

# Gibside Fruit Bowl 21st October 2012

Another glorious autumn Sunday, another early start for yet another 10K, this time the Gibside Fruit Bowl. Yesterday was a bad, bad day – watching roller derby at a leisure centre that had a bar. I was remarkably restrained, a mere three pints – though that was then topped off with a McDonalds on the way home...and curry when actually got home, possibly followed by toast and marmalade. Carb-loading gone mental, but never mind.

Waking up this morning, I had absolutely no idea what today's race would have in store for me: HILLS. And then more HILLS. Finished off with...yes, you guessed it: HILLS. But I race ahead of myself here (sadly, that never seems to happen during an actual race).

We picked up Lesley Hellhound Richardson en route, and idly chatted about signing up for next week's Kielder 8 mile trail run, laughing about the Kielder hills and the mud, and oh so very casual about the possibility of managing a third race on three consecutive Sundays.

We arrived. It was cold, but bright – and so many runners! We met up with our fellow Striders – Maria, Philip, Linda and Mark – and I realised that for the first time, I was actually excited about the prospect of a race, gone were the days of self-doubt and fear. I actually rubbed my hands with glee! I felt gleeful! Ha! In the words of a certain Ricky Tomlinson, 'Gleeful, my arse!'

We set off in the most amazing surroundings, trees sporting the warm colours of autumn, supporters shouting their encouragement, lots of excited runners full of tales of previous Gibside races. It wasn't long before much of the chatter stopped, as we began a steady climb up a hill that seemed to have no end to it. At all. It just kept going. And going. And just when you thought it was all over, the bloody thing started again! But get to the top we did, with Lesley doing her best to keep up with me as we headed along a flat stretch, before a merciful downhill.

I was really hoping for a PB today, but soon realised that was going to be tall order given the nature of the route – and I just couldn't seem to make up enough time on the downhill stretches to make up for the long drags up again. That's ok, I thought to myself, you just need to enjoy this one, look around you, admire the view...until the next hill.

Did I mention the hills?

At one point, I hallucinated about cake. This seems to happen often on a big run like this...and it's always cake.

We got to mile marker five, and by this time, if it wasn't for Lesley, I would have gone off in search of that cake. I felt awful. Really, really awful: light-headed, hungry, tired, aching muscles. In my head, Lesley told me to stop being so bloody ridiculous. What she actually said was 'We're nearly done, Ruth, a flat stretch to come, cup of tea, ignore those muscles!'

A last hill – hideous, so steep I felt like I was going to fall backwards and roll all the way down again, but mercifully short – then on to the flat stretch where we'd started. We could see the finish line in the distance, and there were lots of people cheering and clapping as we ran past. Lesley spotted Mick the photographer, and told me to paste a smile on my face. I did, possibly more rictus than I would have liked. Katherine and Max waved and hollered at us as we 'killed it' (Lesley's words!) to the finish line, more rictus grinning as Jason papped us at the finish.

Wow! I did it! Fantastic! I couldn't actually walk in a straight line – for some reason, I kept veering off to the right – but at least I was still on my feet. It was amazing to meet up with the other Striders and compare our race times and our feelings about what we'd just – willingly – put ourselves through. Like the tee shirt says:

**Gibside Trail Race: like life, full of ups and downs, it's not flat!!**

**Til the next time, Ruth Whiteside, proud to be a Strider**

PS Lesley: you are amazing xxx

PS I got my PB!!

PS Did I mention the hills?