An unusually sunny day greets Hallaton and Medbourne on Easter Monday 2006. As shown here on Hare Pie Bank, for the most part the bottles are carried, rugby style, in frenetic bursts, interspersed with slow moving scrimmages. But the bottles can also be thrown, rolled and even kicked, at least by anyone wearing steel-capped boots. Otherwise there are no rules, other than an understanding that the use of horses (as was tried in the past), and now motor vehicles, is contrary to the game’s spirit.

As can be seen from the shirts, rugby players figure prominently. The red and green shirts (right) are those of the Leicester Tigers. Walter Gilby, a Leicester player from the Edwardian era, was apparently a keen bottle kicker.

However, one of the greatest bottle carriers was one ‘Deerfoot’ Butteriss, who played for Hallaton in the 19th century and was named after the native American long distance runner, Louis ‘Deerfoot’ Bennett, who thrilled crowds in England in the 1860s with his record breaking feats.

More typically muddy conditions in the early 1980s (top left) captured by veteran folklorist Doc Rowe, showing how tough bottle kicking can get. Apart from confronting their opponents, players must also work as a team to sneak under barbed-wire fences, through hedgerows and thorns. More experienced players, as above in 2006, help to co-ordinate the approach to these obstacles, sending runners ahead to catch the barrel on the other side of a hedge, a tactic also often seen at Ashbourne.