

## **BATTLING AGAINST ALL THE ELEMENTS**

This year's Southern 50 Challenge Hike was just that little bit different. It wasn't so much a battle for the nearly 90 teams competing against each other. It was more of a battle against the elements. When the Southern 50 was created some 33 years ago, the idea was to put on a real challenge for walkers in the Chiltern Hills in the middle of February when weather conditions just might be at their fiercest. This year, the elements were at their most challenging in the history of the event. Local radio reported that on the Friday night and at the start of the walk, temperatures in Chesham, the location for the start and finish school, had plummeted to minus 18 degrees. How were all the teams from 14 different Counties across the UK, going to cope?

The answer is that they all coped amazingly well. Despite 60% of the walkers being young people, some 90% of the nearly 400 participants finished their chosen event in good shape, having planned sensibly for the adverse weather. The Arctic conditions were difficult enough, but the fall of heavy snow on Thursday night together with ice underfoot, meant that progress was hindered even further. Nevertheless, the walkers stuck to their task and sheer guts and determination drove them home.

The 30km event saw Harrow ESU make light of the wintery conditions to stride home in just under seven hours, just 14 minutes ahead of the runners-up team from The Hatters ESU in Southgate. A few minutes later came an all girls team from Majendie-Steeple ESU. This Essex based team are regular entries and all the girls taking part made up a superb 30% of all participants.

The 50km event saw 1<sup>st</sup> Runwell Overtakers from Essex live up to their name. They starting off last and overtook all their rivals to finish their event in 9:36. They have been knocking on the door for a few years, as they were runners-up last year and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in 2010. They were a half an hour ahead of another Essex based team, The Undertakers, from Halstead and Colne Valley. Twenty minutes later came Phoenix Flyers Too from 201<sup>st</sup> Islington, who always used to do well in the 30km event, but now they are over 18, they were tackling the 50km event for the first time, and are obvious stars in the making.

Finally, in the blue riband 50mile event, hot favourites Shuffling Pullovers from 1<sup>st</sup> Chesham Bois made good use of local knowledge and experience to storm home in 10:54, finishing over 90 minutes ahead of Phoenix Flyers – a team of Leaders from 201<sup>st</sup> Islington who were forced to move up in class for fear of being beaten by their other younger team. Third home was Ten Gallon Dixie from Hornchurch, led by the amiable Mike Suggate, who was responsible for entering five teams from his old base in Hornchurch and his new base in Abingdon, Oxfordshire.

Event Secretary, Chris "Fozzy" Foster said "I have nothing but huge respect for everybody who took part this year. It's a tough enough event at the best of times, but throw in snow, ice and the coldest temperatures I have ever experienced in the UK, each finisher's certificate is a thing of beauty to cherish by its new owner. Our loyal group of over 100 adults who help to staff the event were once again all brilliant".

Meanwhile, Pippa Byrom, aged 15, from the Bush Hill Park ESU in Enfield said "It was really brill. The guys at the checkpoints were so encouraging and they kept us going. It was difficult but the challenge was all part of the fun, and afterwards we really felt like we'd achieved something. The evening activities were good and it was great to hang out and make friends with other Explorers. I am really looking forward to trying it again next year".