

Southern 50 Challenge Hike

10th February 2007

An event for all seasons

This year's Southern 50 Challenge Hike celebrated its 28th consecutive appearance and turned out to be a scorching success. An avalanche of 75 teams from 16 counties across the UK wanted a slice of action and adventure – never mind the snow on Friday, the freezing cold temperatures on Friday night, the driving rain on Saturday morning and Saturday night, and the warm sunshine on Saturday afternoon. A flood of 300 walkers were keen to try their hand at a linear walk, brought back as quick as lightning by the organising committee to make this event special for Scouting's Centenary year.

Teams assembled on the Friday evening and early Saturday morning at Icknield Community College which provided us with a fine base in Watlington in Oxfordshire in the Chiltern Hills. From 0600 hrs on Saturday morning the teams of four set off, evaporating into the hills, testing the temperature with their navigation, determination, teamwork and endurance skills.

As usual, Greater London North (GLN) managed the event and welcomed all participants so they enjoyed a good atmosphere rather than a frosty reception. The rules provided either a 50 mile or a 50 km course. Explorer Scouts had their own 30 km course to tackle and were ferried to Speen Scout Hut for their own thunderbolt start, which nicely doubled up as Checkpoint 8. This was after everybody had enjoyed a hearty breakfast, and the extra portions of porridge were not only good for the wind but they also gave walkers a warm front.

Everybody had to navigate their way along their own route, a hilly climate, passing random snowmen along a ridge of high pressure before ending up at Tring School in Hertfordshire. They all had 24 hours to complete their mission before they were given a sunny welcome at the end.

The main event, the 50 mile hike, was won by old friends of The Southern 50, the GLN mountaineering team, who paradoxically named themselves "Late Finishers". They stormed round in 13 hours 16 minutes, thus becoming "raining" champions. Runners-up, breezing home 29 minutes later were The Psychic Pop Tarts, from Chesham in Bucks. Ten Gallon Dixie from Hornchurch, GLNE produced a hurricane finish to come 3rd. Ven-Ford, a team of mild Explorer Scouts from the 20th Torbay finished 4th, picking up the Novice Trophy and the Chiefs Cup for the first team home with team members under 25. The next team finishing a few minutes later was called La Grande Traversee des Alpes, which made you think that the event had gone truly international until being told that they came from the 15th Finchley. They were only trying to fog the issue. The last team to finish was The Corner Plotters from GLSW who enjoyed the wet so much they stayed out for 21 hours 54 minutes.

For the second time in two years, the 50 km event saw another GLN team named "The Phoenix Flyers" finishing in 9-37, some 8 minutes up on last year's time and blowing like a gale at the end. They were 28 minutes in front of the 20th Torbay Network Scout Unit from Devon, who, in turn were 75 minutes ahead of the 1st Plympton, also from Devon. "The Fruitcake Hobblers", also part of the GLN mountaineering team appeared from out of the haze just a few minutes later, ending their drought by picking up the Martin Hornsby Tankard for the fastest team whose combined age exceeds 200 years. 19 complete teams finished this event.

The first three teams home in the 30 km event were dominated by Devon based Explorer Scouts, with once again the 20th Torbay taking home the spoils. It's obviously all that training on the exposed parts of Dartmoor in the drizzle that did the trick. A total of 18 Explorer Scout teams completed their event. The Plympton Explorer Scout Unit based in Plymouth, Devon, consisting of three 16 year olds and one 15 year old, took time out of the event when they came across an overturned car that had skidded on ice. The two occupants were escaping when our intrepid band of heroes found them. They all made sure that the occupants were not injured and re-assured them before turning the car the right way up and continuing on their journey. They tried to cloud over their heroism but their gallant act was caught on camera.

Overall, 45 complete teams completed this year's event, that's 60%. However, 224 a total of walkers successfully finished, and that works out as 75% of all starters.

The event would never have been possible without the help of a monsoon of over 100 volunteers who hail the Southern 50 as much as the walkers themselves. They return each year to staff checkpoints, cater for your every need, drive minibuses, and help out at the start and finish.

During the slick Sunday morning presentation, our new CC Barry Manley was a ray of sunshine. He showered praise on the event and asked the misty-eyed audience "weather" everybody would be back for next year, 16th February 2008.

Chris Foster
Southern 50 Committee