

The way 2026 is going, every Harrier will have grown gills by March, but that didn't stop me and Melissa Wright from signing up to the Nice Work Cannock Chase run on the 8th February. A 5 mile loop that incorporates Rifle Range Corner, Pepperslade, and other routes familiar to the Chase Harriers summer season, you're also able to sign up for 10, 15, even 20 miles - something for every level, although perhaps not for the faint-hearted.

Driving up to the Tackeroo, the entrance had hi-vis clad volunteers on duty ready to direct you to the ample parking on site. The race village was at Rifle Range Corner so fairly easy to find, and made for a nice little warm-up jog from the car park. The morning was thankfully forecast to be dry, although the weather had already done its dastardly damage and churned up the mud on the trails.

There were around 280 participants taking part across all four distances, so while you were never too far away from another runner, it didn't feel crowded or dangerous (very important during the more narrow sections!). The hills were extremely tough, but it was the mud proved to be the biggest challenge particularly after the third mile, so trail shoes were and are an absolute must. After a certain point I gave up trying to dodge around the puddles, instead opting to sprint straight through them. My emergency gel was quickly swallowed at the water station, I needed every bit of energy I could get.

It was when I was shuffling up Pepperslade that I heard a rather familiar voice shouting at me to keep going. At first I thought I was hallucinating, but it really **was** Vicky and Sue, fresh from junior parkrun, come to see the Harriers through to the finish. Vicky paced me up Pepperslade, and with that I was safely over the timing mat with a time of 1hr 11min, swearing up and down that it was the toughest five miles I'd ever done. Thanks so much to both of you and to Alan Burt (plus pooch!). Your support was a lovely surprise.

The biggest win of the day goes to Melissa Wright who was third female home in a spectacular 45:05 (and seemed to enjoy every minute!). She's received a lovely trophy courtesy of Nice Work, plus a custom medal ribbon. Fantastic work, Melissa - that'll look right at home next to your Harriers time-trial trophy! It was a challenge and a half but you smashed it. Well done!

All in all, the £25 entry fee got us an invigorating start to Sunday morning, a well-marshalled route with friendly volunteers, race photos with no additional changes, and a nice hefty piece of bling for the medal rack - and despite the race's difficulty, you can't say fairer than that.