

## Another Huge Southern 50 Challenge

- Imagine one of the longest running and major Scout County events in the UK;
- Imagine young people and adults from far and wide taking up the challenge of walking and navigating their way around a choice of three new long distance routes each year;
- Imagine throughout the past 39 years every member of each team reaching a combined mileage equivalent of over 14 times round the world.....

This isn't imagination – it's reality. The GLN Southern 50 Challenge Hike has maintained its popularity with nearly 100 teams taking part in either the 50 miles, 50 km or 30 km routes. A total of 15 Scout Counties were represented last weekend.

So, what happened at the bitterly cold start in Wendover, nestling within the folds of the Chiltern Hills? A total of 350 walkers set off at two minute intervals from 06:00 on a circular course taking in the delights of Coombe Hill, Ellesborough, Pulpits Wood, Radnage, Cowleaze Wood, Maidensgrove, Cadmore End, West Wycombe Hill, Speen, Great Missenden, Lee Common and Kings Ash before heading back to Wendover. Weather conditions worsened from midday onwards, meaning that every team had to endure penetrating rain throughout the remainder of the day and all night. Heavy mud was a major factor, slowing teams down and making this year's event one of the toughest for years.

The 30 km event for Explorer Scouts saw the first two teams battling it out and walking superbly to finish in under six hours. The winning Explorer Scout Team "Bandanas" one of several teams from The Hatters ESU in Southgate, finished in 05:34, just fifteen minutes ahead of Phoenix Flyers Too, seasoned campaigners from 201<sup>st</sup> Islington. Some 75 minutes later came a team from our old friends at Hitchhikers ESU in Cambridge, who are showing good improvement every year. The novice trophy was won by a team of 13-14 year olds from 22<sup>nd</sup> Southgate who were using the Southern 50 as a perfect linked event before they become Explorer Scouts.

The 50 km teams, a good mix of young and old, produced the same clear winners for the second year running, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Southgate Leaders, superbly led by Tom Nagle. Having been runners-up in this event in 2016, they went one better last year to win in 7-01. This year, they were nearly an hour slower owing to the challenging weather and ground conditions. They finished 47 minutes ahead of the evergreen Phoenix Flyers, who also picked up the trophy for the fastest mixed team. Nearly an hour later came a team from another of our good friends from Thames Ridge Network in Oxfordshire who won the award for being the fastest team aged under 25. Despite finishing up in 23<sup>rd</sup> position in a time of 14:27, a team from the Evolution ESU in Barnet with the delightful name of "Vegan Butchers" took home the novice trophy.

Finally, the 50 mile Blue Riband event followed the form book. Ten Gallon Dixie, made up of Leaders from Didcot ESU, from Thames Ridge, were last to start but stormed home in first place in 14:45. They were led by a great friend of the Southern 50, none other than Dr Mike Suggate who is no stranger from being presented with the winning shield. He led a similar team to victory in 2014, 2015 and 2016. He took last year off as he wanted to see for himself what was on the other side of the world.

Ten Gallon Dixie finished a colossal 80 minutes ahead of a splendid effort by the 8<sup>th</sup> Muswell Hill leader team, who in turn were just fifteen minutes ahead of the "One Step Beyond" team made up of three Barnet and Southgate leaders, who took home the fastest mixed team trophy. There was then a wait of over three hours before last year's winning team emerged from out of the gloom, namely the Southern Fitties from Southgate Network picking up the County Trophy for being the

fastest GLN team not picking up any other award. It took 21 and a half hours for “The Fast, The Slow and The Pretty” to complete their event. This all female team from Thames Ridge Network were the fastest all female team. In between them were three 17 year olds, more good friends from 7<sup>th</sup> Purley and yet more young people from Argo ESU in North London District. Spare a thought for the Hatters ESU Leader Team who enjoyed the event so much that they carried on walking for just over 23 and a half hours. They started just as it was getting light, and they finished.....just as it was getting light. An excellent total of thirteen teams accepted the 50 mile challenge and eight complete teams managed to finish – a brilliant achievement.

None of this would have been possible without the help of over 100 volunteers. This Centurion army fought its way through cooking, cleaning, managing and operating checkpoints for up to 15 hours at a time, staffing Central Control, driving supplies to checkpoints and then driving back retired walkers, and running Saturday evening entertainment for our 200 Explorer Scouts. All this must have had a positive effect on the participants as nearly 80% complete teams successfully finished – something of a record in such tough, challenging and dreadful weather conditions.

There were surprises in store from our County Commissioner at the Sunday morning presentation. Cathy Heels, the event chair, was presented with an Award of Merit for her outstanding services to Scouting in general and her commitment to the event over many years. Our route manager, Mark Waterhouse and our event photographer, Ian New, were both awarded substantial long service awards. Something that very few people saw was an Award of Merit presentation to Ross Paybody, our ACC Cubs for his outstanding services to Scouting. Ross was in the thick of the action in Central Control before he rushed back to work as he was on night duty.

Over the past 39 years, thousands of young people and adults in Scouting have either enjoyed or endured the Southern 50 Challenge. Next year, the event celebrates its ruby anniversary with lots of surprises in store. The organising committee has already started planning for this very occasion. The date will be Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Keep clicking on to the brand new Southern 50 website for regular updates – [www.scouts-gln-southern50.org.uk](http://www.scouts-gln-southern50.org.uk) and follow us on our Facebook Southern 50 page and our 1000 followers on our @S50Challenge Twitter account.

P.S. The usual long list of unclaimed property is currently looking for its owners. If you find yourselves short of an item, please email [secretary@scouts-gln-southern50.org.uk](mailto:secretary@scouts-gln-southern50.org.uk) with what you have lost and we will do our best for you.

We leave you with this heart warming story. Caution, you may need a box of tissues handy because it made the author of this report well up.....

*Southern 50 Challenge 2018: A personal account from Mike Suggate, Leader of the winning Ten Gallon Dixie Team.*

*Winner, noun, to come first in a competition. Ten Gallon Dixie were presented with the winners shield for the third time in four years on Sunday 11th February. But that winning streak did not begin in 2014. In fact, it all started in 1997. Back then, like many of today's competitors, I was a 17 year old, naive to just how far 50 miles was and rather encourage to enter rather than chose to of my own accord. After meandering along with my friends for 30 miles, the cold weather rather took a hold of my team mates and they were pulled out of the competition. As instructed by my Venture Scout Leader (the precursor of Explorer Scout Leaders), I was still fit to continue, and so on I marched with a team of complete strangers. It was already 9pm, there was still 20 miles to go. There is only one explanation of how, at 0519am, I managed to get to the finish line, and that was down to the support and overwhelming warmth of the walkers who welcomed me into their team and dragged*

*me along, to the detriment of their own pace and prolonging their evenings walk well beyond any tolerable timescale. I have no idea of where those Scouters are now, I have only a slight recollection of them being a few years older than me at the time, but if it was not for them, one of my proudest achievements in Scouting would have been lost.*

*A year later, I came back with the same team as before. This time, I was joined to the end by two other team mates, but sadly not a full squad. The following year it was the same story, three finishers out of four! Our ambition soon became to get around the course as a complete unit, an ambition that took a further four attempts to realise! By then I had walked with eight different team mates. Each time we pitted our wits not against the other teams that were taking part, but alongside them doing battle against the course! With the help of the terrific checkpoint teams we continued to plod around the courses, year after year, and enjoy the camaraderie and achievements of so many others who like us, were simply in it to finish it!*

*Although recently Ten Gallon Dixie has started to put its skates on and be a bit more competitive, the magic of the event is still the same as it ever was. Pitting the team against the environment, the hills and the weather, meeting fellow competitors who just like us, come back year after year; some to challenge themselves, some with the intent to inspire others. Really, this is what it is all about. Indeed, one of my proudest moments was seeing our first Explorer Scout team finish the 50 mile event. The Southern 50 Challenge could quite easily be seen as a daunting, treacherous, blister inducing affair that can be avoided by taking the slightly shorter route, but when I reflect on all the eighteen times I have taken part in the 50 mile event, my very first fifty gives me the greatest pleasure of them all. And as for my team mates from those early days, each of them bar one came back to complete it at some point down the line. So how about you – are you ready to inspire a young generation to give it a go? You should – you may just end up getting slightly addicted!*