

The Fellrunners' Association

Guidelines for race organisers

The information in this leaflet is primarily intended to be of assistance to organisers who are intending to put on a race for the first time, although it may also prove helpful to more experienced organisers.

It addresses those issues which cause organisers most problems and it offers hints on avoiding possible difficulties. If after reading it you feel you would like more information on any of the topics please contact the Fixtures Sec. (see committee details in the Fixtures Calendar and Handbook).

Route - Most new organisers have a fair idea of where they want their route to go but it is in the fine tuning that the difference between success and failure lies.

If your race has a road section and you have a choice between putting it at the start or at the finish then put it at the start; it is far easier and safer to marshal a whole field of runners moving rapidly together along a road than to have them moving along it at the end of a race, spread out, tired and not paying attention to traffic. In the first case you can, if necessary stop the traffic for a short time, in the second case you can't in practice ensure a safe situation. If you have road crossings on your route then ensure they are manned by two helpers, it is not safe to try to have only one person watching both directions and trying to spot runners as well. If the race is partially marked then ensure that sufficient (and sufficiently large) copies of the race route map are available at registration and that they indicate clearly which sections are marked and which sections are open to individual choice of route.

Please note that any compulsory route sections should NEVER cross hazardous terrain; if runners wish to take individual choices which may be hazardous on non-compulsory sections of the race route then that is their decision but they should not be forced into such sections by the organiser.

Permission – Once you have settled on your route ensure you have permissions from ALL the landowners, tenants, authorities, etc. over whose land the race passes. Failure to do this probably won't affect the actual race itself but it may well make it impossible to hold the race again and may also land you in considerable trouble.

Parking – This can cause organisers no end of problems.

Make sure that your designated areas are large enough for the expected number of vehicles, are very clearly indicated and, if necessary, employ marshals to direct runners' cars.

If the parking area is on fields which are liable to become muddy after rain then ensure there is a contingency system for rescuing stranded cars – it is much kinder on the ground to have a tractor or four-wheel drive Landrover towing cars off than to have them skidding all over the place in their attempts to leave.

Toilets – The lack of these can cause both problems and offence. Nearly all runners find it necessary to “go” before a race and you should ensure that the location of your toilets is clearly indicated and that you have sufficient facilities for your potential race field.

Registration – Unless your race has specific restrictions, or you wish restrictions to apply, it is far easier to have registration on the day.

The exact nature of your registration will depend on your results system. Most people use the tried and tested “sticky labels and a board” arrangement, which is surprisingly fast to operate and has the advantage of presenting you with a complete set of results immediately after the race. Other systems, such as computerised ones, can be used as a back-up or as an aid to producing faster print-outs for your results sheets to send out to individuals, etc.

To operate this system efficiently you will need to create a results board with a numbered grid on it with the spaces on the grid large enough to accommodate the size of labels you choose to use. You will also need a supply of numbers and at least four (preferably six) people. Your registration forms (see example in “FRA Safety Requirements for Fell Races”) will need to be spread around your registration venue, together with pens (most of which will disappear !!). You will need a supply of sticky labels, preferably in sheets of no more than twentyfive, and these should be pre-numbered and distributed to the two/three people sitting immediately behind the two “front” members of the registration team.

When runners come to the “front” members they hand in their form, their registration fee is collected and as their race number is given to them it is written down in the top corner of their form. This form is then handed to the other members of the team who put the runner’s details and number onto the appropriately numbered sticky label, leaving a space at the bottom for the time to be entered. It is usual to put category details such as “Vet”, “Lady Vet”, etc. in coloured felt tip abbreviations (“V”, “LV”) across the label. At this stage, especially if the race is a relatively easy one, it is important to check that no underage competitors are attempting to enter – insurance could be invalidated if this occurs.

With a bit of luck, and fast writing, the team can have all the labels entered up shortly after the race has started and then the labels can all go with the results boards up to the finish – preferably to be hidden in a van with the two people who will be entering the results on the board. The registration team can then become the finish/results team.

In addition to your actual registration layout, make sure that either in or at the entrance to your registration venue you have route maps and any notices referring to minimum kit, route changes, etc.

In your registration venue and placed so someone can keep an eye on it you should have a box full of envelopes with a large sign above it “Results envelopes”. This sign should state how much you want each runner to put in the envelope before they self-address it and place it back in the box. Ensure you allow for photocopying costs as well as for postage and envelopes.

Kit requirements and checks – This is a very important and quite tricky area. Clearly your minimum kit requirements will depend on a number of variables – when the race is held, its length, the type of terrain it covers, the weather on the day – and requirements for Category “A” Long and Medium races are mandatory (see “FRA Safety Requirements for Fell Races”). However, once you have decided what your requirements are you must ensure you do two things –

1. Place large notices, where every runner has to see them, detailing your requirements.
2. Ensure that whatever requirements you specify on the day are met by holding complete or random checks before and after the race. Before the start of the race this can be arranged by ensuring that the runners pass through an unavoidable short funnel and have to show the equipment to a marshall. Runners who fail to comply should be disqualified.

Start – Try to ensure an obstacle-free first section to the race to avoid bottlenecks before the field is sufficiently spread out for them not to matter. If there are gates then have them held open by marshals. If there are stiles close to the start then either pull the race start further back to give the field time to spread out or, if possible, construct temporary stiles next to the permanent ones.

At the actual start of the race make sure you have at least two watches started to record the finish times.

Marking and Marshalling – Marking can be done by tape, flags or a combination of both. Do not try to mark the route equally intensely throughout; obvious sections such as tracks or uninterrupted paths need only be marked every now and again as a reassurance that the runners are on the right line. Really detailed marking needs to be done wherever there is a chance of runners going wrong, for example at path or track junctions or around farms or other buildings. A useful trick is to run the route beforehand with someone who has no idea where it goes and see where he has problems.

Marshalling offers lots of possibilities for disasters. Do not use marshals just for the sake of it; there should be a reason for positioning a marshal. Gates in particular need marshalling; all too often runners leave them open behind them in the heat of a race; younger helpers are very useful as gate marshals and often love the responsibility. There is no point in placing a marshal on a summit unless numbers are going to be taken as a check on the race progress; if you do place marshals in fairly exposed positions then make quite sure they have at least twice the amount of clothing they would normally wear and also that they have a flask of tea/coffee/something. If you want marshals to take numbers then it is preferable for them to operate in pairs, especially if the checkpoint is near the start of the race; if the race is fairly long then the later checkpoints could be monitored by a single marshal but, even then, company is pleasant during a long marshalling session.

Ensure that your marshals know exactly where they are marshalling and how to get there, especially in adverse weather – a surprisingly large number of incidents have occurred during races because marshals were not where they should have been.

One of the most useful marshals you can employ is someone in the role of “sweeper” to follow behind the last runner. The “sweeper” can collect all your marking tapes and flags as he goes round, can inform the rest of the marshals that the whole race field has passed them and their job is finished and is often in a position to help any injured runners.

If your race is of sufficient severity/length you might wish to consider hiring the FRA radios to help you keep track of things.

Finish – Try to site this so that your finish marshals have a clear view of approaching runners. The ideal finish from the point of view of the officials is an uphill one as this slows runners down and reduces last-minute sprint battles; conversely the worst type of finish to manage is a downhill one.

The finish funnel should be fairly long; one of the most common mistakes at races is the employment of too short a funnel, which results in runners pushing and crowding into each other.

It is at the finish that you will need your greatest number of helpers – ideally you need two people at the finish line taking times; two more at the other end of the funnel taking numbers; two people hiding somewhere putting the results on the board and one person acting as a runner between the four finish marshals and the results team; a total of seven people. The people taking down times and positions should do so on consecutively numbered strips with no more than 20/25 numbers per strip, otherwise the people on the results board will have nothing to do for long periods and this will slow down your results process.

Results – If you are using the labels and board method then this is relatively painless. As the “runner” brings the lists of finishing positions to the results marshals they simply find the appropriate label by comparing the runner’s number with the numbers on the labels, peel that label off the sheet and stick it on the board in the position the runner finished.

Once the timekeeper’s lists start to arrive, one of the results marshals writes the times in on the labels on the board while the other continues to do the positions. In this way the results board is being completed almost as fast as the runners arrive.

It is essential to keep the results board away from the runners who have finished while it is being compiled, otherwise the job will become impossible as runners crowd round to check their positions/times and those of other club members/rivals.

Using this system it is easy for the organiser to compile his list of Prizewinners by writing them down on a sheet as they are put on the board. The whole board (or boards) can go down to the Prizegiving once it is completed for all the runners to see and it then forms a ready source of information for producing overall results sheets for distribution.

Any completed sticky labels not on the board at the end indicate runners who have either dropped out and not informed anyone or runners who are still out on the hill – appropriate action will need to be taken about this.

Prizegiving – It is all too easy for a busy and pre-occupied organiser to delay the Prizegiving for far too long. There is no necessity to wait until every single result is entered on the board or even, in the case of longer races, until every runner has returned. Once the Prizewinners’ List has been completed it is probably best to delay the Prizegiving only until the majority of people are back, changed and assembled; otherwise people will begin to drift away - in some cases the very people who have won prizes as they will be the ones who have waited longest.

It is not necessary to wait until the results boards have been completed to hold the Prizegiving, in fact it is better to hold the Prizegiving without the boards present so that all attention can be focused on the Prizegiving itself. Once the presentations are completed then the boards can be displayed for the assembled multitude to crowd round, copy down, discuss or whatever.