

Bartley Marathons- Planner's comments

The idea of HOC putting on a Barkley Marathons style event came while watching highlights of Jasmin Paris' phenomenal achievement earlier this year in becoming the first woman to complete five laps of the fearsome course just seconds within the cut off time. Surely, she should win Sports Personality of the Year.

Although I'd cycled around Bartley Reservoir, I'd never been to Bartley Green and made a reconnaissance visit a few months ago during which I was impressed by the size and variety of Sennelys Park and by the complexity of some of the surrounding roads and paths. Finding that there was an old O map of the park, courtesy of Dave Ellis, dating from the mid 1980's gave the possibility of putting on an event that juniors could also take part in.

Coming up with the way of incorporating books into the MapRun model took a bit of thinking time, especially as I didn't want to be stuck with a load of scattered books to collect after the event, so I decided to award runners coming back with books points based on their 'control' number. This part of the plan worked well with all but two books accounted for.

I was pleased that so many HOC members, and a couple of guests, were willing to take part in an experimental event, especially given the weather on the afternoon of the event. I was really impressed with the way everyone got the hang of the event so quickly and returned with lots of soggy pages and books variously stuffed down leggings, in a carrier bag and in bum bags.

One thing I hadn't thought through was the way I'd verify results- it was too cold and I was too wet (from putting out the books in rather unseasonal weather) to stand around counting everyone's pages, especially since some runner's collections looked like papier mache (although Peter's were dry and neatly folded) so I've taken totals on trust.

Apologies if I've made any mistakes, but unlike the real Barkley Marathons, this was a fun run (although I believe that anyone dropping out after one lap of the Barkley Marathons is recorded as having completed a 'fun run').

In the end, 22 runners took part producing some fine results and returning almost all of the books to the finish. Ben Crone and Eloise Lee came out top in the Men's and Women's races, with Ben being just pipping Dave Aldridge to first place by returning with book 27 which trumped Dave's book 20 by 7 points.

Craig Thompson paced his dad, Simon around 11.3 km of the course and returned with a haul of six books, albeit rather low scoring ones such that their total books returned score was beaten comfortably by Rew Francis who arrived at book 30 after 57 minutes giving him three minutes to gather his breath before he could collect the book. He also managed to collect book 26 on the way back gaining 56 points for these two books alone.

Award for the most efficient run probably goes to Sammy Pritchard who visited 19 controls in just over 8km and coming in as 8th overall. Commiserations for the most unfortunate timekeeping go to Karen Thompson, who finished just 5 seconds overtime after 75 minutes running.

I'd invited Damian Hall (aka 'Ultra Damo') to the event as he's been to a few Western Night League events in the past. He is one of the elite few who has actually competed in the Barkley Marathons and made it to the fifth lap. He was busy on the night of the Barkley Marathons but said to let him know if we ever repeat the idea. This article about his experience in this year's event talks about hallucinations and the problem of finding a pesky book after three days of running in the outback.

Damian Hall on the 2024 Barkley Marathons (runnersworld.com)

Based on feedback about Sennelys Park I think I'll map it next year so if anyone would like to arrange a similar event next year, I'd be delighted to hand over the reins and a better core map.

John Leeson