

The Brecon to Cardiff Ultra, is a 70K one way, fully marked race that starts in the Brecon Beacons National Park with its dramatic mountain landscapes. As the route is linear competitors park at the finish and are transported, by coach, to the start in Brecon.

I run all my Ultra's with my son Gareth and for this one my wife had been roped in to drive us from the hotel to the finish line where the coaches were waiting to take us to the start. The coaches were due to leave at 6:30 which of course meant a 5:30 start for us.

This race had been jinxed from the moment we entered, with both Gareth and I having problems training due to illness and other factors and the morning of the race was no different. Having got ready in plenty of time we went down to the car only to find we'd left the car keys in my room. This in itself was not a problem except on trying to enter our room to get the keys we found that the card key wouldn't work. Back down to reception except of course there was nobody there. Eventually we got that problem sorted and set off to the coaches.

The weather was atrocious with Met Office Amber warnings of gale force winds and torrential rain, even after we boarded the buses the general opinion was that the race might well still be cancelled.

The race was due to start at 08:00, however, one of the buses had broken down and so the Briefing and Start were delayed until that bus arrived at 8:45. It hardly seemed possible but the weather seemed to be getting worse. One of the key points at the briefing was that a bridge in one of the forest sections was down and so a short deviation around the bridge had been implemented and since this loop was on a tarmac track the time allowed to complete had been reduced by 15 minutes because running on tarmac is easier!!!

The start is from a pen with a single file exit, this has the effect of spreading out the field, unfortunately it also means that anyone at the back of the group, as we were, lose time as they wait their turn to cross the start line. The first 11Km is along a single-track towpath where passing was virtually impossible which made getting a comfortable, regular pace difficult. The path itself was a mixture of energy sapping ankle deep mud and pools of water. This along with the torrential rain and a wind that seemed determined to swirl around to catch us runners off guard and blow us into the canal made this easier part of the course very unpleasant. At around 5Km we came across the first blown down tree, which caused a bit of a bottleneck as we climbed over. This actually brought a smile to my face as I recalled the Race Director warning us to be aware in the forest section of creaking old things about to fall down, to which my son turned to me and said he's talking about you dad. Checkpoint 1 (11Km in) we swiped in and I wondered how on earth the Marshalls stayed so cheerful and encouraging in such brutal conditions. From checkpoint 1 you turn sharp right over a stone bridge and begin the 10Km continuous climb. If I thought the first section was unpleasant what greeted me as I began the climb made the first section feel like a Sunday stroll. Ahead I could see groups of runners all walking and with good reason the head wind now made running something you could only do between lulls in the wind and the rain hitting you felt like bullets.

We continued on up and came across two more fallen trees but strangely I didn't give either a second thought as I got around them. Towards the top of the climb life was very unpleasant and extremely cold with the constant rain and relentless gusting winds but we were well ahead of the cut off time but it has to be said I was not enjoying the run, the last 30Km is mostly on tarmac or compact cycle tracks and I kept telling myself once I'm over the top the wind and rain might ease off and it'll be easier.

At around 25Km some flying debris hit one of the runners although fortunately not injuring her, it did make me realise that perhaps this was not the safest run I've done. Shortly after this Gareth voiced the thoughts I'd had for a while, when he said "this is madness and not fun at all" after a few seconds conversation we decided that there'd be other Ultra's and this is one that isn't worth the risks involved.

So when we reached the next checkpoint at around 27Km we pulled out and of course immediately regretted doing so, especially since we were almost an hour up on the cut off.

Was it the weather, the risks involved, the lack of real training due to our illness over Christmas or perhaps simply a lack of determination? Who knows but on balance it was probably the wisest decision.