

The Congleton Harriers cross country aficionados had a nervous wait all week to see if the storms and the incessant rain was going to impact the pinnacle of their season: the English National Cross-Country Championships, which this year saw a return scheduling at Wollaton Park in Nottingham. They needn't have worried; whilst emergency parking arrangements had to be put in place by the organisers, the only other impact from the weather was to turn some rather large muddy puddles into larger muddy lakes.

The nice thing about the nationals is that whilst it attracts the elite runners of all ages (rumours were going around that the Brownlee brothers were to put in an appearance) it is also open to mere mortal club runners. The distances are more challenging though with the course being a couple of miles longer than those experienced in regional events. The large number of entrants also make the start a superb spectacle. With 990 entrants in the ladies' event and 1710 in the men's event both starts resembling a charge from Agincourt albeit without the weaponry.

There were five female Harriers in the 5 mile ladies race, which saw them run three laps of the park with each lap being slightly longer than the previous. On top of the muddy lakes, the organisers saw fit to add in some fallen trees to make it more of a steeplechase and some sections of energy sapping glutinous mud to halt the runners in their tracks. Michelle Stevens had a storming run and was 351st in 45:38, Jo Moss was 534th in 49:40, Lucy Rusbridge was 570th in 50:35, Sarah Proudmore (her first outing in one of these events) was 609th in 51:32 and Polly Kennerley was 634th in 52:23.



Michelle Stevens

Photo: Saucony event photo



Polly Kennerley

Photo: Paul Birdsall

There were four male Harriers at the start of the 7.5 mile men's race which followed the same route as the ladies with one additional loop. The race was about 2-3 weeks too early for Chris Moss who, returning from injury, was under strict physio instruction to limit his time and distance which meant he ran a premeditated three of the four laps before halting. Out of the remaining three Harriers Bryan Lomas had the best run finishing 659th in 57:15 (all the additional Manchester cross-country events he has entered this season clearly paying dividends), Adam Powell, running with a dicky knee was 1534th in 75:26 and Nick Budd had an enjoyable run to finish 1580th in 77:36.



Bryan Lomas

Photo: Paul Birdsall

All the Harriers chose to stay over in various locations across the East Midlands and relax. That is except for Michelle Stevens who had decided to double down by entering the Leicestershire Half Marathon on the Sunday. Stevens is in good form at the moment and showed no ill effects from the cross-country as she set a half marathon new personal best, taking over three minutes off her previous best time. She finished 347th out of 1169 runners in a time of 1:46:48.

This Sunday will see the club host the Cloud 9 Fell race which sets off at 11.00 on the Biddulph Valley Way, heads up over the Cloud and back down. If you are out for a walk on Sunday and in the area stop by and give the runners a cheer.

The club is always keen to see new members whether you are a speedy racer (on or off-road) or more of a social runner. So, if you are thinking of joining then just come along to one of the regular/ club runs for a few weeks and try us out for size; you will be made to feel more than welcome with no obligation to join. Regular club runs are held on Monday and Tuesday with speed training runs on a Thursday. Mondays are especially good for runners wanting to try the club out for size and is proving to be very popular.

You can find full details on our Congleton Harriers website: Congleton-harriers.co.uk. You can also connect with the club on Facebook where details of club activities are posted regularly.