Bullock Smithy – Saturday 5th September 2026
Special report by Paul Haigh (you can tell because of the emojis :))
and a few bonus words from Francis Wooff

🏃 58.5 miles. 8,500ft elevation

⏳ 10.5 hours

🕐 47-minute PB

💥 56 Strava Segment PBs 😅

🥉 3rd Overall

The race that, post-Lakeland 100 in July, I didn't really want to do.

I did it last year and loved it. The organisers can't do enough for you and treat the participants as royalty – even at 3am, when they've been volunteering unpaid, with no sleep, for hours! They're aware they're custodians of a precious tradition that has now gone on for 50 years and means something to so many people.

The course, which runs from the edge of Stockport into the Peak District, is in the main beautiful, showing off some of the highlights of the Peaks, and then some less well-known but equally stunning locations. These even make up for being chased down along a flat disused railway and the main Macclesfield road to the finish!

The checkpoints are frequent and get better stocked as you get nearer the finish. The finish cooked 'breakfast 'is perhaps the nicest cooked breakfast you'll ever eat – especially as the volunteers are only too pleased to offer seconds, thirds and fourth portions! 😋😌

But last year I tore a flap in my meniscus that took seven months to recover from. And I was dreading a repeat!

This, combined with just six weeks to recover from the Lakeland, three of which were spent on holiday, aided by all-you-can-eat breakfast buffets and dinners, meant I came into the race looking just to get through it unscathed, ready to hopefully face into the future.

I knew it may prove to be a suffer-fest and only entered because it was in the **CVFR Ultra Championship** and, with it being the 50th anniversary, it was going to be a special occasion.

And it indeed proved special – but for many more reasons than those stats at the start!

🌈 After all the special volunteers I mentioned above, let's talk weather.

It was almost as if they'd had a word with the gods who rule the clouds and wind of Manchester and got them to declare a special weather window for the 50th Bullock Smithy!

Gone was the incessant rain of the previous days and, in its place, the Peaks were lit with sunshine and a glorious evening. Gone too was the 45mph gust of the day before, replaced by a pleasant tailwind for the first few hours, which seemed to peter out into nothing by the time we faced back towards Stockport!

🏃 Fellow runners.

The running community is ace. Fact.

Rory Harris, who won the race yet again, is one of the humblest people you'd come across, and I spent the first few miles having a pleasant chat and catch-up before he left me for dirt!

Twenty-five miles in, at Edale, I was still in 3rd place, but I'd pushed a bit too hard and needed to ease off.

Fortunately, that's where I sparked a conversation with Oli Gaillemin and, as is often the case in ultras, the kindness of a fellow running obsessive helped keep the miles ticking along, pushed me to run when the brain was saying otherwise, and added a different dimension to a day to remember.

I wouldn't have come 3rd without Oli. Fact.

And in the end, it was Oli who told me, with 10 miles to go, to **put the hammer down**.

🏃‍♂️🏃‍♂️ **Fellow runners.**

I've called out two above, but alongside the amazing volunteers, every single entrant made it a special day.

From sharing the van journey across with fellow CVFR club mates, to pre-race photos, to swapping stories at the end and cheering others over the line, it was special.

And this year I'd committed to waiting until the final CVFR runners came home to give them all a lift home.

If anything, this gave the day another lovely dimension – listening to stories of people who have been out on the course for 17-plus hours makes you realise how deep people go to achieve their goals. 💪🎯

And I loved the journey back, discussing the adventure. 😍

⛰️ **In terms of my own adventure, it follows that familiar ultra trail.**

I felt good at the start.

I then had a dip in the middle.

I then rescued it!

I suppose I learned from Lakeland and, for the first time ever, took salt tablets regularly. But I overdid it and, about 30 miles in, stopped taking them as I felt dizzy and had only had one wee all day. ☐

When I did, it was the colour of a pint of Timothy Taylor's! 🍺

Needless to say, I largely drank water from then on. 💦

💥 I knew that with my special training regime I was going to feel hurty after the race, but sitting here now, it's a special kind of hurty! 😅

From last year's 'recce', mentally I'd saved a bit for the last 10 miles as it really suited me.

So I bombed it down the last big descent and ran towards the penultimate checkpoint as if a dog was chasing me!

As I got towards it, the person in 3rd place was just coming out.

⚒️ The final seven miles are along a flat old railway and canal for five of them, before plunging downhill for two miles towards the final stretch along the Macclesfield Road.

Along the first mile of the railway, I reeled in the head torch in front, whose owner admitted to suffering with cramp. 😬

Here my inner voice kicked in and asked:

“What would the CVFR A team do?”

So, despite howls of protest from the body, I **put the hammer down**.

🔨 With five miles to go along the flat disused railway, I could see the head torch creeping towards me like some kind of *Blair Witch* horror.

My inner voice said:

“Imagine what the CVFR lads would say if you let it take back 3rd place now.”

So, with three miles of flat to go and my body screaming at me, I tanked it! 🤣

☐🥉 With two miles to go, it was all downhill to the finish.

But those two miles seemed to go on forever.

I knew all I had to do was make it to the main road in 1.5 miles and I could hang on for 0.5 miles of flat.

But where was it?

In my state of panic, body screaming and head looking back every minute, I even managed to overshoot a couple of little shortcuts and probably ended up running half a mile more!

But eventually, in what seemed like hours rather than minutes, the main road came.

Mentally, I ticked off the markers, trying desperately to make the finish line of the Hazel Grove Scouts HQ in the distance appear bigger.

And still occasionally checking for head torches behind!

The relief when I crossed that line was immense.

As was the elation – when I eventually came round from sitting on my haunches for 20 minutes, concentrating on just taking breaths – to be told I was **3rd**. 🥉😍

💗 **So that was closure.**

One place better than last year.

A memory bank of lovely Bullock Smithy memories, rather than it being the race where I did my knee in.

And with turning 50 in October 2027, I now have 12 months to share some more adventures with friends and hopefully raise more awareness for **Abbie's Army**.

After all, this is **Children's Brain Cancer Awareness Month**. 🎗️

And a few words by Francis Wooff …

Paul did superbly in **3rd place in 10:33:19** as did James 23rd in 12:43:11.

At 16:05, my own race certainly wasn’t up to my 2023 time of 14:36 and 25th place, but, as I’ve been wondering whether I have some issue inhibiting my running recently, it was actually quite welcome.

(Apart from the imaginary issue, I did have four things inhibiting my running – left ankle, right psoas tendon, general lack of fitness and my back, the biggest problem. But I know about all of these!)

Last year I was quicker, but I finished with a hand that subsequently needed stitches and was nearly sick in a bucket with exhaustion. So, in 2026, I was happy to finish well and have a full English shortly afterwards. And **95th out of 353** isn't too bad, so I'll take that.

What I think would be satisfying is if the not-very-user-friendly Fell track system showed your position at each CP, as I will have gradually risen through the field at each one. I passed people steadily all the way to Millers Dale at 7:25pm, approaching halfway. I then ran through the night seeing no one, apart from people leaving CPs as I entered them and head torches in the distance, until Rainow at around 2am.

I then ran with someone for a while and we passed several people. He eventually stayed with the last of them, while I pushed on to the end.

Ash Crosby was heavily inhibited by cramp, and probably her finishing position doesn't do her justice.

Francis