old Railway Route: controls 7 and 8

I love the route along here: it feels wonderfully atmospheric to me, though very muddy in the bottom after rain. Running on the banks to either side is better, but you don't want to be above #7 when you get to it because it's a sheer drop down!

Control 9

I put this here to give extra options: an additional control for those who want the shortest route back to the finish, and also a consideration for anyone going from the North Dean Woods controls to Norland Moor and then #18 – whether to pick up #9 between North Dean and Norland.

Control 6

This gives a temptation to go past Sowerby rather than Sowerby Bridge on the way home. Unless you have plenty of time I don't think it's necessarily the best option though since it does involve an extra climb.

Final controls: 1 – 5

Plenty of options to collect a few more points for those who have enough time left. They are quite low scoring, but there are several different ways of combining the controls depending on how much time you have left – judging how long it will take to get into the finish, and so whether you have time to get that extra control, is a key skill.

I was a bit unsure about #1. The 'platform' or flat area between slopes is not detailed on the map, but the wall corner and junction below are close attack points that should enable it to be accurately found.

Points

I always spend a lot of time considering the point allocation for each control, and playing with lots of permutations. Ideally I want to make the competitors have to think about which ones to go for, and reward good options.

The two 30-pointers might tempt people to go south and over-commit: the controls in the south (19-23) are in total worth considerably less per mile than 10-17.

Having said that, if you want to win you would have to be bold and strike out for these southern controls from the start then circle clockwise to try to get as many of the

15-pointers as you could; but unless you are going to be in the top-5 it would be a better option to go straight for the higher concentration of controls in North Dean Woods and Norland Moor.

On the other hand I didn't want to undervalue the southern controls too much, so that collecting them and then getting home via 18-7-8 would still be a viable option.

Whether you did 19-23 or not, the next choice would be whether to go for the 45 points of 18-7-8 or the 10 points of #9 and pick up the closer controls to the finish while keeping an eye on your time. That is where judging how fast per mile you are moving and how far each option is, is vital.

With the vantage of hours of planning and consideration, I thought a winning route would be 22-23-20-21-19-17-16-13-12-11-10-14-15-18-7-8-5-3. That would be 300 points.

Without the advantage of advance time to think about it, James' winning route was 22-23-20-21-19-18-15-17-16-14-13-12-11-10-9-5-3. I.e. getting #18 earlier on and heading back via 9 instead of 7 & 8 - about a third of a mile longer and similar climb for 10 points less than my suggestion. But he ran it a lot quicker than I could have done it in!

Again with the vantage of planning time, I thought a high scoring shorter option would be 13-12-11-10-9-14-16-17-15-18-7-8-5-3 for 195 points. It looks like Jackie did similar (except 6-4 at the end instead of 5-3) to win the women's title, and Graham similar but with the addition of #6 for his 6th place. However the complete range of combinations of controls that different people went to testifies that there was plenty of choice!

The most visited control was #13 which 33 of the 43 teams went to, followed by #10 and #16 both of which had 32 visitors. The least popular were #1 and #2 which only four teams went to.

Hope you all enjoyed it. If we find a buyer for Trough Farm perhaps it will be the last one finishing here. But then perhaps we'll have a different location to finish at for future years instead...

Cheers, Bill