

New Chew Fell Race

By Lizzie Rosewell

I came across the New Chew Fell Race while searching for a long hilly event that would complement my preparation for the Hardmoors 55. When I found this race I was keen to give it a go as it combines my twin loves of running long distances in the hills and orienteering!

Organised by Saddleworth Runners, the New Chew starts from the sailing club at Dovestones Reservoir, with the option of running for 4.5 hours on the Long Score course, 3.5 hours on the Short Score, or undertaking a linear orienteering course. Arriving at the event start the clag was down and it was clear that this was going to be a tough day!



This would have been a very picturesque starting location, had we been able to see anything!

After a very well organised and quick registration and kit check I was ready to get going, so headed through the start, picked up my map and set off on the Long Score course. The terrain looked very tricky, with very few tracks, lots of marshy moorland and some deep stream gullies (or cloughs, in the local parlance). The checkpoints were worth a range of points from 5 to 40, with the idea being to accumulate the largest score over the 4.5 hour period (with 3 penalty points being deducted for

every minute late). I decided to aim for one of the 40 point checkpoints, picking up others I passed on the way, and then to hope I might have enough time to collect a second 40 pointer on my way back.

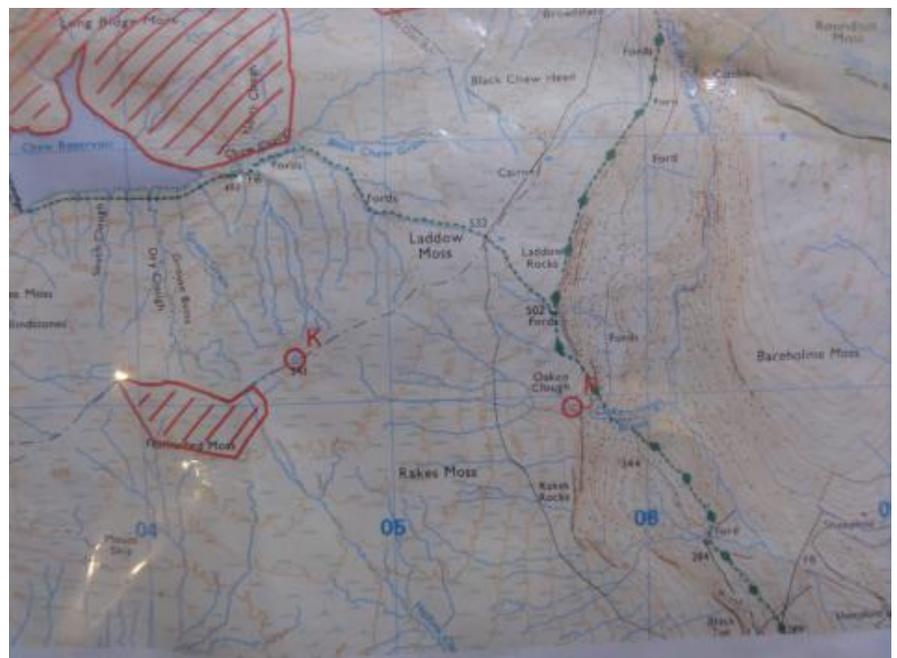
I set off along the Chew Road which leads to Chew Reservoir, the easy running giving me a false sense of what lay ahead! I reached the foot of Charnel Clough and began the steep clamber up the stream to punch checkpoint E –



– much to the confusion of two mountain bikers who had stopped for a rest down on the road and couldn't figure out why there were runners going in all directions. I was now up in the clag and would be surrounded by clouds until re-descending to the reservoir right at the end of the course. After a tricky scramble up the wet rocks the actual checkpoint was easy to locate alongside a prominent large flat rock. I punched my

card and continued up to pick up a boggy path which then led me back down to the dam at Chew Reservoir.

I now headed for checkpoint K, running around the edge of the reservoir, before following a line of grouse butts up onto the ridge and then heading East to try and locate the trig point which was the site of the checkpoint. On a clearer day this would have been fairly straightforward to locate, but with visibility down to about 10m some careful navigation was required. I did veer off my line slightly as I stumbled about through the peat hags, but I was paying close attention and just spotted the trig off to my left before I shot past. I then continued heading East to pick up Oaken Clough and followed the stream bed down to locate the checkpoint at the stream junction.



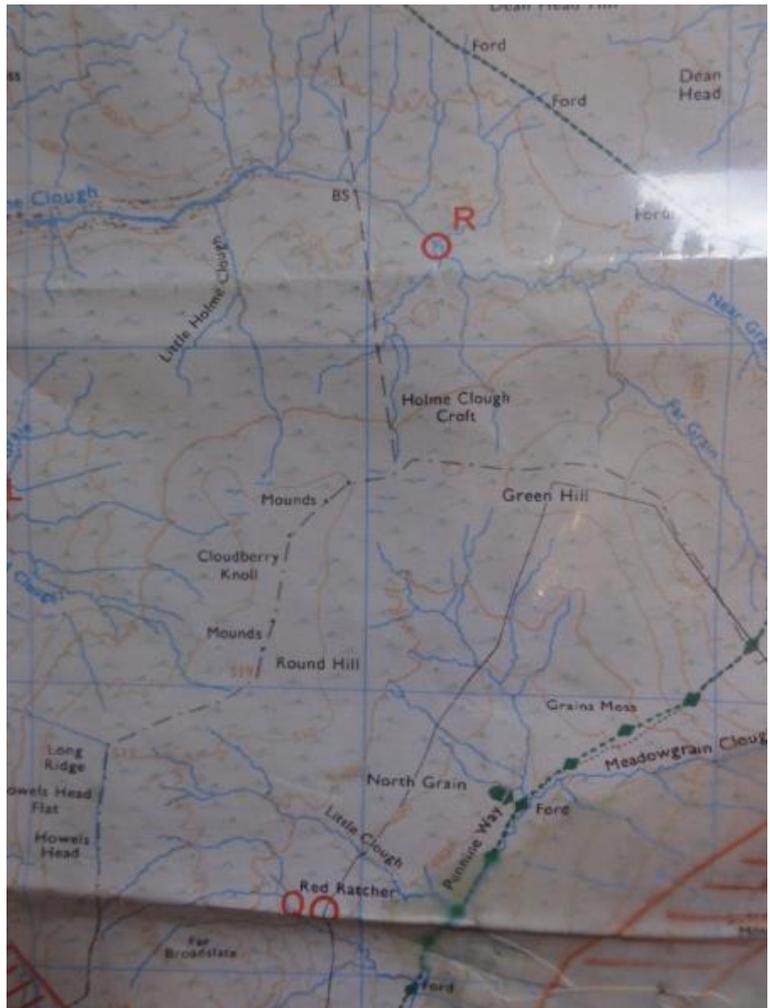
I now wanted to head for the 40 points on offer at checkpoint U. This offered the navigational quandary of whether to head straight up and over Bareholme Moss or whether to contour around. I decided that given the rough ground I would probably be quicker to contour around through the sheepfolds and follow the stream heading north.



As it was I was fortunate to discover a good sheep trod running alongside a wall and so made reasonable progress before dropping down to cross the stream and head up to the obvious checkpoint tucked into the sheepfold. I then joined the good track heading North, enjoying having easier terrain underfoot and taking the opportunity to take on some food and drink, before fording the stream and following the clough and another line of grouse butts to checkpoint S.

Visibility up here was virtually non-existent and I was completely dependent on my compass as I followed the line of grouse butts to the West, before heading North West and dropping down to the Pennine Way (the opportunity to get my feet on the Pennine Way, even if only for a total of about 20m, caused me some excitement as I start to prepare for the Spine Challenger in January 2018!). I only joined the Pennine Way for about 10m on this occasion, before again heading West to meet the fence line and follow this North to checkpoint Q at the excellently named Red Ratcher.

I found this checkpoint without any problems, but here was where my race started to go wrong. By this stage I had been out for around 3 hours and should probably have started to head for home. Instead, I failed to fully appreciate the nature of the rough terrain between me and the finish, and decided that I would have time to pick up checkpoint R before heading back. I followed the fence to its corner at Green Hill, before heading on a bearing to checkpoint R. The ground along the fenceline was fairly boggy, but the navigation was straightforward; as soon as I struck out away from the fence I was faced with bogs, peat hags and almost zero visibility. Progress was extremely slow and I became convinced that I had come off my bearing and gone round in a circle (looking at my GPS trace later I was actually following the bearing well, but my progress was so slow that I was sure I must have made an error). I decided that I would play it safe and head due North, which would mean that I would hit Holme Clough and could then follow this down safely even if I missed the checkpoint. As it was this strategy brought me onto the exact line I had planned and I came down between the smaller stream gullies to hit Holme Clough bang on the checkpoint!



However, the 2 km between these checkpoints had taken me about 40 minutes and I now knew I would be late back. As the visibility was still atrocious I decided to take the navigationally easier (but longer) route back and followed Holme Clough down to meet Greenfield Brook before running along the string of reservoirs back to Dovestones. Unfortunately, although the navigation was easy with this approach, the terrain was anything but! Tussocks and heather made for slow going, before a very steep scramble was required down to the stream bed and then over treacherous wet rocks to meet the weir at Greenfield Brook. Here my luck ran out and I slipped on a rock and fell, giving myself a good set of scrapes and bruises on the way down. I picked myself up and after a bit of a shake decided I hadn't done any serious damage.

I was now thankfully onto some good tracks and began to pick up the pace back towards the finish. It was great to be running at a reasonable speed on good tracks

after a hard day on tough terrain. I picked up a couple more checkpoints along the way in the hope that these points might slightly mitigate the massive number of penalties I knew I was going to accrue! As I came down out of the clag to round Dovestones Reservoir it was a strange sight to see massive numbers of walkers and families out for a Sunday stroll, having barely seen a soul all day. Then it was into the event finish for a very welcome meal of cheese and onion pie, mushy peas and some very tasty cake!

Having been almost half an hour late and wiped out around half the points I had actually gained at checkpoints, this was not my most successful competitive outing! However, this did not detract from a most enjoyable day and a really well organised and challenging event. It certainly provided a full body workout, with my core and back muscles still slightly tender as I write this a couple of days later, and should hopefully stand me in good stead as I head towards some hilly ultra-marathons later in the season.



You can read more about Lizzie's running adventures on her blog:
<https://lizzierunning.wordpress.com/>