

## THE STOOP

By John Foden

The build up to the Stoop was ominous. Snow and rain showers with 20 mph winds causing considerable chill factor were forecasted. So I rang Dave Woodhead the organiser. He reassured me that whatever it was like at the start it would not get worse. No snow there. None elsewhere.

On that reassuring note I set off for Haworth of Brontë fame. It was a bright frosty morning. A pleasure just to be alive. The start proved to be one thousand foot up on the very top of Penistone Hill.

It was immediately obvious that this was a particularly friendly race. Everyone knew each other, and foreigners like me from far off Nottinghamshire were made welcome. By the time I finished my coffee everyone seemed to have introduced themselves and I had a new circle of boon companions.

Because the driving conditions were much better than expected I arrived early and was able to watch the two children's races. They were great and contributed further to the happy atmosphere. We really ought to have junior races associated with trail racing wherever possible.



*The Stoop in real Christmas Conditions.*

*Photo by David Brett*

We started in a ravine out of the biting wind, and then climbed up a short bank onto the frozen Haworth Moor where the brilliant winter sun was glorious. The map clearly shows the whole race is on public rights of way, yet is described as a fell race in the leaflets. Fell runs are classified by the amount of climb in stated distance. So the Stoop legitimately claims both trail and fell status.

Initially we ran down a gentle incline to a road at the bottom of a valley and then climbed up hill to the Stoop, an old Yorkshire-Lancashire boundary stone. We then ran back the same way.



*Xmas at the Stoop. First four home collect their chocolate.*

*288 Steve Oldfield, 290 Mark Horrocks, 245 Ian Holmes, 431 Andrew Wrench*

*Photo by Dave Woodhead*

I had been warned it was a technically difficult course, and feared I was going to have to climb steep fields of boulders to be followed by precipices to be parachuted off. In fact the technique needed was to be able to judge which tufts of heather and grass could be trodden without disappearing into the bog underneath and so slowing up. I slowed dramatically.

I was asked to keep out of the way of the faster runners as they came back. In fact those mountain goats at the front were under perfect control and floated down. It was the middling runners staggering from one tuft to deep bog who were the loose canons. Near the back were the gentlemen and lady runners pussy footing from one tuft to another. By the time they passed, I was panting hard enough to be heard in London and was likely to knock everyone over with uncontrolled lurches.

But the most memorable part of the race were the sharp cracks as runners broke through the ice, followed by cries of frustration as they disappeared into the freezing bog. (Why didn't this ever happen to girls? They finished as clean as they started.) But compensation for the refrigerated water was absence of stiles. There was not one anywhere near the course and it was impossible to get lost.

At the finish all finishers received a chocolate in stead of a useless medal or yet another T-shirt. More free coffee was at the finish and soup in the Sun Hotel. The pub was so crowded with runners getting a beer took fifteen minutes. Not that it mattered. There were so many prizes (mainly alcoholic) to work out even slow runners had a fair while to wait.

In summary I totally recommend the 5 mile 800 foot climb Stoop to trail runners – providing you don't leave the TRA for the FRA! Dave organises a series of trail/fell races during the year. They are listed in the TRA's Short Race Fixture list and are basically the same. None are frightening. All are fun. All have some form of chocolate for instant energy when you finish. All have prizes we like.