

Quite a few of the Congleton Harriers have got into ultra-running, testing themselves over much longer distances across harsh terrain. For the uninitiated, any race over 26 miles is classed as an ultra but many of these events are set at distances far in excess of that; 50 miles, 100 miles and many much in excess of that. The athletes who participate have to undertake extended and rigorous training to build up their endurance, condition their body and develop the mental fortitude to keep going the longer distances battling against physical and psychological challenges. Many of the club have started off on local events such as the Gritstone Trail, the 25 mile route which cuts across the top of The Cloud before graduating onto tougher challenges such as the Ring of Fire and the Dragons Back.

One of the toughest ultra-events, if not the toughest, in the UK is the Montane Spine Winter Race which takes place in January. Starting in Edal in the Peak Distance the full race follows the Pennine Way for 268 miles right up to Scotland to finish on the Cheviots at Kirk Yetholm (there are shorter, slightly less challenging, Spine Sprint and Spine South / Spine North events run concurrently to the main event). The terrain for the most part, is a mixture of peat bog, isolated moor, rocky outcrop set between isolated villages along the route. The athletes have to be self-sufficient carrying all their food, warm gear and emergency equipment and are on the go continuously all day and night except for short rest periods at the checkpoints along the way, and there are only 5 of those across the whole route! Make no mistake, this is a gruelling race with almost half the participants not making it to the end each year.

Not daunted by these stats, buoyed by his 2022 successful completion of the Dragon's Back and not fazed by the falling temperatures, Graham Cooper from Congleton Harriers set off on his attempt on 14<sup>th</sup> January. Graham set off nice and steady with many of the club back home tracking his progress on-line from the warmth of our homes watching with alarm the worsening weather and the increasing number of dropouts. His only company was the occasional other competitor, a few sheep and the marshals at the Checkpoints (which included Congleton Harrier's Suzie Roebuck, who herself had previously successfully completed the Spine Challenger race in June 2022). Graham maintained a steady progress despite the cold through Checkpoint 1 (Hebden Bridge) and up to Checkpoint 2 (Hawes). Unfortunately around CP2 Graham picked up a sprain. He soldiered on for a further 40 miles to CP 3 at Middleton in Teesdale, but unfortunately the sprain got progressively worst and his adventure came to an end after 140 miles. This is a race where there are no winners and losers – just getting to the starting line is a success on it's own and completing 140 miles in such atrocious conditions represented an epic achievement.



Graham Cooper and fellow competitor

Photo: Montane Spine Team

Elsewhere in the start of January meant it was time for the Cheshire Cross Country Championships and there were seven male and three female Harriers in action. This race was off the back of the conclusion of the North Staffs Cross Country League in which the Harriers had performed well with a strong men's team finish of 4<sup>th</sup> in Division 1 and some fine individual performances (special mention to Bryan Lomas who picked up 1<sup>st</sup> place in the MV50 category over the whole series). The race was run at Winsford in some of the muddiest conditions seen for some time.

In the women's race over 4.8 miles, out of the 92 runners, Emily Nott finished 30<sup>th</sup> in 40:59, Gill Armstrong was 67<sup>th</sup> in 48:05 and Georgie Budd was 70<sup>th</sup> in 48:20

In the men's 6.3 mile race, out of the 143 runners, Tom Fellbaum finished 14<sup>th</sup> in 42:35, Chris Moss was 44<sup>th</sup> in 48:56, Bryan Lomas was 57<sup>th</sup> in 50:00, Stuart Rider was 60<sup>th</sup> in 50:15, Tom Walker was 86<sup>th</sup> in 54:09, Jack Sargeant was 106<sup>th</sup> in 57:44 and Nick Budd was 126<sup>th</sup> in 62:14. It was a particularly strong run by Chris Moss who picked up 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the MV50 category.



Harriers post-race at Winsford

Photo: Dean Windsor

Mid-January saw seven Harriers tackling the Four Villages Half Marathon (1134 ran)

Tom Howarth was 32<sup>nd</sup> in 1:18:23, Stuart Rider was 106<sup>th</sup> in 1:25:09, Jessica Knowles was 370<sup>th</sup> in 1:39:50, Danny Jackson was 556<sup>th</sup> in 1:47:57, Nick Wilkins was 576<sup>th</sup> in 1:48:45, Kelly Marshall was 659<sup>th</sup> in 1:52:01 and Stephen Canning was 988<sup>th</sup> in 2:11:39. Congratulations to both Tom Howarth and Stuart Rider who both achieved new Personal Bests.

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2023 there were ten Harriers at the Alderley Park 5-Mile Winter Trail Race (4.6 miles). Hannah Harding was 87<sup>th</sup> in 34:19, Mike Stanley was 117<sup>th</sup> in 35:19, Lucinda Brown was 119<sup>th</sup> in 35:24, Georgie Budd was 135<sup>th</sup> in 36:03, Linda Fairbrother was 180<sup>th</sup> in 37:50, Gill Armstrong was 183<sup>rd</sup> in 37:56, Beth Ambler was 235<sup>th</sup> in 39:35, Christine Gilligan was 312<sup>th</sup> in 42:22, Jackie Moss was 375<sup>th</sup> in 44:20 and Andrea Whiteley was 376<sup>th</sup> in 44:29. Congratulations to Hannah Harding who achieved 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the F35 category.

The start of January also gave the Harriers the opportunity to make some improvements to their running schedule with speed/interval training being moved from the Thursday to the Tuesday, which from early indications is going well. It also saw the start of another Couch to 5K programme, so good luck to all those who are participating in that.

If interested in joining us, there are club runs on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday with most runs setting off from the Congleton Tennis Club. The club is always keen to see new members whether you are a speedy racer or

more of a social runner. So, if you are thinking of 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. You can find full details on our Congleton Harriers website: [Congleton-harriers.co.uk](http://Congleton-harriers.co.uk). You can also connect with the club on Facebook where details of club activities are posted regularly.