

A bit of a different race report this week with a Man Vs Barge challenge. Congleton Harriers' Rob Parkin was one of 180 runners taking part in an unusual event.

A bit of background is required first: the Standedge Tunnel is part of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and was the cutting-edge engineering of its time way back in 1794 when the idea was conceived at the height "Canal Mania". Finally finished in 1811 the tunnel is more than 3 miles long under the Pennines between Marsden and Diggle. When completed the narrow boats were propelled through the tunnel by "Leggers" - the boatmen lay on the cargo and pushed against the roof or walls of the tunnel with their legs. Professional leggers were paid one Shilling and six Pence and could push an empty boat through the tunnel in just over an hour.

Sadly, with the railways taking traffic away from the canals, the Huddersfield Canal fell into slow decline and the last commercial boat passed through the tunnel in 1921. In time, parts of the brick roof became unstable and some sections collapsed, making navigation impossible. Happily, the tunnel was restored and reopened in 2001 and thus opening up a race opportunity.

The start of the race is at the Marsden end of the tunnel and the runners set off at the same time as the barge enters the tunnel. The aim is to beat the barge to the other end at Diggle. The runners, however, don't have it easy as there is no towpath to run along – instead they have to go over the top on a five mile run featuring a 743m climb to earn a chip butty at the Diggle hotel.

Rob was pleased with his time of 54.59 finishing in 83rd place and was well into demolishing his chip butty with a welcome pint of beer before the barge emerged.

If you are interested in entering unusual challenges like this or even fancy a spot of "normal" running, the club always welcomes new members. You can find full details on our Congleton Harriers website: Congleton-harriers.co.uk. You can also connect with the club on Facebook where details of club activities are posted regularly.