

Southern 50 Challenge Hike Report

14th February 2009

Scouts Love Hill Walking

It was Valentine's Day and it coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Southern 50 Challenge. The start and finish for this year's event was Icknield Community College in Watlington, Oxfordshire, situated in the highly appropriately named Love Lane – a perfect marriage.

This year's event saw a passionate entry from 65 teams across the UK, 28 from London, 13 from Devon, 5 from Warwickshire, 5 from Buckinghamshire, 4 from Essex, 2 from Dorset, 2 from Wiltshire, 1 each from Central Yorkshire, Hertfordshire and for the first time we added an international flavour, a team from Oman Scouting. As usual, the challenge presented a lust for three routes from 30 km, 50 km plus a tough 50 mile which some walkers described as heartbreaking.

The morning air saw temperatures dip to minus 5 celcius, which set a few pulses racing. Teams just adored walking through the last of the snowy conditions to 20 checkpoints in clear, frosty and sunny daytime conditions. However, once darkness set in, the participants just had a longing to see the warm glow of the finish.

The winning 30 km team, in a time of 5-26, was set by four Explorer Scouts from Inner City London. The Phoenix Flyers Too, from 201st Islington in Greater London North consisted of Gemma 17, Gemma 16, Kelly 16 and the sole male team member, Giacomo, 14, who all finished barely a minute in front of Hoxton's Heroes, a good hearted team of four 17-18 hot blooded males from Warwick.

The 50 km winners, in a time of 7-22, were Team Extreme from 20th Torbay Scout Network. Some of their team were in bronze medal position last year and they finished half an hour in front of The Phoenix Flyers, heartbreakingly runners-up again, as they occupied the same position last year. They were 40 minutes in front of Halstead Undertakers in Essex who won the award for the fastest team with an aggregate age of at least 200. Southgate Stragglers completed their task in just over 10 hours, winning The Ladies Trophy in the process.

Finally, those with a desire for a 50 mile walk, couldn't match the superb performance from Late Finishers Again, a quartet made up of the Greater London North Mountaineering Team, who clocked 12 hrs and 43 minutes, nearly an hour in front of last year's winners, Snorkelling Jam Tarts from 1st Chesham Bois in Buckinghamshire. They were just a minute ahead of Sole Desire from 15th Finchley, who in turn were just 10 minutes ahead of Devonshire Cream from 20th Torbay who collected The Novice Trophy and the award for the fastest team all under the age of 25. At the other end of the spectrum, the first team to set out were four Explorer Scouts from Hampton in Greater London South West, named Don't Worry, We've Got a Window. They proved to have real staying power as they were the last team to finish in 22 hours and 22 minutes, spotting daylight breaking as they completed their event at 0447 hrs on Sunday morning.

Individually, nearly 300 participants of all ages took part and they were supported by a warm hearted 100 volunteers to love the Southern 50 as much as the walkers.

So until February 2010, The Southern 50 bids you a fond and affectionate farewell until we meet again in a year's time. Adieu, mes amis.

Fozzy alias Chris Foster
Walk Secretary