Ho Ho Hell on the Humber - 6 December 2014 – Ian Richardson

Regular readers may recall that I did an evening version of this event in August 2013 and did not enjoy it one little bit.

I swore to myself that I would never do it again.

That seemed unfair on a well organised event that was dominated on that occasion by storm force winds, so I decided to give it another try.

After all, if the weather was awful in August, surely it would be lovely in December?

And why would you not want to spend six hours running back and forward over the Humber bridge?

In fact, as I arrived at the Visitor Centre on the North side of the Humber Bridge, the outside temperature inds, so I decided to give it awas 3C and there was a strong and very low sun.

Festive costume was the order of the day and there were many entrants in full or partial Santa suits, elves and reindeer and snowpeople. I settled on wearing a Santa hat.

As the 50 or so of us assembled for the pre race brief, I had a chance to check out the supplies laid on. These consisted of sausage rolls, mince pies, yum yums and a vast range of Haribo, as well as a container of water for filling up your own supply (along with some cups already laid out).

It looked as if my food stocks were not going to be required but I laid them out anyway on the grass near the start, along with many others.

On midday, we were set off on our way. When I did this previously, you could stop after finishing a lap in the last hour and I managed to contrive a lap finish in 5:02. They seemed to have become wise to me as you could not now stop and claim a finish until after completing a lap after 5:30.

This time we were running on the footway on the west side of the bridge, which exposed us more to the SW wind than had we been on the other side. The footways are about 5 feet below the roadway, and so can give some shelter if between you and the wind.

The advantage of the west side were the views, particularly of the sun going down, giving a magnificent sunset a little over half way through the event.

The start of each lap has quite a steep hill to the footway proper and this flattens a little as you approach the first of the two main supports for the bridge. The south side then dips down to the turnaround point and it is a climb back up for the first part of the return leg of each 4 mile lap. As the hours progressed, I used these uphills for walk breaks and very welcome they were too.

I now had a chance to study my fellow runners and walkers. One chap was wearing a full Santa suit and bare feet. He did change into Vibram shoes after twenty miles.

Another hardy soul had on a pair of Santa shorts, red and trimmed top and bottom with white fluffy material, and a Santa hat. Nothing else. He put shoes on after 24 miles, but remained bare chested throughout.

I, on the other hand, was clad like Nanook of the north, and all the happier for it.

Despite the hilliness, we all soon settled in to our respective rhythms and I ran with a chap from Scunthorpe for a few laps, which helped pass the time, mostly discussing football.

My refuelling strategy consisted of my water bottle filled with various electrolyte drinks and the yum yums that were provided. I had never heard of this confection which appeared to consist almost entirely of flaky pastry, sugar and a small amount of creamy filling. It proved very easy to eat and seemed just the job. Not the sort of thing that you are likely to find in the healthy eating aisles of the supermarket, though.

By about 4 pm the sun had gone down, the lights were coming on across the bridge and the wind was picking it up, making it rather colder.

This was also the opportunity for some of the runners to add fairy lights to their costumes. As you can probably tell, this was not the sort of event that would be likely to appeat on Run Britain or any other ranking website. It was just people pursuing their own challenges against the clock and the conditions.

I finished my eighth lap, or 32 miles, just after 5:30. I Can’t be sure as my Garmin had packed up by then. I couldn’t fuel it on yum yums.

I picked up a mince pie and wandered over to the visitor centre to receive my rather good T shirt with a great design on it and then made my way to the B&B that I was staying in, as I had no intention of driving back home after that.

I am happy to report that I really enjoyed the event this time round, which shows the difference the wind can make.

Friendly and well organised this is most certainly a low key, no frills event with some very scenic views.

I may come back again!

Ian Richardson

8 December 2014