

PBM25 Report – 54th Punchbowl Marathon – 9th February 2025

The day went well, the going was a bit drier than last year and the flood route wasn't needed. In late afternoon the generally overcast sky turned to cold rain for all the later finishers. As usual just over 80% of entrants started (319 of 398), and 310 were awarded Certificates.

This year the event limit was increased from 350 to 400, and surprisingly it was again oversubscribed. Surprisingly, as in 2024 only(!) just over 384 wanted to enter, while this year just over 420 wanted to enter. There were sufficient cancellations beforehand in both years such that most of the late comers got in, but not all. This year two people entered so early that presumably they forgot they'd done so, and then somewhat closer to the event entered again. One of them decided not to come just before entries closed and cancelled one of their entries. By then it was too late for anyone else to get in so there were only 399 potential starters (or rather 398 as one must also discount the other double entry).

Along with the churn on Fabian of cancellations and new entries, some people also changed the Route they intended to follow (presumably in the light of changes to their fitness). Even so, Registration did have to deal with 27 Route changes, most of which seemed to be caused by the weather forecast of "cold wind and rain later". 25 of those entered onto the 30 mile Route – including some stronger walkers on this years '100' - "changed down" to follow the 20 mile Route. Only two entrants "felt lucky" and changed from the '20' to the '30'. By the end of that kerfuffle 178 people started the 20 mile Route and 141 started the '30'.

Obstructions: This year the River Wey was low enough that the Flood Route did not need to be followed on the '30'. However, an over-excited horse had recently been placed in the field next to the River and molested several entrants passing along the adjacent public footpath, pushing one lady over (the vegetation is not well maintained and in places the footpath is confined to a narrow strip next to the barbed wire fence). While an animal obstruction was reported to Surrey Public Rights of Way, it might be that instead the vegetation finally gets cut back so walkers can pass out of reach.

Changes: the route was improved again - the '30' beyond CP3 now again goes over Crooksbury Hill (which features on the certificate), avoids some significant road sections by Farnham Golf Club and instead traverses commons and some Hampton Estate permissive paths. And having a Tilford Hall Marshal (new) meant that the late kitchen team could concentrate on serving the finishers.

Numbers Check: there was one this year and it was open for 4.5 hours on the new part of the '30', just after Crooksbury Hill due to an impromptu location change. All entrants followed the new Route via the NC and times from CP3 indicate there was no short-cutting. Nowadays entrant self discipline (and the sharing of Strava/etc. tracked route data between peers) seems to have removed the need for NCs. No NC for the past few years has detected any deviation from the published Route. And as NCs by their nature have to be away from facilities, cover, etc. it now seems to be a waste of Marshal time and goodwill. While circumstances may change (never say never), there doesn't seem to be a need for NCs in the foreseeable future.

20 milers: special thanks to all the earlier Checkpoints and especially Splits that were kept open longer than planned (Splits for over an hour). All finished in time, but over 10 of the slowest walkers started with the runners! While the two slowest started at 7:30 and finished

just after 4PM, the last two '20' finishers started around 8:30 and finished at 16:53 and 17:08. Next year, were CP2 to close at 1:30PM most of the 10 (and only them) would be disqualified there. But as they aren't the last finishers overall we probably won't do that. It also seems likely that these late starting 20 mile walkers are choosing to start late to avoid the early "crush", and in any event help to spread the load on the Finish catering.

PACER: a long standing problem of intermittent outages that required a manual system restart as a work round was fixed over six months ago. Since then no intermittent outages have been reported, and none occurred on this years' PBM. Special thanks to Tim Bedwell who provides the "restart" service – this is the first year it did not need to be called upon. Also possibly helping with reliability, the LDWA is now using a different web hosting service. Should this new found reliability continue for at least another year - and during next year's event – it might then be possible to reduce the number of PACER Marshals (no paper?).

Splits: as noted above, this was kept open for over an hour longer than expected. The main reason was that all the slow walkers on the 20 mile Route who started an hour late were an hour late getting to Splits. One of those was somewhat "navigationally challenged" more than once, and on the second time they were called it turned out that they had somehow managed to bypass Splits unseen. As there is no "short cut" from CP2 to the Finish, this didn't seem suspicious, and they probably walked a few extra miles anyway. As it turned out, all Route changes were made at Registration - no-one changed Routes after reaching CP2.

Splits (the future): after the event all the times taken by the entrants who left CP2 to arrive at either the Finish or CP3 were evaluated. It seems that there is no longer a need for a Splits Marshal to identify anyone who changes from the '30' to the '20' part way round. Now that CP3 is now somewhat further away from CP2 – at Seale rather than Puttenham – anyone changing to the '20' Route on the day would finish over an hour before they would be expected at CP3. Anyone on the '30' who arrives at the point where the Routes diverge (about 17.4 miles) would only have 2.6 miles to get to the Finish on the '20', instead of another 7 miles to get to CP3. So even if PACER had an insurmountable problem there would still be an hour or so in which to let CP3 know not to expect them. There will be no Splits from 2026.

30 milers: Nine people didn't get certificates this year, most through retiring. At CP2 two people retired who had come together and were going round together, when one of them sprained their ankle. When it arrived, the mid to late afternoon light but cold rain and wind took its toll, and made conditions treacherously greasy underfoot. At CP3 there were five more retirements. Four retired after the ascent of the Hogs Back (maybe they didn't fancy more of the cold driving rain and the coming ascent of Crooksbury Hill? Or had they heard of the "user hostile" steps coming down it?), but two of those decided to walk back to Tilford – presumably following a more direct and less steep route. The fifth person to retire had to be collected and brought to CP3 from just before the ascent of the Hogs Back. Their footwear wasn't working for them – neither the new pair they'd started with nor the older and more worn comfortable pair they changed into – and then repeatedly slipped over in.

30 milers (late finishers): The last finishers came in cold and bedraggled. Discretion was used to award certificates to all who took less than 10.5 hours but arrived at Tilford after the 6PM Finish Time (at 18:02). On looking at their times it was apparent they had been toward the back of the "Start" queue that began to be processed at 7:30. Unfortunately the last two back had to be disqualified at the finish as they had also taken longer than 10.5 hours (started at 7:31 and

arrived back at 18:18). Thanks again to all the Marshals who in consequence stayed late and/or relayed the late finishers to their cars which were by then benighted.

In summary, everything worked well again this year. No changes are needed to how we use and set up the various venues (booking times, what we get, re-usable floor sheeting for Tilford, etc.). Three marshal roles (NC, Splits) will not be needed next year. Provisioning worked out well apart from a couple of minor things that were forgot. Some food was not brought to CP3, but Vicki Bell (second PACER marshal) was able to get some on the day. Likewise, toilet rolls and hand wash were needed at Tilford, but Alastair Charlesworth (Hall Marshal) was able to procure supplies. And this year there was more a co-ordinated differentiation between the foods on offer at the various checkpoints. Unlike previous years, when equipment was transferred at the Marshals Walk, it was dropped off the night before at Tilford while the plastic floor covering was being put down. This will probably happen in future years.

The 28 strong 2025 Marshal team (some of whom had multiple roles) were: Ann Muggeridge, Roger Sage, John Preston, Tony Cartwright, John Goody, Stewart Hilton, Elton Ellis, Frank Eberle, Paul Chamberlain, Richard Ireson, Avril Stapleton, Elizabeth Bryan, Stephen Ford, Ertan Ali Falk, Fiona Cameron, Jude Unsworth, Mike Tuke, Robert Swan, Tim Bedwell, Simon Delph, Jackie Barker, Vicki Bell, James Blogg, Alastair Charlesworth, Jennie de Bossart, Henri de Bossart, Cathy Turton, Sue Charlesworth.

Facebook comments by entrants included:

Thank you Surrey LDWA for bringing us Punchbowl smiles to the day 😊 Amazing volunteers and a beautiful route, can't thank you enough

Thanks Surrey LDWA for yet another brilliant challenge event at Punchbowl 2025. A grey day weather wise but great fun lit up by the fabulous volunteers and the like minded souls on foot enjoying the amazing trails.

Thank you to everyone involved in the [LDWA](#) PBM today, a great day out as always. Really enjoyed the new route, what a 'pleasant' surprise to climb all the way to the top of the Hogs Back! 🤩

Thank you so much to all the volunteers today for your kind friendly welcome at each CP. Also thank you to the route writers and admin people and for all those small jobs that make an event into a great one.

Our first time doing the PBM. It was fun! Except the Bad Bitey Horse that tried to bite each person in turn as we tried to get past. (poor thing was clearly a bit overexcited).