

# The River Bank Challenge

Our annual race has been on the go in one form or another since 1982, when it was organised by the Goole Lions. The Striders assisted with the race in 1985, which was the first year it was run under AAA rules, then took over completely in 1986 after differences of opinion with the Lions about how the race should be run. Hopefully the Lions' pride wasn't too badly dented. (Lions, pride, get it?)

In those days the race was called the Three Rivers, but had far greater pretensions to being called a challenge than it does today. It was run as three separate races, a 5 miler, one of 8 and a half miles, and finally the big boys race, the Three Rivers itself. Run entirely on the river banks apart from one or two short road sections, it took in the River Ouse up to Airmyn, the River Aire up to Rawcliffe, then the Dutch River back into Goole from Rawcliffe Bridge. It was fully 15 miles long and believe me, it felt like it.

Despite its length, the Three Rivers attracted runners from all over the country because there was nothing else like it anywhere else. At its height it was taking in well over 400 entries, and therefore generating plenty of cash, some of which I seem to remember going the way of local charities. What happened to that generosity of spirit?

Anyway, it was going very well. Until 1989. The Year of the Bullocks.

One problem with running a race along river banks in June is that there is always livestock to consider. This we did by warning the farmers involved that the race was taking place and advising them to secure their animals elsewhere. All the farmers took heed of our warnings. Except Mr Jackson between Airmyn and Rawcliffe. Eighteen of his bullocks took one look at the rampaging horde of runners bearing down on them, and made a break for freedom.

Some ran so well they could have won the team prize if they'd got their act together (I don't expect they were in the moo-d). Some ended up on the M62, while others turned up in the garden of one Mrs Dealtry at White City. Imagine looking out of your window and seeing a load of cattle munching your chrysanthus and crapping copiously on your lawn! It was made doubly embarrassing for Roger Foster because Mrs D was a colleague of his at Howden Junior School. I bet you could cut the atmosphere at morning assembly with a knife.

It was all sorted out in the end, and the cost (running into £1000s) of damage to fences, crops and gardens was met by our AAA public liability insurance. But it was the end of the Three Rivers. I have made light of it in the preceding paragraph, but it was deeply upsetting at the time, and Keith Tattersall the Race Director was threatened with violence by one of the farmers whose crops had been damaged (the farmer can't have known how big Keith was). Cattle are unpredictable at the best of

times -- Peter Gray and I were running along the Dutch River once, on the Old Goole side, when half a dozen bullocks took fright and Fosbury Flopped over the fence into the adjoining field. We weren't so ugly as to frighten cattle, not in those days anyway.

As a postscript to the Three Rivers story, that last race in 1989 was won by Brian Ward, a good friend of this club, in 1.27.07, a fantastic time considering the heatwave conditions of the day.

So the one third marathon River Bank Challenge was born in 1990, and has continued to the present day without major incident (if you don't count the runner one year who accidentally vacated his bowels all over Karen Bexon's leg. Lucky it didn't hit a fan first). Tidal Defence works in 1993 forced a change of course upon us, so we ran the race up one side of the Dutch River to Rawcliffe Bridge, then back down the other side (the course was devised by Mr Boring of Boretown, Boreshire). The only interesting part of that course was where the race had to be routed through the docks on the way back, but this in itself caused problems when some of the later runners found their way barred by a ship being moved between locks! Serves 'em right, they should have run faster.

There was also a problem the following year when part of the banks were being re-seeded, meaning another course change, but we used roads and tracks rather than resort to the Dutch River again.

Importantly, the conversion to the shorter distance didn't have a negative affect on numbers, certainly not in the early years. In 1991 we attracted 450 entries, which we didn't think would be beaten, but the following year that number increased to a massive 510.

The only time we have been unable to run the race was in 2001 because of the Foot and Mouth crisis. A Community Sports Day was held at Westfield Banks instead, involving loads of activities and sports for kids, which I understand was very successful but I didn't go myself, having invented a death in the family to get out of it. Well done to all those who couldn't think of an excuse fast enough.

The organisation of the race is a major challenge in itself, but it is a good example of how the whole club, plus friends and family, all muck in to bring about a successful conclusion. The co-ordination of all this effort is no mean feat, and each Race Director deserves a medal. Keith took over from Peter in 1988 and liked doing it so much he kept it until 1995. Dot Pullman took over for the next 3 years, then Caroline Houseman for the next two, followed by Dave Hanney from 2001 onwards. Well done to them all, I wasn't alone in only wanting to view the job from the other end of a bargepole.

The sponsors also deserve a special mention, because without them we would make very little money for ourselves let alone charities. Over the years we have been sponsored by Hygena, Nat West Bank, Boyes store and numerous others, but a constant contributor has been Chris Houseman through his various business interests. More than once Chris has rescued us when we were struggling to attract interest from outside, and for that, many thanks.