

Winter Challenge 2/3 December 2011 - Six County Tops



Left to right: Bryan Carr, Jon Kinder, Holly the Collie and Steve Leach. Photo taken by Allan Pollock.

Following the previous year's Winter Challenge where we completed a traverse of the legendary Dark Peak 15 Trigs in true winter conditions, an outing no doubt remembered with fond (!?!) memories by those who took part, I was asked to come up with another suitable challenge for 2011.

Having previously completed the Dark Peak 4 County Tops with Allan Pollock, which is a wonderful circular route from Hayfield, I was wondering one day how many County Tops could be reasonably completed in a single day. A quick check of the map revealed the answer is six, at least in the Peak District. To add the two extra county tops of Cheshire and Staffordshire and keep the mileage to a reasonable distance a linear route was devised, starting from Fairholmes car park by the Derwent Reservoirs and finishing on Axe Edge Moor above Buxton.

Although this is another long trek around the Peak District surprisingly little of the route is common with the Dark Peak 15 Trigs. Only two of the Six County Tops have an OS trig pillar and neither of these is on the Dark Peak 15 Trigs circuit.

Despite a good deal of initial enthusiasm at the idea, this whittled away and in the end only three of us did the route – Jon Kinder, Bryan Carr (Congleton Harriers) and Steve Leach plus Bryan's dog Holly. Allan Pollock had planned to come with us but had gone down with a cold and was running a temperature when we arrived Friday evening to pick him up. Very generously Allan offered to take Jon and me up to the start, return home Friday night then meet us again on the Saturday and take us home. A lot of driving but a great help (thanks Allan).

We had agreed to meet Bryan on a minor road on the moors above Buxton on the Friday evening. It got off to a bad start when Bryan managed to get his car stuck in a waterlogged ditch. Even with the rest of us pushing it wasn't coming out so a call to the AA and a long wait ensued until a suitably equipped pick-up truck arrived to drag it out.

As both Jon and Bryan are superb ultra-runners I was a little concerned about the pace they would set. However I need not have worried as they were both happy to go at my pace, greatly helped by the fact that neither of them really knew where they were going as I had been (deliberately) vague about the route. Starting late evening also meant much of the route would be undertaken in darkness on mostly trackless, featureless moorland and with no road support we had to carry most of our food and drink supplies with us so it was more a long walk than a run.

The forecast rain began shortly after starting and the strength of the wind and intensity of the rain increased overnight to reach a crescendo on the long moorland crossing to Black Hill. The late start and slow pace due to the atrocious weather and wet boggy nature of the ground meant we were well behind the schedule I had planned. Breakfast at Chapel became lunch at Chapel and the sun set again as we climbed towards our 5th County Top of Shining Tor. Finally the weather cleared and we were rewarded with a spectacular view across the Cheshire plain. From there it was just 3 miles in the gathering darkness across Axe Edge Moor to the final top on Cheeks Hills.

The route we took, as measured by my GPS, turned out to be 51 miles with around 9,000 feet of ascent. The 6 tops and our times are as follows.

Name	Height (m)	OS Grid Ref	Distance (miles)	Time (hh:mm)	Description
Start	210	SK 172 893	0.0	00:00	Fairholmes, Derwent Dams
High Stones	548	SK 188 943	4.5	01:28	County Top of South Yorkshire
Black Hill	582	SE 078 046	17.0	06:56	County Top of West Yorkshire
Black Chew Head	542	SE 056 019	19.5	07:55	County Top of Greater Manchester
Kinder Scout	636	SK 085 875	34.0	13:59	County Top of Derbyshire
Shining Tor	559	SJ 994 737	47.0	19:09	County Top of Cheshire
Cheeks Hill	520	SK 026 699	50.5	20:12	County Top of Staffordshire
Finish	485	SK 034 698	51.0	20:23	Layby on A53 by Axe Edge Moor

Steve Leach – December 2011