

## Southern 50 Challenge Hike Report

February 2008

Picture the scene at this year's Southern 50 Challenge Hike. Ashlyns School, Berkhamsted, this year's selected base, possessed unique light sensors. Classrooms that had become overnight accommodation units turned out to be rather a challenging location when it came to sleeping. The lights automatically went off if you lay still enough for a few minutes, but a mere wriggle set them back on again. Couple this fact with The Lee Scout HQ, transformed into Checkpoint 11 for the day, also doubling as the 30 km Explorer Scout start. This venue was having its own power problems. The Greater London North Galleon Fellowship Team was staffing this checkpoint and our gallant band threw themselves into creating simultaneous mass produced toasted cheese sandwiches, a skip full of piping hot sausage rolls, a mountain of assorted hot pies and kettles full of water for hot drinks. Whilst in full swing the power supply suddenly fell over and the place was plunged into darkness. Yes folks, the atmosphere at this year's Southern 50 was truly electric.

The event saw a surge of 80 team entries, with teams geographically poles apart, all anxious to flex their muscles. They charged up the motorways from Avon, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire, plus a number of illuminating entries from London. There was even a team from Gilwell Park. I've been asked to give them all a plug. As usual, the challenge generated three routes from 30 km, 50 km plus a tough 50 mile which some walkers described as shocking, all providing a complete circuit to re-charge everybody's batteries.

The spotlight was on the lead teams as they navigated their way through a supply of 21 checkpoints in clear, frosty and sunny daytime conditions. Signs of spring were emerging with the sight of snowdrops and other bulbs. Some teams made light work of the conditions whilst others were forced to pylon the agony. Most participants displayed a positive approach but a few blew a fuse once the light dimmed which somewhat neutralised their energy. However, to everybody's credit, nobody switched off and maintained full power until returning to earth.

The lead 30 km team, in a time of 5-44, came from four Explorer Scouts collectively named "3 Blondes and a Tagalong" from the 20<sup>th</sup> Torbay, who just happened to be the current Chiltern 20 winners (our sister event for Scouts in October). They finished just two minutes in front of a local team of Explorer Scouts from Buckinghamshire. The top GLN finishers were two Explorer Scout teams from The Hatters Unit in Southgate District. Both teams completed the event in the dark in just under 9 and 11 hours respectively.

The 50 km winners, in a time of 7-43, were "The Phoenix Flyers" from 201<sup>st</sup> Islington in GLN. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> year running they had won this event setting a new record in the process and proving that they are a force to be reckoned with. They were 19 minutes in front of The Undertakers from Essex who picked up the runners-up trophy along with the fastest 50 km team award whose ages total over 200 years. 3<sup>rd</sup> team position came "Happy Feet" from 20<sup>th</sup> Torbay who collected the Novice Trophy and the award for the fastest team who are all under the age of 25 years. Despite finishing way down the batting order, a team from 2<sup>nd</sup> Warwick Sea Scouts, stuck it out to finish in 17-43 and had the honour of being awarded The Ladies Team Trophy.

Finally, in the mains 50 mile event, nobody could live with a team of Leaders from the 1<sup>st</sup> Chesham Bois in Buckinghamshire. This year they were named "The Cycling Jump Starts" and they powered round in an amazing 12-05, setting an excellent standard, winning the event for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 3 years (last year they were gallant runners-up). The second place team award, some two and a half hours later, were "The Pompey Boys" from Hampshire. This team contained three novices and they were also the fastest team with an aggregate age of over 130 years. They were just minutes in front of the first GLN team, known simply as "Maggie" from 15<sup>th</sup> Finchley, and half an hour later came another GLN team "Hell's Ankles" from 23<sup>rd</sup> Southgate who picked up the fastest mixed team award.

Individually, over 300 participants started and metered out enough force to generate a record 90% finishing rate. Totally electrifying!!!

See you all next year to celebrate The Southern 50's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. You will love it because the date will be 14<sup>th</sup> February 2009, Valentine's Day!!!

Chris Foster  
Southern 50 Committee