

Bah Humbug! 'Tis the season to be miserable old Scrooges. Christmas is a sentimental agonising charade that forces people to be Happy in order that the shops on the high street can balance their books. The pressure starts in September and culminates in the Sales, leading to further £billions being squandered on shoddy imports. And as for those mindless musical viruses: Slade, Cliff Richard, McCartney, Crosby, Sinatra... AAARRGHHH!!

Thankfully it wasn't ALL bad: the Xmas meal hash was a joyous affair – happening before this Bah Humbug rot got properly started. Fifty-five hounds turned up according to Phil, who volunteered this info near the end of the run. I haven't got other statistics to hand, so 'thank you' Phil for that. The weather was mild & sunny to begin with, and the recent flooding was on the retreat, so all bode well. I could even begin to relax a little following my previous night's pre-GG-do incident, namely:- getting rammed from behind by a Chinese girl while I stood at a red traffic light – inside my car of course... and luckily it was not my fault.

We set off in the 'Roman wall' direction via some side streets. A mass cheat was instigated by Sally who drew various runners down a short-cutting lane, later claiming "Well that's where I took the dog this morning, so it seemed obvious". We got to the main flooded field and Pole Pussy / Anorak re-inacted some incident from years gone by, where Anorak slid on her bottom. Well it must have *uniquely stood out* as being pretty spectacular at the time, because I'm sure there's been a plethora of similar incidents since then...

Next was the part of Ciren around the Bees Knees. FR Grizzle on a mission as usual, aided by co-masochists DC and Neptune. Still I caught them cheating every so often. Grizzle's got the determination of someone trying to win the race to the South Pole. Following the initial under-pass, a whole load of winding, double-bluffing urban trickery had to be negotiated. Before the inescapable high point was reached:- the **Roman amphitheatre** in all its spectacular (but oft beheld) glory. Carloss wallowed down below, like a blind man with his stick, presaging the eventual exit, while the rest of us gathered on one of the breezy peaks. Pickle was challenged by Must-hash-less to run down and up to the other side, and back, in under a minute, for a quid (?); but something went wrong and Pickle wandered about aimlessly, like a disoriented bumblebee.

Invariably, the trail skirted the Hospital and took the usual pedestrian bridge towards the centre. Grizzle must have been in crisis or something, because DC was now leading the way past the leisure centre and out towards Cecily Hill. Surely to God Tim wouldn't set an unnecessary extra loop along the stream...? Yep, afraid so. But at least he wouldn't continue all the way to the garage on the main road...? Yep, afraid so. Even the delightful incarnation of Santa presented by the young 'Mad Cow' was looking a bit bedraggled by now.

Crossing over the charming stone footbridge and through more flooded meadow, we emerged by the park again. Mr Sheep and others falsied to the back of a little child's roller-skating platform, past a "Mr Porker" van that had seen better days. The On was past the front of said skating platform, through a field, a twisty 'wooded' bit and past a house with Pickle in the garden announcing something: was it his house?! And at last the final On Home, with the Beeches carpark within sight on the other side of the road.

**The Vaults.** had to be negotiated.... before the inescapable high point was reached:- the Roman

Great venue as on previous occasions. Every body stayed in the bar area for about an hour, before dinner was served in the marquee. It remained quite warm in the space, even after the weather turned rainy, making a pleasing pitter-patter on the canvas roof.

After the very good meal, the Bags and Hat were handed out, and Fishfingers gave down-downs to people recently celebrating birthdays: Fire Raiser, Caviar and Eddie.

A new version of 'pass the parcel' was played, which involved selecting numbers, and according to whether the number was odd or even, performing either a forfeit, or selecting a proper 'prize'. The parcel being passed around was a shoe-like object (I think?). The music stop/start was ably controlled by Kipperniks as usual, and the numbers were dispensed by Caviar. Some of the best forfeits were: laying a live trail between the table for Avril and Claude to follow; singing in makeshift Xmas choirs; acting like the dogs on the hash; impersonating a stile.

Hope you all have a Happy New Year (no pressure of course!)

On-on Dyldo

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