

After Saturday's ferocious wind and rain, it was rather pleasant to be greeted Sunday morning with glorious sunshine, calm and blue skies. I took the opportunity to arrive early to have a look around the stone circle and the village. The latter has changed a bit, the pub is still there thankfully, but now the National Trust has added a proper visitor's centre. After taking a few photos I joined the rest of the running field for the start.

Jayne had giving me strict orders to finish under 1 hour 10 minutes, normally this wouldn't be a problem for me on a road-based 8 mile race, but for off-road this seemed a bit of a challenge.

There was lots of debate amongst the starters of just how muddy and rutted the course was. This seemed to excite most of them with even the race organisers joining in claiming that their rain dancing earlier in the week had worked! For an asphalt-loving guy like me it filled me with dread. Anyway it was too late to change my mind now.

The start of the run followed along a small country road, a nice way to get into the swing of things before we would leave the comfort of asphalt for country lanes. Apart from a few deep puddles, things were looking ok, though some of my fellow runners seemed to relish the idea of running through the puddles rather than around them.

Things then took a significant turn as I found myself having to run down a steep muddy bank. It was at this moment that I wished I had bought a pair of running shoes with spikes and not used an old road pair, for I had zero-grip under foot. In fact I probably would have better off on skis! Somehow I managed to descend upright and in one piece.

The terrain didn't get much better after that. One of the local farmers had thoughtfully decided to plough one of his fields a few days before and it was this field we had to run through. I say run, for me it was more of a walk-and-slide affair.

There was then a very short respite before another country lane that initially looked ok but soon had so many deep and large ruts than it looked like it had been poorly excavated by some amateur archaeologist. As you can imagine I struggled, sliding and almost climbing my way through whilst others around me seemed to leap like gazelles over it all.

Eventually I got through and found the terrain a bit more stable. There were still quite a few large puddles, but by now even I was running through them. Well, I had to clean the mud off somehow! There were some more rutting to contend with but these weren't quite as big as earlier and I seemed to have got used to the sliding.

In fact my biggest concern now was the fact that a small stone had managed to enter the back of my left shoe and started giving me grief. I tried to shake it free but it wasn't budging so I had to put up with it.

Actually 'up' is the key word here. Remember that steep bank I slid down earlier? Well now I had to ascend it! One of the helpful marshals warns me of tripping over the tree roots en route. Actually, if it wasn't for those tree roots acting as steps I probably wouldn't have made it to the top!

Now I was back on more predictable terrain as I started the last mile to the finish which was at the same place as the start. Near the finish a fellow runner gets

past me, but I wasn't having this, so I upped my pace only for him to respond. We ended up both crossing the line together. Incidentally he was wearing bib number one!

Looking back at it all, I did enjoy it, though a lot of that was down to the glorious sunshine, great views of the Wiltshire countryside and finishing in one piece! Also with a finishing with a time of 1:07:29, I beat Jayne's target time by over two minutes. There was also a nice black t-shirt for all finishers and free photos to download afterwards. The attached was taken earlier on in the run before the real mud and ruts!

Though 150 people registered to take part, 121 actually finished on the day and I was the 32nd person home. 150 may sound small but I can see why they have kept the number of entrants down. The run was never over-crowded, but again you were never alone and for that part was better for it. As for the terrain, I can say it was muddier than the GRIM and more rutted than the G3, in fact it reminded me a lot of the Stockbridge XC.

