

Green Belt Relay 2014

Race Report and Feedback

Race Summary:

The race took place on the weekend of 17/18 May.

33 teams made it to the start line. Of these, five were new to the event.

Weather conditions were hot for much of the race, leading to some challenges (see below) as well as helping to create a great atmosphere.

The race was won again by Serpentine running club overall. Generally times were a little slower than normal, perhaps due to hot conditions combined with some heavy ground.

The race gathered £8,723 of revenues from race entry fees, and total expenses were £6,133. This surplus will be donated to Princess Alice Hospice.

Feedback – Race Director

Generally, the race was a success, especially given the number of new faces in the organisation team. Veterans of the organising team brought an immense amount of expertise and sound judgement.

We have further improvements to make, mainly to course marking, provision of water stations in hot weather, and some aspects of course safety, and these were reflected in feedback from team captains.

The following is a summary of my notes from the race weekend:

1. Safety

There were four largely new aspects to the safety of the race this year:

- Course amendments to stage 13 to avoid a train crossing, and to 20 to avoid a busy road
 - o This worked well and these changes should remain.
 - o There are still some road crossings which require very assertive marshalling to avoid danger, for instance in Kings Langley and in Epping Forest.
- Two dedicated first aiders, accompanying a lead car and a trail car
 - o This was OK, although in practice it resulted in the first aiders spread too far between stages and we had already moved on to stage 9 when the collapse happened on stage 8. It would be better to have one remaining at the end of each stage, then advancing two stages to the next one. Having a first aider at the head of the race is actually not much use.
- Dedicated motorbike marshals to verify that the critical road crossings were marshalled and to fill in gaps where required
 - o This worked well, although they were hard pushed at some stages. It is essential to know for sure that critical crossings are covered and we must have this in future.
- Obliging runners to carry mobile phones and more generally encouraging them to help each other.
 - o The runner who collapsed was aided by other runners, and two other rescues were from runners calling us. This is an essential improvement and should remain.

The main issue regarding safety was a lack of water stations on some routes, compounded by the hot weather. For the collapsed runner on stage 8, we had a planned water station in St Margarets (8 miles in), and we also briefed runners at the start to use water points at canal locks if needed.

Key points for next race:

- Need to investigate potential further route amendments, especially Kings Langley and Epping Forest
- Change first-aiders to remain for longer at stage finishes rather than at the head of the race.

- Review marshalling approach with Alan Pemberton to plan verifying critical road crossings
- Increase priority of critical water stations on long exposed sections.

2. Recruiting

Main points:

- We attracted 33 teams to the start line, which is a good showing.
- At one point the entries were up to 40 but we had a lot of late drop-outs; we didn't focus a lot on securing payments in the six weeks leading up to the race.
- Pre-race buzz generated on Facebook and Twitter was really excellent and increased the enjoyment significantly.
- Publicity in Facebook, the website and Runners World generated quite a high level of interest from brand new teams as well as old customers.

Key points for next race:

- There is a good list of clubs who expressed interest this year, including Beckenham RC, Dunstable, Victoria Park Harriers, Newham college
- Need to agree ownership of Twitter accounts.

3. Timekeeping and Results

Main points:

- Timekeeping generally is an extremely well documented and understood process, with an excellent level of expertise in the club. I don't really have anything to add to it, except the small point that timekeepers needed to be aware of one club doubling-up its runners on each stage, which they dealt with well.
- The results service was new for this year, and included a new online database for team registrations and to provide leaderboards and stage results.
- The online results worked well, with the one anomaly on Saturday of missing clubs off the leaderboard if they had missed a stage. This was resolved by simply adding dummy runners on Saturday evening. It also currently lacks the ability to display the overall leaderboard at a previous stage of the race – we calculated these manually using a spreadsheet.
- The backup spreadsheet results also worked well and results matched the online version.
- Most teams registered their runners successfully; one team didn't provide this until after the race but updated it swiftly afterwards
- Prizes were allocated fairly and quickly; the main anomaly was that the overall winner was also a mixed team, as was the second place. The priorities seemed fairly obvious and all team captains agreed.

Key points for next race:

- Enhancements to the online database:

- Generate leaderboards as of a particular stage
- Show the runner category on the individual stage results, rather than the team
- Show how much a team has risen/fallen on each leaderboard since the last one.

4. Changeovers and Start/Finish

Main points:

- Changes to starts/finishes on 13/14, 17/18, 18/19, 19/20 were successful and well received
- Permissions from Hampton Court and Box Hill were not well communicated by those organisations; have followed up with them since then.
- Gaining permissions from Tatsfield was difficult and we should review for next year.

Key points for next race:

- Review Tatsfield

5. Course

Main points:

- Major revisions to stages for 13, 14, 18 and 20 seemed good, although 18 is now very tough and perhaps more so than the "mountain stage" 19
- Stage 6: As noted above, I want to change stage 6, as the Kings Langley road crossing is too dangerous, and I have some ideas for a significantly nicer route which I will explore
- Stage 7: We revised the route through Commons Wood at the last minute because the stepping stones we used to use are getting dangerous. It now involves a short paddle over the stream, and we may look at shortening the run around the fields after the stream crossing too
- Stage 8: We seem to have had runners inadvertently taking a significant short cut on stage 8. I need to look into that one.
- Stage 17: Should also make some revisions to use the NDW more consistently.

Key points for next race:

- Amend difficulty rating for 18 and re-classify mountain stages
- Amend stage 6 to avoid dangerous road crossing
- Clarify/amend Commons Wood on stage 7
- Clarify potential short cut for stage 8 and amend instructions
- Review stage 17 – there were a lot of navigation errors there.

6. Marking

Main points:

- Marking teams for this race were all new to course marking

- Generally, runners found their way, and having five teams took a large workload off the race director
- Coverage of markers on some routes were inconsistent; need to restrict marking only to sawdust and to correctly marked arrows.
- We had complaints from Chevening and from Westhumble about the ugliness of arrows and had to go back to clean up.

Key points for next race:

- Order far more orange stickies for lampposts
- Review idea of a trail bike to collect debris.

7. Other logistics

Main points:

- Printing: we saved well over £1,000 from not providing race maps or booklets, replacing with a gatefold leaflet. Runners seemed quite capable of printing off their maps, although need to increase awareness of the detailed driving instructions.
- T-shirts provided in bulk were entirely different fabric from the samples from Sweatshop/ Estimates for providing additional t-shirts around the course were about right from Pat although the sizes I ordered were not quite right, with insufficient large and extra-large
- Hotel accommodation and dinner in Brentwood was excellent
- Finish barbecue and prizegiving were excellent

Key points for next race:

- Publicise detailed instructions
- Order t-shirts from a reliable provider
- Review sizes and allocations with Pat.

Feedback – Teams

These are generally divided into the following categories:

<p>Getting Ready – preparation, team meeting etc.</p>	<p>“As a new team we were acting slightly in the dark, having spoken to the race director we were able to cover some of our queries. Unfortunately we were unable to attend the captains meeting. A call with a few experienced teams would have been useful to gather some tips and hints on how to run the event. Marshalling information was good, we were able to cover our legs. Online team registration was easy and simple to use” (Accenture)</p> <p>“Online team registration worked well. Captain’s meeting was okay but some could be covered by email – details re: course changes probably don’t need to be covered in quite as much detail although the whole meeting was about an hour so very reasonable. If you could really emphasise the mobile phone rule it would be appreciated – the impression I took from the meeting was that it was something that was being strongly encouraged rather than the rule per se which is probably my fault!” (Clapham)</p> <p>“Having my own meeting was good, saved me a lot of travelling, online registration of the team worked well, but I couldn’t access the site through the GBR site, not sure why. Only problem was that, because we struggle so much to get a team, sometimes doubling up or we can only get 1 runner for 1 day, I don’t always want a T shirt for each runner. Can we have a No T shirt option?” (Havering)</p> <p>“This was all great - really appreciated meeting up with you and you helping me understand how best to organise the logistics. It was definitely more of a task than I anticipated as I was ensuring that all runners had roughly the lengths they wanted but also making sure they were in the correct car. But it was all very clear on how to do it. Thank you.” (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>“In the online system it would be much simpler if we could assign a number to a runner, rather than having the system keep a block of numbers per team. I had to keep deleting runners from one team and adding them to another with a new number every time I made a team change. It could be a one-step process as well: just have numbers x to y available to assign names against for each club / set of teams. At the captains' meeting etc. I think you need to stress a lot more that clubs/teams must provide water stops for their athletes on each stage, and to give water to all the other teams' athletes as well. If a few actually do this we'll get decent coverage. This year was very poor compared to other years, not helped by the hot weather.” (Serpentine)</p> <p>“I thought the preparation was quite straightforward and the registration process made life easy as I could get the other team members to do their bit. I thought the meeting went well, but in</p>
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	<p>hindsight there could have been more emphasis on the roles of the marshalls (see below).” (Hampton Wick W)</p> <p>“The online registration is a great idea and I would aim to complete mine a lot earlier next time. The only time it can be tricky is if you have team members that swap around or drop out last minute but then that’s out of our hands so as long as we complete the info as best we can I think it is a great tool and I think it works well so well done.</p> <p>Meeting was absolutely fine. I had issues with finding affordable travel and accommodation but I think most of us do – I feel guilty asking runners to pay out too much as the weekend does become quite expensive. In an ideal world I would like our running club to pay for the entry so that the runners only need to pay for their travel, food and accom but at the moment they are not agreeing to this, they have agreed to pay 50% so that is something.</p> <p>What could be useful is a section on the website where we can have a list of recommended hotels or mini bus providers? This way the info is all in one place and people can see roughly what the costs are. For example. I used Hounslow Council mini bus hire in the end as they were the easiest to deal with, they might not have been the cheapest or best but I didn’t have time to research it in great detail”. (Ranelagh)</p>
Documentation	<p>“all fine, told our runners to use Smartphones and install apps onto Mapmyrun. If needed marshals had a few spare maps which helped” (Accenture)</p> <p>“Reduced documentation was fine especially reduced race booklet and us doing the running maps. Only bit that perhaps I would suggest for next year is that a small map for each of the highest risk marshalling points that a team is covering would be useful” (Clapham)</p> <p>“We liked the green leaflets, although I didn’t personally use them at all, prefer to write my own itinerary to give me a where/when to go listing for each day. Downloading our own maps caused no problems” (Havering)</p> <p>“This was so good and I was very impressed with how all the postcodes got us to the correct place. Only one we struggled with was Davy Down on the Sunday. But hear others struggled too! But the instructions were very clear and I think it was good runners printed their own maps and drivers too as it ensures they take responsibility and it creates more of a team. Rather than the captain doing everything for them.” (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>“Not sure the green fold-out was even looked at by most people, although I provide a lot of documentation and maps as a matter of course for my buses. It may be useful to newer teams. I was happy with what you gave us” (Serpentine)</p> <p>“No problems there. I made up two more folders for the other two cars and car sat navs did the rest.” (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>“Approach worked well – no need for additional info” (Accenture 2)</p>

	<p>The documentation was spot on – far better than before, the fold out leaflet a perfect size – I used it the whole of day 2 as sweep car and the parking instructions were spot on – very well done.</p> <p>Maps – agree runners should be responsible for printing their own and this is a good thing not only for costs but because it forces each person to have a good look at their leg in advance. (Ranelagh)</p>
The course	<p>“– I had feedback on a few routes that they weren’t particularly well marked. Stage 12 both runners got lost, Stage 16 (13.5miler) was quite difficult said one runner. But overall the routes were very well marked. The arrows were visible, sawdust was useful. The sprayed arrows/chalk, not so obvious as unsure if GBR arrows or something else” (Accenture)</p> <p>“stage 12 map with note - map reads at 9.6 miles take Public Footpath 42 to left of golf club entrance and it should be RIGHT of golf club entrance” (Accenture)</p> <p>“No complaints about the course and generally felt to be exceptionally well marked. Only point to make would be to highlight that it’s marked in both chalk, sawdust and arrows in race briefing as for my first leg I didn’t realise that the chalk arrows were definitely green belt related until quite late. Marshalling – a couple of my runners highlighted that they were expecting a few more water stops based on the route maps and instructions at the start – haven’t done an in-depth analysis but appreciate you’re doing all you can already to make sure that people are in place at the crucial crossings. (Clapham)</p> <p>“Although I preferred the maps to written instructions I had some concerns as to their accuracy. My own experience on Stage 17 worried me, the path shown on the map was not the path marker’ed and the instructions were just wrong. (further detail provided). So far in my chats with the H90J team no one else had this kind of problem and all used their maps. From chats I had with other club runners I got the impression that more people got lost or struggled with markings this year than before, and from my stages it seemed that sometimes there were GBR sign overkill and at others nothing to show you were still on course” (Havering 90)</p> <p>“The Finish at Stage 18, Box Hill, is so spectacular, I just loved it” (Havering)</p> <p>“There were a few people getting lost but the worst leg I think was the one which finished on Letty Green. I can’t remember the stage number at the top of my head but it was a really hilly one round about mid day Saturday. The runner who ran for our team was actually using his hands at one point to get up hills. And due to the heat and only 2 water stations was incredibly dehydrated and nearly collapsed at the end.” (Joy 4C&C)</p>

	<p>"Did 9 and 18 and all markings were there, didn't need to refer to map etc, just mentioning as suspect some might be whinging about 9 and not really stragglers fault, though if they wanted to make it even more idiot proof then a cross to indicate people going too far past a turn could help e.g. off tow path etc" (Serpentine)</p> <p>"In most cases I saw sawdust after the junction to confirm we were on the correct path but not before the junction. In past events there has been a chain of spots of sawdust before and through most turns." (Serpentine)</p> <p>"On the positive side, I heard about or saw several route changes from previous years which all seemed to be improvements, in particular on stages 18-20." (Serpentine)</p> <p>"This was amazing and went/ran though some beautiful places. One issue raised was confusion at the end of leg 18 as to where leg 19 started. I did get lost on leg 17 and found the map wasn't entirely clear on the more remote bit of the route and I think there was confusion on part of leg 14." (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>"No real issues, On stage 8 there was a fork where you could go left or right that was marked on the map but I did think having a bit of sawdust there would have helped but I am sure most of the things are minor ones like this." (Ranelagh)</p>
Changeovers	<p>"changeovers went well. Probably would have been easier if we hadn't had a breakdown, this required a lot of planning, one of the experienced teams suggested two mini buses leapfrogging each other. Refreshments were good, water stops a plenty on the Sunday (which was needed). A few of the postcodes didn't take you to the exact stop, a full address for some stops would have been useful" (Accenture)</p> <p>Changeovers – absolutely perfect (Clapham)</p> <p>"Don't think we had any major problems, and regarding providing snacks, I, personally, hit the wall in a big way on Sunday (Marathon the weekend before didn't help) and got the munchies badly, so was very pleased to have some chocolate bars at the finish, it was appreciated, by me at least" (Havering)</p> <p>"The changeovers were all fine. Easy to park and well signposted on the maps." (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>"These seemed to go quite smoothly for us. We had spent quite a bit of time on the logistics and amazingly it worked quite well. Parking proved a bit tricky at the start of leg 20, but I think because of the good weather, there were far more people out and about than usual. Cookham was a nightmare because of the music festival, so it</p>

	<p>might be good to have updates on potential traffic issues in advance?" (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>"Again no issues personally – I drove to most points and had no complaints." (Accenture 2)</p> <p>No problems from our side. Box hill was a nightmare for parking as it was a nice day but that's not something we can control. (Ranelagh)</p>
Safety	<p>All good (Accenture)</p> <p>"H90J marshalled at 2 busy road crossings, and we had no problems with runners or drivers at the crossings. However, some of the lead runners at both points saw us in the distance and crossed before they reached us, dodging through the traffic. Perhaps more emphasis could be made at briefings to cross at the crossings? or a time penalty? or threaten disqualification on that stage?" (Havering)</p> <p>"The 3rd to last stage on Saturday didn't have any water stations - this was 10.65 miles and our runner was vommiting etc due to dehydration that night and the next day which was a shame as he then had no energy to do his second run. Other runners at different stages said the same and many of our runners had to go into pubs to get water" (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>"It'll come as no surprise, but the main issue I was aware of over the course of the weekend was that runners wanted more water to be available due to the heat. This was exacerbated by marshalls not being at scheduled water stops (perhaps due to getting lost, mechanical problems etc) or otherwise marshalls just marshalling and not providing water at the same time. (New teams perhaps need to be asked to provide water as well as helping people cross roads etc)" (Serpentine)</p> <p>"The only other thing that I disagreed with was the requirement to take a mobile phone, Personally I think this is unnecessary, but then its probably a rule that is laid out by UKA."(Serpentine)</p> <p>"I think the overwhelming message from my team was the lack of water along several of the routes. At the captain's meeting you did tell us to bring water as it was our responsibility, so I made sure we had large containers for each of our slots. I know there are long parts of each routes where it would be impossible for people to be with water, but on one of my legs there was no one at one of the marshal points. I think the provision of water by the marshals should be emphasised and their locations maybe revised for next year. It would also be an idea to tell marshals to send a text to the emergency number when they arrive at their point and check the number of runners who set off. Also if it were at all possible for</p>

	<p>marshals along the route to be in contact to keep up with numbers?" (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>"Well marshalled. The runner passing out on stage 8 is a concern but the weather was quite extreme, I personally think there was enough water." (Accenture 2)</p> <p>No issues apart from the one Bev Ali reported to you from our side. Some comments were that the slower runners didn't have as much access to water as some of the water was provided by clubs who left once their runners had all come through. I do think that on hot days like we had runners need to be prepared to have their own water or some money on them just in case. (Ranelagh)</p>
Results	<p>All good (Accenture)</p> <p>"The online results service worked very well I thought. I never felt the need to find the old paper notice boards!. Nearly all our runners have smartphones so were well on top of it. I think Claire might have got a bit too carried away with the tweets as there were so many it was hard to follow. Encourage everyone to tag their tweets but maybe Claire shouldn't retweet them all as it doubles the volume?" (Serpentine)</p> <p>"Used the online results portal, really good." (Accenture 2)</p>
Rules and prizes	<p>"t-shirts looked great, rules were clear and fair" (Accenture)</p> <p>"Prizes – maybe worthwhile looking at the split needed for male/women/mixed as I think almost every team was mixed – either more ladies required to be mixed, allowing 2 men in a ladies team or alternatively just offer prizes for the top 5 teams? Maybe a few more "odd" prizes as well – the Green Belt isn't the National 12 stage and speed isn't everything! Possibly the "Dr Livingstone" prize for the person who gets the most lost?</p> <p>T-shirts – loved the old ones which were a dark single colour with the logo on – very stylish. Sorry I'm a dinosaur!" (Clapham)</p> <p>"H90J were never likely to worry about the Winners prizes, but we might prefer a large wooden spoon instead of the "Toilet Seat of Shame" that we so narrowly avoided this year. T shirts were an improvement I thought, stood out more, but getting a cotton shirt is now a bit of an anachronism?" (Havering)</p> <p>"All great - our team wasn't running to win so we were pretty relaxed!" (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>"People liked the compasses. Different! The new T-shirts are nice but the stage winners felt that their T-shirts were not sufficiently different to stand out as they have been previously. We have no issues with the rules, such as they are!" (Serpentine)</p>

	<p>“The t-shirts were popular, although a few preferred the more understated 2012 version”. (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>“t-shirts good. Prizes - maybe medals would be better” (Accenture 2)</p> <p>Pretty happy with the rules and prizes. T shirts were nice. My only problem was I won my stage and my T shirt was a plain one, it doesn't say stage winner... I am only bothered as I will probably never win again lol!! I may write it on myself (Ranelagh)</p>
Media	<p>“We used a team whatsapp group, to keep everyone updated on progress and group info” (Accenture)</p> <p>“Leaderboard was great but would request an obvious link to it on the main site and using the twitter feed (which was a great idea) to highlight when the latest stage results were updated plus the link (Clapham)</p> <p>“As a recommendation based on our experiences – I'd highly recommend the use of whatsapp within teams and if the organising team aren't using it it may be useful as well. It basically can be set-up to deliver a message instantly to everyone on the list's phone – it was very useful within our team to communicate with the different minibuses and get quick responses rather than calling 14 different people and hope one of them had a working phone. It may be useful for you to set one up with the team captains to relay any important information quickly as an emergency broadcast system and for the team captains to assist each other as well with covering marshalling points in an emergency or helping out when minibuses break down!” (Clapham)</p> <p>“Very quick system, seemed to work well, but I still like the paper results as not all of us carry smart phones or other portable wifi stuff, and as for Twitter, am a technophobe, and avoid Facebook at all times! Website is good, very clear and, apart from assign teams bit easy to find/use.” (Havering)</p> <p>“I thought the facebook page was good for publicity and also for counting down. The website also is very clear so thank you as it meant the runners could easily print their own maps etc!” (Joy 4C&C)</p> <p>“Personally, I'd like to see more teams taking part. There seemed to be a lot of drop-outs this year which reduced team numbers. It'd be really good to have 40+ teams actually racing, especially if we can get clubs like TH&H to return. Maybe you can get something published in Runners World on online to promote the race? Les Croupiers managed to for Welsh Castles!” (Serpentine)</p> <p>The results system worked well and the social media was a good way to keep up to date with other news along the two days. (Hampton Wick)</p>

	<p>“Website great, didn’t use the other forms of interaction.” (Accenture 2)</p> <p>Found it all very useful. Well done. The website really is so much better!</p> <p>I use both FB and Twitter, I think we should continue with the online banter and hope it grows. I think that whilst people are still thinking fondly of this year it would be wise to announce a date for next year so that as Captains we can start harassing our teams now so that everything runs smoothly next year. I was a bit slow organising my team for various reasons and certainly would benefit from having a date to start my preparations early. We can then start promoting it online too and have a long time to do it. (Ranelagh)</p>
Other	<p>Overall a smashing event and look forward to taking part next year (Accenture)</p> <p>Have to say that the organisation was phenomenal and everyone hugely enjoyed the weekend. (Clapham)</p> <p>“Another triumph for the Stragglers, I really don’t know how you organise such a huge event and the stress must be enormous. All I can say is I really appreciate all the hard work that you all put into the GBR, and Long May It Continue!” (Havering)</p> <p>“Firstly I just want to say thank you so much for organising the event and that we all really enjoyed it, even though our team sadly lost people along the way there was a great vibe! Thank you again for organising the event. Overall it was great!” (Joy)</p> <p>“generally please pass on our thanks and congratulations to Stragglers for an amazing logistical feat!” (Serpentine)</p> <p>“I would like to thank you and all your team for running such a fantastic event. I think on the whole our team was very impressed with the organisation and had a great weekend as a result.” (Hampton Wick)</p> <p>“Really great race, it was our maiden year and I will certainly be looking to enter a team next year too. Well organised, great experience.” (Accenture 2)</p> <p>Thank you to you and everyone for all their support! (Ranelagh)</p> <p>Thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback. In general we thought it was very well organised and the runners in both the Dulwich teams found it a highly enjoyable experience. Thankyou Stragglers! We'll be back next year. (Dulwich)</p>