

SOUTHERN 50 REPORT 2005

Every Dog Has Its Day

Fifty-two teams from across 10 counties assembled at Tring School for "The Year Of The Underdog". Particularly when a young and rather good looking black Labrador decided that she would join the fun somewhere between the first and second checkpoints. Our furry friend made a right dog's dinner with the competition rules by barking up the wrong tree and switching from team to team. But she enjoyed the hospitality on offer by the friendly staff at every checkpoint where all sorts of goodies were wolfed down.

This unofficial competitor found herself dogged with some good fortune when she had the good sense to follow the scent on to the 50km route after Checkpoint 7. This was where the 50km walkers broke away from the 50 milers, reserved only for the super fit and barking mad.

Along with everybody else she had to endure all sorts of weather conditions during the event which saw sunshine, strong cold winds, darkening skies and a freezing night-time blizzard. At one point it was raining cats and dogs.

She was as pleased as a dog with two tails to complete her extended 50kms taking in Ivinghoe Beacon, Ashridge Park, Berkhamsted, Braid Wood, Great Missenden, Coombe Hill and Wendover. She even hounded out an all-girl team to finish her walkies. These were The Pink Ladies from GLN, who enjoyed themselves so much that they were last to finish in 15-48. However, they still took the lead by winning The Ladies Trophy.

So what about everybody else then?

70% complete teams finished with a highly impressive 87% individual completion, particularly as it was a tough course this year. The GLN Mountaineering Team, aptly known this year as "4 Go Groaning", were Top Dogs, winning the event for the second year in succession but taking two hours longer than in 2004. Hot on their heels were "The Undertakers" from Essex, just 4 minutes behind and improving on their bronze medal position last year. A couple of hours later came "23rd Southgate - Hells Ankles", who won the trophy for the first mixed team home.

Not to be outdone, "Undertakers Too" won the 50km event in 9-08 finishing 14 minutes ahead of The MT Heads" from GLNE.

The Explorers, nearly all novice walkers, were bussed out to Checkpoint 10 at Speen for the start of their event to walk the final 30km of the 50 mile event. "Norfolk, In Chance" from Essex came in first, a full half an hour in front of "Hampton Explorers" from GLSW. One Explorer Team found themselves slightly off course at one point and decided to vault across a sturdy barbed wire fence and traverse the grounds of a stately home to link up with the right footpath. It was only when they were challenged by half the Metropolitan Police Force and a size 12 snarling police dog that they realised that they were strolling through the grounds of some place called Chequers.

This event would never have been possible without the help of over 100 volunteers who love this annual event as much as us. A big thank you for all those who did cooking, cleaning, operating checkpoints for up to 15 hours at a time, staffing Central Control, driving supplies to checkpoints and then driving back retired walkers, and running Saturday evening entertainment for 50 Explorer Scouts.

And finally, what became of the black Labrador? She was deposited at Hemel Hempsted police station on Sunday morning and I am delighted to report that she was collected by her owner two days later. If only she could talk she would have a real tale to tell (or should that be tail?). We'll send off a Southern 50 finishing certificate to the owner, anyway.

Me? As you can see, I've gone to the dogs.

Chris Foster
Southern 50 Committee