

A view from one minute back – Hoxton Heroes Team 85

Thought I would take the time out to tell you what it feels like to miss out on the winners' trophy by one minute!

Aged 18, entering the 30k, it can be seen as "wimping out", and yes I would probably agree, we were wimping out! However, our troop had been coming down to this event for years! We wanted to get Warwick on a piece of silverware. I'd done 50k before and I'd usually end up in a team with someone dropping out, halfway through, ruining your chances of registering a valid time and therefore knocking you out of the competition. So I thought, why not pick four lads up for the challenge and try and actually win something?

I tell you now we tried! After a great pre walk meal of McDonalds from down the road (we definitely saw some other 30k teams in there!) we got a good nights sleep in the hall, I have to say one of the best I've ever had at Southern 50. No late night piano sessions from some guy who thinks he sounds like Chopin and thinks that sleep is an over rated past time! We woke up at the leisurely hour of 5am, and had an amazing lie in.....

We set off for what was checkpoint 12, but also our start point in Stoke Row. We arrived fairly early, but it gave us plenty of time to give the map a good thorough look at. We were planning on setting an extremely fast time. Our time came, 9.28am, we posed for our photograph, then when we released we were off like a rocket. Looking at the individual times published on the website, we could see that we had overtaken two teams already and got to checkpoint 13 at exactly the same time as two other teams! I found this really strange considering the balloons literally pointing you the right way and the fact that it was only a few hundred metres down the road. Anyway we got there within 13 minutes, pretty good seeing as it took one team half an hour guided by balloons!

We set off with no delay towards checkpoint 14 at a blistering pace. We had looked ahead at the next checkpoint whilst walking down the first road, so we knew where we were going. By the time we reached checkpoint 14 we had overtaken a fair few teams. We never once met a team who set off after us. We knew that to win, we had to keep teams behind us, and obviously good navigation would help us do that. So on the way to 14 we dispatched of Teams 84, 81, 79, 78, 76, 75, 74. We found it fairly funny when we took a slight wrong turn near 14 and as we turned back we found 3 or 4 teams confused at where we went wrong, furiously looking at their maps. We reached 14, and felt good so we carried on with minimum fuss.

Sometimes we felt guilty that we couldn't stay a bit longer at checkpoints and talk to these lovely people. But as we found out every minute counts.

We continued on our way toward checkpoint 15. This is a checkpoint where we lost our way a slight bit. Some slack navigation cost us a few minutes in the woods. We started along totally the wrong path, and were heading east when the compass came into use. Once back on the right path we found the road which would take us to a small village which was home to a scout hut and checkpoint 15. We met a few teams in there already dipping into a selection of biscuits. We however continued without too much delay. We were now heading north towards Woodcote. As we travelled along the minor roads we over took teams 73, 72, 71 and finally we had caught 80. When in Woodcote we caught sight of a Team of three girls and a boy. We weren't sure of what number exactly. It turned out they were our main opposition Team 77. We followed them through Woodcote, (they seemed to be taking all the routes we planned to take!), occasionally running to try to catch up. No matter how hard we pushed, they seemed to stay a similar distance away. As we approached checkpoint 16 we caught them, as they stopped to work out navigation. Then as we overtook we asked what Team number they were. After a few mental calculations we worked out that we must have overtaken everybody in front of us.

However, the next field was probably key to the whole event. Them being team 77 we didn't see them as competition as they had set off 16 minutes ahead. In the next field, we stuck to the footpath at the side, they however saw an opportunity and trudged straight across it! It would be the only time we lead every single group however. A few hundred metres of being purely in front of absolutely everyone on the walk! We kept sight of them and reached checkpoint 16, a caravan in a lay-by, two minutes behind them. We headed off to 17 which was located in Ipsden. We kept on their tails which we thought was all we had to do, as we were allowed 16 minutes on them. On the way to 17 we stopped briefly to sort out a boot problem. Yet we still arrived at 17 two minutes behind them. Spirits were high, although I had looked ahead at the next checkpoint and decided it was what I called "a beast", I did feel sorry for all the 50 milers. Along this route to 18, there were two distinct choices go right over the hill towards Nuffield, or go hell for leather around the hill. We opted to go around the hill and head straight for the road. I still don't know which way Team 77 went, but however checkpoint 17 was the last time saw them. After a slight climb, and a fairly slow walk along the road towards Nuffield golf course, we arrived at Checkpoint 18.

We were told by some very nice Jam sandwich makers that we were the second team through and were trailing the other team by ten minutes. We set off determined to not fall behind. Some quick maths, earlier on in the walk, said that we had to finish no more than 16 minutes behind team 77 to win presuming there were no faster teams starting after us. We raced off along the bridleway, towards Swyncombe and checkpoint 19. A very gradual rising hill in a field which made our boots collect tonnes of mud, made us think again of the 50 milers doing this at 3am! This new-found desire to know how we were doing compared to team 77 resulted in us asking many leisure walkers along the way to 19. When posing the question "Don't suppose you've seen a group of girls ahead have you?" I have to admit we got some funny looks.

After a brief worry as to where checkpoint 19 was, we found it. At 19 we were told that team 77 had passed through quarter of an hour ago! It was getting tight. In reality it was 17 minutes between our two groups. Also after saying sorry for not being able to stay and talk much, to the kind people there we set off for 20.

It took us up a fairly steep foot path, however we "blitzed" it. We continued on the footpath towards North Farm where we met a guy and a girl who seemed to know what they were talking about. We think they were Southern 50 officials but we weren't sure. They said that we were the first team through to just before checkpoint 20 but they knew that Team 91 were doing well. Which in fact wasn't true, because looking back at the results they had a non-starter and retired at 19!

Anyway we took their word, and considered new rivals, that could be anywhere behind us. We decided that we didn't like being chased! As we reached checkpoint 20, we were told that Team 77 had been through around 16 minutes ago. Things just couldn't get any tighter. After a very brief goodbye and thankyou, we went for it. Reaching the B480 and heading towards Watlington. As we reached the village, I was itching to get running. We broke into a run soon after that and decided a shortcut through the village and not to go down the conventional route of Love Lane. We expected to come out near the pub next to the school. WHERE WAS IT? Turned out it was only one street to the right, so we didn't go too horribly wrong. We reached the school, and broke into sprints. After starting to go in the main entrance (Should have known from previous years, was just too tired to concentrate), we set off on what seemed like a endless series of left turns around the back of the school to the official finish. We burst through the doors and saw Team 77 and the clock stopped at 14:55pm. After handing in our tickets, we hovered over the times. I saw 14:38pm next to 77. When sitting down, we were still trying to do a bit of simple maths. Then it struck, one minute. One minute. As we were looked over

very kindly by the finish staff, it started to dawn on us. We looked knackered I can tell you it wasn't the walk! No way, It was the Olympic sprint we did in the school grounds that got me!

We settled down after a while, and were told that nothing was official until the Sunday morning. After a lazy afternoon, we watched as some other teams from Warwick came in then we hit the sack. Too shoeless to walk over and watch England get beat by the Welsh. On the Sunday morning, we hoped but we probably knew it was inevitable.

The presentation came and we enjoyed it. As we went to collect our trophy we raised a smile as we heard the "oooooh" as they announced how close we were.

In all seriousness, we have to say a massive well done to Team 77. To raise their game when we were bearing down on them and keep spirits high whilst carrying out some difficult navigation was top notch scouting.
Well done guys.

Thank you to all the checkpoint staff, however little we may have seen of you! and also to the organisers for putting it all together. I say keep the 30k event, it provides interesting competition and some close results. I know the first two teams were only two minutes apart last year. Who'd of thought it was going to get closer in 2009.

Thank you everyone though we definitely had a thoroughly enjoyable Valentines day, spent chasing some girls through the countryside.

Dan, Ali, Dan and Matt - Team 85 – Hoxton Heroes