Absolutely brilliant, truly lovely, amazing, fantastic - just some of the comments from the happy finishers at the inaugural Wakehurst Willow Run on Wednesday, July 20.

Almost 300 people gathered after the gardens had closed to the general public, and were treated to a spectacular two-lap run around the grounds, including the long climb up past the world-famous seed bank.

The event, which was organised jointly between Wakehurst and the Haywards Heath Harriers, showcased the gardens at their most beautiful in the early evening sunlight. First runner home over the eight kilometre course was Daniel Saunders, of St Francis Runners, who finished in 32:25, just over half a minute ahead of the Harriers’ Ben Adams.

First woman was Arena 80’s Caroline Wood, who had come up from Brighton to take part in the event. She held off a strong challenge from Amelia Brown (Saints and Sinners), who finished just 11 seconds behind her.

Wood said: “It’s a fabulous course, you could run free the whole way, there was shade from the trees most of the way round. And five miles was the perfect distance. It was excellently marshalled and well thought out.” The first two men and two women were delighted to be presented with annual passes for Wakehurst, which will enable them to return to the gardens to enjoy the scenery at a more leisurely pace.

Tim McGregor, head of visitor and commercial services and Wakehurst thanked race organisers Marion Hemsworth and Ian Dumbrell, saying: “It’s been a wonderful evening, seeing so many people enjoying themselves in the glorious sunshine and having so much fun here at Wakehurst. It’s been a true partnership with the Harriers.”

Haywards Heath Harriers’ Marion Hemsworth, who was one of the organisers, said: “There was a great atmosphere at the finish with everyone cheering the runners in. Such a lovely evening and such a relief it went so well. Thank you Wakehurst for letting this event happen.'

The event raised money for Crohns and Colitis UK and representatives from the charity helped out with the finish water and the all-important medals.