

SOUTHERN 50 REPORT, 15TH FEBRUARY 2014

LOVING THE SOUTHERN 50

The Southern 50 is attracting more and more participants every year because they love the event, which is just as well because the date always falls around Valentine's Day. However, in the past two year's, two participants have taken this annual event one stage further as halfway round the course they proposed to their girlfriends. Last year's proposal was equalled this year by Derek Austin, a 16th Wood Green Scout Leader in the grounds of Wendover Church which was doubling up as Checkpoint 18. Derek did the decent thing by going down on one knee to propose to Sarah, Beaver Scout Leader at the same Group, and there were tears of joy all round when she said yes.

As for the event itself, following torrential rain and flooding, the organising committee made the decision to go ahead but with some modifications. The 50 mile route was abandoned for the first time ever for safety reasons (but will definitely return next year), which meant that extra numbers of adult volunteer staff could support the 50 km and 30 km routes. Despite the dreadful weather and challenging ground conditions, a record number of 100 teams from across 15 Counties started the 35th consecutive Southern 50, the longest running Scout County event in the UK.

When it was all over, 82 full teams and 93% of over 400 participants successfully completed the event. For the record, the first team home in the 50 km event were our old friends Ten Gallon Dixie who began life in Hornchurch and now based in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. In the recent past they have always been close to a 50 mile trophy without managing to lay their hands on one. They finished in a remarkable 7 hrs 39 minutes. Just five minutes later came the perennial Phoenix Flyers, a team of Leaders from 201st Islington who have either won or been runners-up in either the 50 miles or 50 kms since 2006, an amazing achievement in itself.

An ever increasing number of Explorer Scouts entered the 30 km event which was won for the third year in succession by Harrow ESU calling themselves The Spartans. They finished in 5 hrs 16 minutes, some 35 minutes in front of 20th Torbay in Devon.

John Hall, retiring Chairman who founded The Southern 50 some 35 years ago and has since spent half of his life managing the event, said "The Southern 50 has always remained popular because it has offered real outdoor adventure to so many young people and adults in Scouting. All participants can be rightly proud of their achievements".

Enfield Explorer Scout Pippa Byrom, who took on the 50 km route for the first time and finished it in 11 hrs 27 minutes, said "I've done the Southern 50 for the past two years and decided to challenge myself by stepping up to the longer route. I love the challenges Scouting has set me and look forward to many more".

The loyal group of over 100 adults who help to staff the event were all brilliant, making sure that everything was well covered at checkpoints, kit check, the start, the finish, central control, the information desk, the catering and transport teams.

Plans are already under way for next year's Southern 50 which will be a perfect way for World Scout Jamboree participants to be sponsored to help raise funds for their Units.