

## A Flyers Eye View of the Southern 50 - 2008

This year the event was based at the Ashlyn's School in Berkhamsted, which looked very much like Hogwarts !

It looked great with lots of wood everywhere, but then we found the major downside – all the lights worked on motion sensors, so every time somebody rolled over in the night or got up to go to the loo the lights came on! Well the first night that meant we didn't get an awful lot of sleep, not so good when you then have to get up and yomp 50k.

Our main aim this year was to get back to the school in time to watch the Man. United vs. Arsenal match (being from Highbury we are all Gooners) and that would mean a time of around 9 hours, which we hoped would be good enough to win. We were quite nervous before the start as we were trying for a hatrick of wins and knew that the weather was forecast to be good, whereas we felt that as a team we did better when the weather was poor and the course was tough!

As were the third from last team to start the 50k we had a leisurely breakfast, sorted our kit, visited the loo a few times (nerves!), and sorted out our feet. Paul was determined not to have the biggest blister this year and employed blister plasters, larger plasters and a topping of duck tape for luck. Then it was kit check, followed by our call to the start line; plot the first three grid references and then we were off – into the frost and a lovely sunny morning.

Our tactics were simple, virtually everyone was in front of us so all we had to do was chase them and see how many teams we could catch. There was some early gobbling as we went past a few teams and then into a stretch where we were on our own for a while and got into our stride.

For the first time the route took us through the middle of a fairly large town (Chesham) and that had its own dangers – including the temptations of the market stalls, Starbucks, and Millets – some teams may have stopped for a bit of retail therapy but we managed to avoid these and got out of there as quickly as possible.

The checkpoint staff were great, as always, and the food and drink they supply are always very welcome, although we did notice an absence of jam sandwiches this year. We didn't envy the staff on the later checkpoints who would have been bravely manning their posts very late into what was one of the coldest nights of the year – I'd rather be walking! – and I think they deserve a medal.

At checkpoint 4 we came across a group of what must have been four or more teams, they took the low road option and we took the high road which, after the initial climb, was probably the better option. As we crossed back over the A41 and plotted more checkpoints we could see that the route was taking us north and then starting to swing east, towards Ivinghoe. "They're taking us up Ivinghoe Beacon" was our immediate thought, and fairly late on in the route when it will really hurt. But no – the route setters must have had a change of heart because when we got there, the route took us around the edge (still uphill but nowhere near as bad), are they going soft?

As we went through the later checkpoints we started to see boards with times of teams ahead of us and one started to stand out – team 37 were on a roll and, at that point, were about 5 minutes up on us. So we started to push a bit harder and 2 checkpoints later we were about level, this was going to be close – and painful.

In the woods at Ivinghoe Common we did some straight line compass work to try and save time, which seemed to help morale if nothing else. At about this point Paul was starting to have problems walking, so he got us all running across Northchurch Common (in a straight line naturally), which was quite tufty and tiring. After that we did quite a lot of jogging for quite long stretches! Martin had one problem with cramp but got over that with a bit of stretching and on we went. Paul kept pushing the team saying it will come down to who wants it the most!

Then we were suddenly back into the other side of Berkhamsted, we dashed past the pubs (boy that was hard) and then found the last little trick up the route setters sleeve – a long uphill slog all the way up to the school and the finish (not so soft then!). Stephen and Martin were struggling a bit on the hill and Paul was cagouling them saying “how will you feel if we come second by 10 seconds?” and that seemed to work. (In fact the 30k event saw only 2 minutes between first and second).

Then we could see the school and it was back to running all the way to the finish line. We dashed in and collapsed onto the chairs so thoughtfully provided. We were the fourth team back with a time of 7 hours and 43 minutes, well within our estimate and more than in time to watch the footy.

We were pretty much all done in and there was a lot of pain for all concerned!

After a rest, cup of tea with some bread pudding and a shower (in that order) we were ready to go to the pub. Given how we felt we took the easy option and drove down there and later got a cab back – we weren’t going to climb that hill again! The football was c\*\*p, Arsenal got stuffed, but the beer was good, as was the curry that followed, and after all that we certainly slept better !

The next morning came the results. We were indeed the winners for a third time and boy were we happy! We managed to beat our old rivals the Undertakers by about 20 minutes in the end, which is not a lot of time really, and all credit to them for pushing us all the way. Oh, and all Paul’s hard work with the plasters paid off as he didn’t get any blisters, this years winner of the biggest blister competition was Stephen – that’ll teach him to buy new boots!

Well done to all my team mates for preparing for the event and pushing on when it was really hurting, it was worth it in the end. So, next year lads – what do you think ? Give it another go, or maybe the 50 miles ..... ???!

Team 57

**Phoenix Flyers**

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