

South Downs Relay 2008 – Roles and Responsibilities

Background

1 The Relay will again take place this year following pretty much the same pattern as in the last couple of years. In summary, we will rely on the marshals at changeover points, establishing a central control point at Chilcomb throughout the day and giving greater decision making responsibility to teams. We will exchange information by using SMS text messaging on mobile phones, but will keep the flow of information to an essential minimum by reporting key issues not routine progress. Voice messages will be reserved for emergencies, where an instant response is needed.

2 Each changeover point is 'owned' by a club, and that will continue this year. The most important information now needed from each club is to provide the number of the mobile phone, as well as a back-up phone, that will be used as a contact during the day. Once given, this must not change. The crux of this system is the interface between marshals at changeover points and the control at Chilcomb, so anything that weakens it undermines the safety of the event. Changing numbers that have been widely distributed will cause considerable, and unnecessary, strain on the system.

3 The responsibilities of all concerned are set out below.

Responsibilities of marshals

4 These are key players, who have to do much more than offer a benign presence at changeovers. Recruitment of good marshals, ideally with experience of running the event, is a must. There needs to be a minimum of two marshals at each changeover for the whole time that it's open. They need to know how to send text messages – don't take it for granted, because if they can't there will be problems. We'll be using standard message formats to avoid ambiguity, and these will be confirmed on sheets that marshals will have on the day.

5 Before the event, the marshals or other team members must visit the checkpoint and confirm that there is mobile reception for two networks. This is so that in case of a network failure they can remain in contact. The two mobile numbers – main and back up – should then be sent to Jonathan by May 23rd.

6 Both phones should have a fully charged battery, and ideally a means of charging the phone – presumably a car charger – although a full battery should comfortably cover the period a changeover is open.

7 The first basic is to know the identity of the changeover point. These will be lettered A – Q, with Jevington as changeover A, through to changeover Q at Holden Farm. This letter will be used in all communication, so it has to be right.

8 On arrival at the changeover point, marshals should text Chilcomb to confirm they are on site, using the format: 'Changeover letter Open', e.g. 'F open'. When the final team is through they text to say so, with the format 'Changeover letter Closed', e.g. 'L closed'. Chilcomb will reply to these and other messages with 'OK', to confirm receipt. This is crucial, because it allows us to track progress of the final runner.

9 When they start, marshals should check messages on the phone for information about teams who have failed to start or who have dropped out before the changeover point opened.

10 Marshals will not record times, and teams will not report them. Marshals will simply tick off teams as they pass through, and as long as this is done within the expected time slot there will be no need for reporting.

11 The key responsibility of marshals is to report any delayed arrivals. Teams will tell marshals the expected arrival time of their incoming runner (details below), and they will need to record this. We'll provide the sheet to do this. If the runner is more than 15 minutes overdue (less for shorter legs) the marshal texts an amber warning to Chilcomb. When the runner arrives, the marshal texts an OK to Chilcomb. Both texts will use a standard template: 'Changeover letter, Team number, minutes late' and 'Changeover letter, Team number, OK'. For example: 'G 28 15 late' and 'D 28 OK'. It's vital that these are followed strictly so that there is no ambiguity.

Responsibilities of control centre

12 The control centre at Chilcomb will be manned from the time of the first starters until the last finisher.

13 The control centre will have a minimum of two mobile phones running throughout the day; one number will be given to marshals and teams for routine text messaging and, in emergency, voice contact. The other number will be given only to the Race Director. Both phones will need battery chargers.

14 The control centre will be advised of any non-starters on the day, and will already know of any late withdrawals. This information will be texted to the 17 changeover points.

15 The control centre will sift incoming messages, especially those amber alerts of delayed arrivals, and decide whether to alert the Race Director. If there is no news from changeover points it will be assumed that teams are progressing as expected.

16 As marshals arrive to open changeover points they will text the control centre, who will keep a record of those which are open. Similarly as they close down with all teams through, this will be recorded, so that the race closure is monitored.

Responsibilities of teams

17 Each team will have a nominated captain – ideally a runner with plenty of experience of the event – and the final responsibility for the team's activities will rest with her or him.

18 On arrival at a changeover point, the team should give the marshal the estimated arrival time for their runner.

19 When the handover is complete, the teams should ensure that the marshal has ticked them off the list of teams; if this is overlooked they risk being recorded as lost.

20 Teams will record their own times on the form provided. This should be put into the box at the end of leg 18. The measure will be the time of day when the changeover took place; if teams also wish to record individual leg times that's up to them, but there is no need to pass this extra detail to the organisers. Times should be to the nearest second, so that teams can compare their times with others.

21 If a runner is more than 15 minutes overdue, tell the marshal. For shorter legs, this will be less than 15 minutes, but teams should use their own judgement. Check with incoming runners whether they have seen/overtaken the delayed runner – they are the best source of information from the course. Make sure that the marshal is aware of the situation at all times.

22 Other incoming runners are the only source of information we have. All runners should be observant during the course of the day, and in particular if they see another runner who is clearly having difficulties.

23 In the past runners have been advised to carry a mobile phone, and this advice remains in place.

24 The decision on what action to take in the event of the non-arrival of the runner rests with the team and, specifically, with the team captain. The marshals will not decide. This could mean a decision that the team abandon the race and send people out to look for the runner, or even a decision to involve others such as the emergency services. The team should keep the marshal informed so that s/he (the marshal) can in turn relay the message to the control centre.

25 If a team has to drop out of the race, for whatever reason, they should tell a marshal that they plan to do so. This is absolutely essential, because it means that the marshals at remaining changeover points can be told.

Summary

26 The flow of relevant, timely information is essential for the event to run successfully. The roles and responsibilities outlined are intended to allow this information to reach those who need it. Sending a few hundred runners out along the South Downs Way is inherently risky, and the organisers' role is to identify the hazards and manage them to a reasonable degree. They will not be eliminated, but can be controlled.

27 Reporting by exception invests a lot of trust in teams to be up front and honest; there's no point in being anything else. Although each runner takes part at his or her own risk, it's the job of the event organisers to have systems in place that minimise the risk. Without the unstinting co-operation of participants this won't be possible.