

## The June Jaunter

### A run through History

**Clent ...** It all started nearly 300 million years ago, when Robert Vickers was still just a boy and the only orienteering on offer was limited to Permian-ent courses. Back then, it was still possible to walk the short distance to North America. Gradually the world entered a period of intense global warming caused, some say, by hot air generated by IOF's early attempts to create mapping standards. The forests dried out and seas inundated the land as ice sheets melted. The Clent Hills were conceived in this time of global upheaval, the product of the marriage of Precambrian neighbours from Malvern and Shropshire. Sand and rocky debris flowed into Worcestershire to form the rocks which would one day rise proudly above the grubby coalfields to the north.

Over the ensuing eons, much of history passed by relatively uneventfully. Then came the first Brexit. Britain left the Pangea Union, saving BOF the trouble, and subsequently fell out with the USA too. Britain became a bit of a backwater, sometimes literally, largely ignored by the global elite, the dinosaurs, and there probably wasn't much orienteering to be had. Eventually, the seas retreated and after an exceptionally cold winter that seemed to go on and on and on, Britain, with the Clent Hills at its heart, came to be the land we see today - The June Jaunter had been born, but it would be many millennia before there was anyone around to run it.

Unfortunately, written records of the June Jaunter run only extend back to the modern period commencing 1983. Prior to that, we know little. In the olden-days, there was an Iron Age fort across the Hagley Rd and there may have been a battle between the Britons and the Romans after a post-run lock-in at The Badger's Sett. In the not-so-quite-olden-days, the region around the hills even had its own saint, young Prince Kenelm. However, in a familial spat, his sister had him killed and hid his body in a pond behind the church just down from Nimmings car park. You can still visit the spot, the source of the River Stour. We don't know whether he ever ran the June Jaunter route but it is possible. I like to think he and others may have done so over the centuries.

**The run :** and so to the modern June Jaunter. The JJ is essentially a fell race; 5km long with about 200m of ascent and, of course, descent. Until very recently it started and finished in Nimmings car park. In the last couple of years, due to access issues caused by 'goings-on', this has been moved down the road to the Walton Hill car park. The run is a time trial and can be run either clockwise or

anti-clockwise with whatever route choice is desired, provided the runner visits the trig point on Walton Hill, the gate of Clent Church, the Four Stones on Clent Hill and Nimmings car park.

If one runs clockwise from the Walton Hill car park (yours truly's preferred option), one is immediately faced with the lung-busting climb to the trig point – 1037ft and the highest point on the run. The latter part of this climb is quite gentle, but most mere mortals are already in so much oxygen debt that this section still feels near vertical. Beyond the trig point, the views open up towards the Cotswolds, the Malverns and, on a really good day, one can just about catch a glimpse of the Forest of Dean and the upper reaches of the Severn Estuary.

Whilst admiring the panorama, you can enjoy the gentle downhill run along the ridge and let the lactic acid drain from your legs before starting the main descent towards Clent Church. Here you need your wits about you to negotiate the steepening rough track with its loose stones and inevitable dogs on extendable leads. There is a choice of tracks off to the right to bring you down to the lower reaches of St Kenelms pass. The choice is either through the woods to Clatterbach Lane, and along the road, or to descend steeply through the horse fields to rear of the church. If your attention slips and you miss these then it's a long slog back up from the houses of Walton Rise. There was time in the past that the control was on the lych gate at the front of the church which made the Clatterbach route more viable, but possibly to keep it out of sight, the control is now placed on the field gate behind. This makes a short-cut through the graveyard tempting but all competitors are told that it is definitely out-of-bounds.

From the church the choice is essentially to run behind the Vine Inn and up onto Clent Hill or to run up the pass a little way to take the narrow rough track onto the ridge, or to stay on the road to a bend and ascend a re-entrant to join the top of the ridge track. Whichever way it's a tough climb to the Four Stones at 1014ft. Rather disappointingly, these megaliths are not ancient at all, being erected around 1763 by Lord Lyttleton of Hagley Hall, as something to see from his mansion. The views from the top are just as good as those from Walton Hill with a 180 view taking in Wales to the SW, the Clees to the W, the Wrekin to the NW and across Birmingham to the Peak District in the NE. If the earth weren't so round you'd also be able to see the Urals. On a clear night you can even see the moon!

Now there is the descent to Nimmings. The choice is steeply down from the four stones to the main track and then a gentle descent along the south edge of Hagley Wood where, in 1943 the skeleton of a woman was famously found trapped in the middle of a Wych Elm tree. The suggestion that this was as a result of a misplaced control has ever been proven. Some prefer to run along the ridge and descend later through the woods, but that's very rooty. After punching the control in the car park, it is then a gently downhill road run back to the start/finish at the foot of Walton Hill.

**Stats:** As I said earlier, the JJ was first run in 1983 and has been run every year since apart from during the global mouth and foot epidemic of 2001. Since then all orienteers have kept their shoes spotlessly clean. Of those who ran in 1983 only a couple are still participating with HOC; Robert Vickers, who with 31 competitive runs (PB 25.25, 1992) has completed more than anyone else, and has looked after the event every year until handing over the reins in 2017. Charlie Nelson also ran in 1983 and has 23 runs (PB 26.48 1985). John Queenan was 2nd in 1983 with his one and only time of

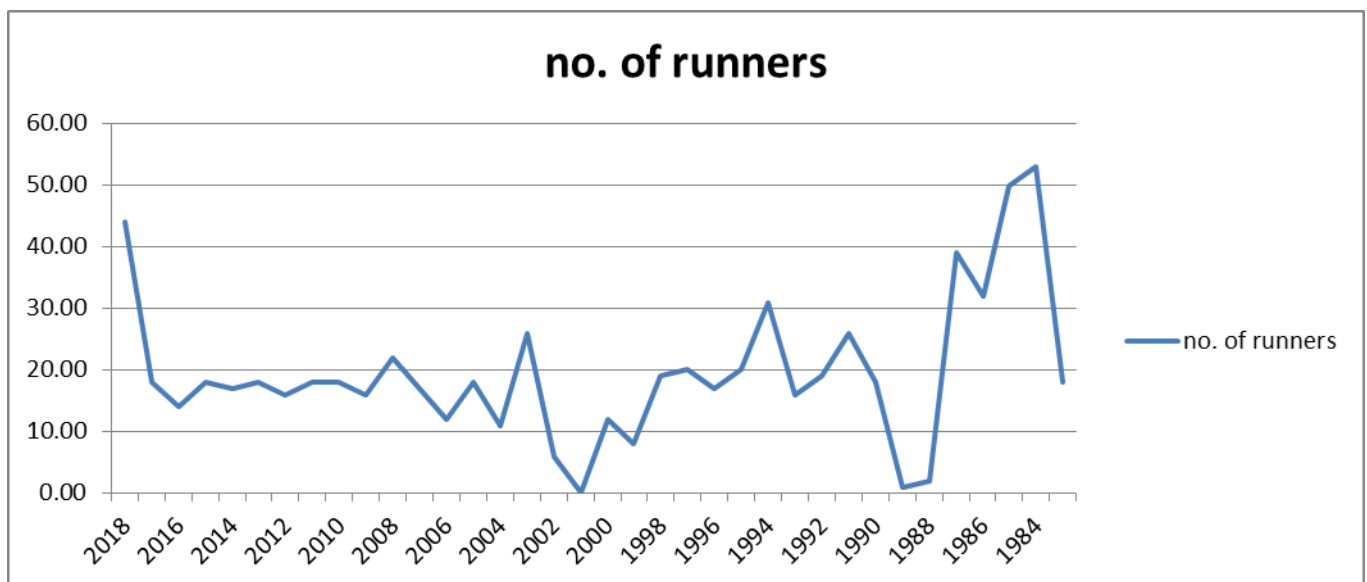
21.50, and although no longer competing with HOC, he is still a member. The fastest man back then was Pete Griffiths in 20.18, and fastest woman was W.Pinson in 25.25.

Barry McGowan first ran in 1984 and has the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest number of runs with 29 (PB 27.20, 1991). Also running for the first time in 1984 was Mike Baggott (PB 24.09 1991) now on 22 runs. 1984 also saw the greatest number of participants with 53 (see chart below).

The current men's record is held by Barry Parkinson with a super swift 18.59 in 1990. The women's record is held by Janet Savage with 22.55 in 1986. Over the years just three other runners have dipped under 20 minutes: Nick Pietrowski 19.41 in 1990, Nick Barrable 19.35 in 1997 and Brian Hughes 19.45 in 1995. Brian's run must count as 'the' stand out JJ performance given he was nearly 50 years old at the time.

In recent years the JJ has seen the introduction of split timing so there is a wealth of stats to be analysed for those that have that bent (not me). The numbers of people able to descend from the Walton trig point to the Church in under 6 minutes is pretty select as is the number who can get from the church to the 4 stones in under 9, under 10 is very good going. In future, I look forward to introducing some age related reporting of results too. So even if you are not one of the quickest or you feel your previous times are inaccessible there would always be something to aim for.

Why not give it a go in 2019?



# fastest time

