

There was more cross country on the last weekend of January for the Congleton Harriers. Three Harriers made the trip up to Witton Country Park in Blackburn to take part in the Northern Cross Country Championship. Open to any runner in the North affiliated to Northern Athletics, this annual race attracts top class runners from all over the north with clubs travelling as far away as Morpeth, York and Cleethorpes. The course at Witton was a fine mixture of undulating open grassland and trails through wooded sections, making it interesting for the competitors. Despite the drizzly weather the ground was reasonably firm apart from one downhill section of the course which was full of gloopy wet mud. There were 499 runners who completed the final event of the day, the men's 11.4km (7-mile) race. Stuart Rider was the first Harrier back finishing 313th in 48:59 followed by Jack Sargeant, 446th in 56:28 and Nick Budd, 470th in 60:19.



Nick Budd, Stuart Rider, Jack Sargeant

Photo: S Rider

On the same weekend it was also one of the Harriers' annual handicap races. Fourteen Harriers lined up at the bottom of the Biddulph Valley Way for a 6.3 mile race up and down the Cloud. Being a handicap race, based upon recent form, the better runners are held back to give the slower runners a head start; the aim is to make for a close finish with most of the runners arriving back at the finish line at the same time.

Andy Critchlow was the first runner back in his first club handicap race in a handicap time of 64:11 (actual time 52:11). He was followed by Iain Thacker, 67:29 (actual

time 56:29), Nick Wilkins, 68:49 (59:49), Chris Moss, fastest man, 68:51 (46:51), Stuart Rider, not feeling any hangover from the previous day's cross country, 68:54 (48:54), Georgie Budd, fastest woman, 68:55 (60:25), Christine Gilligan, also her first handicap race, 72:24 (72:24), Ian Stanway 72:28 (52:28), Louise Roberts, 72:35 (64:05), Gill Armstrong, 73:09 (65:39), Nigel Poole, 73:45 (67:45), Beth Ambler, first handicap race, 75:12 (68:42), Stephen Canning 81:29 (75:29) and Tom Fellbaum, who sportingly slowed down to assist Stephen who picked up an injury, 81:30 (52:30).



Cloud Handicap pre-race briefing

Photo Congleton Harriers

Elsewhere, down in Cornwall James completed the "Arc of Attrition", a 100+ mile ultra along the Cornish coast. James finished the 104 miles in 34 hours 54 minutes coming 206th out of 330 starters. This was James' first 100 miler. Slightly closer to home, Rob Parkin was the sole Harrier at the Stockport Daffodil 10k, finishing 584th out of 1030 runners in 57:02.

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 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. You can also connect with the club on Facebook where details of club activities are posted regularly.