

LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION



SURREY GROUP



WINTER TANNERS - 14th January ²⁰⁰¹ 2000 - REPORT

Entries: 222

Starters: 208

Finishers: At least 194 (probably 200)

Organiser: John Westcott	Certificate Artwork: Tony Youngs
Start: Dave Green and Dave Challenger.	
Checkpoint 1: Dave Challenger, Pat Challenger and Ray Jolly	
Checkpoint 2: Reg Chapman, Ken Styan and Cynthia McLeod.	
Tanners Hatch Youth Hostel Drinks Point: Sarah (The Warden), Richard Ireson, Edward Ireson and Les Maple.	
Finish: Dave Green.	

Well!! What a day? After the gloom of the autumn weather which caused some events in the south east to be cancelled it was gratifying to have the Winter Tanners held in the middle of a period when high pressure was hovering over Britain. The result was a perfect winter day. Bright sunshine nearly all day showing the Surrey hills off to good effect but very cold which meant the ground stayed hard as the frost persisted to suppress the lurking mud. The mud did manifest itself in the afternoon when the weak winter sunshine had had a chance to penetrate but on the whole I think we got away with reasonably good underfoot conditions bearing in mind the excessive amount of rain we have had in the last few months (it seems years).

The good weather forecast and the introduction of shorter route alternatives, attracted a bigger entry on the day than expected and I had not prepared enough route descriptions to cope with all those who turned up. This is the first time I have ever had more entries on the day than pre day entries. On closing date for pre day entries I had 71 so I catered for a total of 200. I do charge, what seems to me, an excessive £2.50 entry on the day in order encourage people to enter in advance but it seems most want to see what the weather is like before they part with their money. Thanks to those arriving after 8.30 who cooperated to alleviate the crisis by sharing route descriptions and a big thank you to Hilary Walker who arrived with extra photocopies to help expand the meagre rations. I tried to get a few more photocopies, but the only available photocopier in town was not working.

My start point for devising the 30 mile route this year was to use the footpath in the field between Ford Farm and Blackheath Lane (para 11.9M) which I intended to use on the 1999 event but on that occasion it fell victim to my pruning the distance down to a reasonable 30 miles. Also I have always thought the footpath between Postford Farm and Locknor Lodge (para 12.9M) has a much better outlook than the much used tracks through Blackheath Forest. This combination meant going to St Marthas and touching Newlands Corner and, ever looking for new ideas, I decided to take the route into the hitherto uncharted Tanners area of Merrow and the Clandons. The footpath in the field with 6 electric fences was a nuisance and I toyed with the idea of using the slightly longer way round the road to avoid it but then I cringed at the thought of what Keith Chesterton (and other LDWA members) would say if it ever got out that I had allowed myself to be intimidated (on your behalf) by land owners in this way. Keith did the 20 mile route so did not have to go through the fences. Most people I asked said it was no problem but one or two did get a shock from replacing the gates.

The 20 mile route short cut between Gomshall and Rammore Common mainly using

the North Downs Way. Originally I had a more imaginative route in mind which rejoined the 30 mile route at Hookwood Farm (Woodcote Lodge para 19.6M) but when I walked out the fenced bridleway from Combe Lane to the farm in December I was up to my knees in mud and I thought I could not take even LDWA walkers through that.

The 28 mile route was also a December afterthought in that with all the rain we had had I was expecting muddy conditions and felt there may be some who would not wish to do 32 miles when they were expecting to do 30. As it turned out the view of north west Surrey on the descent into West Clandon was splendid (surprising even me) and compensating for not seeing the main feature of the 30.

My resident route description critic had something to say but in an effort to put the criticism tactfully I was told "people are saying the route description was not up to your usual standard". Others said they had difficulty in following the description, mainly in just one place, but that place was different for different people. Two places where I heard of difficulty encountered by more than 1 group was the point of turnoff from the frequently changing direction fence after Crocknorth Farm (para 23.6M) and the younger plantation (para 13.4M on the 20 miler). Both, I can assure you, presented difficulty for me when writing the route description and I thought at the time I am sure to have criticism here whatever I write. My "brilliant" idea to relieve the ambiguity of describing the 8 stiles which come close on one another (paras 24.5M and 25.0M) by using a stile symbol $\#$ was dashed by 2 people who had been round together when they said both the symbols Σ and $\#$ were far too small. I will go back to RD but persevere with the stile idea by trying to find a more distinctive symbol.

Many of you have asked me to extend your thanks to my helpers on the day and I too would like to thank all involved for their help and cooperation. Although all did sterling service I would like to particularly mention 8 year old Edward Ireson who made and served the tea at Checkpoint 3 (Tanners) and kept the fire going.

The appeal for the National Trust realised £69.99. This donation will be put to the Surrey Hills appeal which is used to help maintain and improve footpaths and open space owned by the National Trust, much of which Tanners routes go over. Many thanks to all those who contributed.

For those of you who got lost, take heart from an extract of Alan Blatchford's 1977 report "I think that the party I was 'leading?' must have wondered who devised the course. On at least two occasions we were quite lost for several minutes and only a bit of trial and error navigation got us back on route." Alan was the welly shod organiser. I do not wish to tell you too much about the past at this stage because 13th January 2002 is the day for The Winter Tanners Silver Jubilee and I hope to do a review in conjunction with that milestone.

I hope to see you then.

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