

DEEmentors Power to Harvester Glory!

Or

DEEside Powerless in Longmoor Camp.

Two titles and both correct – one for the glasses half-full brigade and one for the glasses half-empty doom merchants.

Seven DEE people made the annual pilgrimage to an army base in Hampshire to take part in the absurd over-night Harvester Relay Event. As ever, this was in full knowledge that we would be experiencing total sleeplessness and group anxiety attacks competing for nothing more than a broken plastic tractor on a block of wood. DEE doesn't have a great history in this event, but this time there was genuine optimism amongst the (younger members of) group that there was a realistic chance of snagging the main prize ... the Men's Premier Trophy! Anybody with a passing interest in entrail-reading and tea-leaf analysis would know it was never going to be that simple.

At 00:05 on a starlit, midge-filled night Chris Smithard disappeared into the scrubby woods and rough open of Longmoor Camp to start our campaign. This was the scene of one of the club's many embarrassing failures in the event back in 1997 – where a DEE team achieved one of its customary disqualifications. Chris had done something to his Achilles earlier and was reduced to hopping around ... sometimes in completely the wrong direction. Like Rafa Nadal, he nobly refused to blame his 7th position on his injury and limped off to bed leaving the DEEmentors within 6 minutes of the lead.

Self-styled night-O specialist and transport manager Jon Hateley then took over the baton on the short (6.7 k) night leg. In addition to single-handedly doubling the aggregate age of the team, he also doubled the gap between us and the lead teams – SYO, FVO and BOK – to over 10 minutes. The stage was now set for Dave Schorah, invigorated from his honeymoon, to undo all the damage and power us into the lead. He duly delivered, and half way around the 9.7k course - for the first time in history - DEE were leading the Harvester A race! Glory was within our grasp.

But fate is a fickle mistress, and what happened next seems to have been lifted from a 'Whacky Races' script.

The old adage of 'You Get What You Pay For' was painfully proven once again: perhaps overwhelmed by Dave's violent and sweaty progress around the terrain, the cheap circuitry of his budget headlamp from a Shanghai backstreet warehouse via eBay began to misbehave. He was plagued by a number of disconcerting 'plunged into darkness' moments and for 15 minutes was forced to resort to battery changes, surgery and animal sacrifices in a bid to keep the thing functioning. Finally, a fall into a ditch was too much for its generic value-pack diodes and it refused to work. Dave manfully continued, collecting one more control by moonlight before realising further progress was impractical. Rather than DNF and face the wrath of the team, he resourcefully ran back to the previous control and collared the next runner ... begging a spare torch. Unfortunately, this was arch-rivals SYO!

Nevertheless, Charlie Adams generously donated his back-up Petzl and Dave stumbled on by its feeble light.

He handed over to a similarly disconcerted Tom Beasant – his expected dawn-leg was decidedly ‘night-like’ and he had to be quickly rigged up with the Hateley torch (which was of equally uncertain quality). Fortunately, Tom and Olly Williams then had good steady runs, gradually reeling in the leaders BOK and moving us into second place. Phil Vokes then crawled out of his sleeping bag and had a blinder ... moving DEE back into first place! He promptly celebrated with a migraine.

Chris Owens had been given the glory leg ... 13.4 k with a spectator control. Unfortunately, Phil had not done quite enough, as three other teams were all within ~10 minutes of Chris. He was caught by SYO and SLOW by the spectator control / water stop, sportingly yelling at the opposition who had forgotten to punch the control. Chris then seemed to respond to team orders, allowing SYO through for their earlier generosity with the headtorch – or it may have been something to do with Nick Barrable being that little bit faster! So SYO won it, with Chris dramatically outsprinting SLOW (is that an oxymoron?) for second place by 7 seconds. The first three teams all finished within ~ 3minutes of each other, making a mockery of Jon’s sanctimonious assertion that there is plenty of time to back-up punch as Harvesters are never decided by a handful of minutes!

Half the team were gutted that we had just missed out on the Big One, but the other half were delighted with the consolation prize - the ‘Small Team’ Trophy for the best club that hasn’t appeared in the Top3 in the last 5 years. And, yes, it was a small plastic combined harvester on a block of wood.

Finally, the team decided it had been a lot of fun, worth the long drive, we would try again next year... and it had all been Phil’s fault that we lost.

The 2013 DEEmentors: (*Please can we have club gilets!*)



Jon Hateley