

The common theme in this report is mud, and lots of it. Even road races are wet underfoot at the moment.

Bryan Lomas is going from strength to strength in his comeback from injury. He was the lone Harrier in the Ashurst Beacon fell race at Dalton, Skelmersdale, on Saturday 18th January. The race is quite user friendly as it is relatively short for a fell race at 6 miles but does have a stiff 950 feet of climb. It takes in a bit of road and some bridlepaths as well as grassy fields. The weather was bright and correspondingly cold in the wind but despite the dry weather the tracks had standing water and the fields had deep mud. Lomas was not fancying his chances due to a lack of races as a result of injury but was pleasantly surprised by finding himself in a final position of 9th out of 145 finishers in a time of 43:45. Not only is this impressive considering the conditions underfoot which sap the strength, this was also a better time than last year when Lomas had considered himself to be more race ready.

Four Harriers travelled across to Helsby for the popular Four Villages Half Marathon road race on 19th January. This event has been going for some 30 years and unfortunately was cancelled last year due to snow. The race went ahead with no hitches this year and as ever was one that needed to be entered early to avoid disappointment. Charmaine Wood was lucky enough to gain a place but was unable to take it up due to injury. Matt Plummer was the first Harrier home in a good time of 1:52:52. Ali McNinch was using the race as part of her training for the London Marathon, along with Matt and Steve Webb, and finished in 2:05:04. Lucy Rusbridge, new to the Harriers in the autumn of last year is keeping Ali company with her training but is not doing the London Marathon and crossed the line in exactly the same time. Steve Webb, a second claim Harrier, actually ran for his first claim club of Belle Vue but did an excellent time of 1:36:38.

The same day was the Lamb's Longer Leg; part of the Hayfield Series. This is a short, but challenging course, at just over 3 miles long, but packing in some 950 feet of climbing. Pete Carvell braved the wet and cold and had an excellent run, finishing in the top third of a field of over 100 in 34:08.

The following weekend, the 25th January was the Northern Counties Cross Country Championships at Knowlsey where the Harriers were pleased to see that they were not expected to run with the wild animals. This was the second time that the event had been held at this venue so the seasoned cross country competitors had some idea of what to expect. The recent wet weather and dark clouds on the way up did not bode well for the conditions underfoot and all were expecting a mud bath.

The men's team consisted of Bryan Carr, Bryan Lomas, Pete Newham, Chris Hewitson, Steve Pullen and Rob Parkin. The men's event involved 3 laps of 4km over an undulating course and things were a bit crowded for the first half lap before the runners became more strung out. The finishers were given scores depending on placing and the combined score of 2453 gave the men 48th position overall. Whilst this was in the bottom half of the rankings, this was an excellent result as the field included some top runners from high flying clubs who compete regularly in this kind of event. Bryan Carr was the star for the Harriers being in 233rd place out of just over 600 (52:52) Bryan Lomas was only 11 seconds behind his friend in 241st. The other results are as follows: Pete Newham, 57:11; Chris Hewitson, 1:02:30; Steve

Pullen, 1:11:51 and Rob Parkin 1:13:19. Parkin was carrying an injury but his participation was crucial to the team as 6 runners were needed to avoid being disqualified from the team rankings.

This was the first year that the Harriers have entered a ladies team which meant the four brave souls who put themselves forward for the 2 laps arriving in torrential rain, wind and hail were wondering what they were doing there. However the weather brightened although the route remained wet and the team came a commendable 24th out of 32. Jo Moss was 122nd out of 262 in 40:27 with Debbie Hill the second Harrier to cross the line in 42:43. Polly Kennerley finished just over a minute behind Hill in 43:57 and Heather Jackson made up the all important 4th Harrier place well in the top half of the field in 45:56. Well done to all the Harriers who took part.

The on line entry is open for the Cloud Nine Hill Race being held on Sunday 2nd March at 11.00am. This is a scenic and challenging off-road race from Congleton, near the leisure centre, to the trig point on Bosley Cloud and back via the ancient Bridestones. The event is the first of the Congleton Race Series 2014. This event is on line entry only with the closing date being midnight on Thursday 27th February (www.congleton-harriers.co.uk/cloud9) This is an excellent race for those new to fell running as it is well marshaled and is relatively short at 9 miles with 1250 feet of climb.

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