

## The June Jaunter

### Some Personal Notes from Robert Vickers

It is quite true that the June Jaunter all began when I was just a boy, and indeed it is so long since my first run at the event bearing that title that I was still little more than a lad even then.

History should record that the event was the brainchild of Dick Wells, a very active Harlequin and member of the Halesowen A&CC back in the 1980s. Although he no longer orienteers, Dick still lives in Halesowen and our paths cross occasionally. He announced one day that we should have a “mini fell race” over the Clent Hills, and it was he who decided to coin the title “June Jaunter”. This is a nice alliterative name, and he can be credited with introducing the word “Jaunter” in this context to the English language (although my dictionary lists other obscure meanings, but it is apparently not in the scrabble dictionary).

The earliest Jaunter runs were strongly supported by the Halesowen A&CC, encouraged by Dick, but somehow the attraction soon waned. Many of their athletes did record impressive times, but sometimes struggled a bit with the navigation, since the event depends on fine-tuning route choice to suit the individual. For many years, you could see an arrow painted on a tree trunk by one of them, at the point where a crucial path on the descent from Walton Hill left the main track.

In the very early days, Dick presented certificates which he had designed. This practice fell into abeyance, though they were produced again for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary run in 2003, when Dick presented a special trophy – which was won by Harlequin Chris McSweeny.

In 1985, Dick decided that the event was such a good thing that it should be run twice, and it was duly repeated in August that year. Somehow “August Jaunter” never caught on, and this was the only year it was run twice. I normally run anti-clockwise, but took advantage of the opportunity to try the opposite direction and recorded a slightly faster time. I have tried the clockwise route on a few other occasions, and generally it does seem slightly better for me.

The original location of the Clent checkpoint was defined as “Stile behind Clent Church”. In the earlier years, there were marshals at all the checkpoints, who were armed with marker pens of different colours which were applied to the wrists of passing runners to prove they had complied with the route - nowadays SI punches are used. The marshals at Clent tended to site their car on the roadside outside the lych gate of the church, and this is how that became for many years the Clent checkpoint. The stile at the back of the church was replaced by the present gate, and for the sake of returning to the original location, this was re-established as the checkpoint some time ago. In practice, if you go round the churchyard you have to pass both these locations.

The time came when Dick lost his enthusiasm for organising the Jaunter, and as one of the “original and regulars” I thought it would be a shame to abandon the tradition – which is how I came to take over its running. It took me a few more years to grow weary of the job, and was so grateful that Andy White stepped up to rescue it again.

I feel honoured to have the record for “most runs” and to be one of just two remaining participants from that first event (Charlie Nelson is the other). Colin and Suzette Spears were there, too, but have not taken part recently. Although the records omit me for some years, this is because I have been away on the dates in question – but I must state that I have still run the course and recorded my own time every year since 1983, even though some of these have been on my own. It is noteworthy that although I was getting older, my best run was several years after my first one. I attribute this to two factors: I had recently escaped from the drudgery of having to go to work, which left more time for important things like orienteering and training. Secondly, my route choice had been the subject of constant refinement, which illustrates the importance of this factor in comparison to running strength.