Leeds Canal Canter - 13 March 2016

I like canals. Running alongside them is one of life’s pleasures, so I couldn’t miss this one.

Davina and I met up at 06:00 to share a car (hers) down for a 08:30 start.

HQ was a postal social club in Kirkstall. This was like a social club anywhere. It was a bit run down, tables and chairs in regimented rows and notices telling you all the things that you can’t do. It had parking and a big enough room to get changed in and leave kit. Tea and coffee were also available for 20p and 30p, so it was getting off to a good start.

I’d already said hello to a few club members past and present before we started the half mile or so walk down to the start on the canalside.

The results tell me that there were 74 in the half and 30 in the full, but it didn’t feel like that as we had a low key send off and we were on our way.

The course was simplicity itself. Head west for 10 miles to Saltaire, turn round and come back to the start/ finish at 20 miles, then carry on east towards the centre of Leeds for another 3 miles, turn around and back again to the finish.

There were three drinks stations on the outward leg, with the third being the turn round point. The half marathon runners turned at the first drinks station.

Drink was water in cups and there were occasional bits of banana and jelly babies.

We spread out quite quickly and at about 3 miles I was joined by Graham Yare, a new member that I had not met before, and who had seen my club T shirt. We ran together, chatting away, until about 16 miles where I needed a longer stop at a drinks station and let him run on.

It seemed that money had recently been spent on the paths and they were mostly excellent for running on. There was a stretch towards the turn round point that was not as good, but I think it was accentuated by how good the rest was.

In the first mile, there was a short flight of locks, a hill on a canal!

I remember it feeling like a steep downhill on the return stretch.

Passing the start/finish at 20 miles was always going to be a psychological issue, but the well stocked nature of the station helped.

Of course, after this 20 mile point, every step took us further away and needed to be retraced, but the course was interesting with a variety of boats to admire. There were also a couple of bridges to cross. More hills!

The sight of a hi-viz clad volunteer at the 23 mile drinks station/turn point was very welcome and it was then a straightforward run back to the finish. Runners coming the other way would ask how far to the turn point, and I didn’t have it in me to answer the lady who asked when she was still two miles from it.

A nice low key finish and we received a medal and a little goody bag. I was very happy as it contained an addition to my growing Buff collection, as well as some food items and a pen. The food table had water, squash and coke, as well as some filled rolls, cakes and sweets, so I was perfectly content waiting for Davina to finish.

After this, we made our way back to the social club to get changed and have a cup of tea, before the drive home. It was at this point that I realised that the goody bag also contained a can of beer. It just kept getting better!

The organisers, the splendidly named “It’s grim up north” are putting on a number of events this year, some, like this one, for the first time.
Have a look at their website. I’m certainly keen on trying out more of them.

Ian Richardson

18/3/16