

COPS 30 Miler

2021 COPS 30 Miler Update

A Brief History

In 2015, police officers Simon Guilfoyle and Lee Gosling came up with the idea of doing a 30 mile load bearing charity event that emulates the 30 mile Commando Test March undertaken by Royal Marines Recruits at the end of their training – the final test required to earn their coveted green berets. The idea received the support of the Royal Marines Corp Colonel's Office and in 2016 the first COPS 30 Miler took place, being conducted with troops from RMR Scotland (Tyne Det), who ensured that it closely replicated the true 30 miler in every way.

Since then, this fantastic support we have received from the Royal Marines has meant that the event has gone ahead each year ever since, apart from 2020 due to the Covid situation. Over this time, COPS 30 Miler participants have raised in excess of £60,000 for the two charities – Care of Police Survivors (COPS) and the Royal Marines Charity (RMC). The event has featured on television and attracts a significant social media following. It is widely-regarded as one of the UK's premier military endurance events, being described by one former participant – an ex-Parachute Regiment PTI – as 'the toughest event he's ever done'.

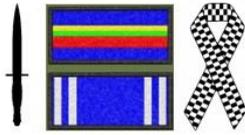
What's happened this year?

Following the postponement of the 2020 COPS 30 Miler, the Royal Marines promptly set a date for the 2021 event – 11th September 2021 – and gave authority to uplift the maximum numbers from 50 to 80. This put the 2021 edition on course to be the biggest and most impactful COPS 30 Miler in the event's history and all places were quickly filled. Participants set about their training regimes, whilst in the background all preparations were made in close consultation with the Royal Marines as usual. To date, over £17,000 has already been raised.

However, in April 2021 we were suddenly informed that due to significant defence funding cuts, the Royal Marines would be unlikely to be able to provide the resources required to hold this year's event. This triggered a series of urgent discussions and a further review of whether this challenge could be surmounted. The CEO of COPS also wrote directly to the RMC in an effort to convince Royal Marines decision-makers of the value of the event and the potential impact should RMR resources be withdrawn. We also began to urgently explore a range of contingencies and have even been offered additional funding by a private donor, designed to ensure the event could still go ahead in some format. Below you will find a summary of the options we have considered, their pros and cons, as well as rationale as to the viability of each.

Options and Contingencies

The overarching principle we worked towards has always been; **The professionalism and safety of the COPS 30 Miler will not be compromised.**



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In order to attain this, we identified three main areas that needed to be in place:

1. Robust logistical infrastructure (e.g. transportation, checkpoint structure (including QRF) and medical support).
2. Reliable syndicate leadership and low-visibility navigation capability.
3. Radio communications wraparound.

All three of these three components have previously been supplied in totality by the Royal Marines, who have consistently discharged themselves with the highest levels of professionalism and ensured each year's COPS 30 Miler has been safe and enjoyable.

Option 1

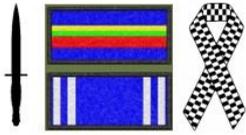
Our preferred option for 2021 was of course to hold the event in the same format as previous years, using the tried and tested template whereby Royal Marines troops run alongside participants and ensure the event is as authentic as possible.

As these men are operational soldiers, we have always been grateful that the Corps has allowed them to perform this additional role in facilitating the COPS 30 Miler and that this comes at a cost – however, the Royal Marines have only charged us a nominal fee for doing so; this works out at approximately £2,500 for each event and reflects a substantial discount for their time and resources. We have therefore asked, repeatedly, what the true cost of their resources would be, should they be able to commit to provide troops for the 2021 COPS 30 Miler but have not received any cost estimations from the Royal Marines thus far.

Option 2

Without Royal Marines support, we first have to accept that the COPS 30 Miler would be a totally different event which represents a significant departure from the basis of what it was and how it developed. As the only such event that is officially endorsed by the Royal Marines, part of the attraction for participants is that it is the closest thing to the actual 30 mile test march there is – no other similar event involves Royal Marines Commandos running alongside participants and providing a near-identical structure and logistical support. Therefore, the absence of the Royal Marines leaves a significant void and even if an alternative event were possible to hold, it would not be the true COPS 30 Miler.

Nevertheless, we scoped out the prospect of such an event and sadly found that there is simply no safe and logistically-effective way of allowing the event to proceed; without the Royal Marines, who would be capable of staffing the 30 miler to the standards we require?



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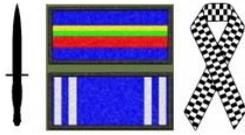
The COPS 30 Miler has relied upon the Royal Marines because they are the best out there – how do we match the level of ability, expertise and commitment of these Commandos? Even with the best will in the world (and a degree of access to ex-Forces personnel, including former Bootnecks) it is simply impossible to pull together a team from scratch who would be required to recce the course in advance and be available for the whole weekend in the same way that the Royal Marines have done previously (and especially under the current rapidly-collapsing time frame).

We would require a particular skillset, not least navigational skills, as the Royal Marines syndicate leaders are pivotal in setting the pace of the syndicates, watching for fatigue amongst participants, acting as guides across some of the toughest terrain in the UK, and not forgetting they complete the 30 miles as well! These qualities are essential in providing a safe and professional event.

Regarding navigation, we have explored many options. Firstly, we have provisionally designed an alternative route, which – in theory – should be easier to navigate and has much better access to the nearest road to cater for emergencies. Faced with the prospect of no Royal Marines syndicate leaders, we considered a ‘self-nav’ option, where syndicates take themselves around the course. This however has the drawback of relying on individuals’ navigational ability, which is going to be variable. Also, we are cognisant that the COPS 30 Miler is not billed as an event where participants have to self-navigate. We also recognise the prospect that the best navigator in a group may not be (or want to be) a suitable syndicate leader and/or that they may not complete the full 30 miles for whatever reason, which increases the safety risk dramatically and way beyond an acceptable level.

Even in a situation where we ask participants in advance to assess their navigational ability and post them across the syndicates, we have to assume that the weather will come down and/or participants will become lost or injured. This ensures we have contingencies in place for a worst-case scenario. Currently, with Royal Marines as syndicate leaders, we are confident that syndicates will be kept together and effectively managed, and in the event of thick fog or some other unforeseen event, these men will be able to identify their location on the map, find the next checkpoint or extract the syndicate to the nearest suitable exfil point. Without this in place, participants run the risk of becoming lost on the hills without the necessary support in place should there be an injury or other emergency. The Royal Marines also provided a CASEVAC and QRF contingency for such an eventuality. This clearly is now absent.

The third critical area for consideration is communication. Firstly, the area around Clennell Hall has no phone signal or 4G whatsoever, so we would require UHF radio comms. Previously, this has been supplied by Royal Marines carrying military Clansman radio sets – without these we would need an alternative. We considered issuing participants, checkpoint teams and medical support staff with analogue radio sets, but this would require an outlay from monies that would otherwise go to the charities and those within a proportionate price range simply would not do the job. Furthermore, we would require a license to operation a radio net. We have considered approaching local amateur radio networks to see if they could assist, but discounted this as once again we cannot rely upon the goodwill of volunteers to put on a watertight professional event that carries as much risk as the COPS 30 Miler.



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Finally, we do not support the concept of changing the identity of the COPS 30 Miler to such an extent as, for example, reducing the weight carried (most of it is essential kit anyway) or changing the distance covered etc. It is a 30 mile loadbearing event for a reason and this is what people have signed up for - were we in a position to hold a version of it this year without the Royal Marines, we would want to retain its integrity as much as possible.

Overall therefore, we feel that although we can provide some of the necessary infrastructure for an independent 30 miler, we cannot guarantee the necessary communications framework or put together a team of event staff with the essential skills required to ensure it remains a professional and safe event. For these reasons, we have arrived at the painful conclusion that Option 2 is not viable.

Option 3

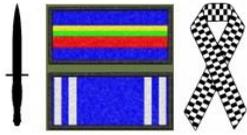
We have considered the suggestion made to us that COPS 30 Miler registrants could still meet up and undertake a yomp independently. This would mean that participants still get some time on the hills and may feel all their preparation and fundraising hasn't gone to waste. Obviously, it would be small consolation compared to being able to participate in the proper event alongside Royal Marines Commandos. Our view on this is that people are free to engage in such activity, but without the logistical and medical infrastructure of the COPS 30 Miler in place, this option does **significantly elevate** the risk to individuals for obvious reasons. We could therefore **not endorse** such activity as a COPS 30 Miler, nor provide any kind of infrastructure to support it – it would be a choice for individuals to participate in such activity at their own risk and one we wouldn't advise for most people.

Option 4

A further suggestion made to us is for participants to undertake their own 'virtual' 30 miler. This would involve individuals selecting their own route in any part of the country, arranging their own infrastructure (e.g. water stops / emergency plans / comms) and then recording their efforts on Strava (or similar) to verify they have completed the 30 miles. Similar to the considerations at Option 3 however, we recognise that there are enhanced risks involved (perhaps even more so where people go off into the hills alone), so for this reason we could **not officially endorse nor support** such activity as a COPS 30 Miler event. We do however recognise that many of our participants have the necessary ability to achieve a full solo 30 miler with full weight, so would understand why some may want to attempt this challenge independently, but again we would advise against this for most participants.

Summary

We hope we have explained the situation we have found ourselves in and the steps we have taken to try and resolve it. Our passion is to be able to put on a professional and safe event and we have reached the conclusion that the only way to do this in 2021 is to adhere to the original model that involves the Royal Marines playing their part. As this is now not possible and in the absence of us being able to hold an alternative event safely and professionally, then sadly we now face the conclusion that the COPS 30 Miler cannot go ahead and are deeply saddened by this.



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We will always be grateful to the Royal Marines who have worked so hard in previous years to ensure the event took place successfully and to COPS for managing the registration process and handling all the funds. We also wish to thank the RMC for their support and make special mention to each and every one who has been part of the COPS 30 Miler, either by helping out with planning, providing support on the day, sharing the experience on the hills as a participant, or who set themselves the challenge for this year and in the process raised vital funds for two charities that are very close to our hearts.