

Southern 50 Challenge Hike Report, Saturday 11th February 2017

A Huge Southern 50 Challenge

This year's 38th running of The Southern 50 was huge in two ways. Firstly, we had a record number of 112 teams who entered and that accounted for more young people and female participants. Secondly, this year was had to cope with mainly sub-zero temperatures, frequent snow showers and regular blizzard conditions. This was bad enough for almost 400 participants, but spare a thought for the checkpoint teams, route controllers and drivers who braved the elements to ensure that this year's Southern 50 was memorable for all the right reasons.

We had teams from all four corners of our County, and GLN was just one of 13 different Scout Counties from across the UK. This year we even went international as Paula, a leader in Austria became a Barnet Borough Network member to join up with the 11th Edgware team and experience what it's like to walk in the Chiltern Alps. The team even picked up a trophy for being the fastest novice under 25 year team not winning any other trophy.

As for everybody else, despite braving the conditions throughout the day and night, only four 50 mile teams completed the event as full teams. For those of you who love statistics, 112 teams entered, 107 teams arrived, 106 teams actually started, 26 failed to finish as a team whilst 80 complete teams finished. A total of 420 walkers entered, 402 registered, 399 actually started walking, 299 finished in complete teams and a further 31 finished as part of scratch teams. The total number of finishers was 330. The total distance walked by all walkers 16,343.3 kilometres – over ten thousand miles. That's the equivalent of all the way from Tring to New Zealand!

273 male walkers started, 228 finished - 83% success. 126 female walkers started, 102 finished - 81% success.

Our last walker, Kieran Ross from Argo ESU in Hampstead came through the door at 03:30 and he was rewarded seven hours later by having his well earned Queen's Scout Award presented to him by County Commissioner Jack Caine.

The Hatters ESU from Southgate won the prize for having the highest number of teams taking part, with ten teams entered in the three distances all toeing the line having travelled to and from the event in a coach.

We even had a complete family team for the first time with sisters and brother: Iona, Isla and Adair Nicolson from North London Network completing the 50km event in a good time.

But spare a thought for one particular adult 50km walker. He misread the instructions and thought that he was only walking 30km and would be back home for tea at 17:00. He finished over three hours later. The finish crew had never seen a participant remove his boots, put on his trainers as he disappeared very fast.

Every walker was presented with an event certificate at the Sunday morning presentation. Tim Kidd, our UK Chief Commissioner was there to speak in glowing terms about the event before he presented the certificates. Jack Caine spoke about his experiences on the previous day and how he bumped into so many amazing young people and adults. Finally, Dave Bush, a veteran committee member who has never missed a single Southern 50, spoke from the heart about how Scouting will provide you friends for life.

So, who managed to walk away with the trophies? The 30km winners were a team of three from Wild Wolf ESU in North London. They flew round in an astonishing 5 hours 1 minute, just 14 minutes in front of a team from Majendie ESU, Halstead & Colne Valley, Essex. A local team from Thames Ridge, Oxfordshire picked up the novice trophy.

The 50km event saw three 22nd Southgate leaders go one better from last year by winning the event in 7 hours 1 minute, a full 51 minutes ahead of a combined Barnet & Southgate team. Over an hour later came three 23rd Southgate adults which included our Chiltern 20 chairman, Colin Batsford. Another Thames Ridge Network team won the Chairman's Cup for the fastest team under 25 and a Phoenix Flyers team from 201st Islington, North London, won the Ladies Trophy. The Sixth Sense team from 6th Friern Barnet walked away with the Hornsby Tankard for being the fastest team with an average age of over 50.

Every walker who took part in the 50 miles event deserves huge credit. Winners were The Southern Fifties consisting of two Southgate Network novices plus a regular campaigner from Sittingbourne in Kent. Having met up for the first time during the previous weekend, they finished in a superb 14 hours 27 minutes, just 16 minutes ahead of an evergreen Phoenix Flyers team. They were only 19 minutes in front of a regular team from Surrey Heath. There was then over a six hour gap before another Thames Ridge Network finished.

This year's event saw the introduction of a brilliant new bespoke system for tracking and timing participants and staff at the event, made by Felltrack which was well liked by everybody.

A new social media team was appointed and they exceeded all expectations with over a quarter of a million people seeing the event on Twitter, plus multiple hits on our Southern 50 Facebook page.

A special surprise awaited participants at the Sunday morning presentation. They were introduced to exactly the same team that took part and won the first ever Southern 50 back in 1980. Some 38 years later they reformed from all parts of the UK to take part once again. They finished in the top half of the results in an outstanding 10 hours 52 minutes.

Massive thanks to all the checkpoint staff who kept the walkers fuelled and entertained. Thank you for all the marshals, drivers, route controllers, central control staff, the Info Desk team, our new social media team, the finish team, the first aid team, the Felltrack guys and the catering teams. You all made the event so successful.