**Green Belt Relay, 13/14th May 2023**

**Race Report**

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The 25th Green Belt Relay took place this year, and was overall a big success, both competitively and organisationally.

Results are held on our website here: <http://www.greenbeltrelay.org.uk/Results.htm>

You can find a film summary of the race and a summary of the marshalling and organising here:

[https://youtu.be/4HUeHFDjs\_U](https://youtu.be/4HUeHFDjs_U?fbclid=IwAR34d5gGS0u2DJuV5Zc-rE6bKPEfh4qDotTRBQAdhHnz8NznIvlN5eFzsnM)
<https://youtu.be/y8Sg-OmzGKI>

**Team Competition**

The race started with 51 teams, one short of our biggest ever field. Zara Hyde-Peters started us off, not only the president of Surrey Athletics but also still the stage record holder for stage 11.

The race was won by Ranelagh Harriers for the first time since 2002, after a close race for much of the weekend with Thames Hare and Hounds, who were second and also Kings of the Mountains. The women’s race was won by Thames, with Ranelagh second and also Queens of the Mountains. Serpentine were third overall and mixed team winners. Clapham Chasers were second mixed team, and also had three teams inside the top 7, as well as some dominant individual runs. Maidenhead AC won the Veterans’ prize in only their second GBR, with Front Runners second vets. Burgess Hill won the “Toilet Seat” prize for the slowest team to fully complete the course.

Feedback from teams was very strong with only a few small suggestions. The common theme was that the race this year included a lot of new runners (perhaps as clubs re-form their membership after the pandemic) and that they all loved it.

**Individuals**

We had some very fast individual performances in relatively cool weather, despite some muddy conditions. Some long-standing records were beaten, notably the stage 5 course record (our longest stage at 13.5 miles) in place since 2000, beaten by James Hoad, with the women’s record also beaten by Gaby Reynolds, who also beat the stage 15 record. Steph McCall took the stage 16 record and 2nd place overall to add to her day 1 stage win, while Anna Lawson’s stage 9 run smashed a long-standing record and nearly bagged her the overall stage win. Nick Twomey (stage 2), Sarah Palmer (stage 3), Harriet Preedy (stage 10), Alastair Matheson (stage 14) and Katy Hedgethorne (also 14) also broke stage records.

**Course and permissions**

We had no major course changes this year, with the only tweak being a request from National Trust to descend Box Hill via the military road, not the spur. This is not as spectacular and also harder underfoot. The cost of permissions is rising with a lot of variation between venues, and the short run through Bushy Park is very expensive given that it is not even a changeover. We had one request from a local to discuss the location of the stage 19 finish as this potentially blocks their driveway, and we had small variations to starts and finishes on stage 10 and 17.

Thanks to Alan Mawdsley for his patient, diligent work on this.

**Course marking**

We had a bigger course marking team this year, and a changed approach to do more marking during the race rather than beforehand – we found that we re-covered ground needlessly in the past, and there is little need for arrows where we have marshals or where we pass anyway during the race and can just put sawdust. As a result, the reduced arrows also reduce the subsequent cleanup. Feedback from runners was very strong, including the point that sawdust is just much easier to see when you’re running. The only weak point was omitting to mark the last few turns in Bushy Park which needed a bit of additional marshalling to resolve.

Thanks to David Clarke, Chrissie Glew, Tom Reay and Alan and Liz Pemberton for their work.

**First aid**

First aiders were provided by Event Medical Solutions again, with volunteer drivers Richard Patient, Ollie Walker and Emily Skipp providing excellent course coverage and also helping with results at stage finishes.

The race got off to a dramatic start when a runner fell during the first yards of the race on Hampton Court Bridge, although she recovered to finish the stage. We have marshals at this point to slow down the pack as they emerge from the Bargewalk, cross the road and then the bridge. The bollards on the bridge were not directly to blame; nevertheless, we will add marshals to stand at these bollards to make them clearer in the crowd.

Aside from that there are no problems to report. Thanks to Kevin Whincup and his first aiders Colin and Ian, as well as to Richard, Ollie and Emily.

**Course marshalling**

Marshalling was provided by clubs with a clear timetable, and checked by the lead car. This system is working well and clubs are becoming familiar with their responsibilities and equipment, and as we get more systematic and diligent at using the WhatsApp channel to report when marshals are in place.

We saw two significant gaps where captains were able to give us advanced warning that they were running late. One in Kings Langley caused us delays to course marking and we will check that one in next year’s plan.

We had a few suggestions from clubs where we need to amend timings, and also advise teams to bring more water on some course finishes which we will add to the plan.

Thanks to all club captains and their runners and supporters for taking this seriously.

**Timekeeping and results**

We worked hard on getting results into the results database quickly this year, and this paid off and was especially useful given the closeness of the race.

We had new timekeepers this year who were all excellent, and have allowed some of our older timekeepers to retire. The process is a simple one, but essential – it is critical to capture the bib number and time together as soon as possible on paper, not to try and cobble these together subsequently using lap timers. Where we’ve had trouble it’s almost always from over-complicating it.

Thanks to Peter Wedderburn, Merran and Jim Sell, Bob and Jane Wheller, Roy Reeder, Tracey Lenthall, Sue Waters, Sue Howarth, Sally Boulton, Rachel Simpson, Mike Mabin, Wendy Stokes, and Emily Skipp.

**Organisation**

As well as those mentioned above, we also had Evan Bond providing graphics for leaflets, prizes and t-shirts, Phil Hall providing financial tracking as Stragglers Club Treasurer, and we engaged photographer Paul Clarke to provide some race photos. Mike Mabin also set up the finish area, Roy Reeder provided race numbers, and the staff at the Bushy Park Sports Centre provided the venue and the post-race food and drink.

We experimented with providing snack bars to runners at stage finishes. These proved quite popular, but they were an extra load of stuff that we had to carry around and distribute and didn’t really have time for. We’ve done a good job over the last few years of reducing organiser logistics during the race to allow us to focus on race safety and we should keep that approach. Thanks nonetheless to Peter Wedderburn for his initiative here.

Finally, thanks to David Clarke CBE for once again serving at the UK Athletics race adjudicator, for a lot of work on course recce-ing and marking, and for supporting our race so tirelessly.

**Next year**

We are likely to hold the 26th race on the weekend of 18th /19th May 2024, subject to licence, permissions etc.

We are keen to hear from volunteers for course marking, timekeeping and driving in future races. If you are a fan of the GBR and are perhaps not as quick as you used to be, please consider helping us out.

Race directors:

Peter Kennedy & Alex Cutting