

Chiltern 20 Celebrates its 40th Anniversary in Style

The annual Chiltern 20 Challenge Hike was back in full swing for the first time in three years. The 2020 event had to be changed for single teams to walk on their own around one of twenty different routes. Last year only happened after the event organisers were given just three weeks to create an event after they received the green light that it was safe to go ahead. But that's now all in the past.

This year's 40th anniversary event took a year to plan with a record number of 427 participants from 88 teams of 10-14 year olds, some with adults walking with them for safety reasons. Teams were spread from across all four GLN Districts, plus friends from GLNE, GLSW, Essex and Hertfordshire. 60 teams entered the 20km Senior event, 26 teams entered the 12km Junior event and two teams took advantage that this was a Chiltern 20 Festival weekend by taking part in the Sunday event which was designed for teams who couldn't take part on the Saturday for religious reasons or the fact that Leaders had to work.

The morning dawned bright and sunny at Princes Risborough School, and teams turned up early to be registered, had their kit checked, and then they had some impressive navigation training provided by the County Activities Unit.

Just prior to the start, teams were given their route cards containing a list of six figure map references where they would find checkpoints which had to be visited in turn. They were then given last minute instructions about how to keep safe, and off they went. Their first checkpoint was at the top of Whiteleaf Hill. Teams then navigated their way through the delightful villages of Dunsmore, Prestwood and Hampden before arriving back at the school. The fair weather throughout the day helped every team to complete their chosen route – the first time this had happened in the history of the event. The Eastbourne Scout District First Aid Team, who have supported the event for many years, were on hand at the Finish in case of need. This team of fully trained medical staff, watched all the finishers safely complete the event.

Whilst all this was happening, there was plenty of unplanned action going on behind the scenes. The pre-booked Friday night supermarket order did not arrive, so our catering team had to rush to local shops on Saturday morning to buy food and clear the shelves to provide over 500 dinners for everybody, plus meals for the 100 volunteer staff who turn up every year, rain or shine, to support the event. If that wasn't enough, two complete checkpoint teams were struck down with COVID on the day before, and willing replacements were swiftly redeployed. The event organisers are so very grateful for Leaders giving up another day to come along to support the event.

Just for the record, first home in the Junior event was 6th Southgate, with 12th Enfield half an hour behind, and 6th Friern Barnet a few minutes later. The Senior event had nine teams which were accompanied by an adult. The winner of that category was 201st Islington followed an hour later by 19th Enfield. Finally, the remaining teams who walked unaccompanied, saw 22nd Southgate "A Team", one of the eight teams entered by this huge Group, go one better than last year to win the event, creating a 39 minute gap between them and the runners-up, an all girls team from 12th Hampstead entering the Chiltern 20 for the very first time.

Three founder members of the first ever Chiltern 20, forty years ago, are still involved and were part of the adult support team. John Hall, the original Chairman who on the day was on Checkpoint 8, was joined on stage at the end by Roy Allison, who this year carried out his final duty as Route Manager before stepping down. They were both presented with individual Commissioner's Commendations for their inspiration, dedication, vision and leaving a lasting legacy. The third member of this trio, Dave Bush, part of the route control team, was still out on the field supporting late teams at the time of the presentation, and he received his award at a private ceremony later.

Colin Batsford, Chiltern 20 Chairman, said after the event:

“It was so good standing at the front for the presentation and seeing so many young people having completed the event that we have all worked so hard to give them. It was also good to be back to our ‘normal’ C20 event and that the demand is still there after so long. We had a great deal to cope with both running up to the event and on the day itself. We had some problems on the day, but these were minor when compared to the successes”.

Karen Fletcher, one of the event organisers added:

“Another fabulous event for our Young People in Scouting. The Chiltern 20 is an event that both excites and challenges these youngsters, the life skills they learn by taking part in an event like this are invaluable. Apart from the obvious map and compass skills that they have to master to take part, they also learn to bond and work together as part of a team. Experience a sense of independence in making decisions about the route, being out there in the Chiltern area with or without adult supervision on their team, learning that making mistakes is okay, they just need to keep focused and keep moving on, learning to feel comfortable and confident around lots of other young people and adults. Being determined and never giving up on their team or themselves. Being proud that not only did they have the courage to enter the event, but their Leaders also had the confidence for them to take part. The sense of achievement that they felt and we could all see in them when they finished the hike and realised just what they had completed, this makes all the hard work, long evenings and days it took in putting on an event like this so worth it! The sea of happy accomplished faces at the end reminds us all why we keep on coming back for more!”

Finally, what about the Young People themselves, who participated in the event? Here are some of their written comments at the end:

“I like hiking and being with my friends”

“I loved seeing the animals like the horses, cows, sheep and dogs. I also saw a wild deer running across a field”

“The beautiful scenery and fresh air”

“I enjoyed the challenge and the experience”

“I enjoyed people who were very nice at the checkpoints”

“The relief of finding a checkpoint”

“It pushed me really hard and made me feel good”

“We got lost four times and did 30km instead of 20km but it was fun”

“Once in a lifetime experience”

“Teamwork and never giving up”

“Singing ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ the whole way”

“It was fun with friends and you feel amazing by the end”

“Loved it (again) - sign me up for next year!”

Fozzy

(Chris Foster, Secretary)