

## Race Reports

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Ribble Valley 10k Road Race. 27.12.2009.

By [David Kelly](#): pdf document for which you may need [Acrobat Reader](#).

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Christmas Parlauf. 22.12.2009.

John Stephens: Fourteen hardy souls braved the sub-zero temperatures for this years Club Christmas Parlauf at 'Swaddlers' on the Team Valley. Actually sixteen if you count Alan (Elders) and myself who almost froze to the spot as recorders for the event. Being the only one of the two of us with gloves I mainly did the writing, with Alan leading on the counting.

The draw for teams at club HQ had thrown up some interesting combinations, none more so than the husband/wife combo of Lawrence and Lesley. Neil had entered into the spirit with a bit of fancy dress, and reports of Gerald joining in with this purely on the merits of being Welsh are completely unfounded.

Group jog down to the Valley, followed by a lap to check the course for ice (Health and Safety even invades the Christmas Parlauf) and allow the teams to complete their warm up, before a quick brief and the event was underway – first team to complete six laps of Swaddlers. The tactical genius of Bill (or so he would have us believe) in running first leg saw the Jon/Bill team take an early lead that was not to be matched (see results). Performance of the evening came from Claire who with Gerald took second spot. There were albeit unsubstantiated reports of Gerald being impeded on the back straight by a wild red haired character, wearing a tam o'shanter (the head gear not the Robert Burns poem) and speaking in a strange guttural tongue. I guess you never know who may be hanging around the TVTE on a Tuesday night before Christmas. Maybe a Christmas reveller gone astray.

The rock-steady pairing of George and Bob were above any controversy and quietly went about their business to record 3rd place, closely followed by the equally task centred Dave and Adam. A close fought battle for 5th and 6th saw Neil easing up too early only to be pipped at the post by the ever alert Shaun (never trust a teacher!) and claim 5th spot with Allan. Just as well Caroline seemed happy with events and enjoyed her run. Allan must have worked hard as the prize giving back at the club had to be held up while he completed his recovery before presenting prizes to the first three teams. Completing a fine evenings competition were Lawrence and Lesley in 7th place and at the same time claiming first place in the husband/wife category. Cold soup for tea I gather for Lawrence.

As mentioned there were prizes, presented by Allan (Clark). Each pairing of the first 3 teams receiving a limited edition technical top. Ok, the last of the trail series t-shirts. However, they are limited edition. Thanks to all that turned out and made for a short, sharp session but more importantly a very enjoyable final training evening before Christmas. Merry Christmas to one and all!

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Simonside Cairns Fell Race. 13.12.2009. BM - 11mi/1420' [18km/430m].

Lawrence Johnson: After running the hobble at Allendale last week I was on a high having done an 11min P.B. So I was looking forward to running the simonside cairns one of my favourite winter fell races lots of mud, bogs, tussocks and rocky downhill's.

I was on my own this week due to a partying Scotsman, a rambling teacher, a floor layer who said he had to work (yeh! right) and a lecturer who was going to see Santa. So I arrived at Rothbury with ideal conditions not too cold and not raining. I registered for the race and chatted to a few of my fellow runners about the run to come.

11 o'clock came and off we went uphill on road to start with then onto the mud. I caught a runner called Brian Robson who had informed me last week that he was going to beat me this week, so I took up the challenge and gave him a wave on the way past. I pushed on running up the hills that I had to walk up last year. Once on the top it took all my time to stay upright as it was very boggy I

settled in to a steady pace picking a few runners off as I went, the leaders had long since disappeared into the distance, but I was aware of people behind me one came past then another both from DFR, one I had ran past in the last few meters last week. I dug in and got on their heels then Karen from NFR came past 1st Lady, so I tucked in behind her, the terrain got very technical stumps, branches, boggy ditches just what I like, Karen went past one of the DFR runners so I followed only one in front now he hung on a bit longer but we nipped past. We entered the woods and it was like night we couldn't see any tapes only some Xmas lights (Don't ask) so we just headed for the daylight and emerged nearly in the right place. There was now another NFR runner who had joined us as we climbed up simonside crag. At this point I noticed another runner right behind me a Wallsend runner I thought NO WAY! The rivalry from the harrier league had reared its head on the fells I got to the top and was off like a scalded cat behind the two NFR runners.

We made our way along the ridge now more solid under foot and a lot more downhill. I edged past Karen only to go flying as I caught foot on a rock, a quick roll then back on my feet and a well done from Karen. Now the serious part about 3miles of downhill the NFR runner David Atkinson was just ahead and I was keeping up ok, we managed to avoid a few rambles and their dogs but once we hit the last piece of road into Rothbury he was too strong for me and pulled away. But then I noticed another runner just ahead a DFR runner so off I went again managed to catch him with about half a mile to go, across the bridge and to the finish phew! I looked at my watch 1.35.27 exactly 15mins faster than last year (I'm not on drugs honest) 16th place out of 115 starters I'm well pleased with that, just need some team mates so we can give NFR and DFR a run for their money. So any volunteers for the future it is great fun better than I make it sound, once you try it you will be hooked.

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### Hexhamshire Hobble Fell Race. 06.12.2009.

John Stephens: There was a change of organiser for this year's Hobble, with Allen Valley Striders taking up the baton. With this came a change of race HQ, the School (just below the Fire Station) being used and a slight extension of the course by about 100m for this Category C medium – 10.6 miles, 1220 ft ascent – fell race. One thing that didn't change was the post race tea and cake, which always hits the spot.

Lawrence, Shaun, George and myself travelled out to Allendale for the event. For George this was to be his debut at a fell event, and what a classic to kick off a fell running career. Weather was a bit kinder than last year's snow and ice, but with a lot of rain during the week and overnight conditions were certain to be heavy. This was confirmed by Phil Sanderson at the start who announced that he had already been around the course earlier in the day! Changing conditions at Allendale School were excellent, and at 1050 a field of 180 runners assembled for the race brief on the School field. 1100, and we were off, over the field, down into the village followed by the sharp (and very long) ascent up onto the fells. Once on top it was very wet and boggy indeed making for pretty hard work, particularly along the section across Hangman's Hill. Lawrence's birthday on Saturday, pressies including a pair of water proof socks which would have come in handy in the conditions. Thankfully the rain kept off for most of the race although quite chilly on top which made choice of long sleeve base layer, hat and gloves more than sound.

Coming off Hangman's Hill in 10th place started to lose ground on those in front, and indeed lost a place as Graham (Burns, DFR) caught me on the climb at Westburnhope Farm. Still, more than pleased how things were going when I 'enjoyed' a fall and a fairly spectacular slide on my knees – just think of Carlos Tevez running/sliding on his knees to the crowd at Eastlands after scoring. Come to think of it I don't think that even the fiery Argentinian could traverse as far as I managed on my knees at that point. Anyway enough messing around better get up and get on with running. Towards the end of Burnbridge Moor every runner had a less than pleasant surprise when the (quite wide) path was completely flooded with seemingly no real options to go around. No choice other than to plough through, with a great deal of uncertainty of what the ground was like underneath. Answer came quick enough, when I found myself up to my knees in water but also quite ludicrously laughing to myself at the thought of Lawrence and his waterproof socks – let's see your feet stay dry through that then! Water was, not surprisingly, very cold and I was thankful that the road and long/final descent back for the village wasn't far away as my left foot had gone numb with just a very strange vibratory sensation being transmitted up and down my left leg at each foot contact with the ground. Noticed a photographer at the gate off the moor and onto the road – must be related to Steve or perhaps a general trait of race photographers to catch everyone at their potential worst.

Back down the hill past the Fire Station (busy with building work), and turn to the finish across the

School field. Very happy to finish 11th and although not comparable on the fells, just under a minute quicker than last year over heavier conditions. This was nothing compared with Lawrence and his 22nd, taking over 10 minutes off his previous time. Shaun enjoyed his first run out at the Hobble managing to edge out his brother Paul – well ok 2 full minutes, it was a thick edge just like the post race cake. We think George enjoyed his first 'proper' fell race, but his face possibly betrayed him when offering to contribute to petrol costs, me stating it wasn't necessary and all three of us informing him that he was now 'contracted' to run four fell races, as we would take turns with lifts over the next month or two. Four for the price of one – what bargain!

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### Thirsk 10 mile. 29.11.2009.

Jonathon Stephens: Missing my first ever NEHL in my running 'career' (well, all two seasons of it...), I was lining up at the Thirsk 10 Mile road race which also incorporated the Northern 10 Mile Championships. As with any bigger race, the plan was to at least gain a PB but a decent placing (in relative terms!) was top of the agenda.

Prior to the race I wasn't too sure as to how I would feel on the day, mostly due to everything that goes with having a new-born baby of now 9 weeks. Training seems a lot harder when already tired from lack of sleep and rest! Sometimes it's more like forcing myself out of the door than feeling fresh and ready to run a good session – but perhaps it will make me stronger (the night before the race consisted of on/off sleeping between 1am and 6am...).

However, training has gone well over the past 6 weeks or so and it's more a process of getting the job done than thinking about it too much; probably a good idea with the lack of running routes when it's dark out in the sticks. My 'favourite' route is a toss-up between the one that takes me past my house two times and the one that consists of numerous half-mile laps round a nearby posh housing estate – they probably think I'm eyeing up their houses for burglary purposes by now

Basically, I thought I'd either surprise myself on the day or collapse in a heap somewhere around the roads of Thirsk. Worth a go though.

Checking the weather at 7am told me that Thirsk was experiencing heavy rain and strong winds; should I just go back to bed? I asked myself the same question as I was driving down the A1 with my windscreen wipers on turbo. However, as I turned off the A1 and got into Thirsk there was no rain and the wind had ceased to a slight breeze. I don't know how the organisers did it, but they seemed to have conjured up some magical 'weather wall' around the course to keep the bad stuff out. All in all, great conditions for distance running; 5-6 degrees, total cloud cover, and only a slight breeze. The rain started later on during the race but only a bit of a light shower.

The race got off to a late start with, in all seriousness, around 90% of the field not being at the start on time; most seemed to fancy a slow walk up to the start. Anyway, at 11:10 we were away and by 11.12 my shoes and socks were soaked through; the road we started on had experienced a bit of flooding and with no way round the large puddle, straight through was the only way.

My idea of trying to be more 'competitive' meant that I had to go along with the very fast start; streams of runners shot off at what I thought was a tad fast for some (including me). However, I didn't want everyone to get away and stay in front so ended up getting through the first mile in 5.07 (yes, that is too quick!). I then settled down with a couple of other 'lads' and tried to stick to the task. The first few miles passed by very quickly with the course proving to be a quick one indeed; I actually managed a 10k PB of around 34mins dead (based on my 6 mile split)! The course is all on good country roads, passing through some villages (including a lovely pub at around half-way - the Sunday lunch smelt very appealing as I passed) and is pretty much the flattest course that you could ask for.

A key point came for me at around 7 miles as I was starting to get that feeling in which you would quite like to slow down a bit as you're getting into the 'discomfort zone'. I've been told that I need to 'learn to push on' so as I was momentarily passed by another runner, and contrary to what my brain wanted, my legs decided to go with him rather than stay with the fellas I was with. I think that this is the first time that this has happened to me in a race - I made myself push on. From now on, I wasn't too bothered about the time but it was just a race between me and this other guy. Over the next couple of miles, we shared the workload; one of us would push on and then get tired and swap. Overall, pace did drop slightly over these last few miles but it didn't feel like it - the effort was still up

there, which was proven by us catching and passing two or three competitors. It was a refreshing change to still feel able to push on a bit after a fast start to the race, and basically be in 'racing mode'. I think this may be a benefit of training when already tired.

In the last mile, I pushed on again, and my fellow competitor was dropped! This gave me a bit of confidence to keep pushing to the finish line in 25th place and in 56:36 - a PB by 1m11s since Tynedale 11 weeks ago. Full results here: <http://www.ukresults.net/2009/thirsk10.html>

Happy enough with that, considering the quality of the field, I sharply got back in the car, put the windscreen wipers on turbo and got back to the family. There was also the nice feeling of knowing that there were a couple of bottles of 'Hobgoblin' at home with my name written all over them!

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## Start Fitness N.E. Harrier League, Farringdon. 28.11.2009.

John Stephens: For the 101st year of the NEHL, it was all change. With Blaydon no longer on the Harrier League calendar, it was the short journey down the A19 to open this year's season, our first in Division 1, and a bit of a baptism of fire it has to be said. One thing doesn't change though and that's the cold snap that seems to always accompany the start of the cross country season, a cool 6 degrees celcius for most of the afternoon.

Almost managed to time my arrival perfectly with the tent wrestling event well under way and canvas winning by a fall. All I can say is that it was a good job there was very little wind around, a (rather generous I think) 5/10 tent erection score for the first fixture, our lack of practice over the summer catching up. The course was soft following the torrential rain over the past week or so, but my 10p for an anticipated ferry ride across the stream was proven unnecessary as the water was not running particularly high at all.

Great to see our two stalwarts for the U-13 boys turning out again this year. Liam and Kyle seemed to enjoy the conditions and finish strongly to record an excellent 36th and 37th.

Although we had a few of our regular runners missing, including Gerald (watching the Swans sink at SportsDirect@St James' Park), Jon (competing at Thirsk on Sunday), Shaun (working), Jim, Mick, and Dave (all injured) we still managed to get an impressive 11 runners out for the senior men's event. A big cross country welcome for Luke and Les, in their first NEHL turnout for the club. If there was a prize, Les certainly would have been in the shake down for his sartorial dress sense – bright orange spikes, cream/buff long shorts (complete with several handy pockets) topped off by the club vest. Neil had somehow wangled himself into the slow pack for the start of the season, leaving me on my loansome in the mediums and Jon Archer in a similar position in the fast pack.

With the time at 1317 and 30 seconds exactly and we were off, giving chase to the slow pack around the park field and onto the first hill. Found myself settled in with Stephen Grey (Elswick) and Fred Smith (Saltwell) on the first lap and began to pick my way through. As stated, soft going but also quite slippery in places particularly the tight left hander at the bottom of the first descent, either side of the stream, the sharp (almost 150 degrees) left hander after crossing the bank, and the steep hill up from the bottom field. Predictably the surface cut up with each lap which made passing quite tricky, either requiring a run through the brambles at the side (literally sweating blood), or some rather ungentlemanly conduct to ease folks out of the way. I don't think I was alone in opting for a mixture of the two, but still almost ended up in the trees on the narrow path after the downhill on lap two – ran a bit wide and managed to take someone with me. Shall we dance – actually they did look a bit startled to be honest. Come to think of it did look a bit like Brucie – nice to see you etc etc.

Anyway, as usual it was a great afternoon out, snatches of conversation with folks as we met on the way around and a great relief to us all to finish a team, rather credibly it has to be said to ensure that we did score. Can't really afford to not have a scoring fixture this year, and a big 'well done and thank you' to all that ran.

Just can't keep Alan (Elders) away – at the meal on Friday (Latin Quarter, very good) he was certain that he wouldn't be running on Saturday, but would come along to help with the tent and maybe run a lap. I think it was the rather pleasant surprise of meeting in the Gateshead Arms, an establishment not

normally noted for the quality of its ale, only to find a more than passable pint of Black Sheep on tap that did the trick. May have to return and re-evaluate the 'Arms'.

Back to Farringdon, and I'm sure Alan was relieved to finally dust off a bottle of wine and give to Lesley, who turned out in the ladies race, stuck to her task admirably, claim the 20 grand prix points and get out two classic quotes in the process: start of lap 2 when passing Lawrence and me "I'm the George Routledge of the ladies event" and further on (I'd managed to cross the fields to give a bit of cheer in a number of places), "haven't you just cheered me on over there?" – final lap, it must have been the lactate build up. The final point was probably an influence at the finish where Lesley, having done the hard bit (get around) almost managed to not get her effort recorded when she almost missed the finish funnel until directed down to get her finish recorded.

Anyway, the cross country season is back and it's like it has never been away! See results for times etc. Next NEHL fixture isn't until January, but we are looking to get a team out at the NECC Championships, at Darlington in a couple of weeks time. See Alan if you haven't done so already. If we can get a team out there then maybe we'll look towards the Northerns in January and even try and get a team out for the National, which is in Leeds this/next year – you know what I mean.

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### Tynedale Jelly 10 mile. 06.09.2009.

John Stephens: The first weekend in September, two weeks before the GNR so it must be the 'Jelly Tea' at Tynedale. Mind you, my participation last year was the first time I'd run the event since the early 1990s since when it truly was a Jelly-tea race. If my memory serves me correctly run on a Saturday afternoon in the 'good old days'.

Back to this year and the logistical fun there is in sorting transport out for a point to point race. Surely the easiest way is to buy a bus ticket with the race entry (only a couple of quid) but runners being runners we've got to sort out an elaborate system of dropping off vehicles at start and finish, lifts back to the start etc etc. Mentioned my memory already and it let me down twice in relation to this race. Number one came at 2200 on Saturday evening when a casual enquiry from Vicky brought minor panic to the Stephens household – "Thought you were giving Neil a lift to the race tomorrow". Bloody hell, yes! Anyway about 20 minutes later and retrieval of Neils phone number from Allan and we were sorted. Must say it was very good of Neil to sound so casual and relaxed about it, like he fully expected me to phone at 2220 on a Saturday evening. Anyway, Sunday morning picked up Neil, rendezvous with Jonathon at Ovingham Middle School (who had managed to get one of the final parking spots) and we were on our way.

Usual milling around at the start, and good to see so many Low Fell Runners out – 15 in total - should keep Mike busy with the grand prix calculations. Bit of an overcast day (100% cloud cover) but good temperate conditions (around 14 degrees) and a bit of light rain (mid-race onwards). Good to see some things don't change with a bit of crack from Bill McGurk, the usual warning to the i-pod athletes (not that they can hear anything anyway) and then wait for him to leg-it to the lead car which always, bizarrely, seems to park around 50 metres up the road. Bill, why don't you ask them to park closer to the start?

1100, bang on time and we're off. One of the benefits of being an ageing athlete and not in fantastic shape at present is that you can get a good view of proceedings, well for a short time anyway. The two Jon's seemed to get a clean start and get away well as did Neil who settled in a group just in front of mine and proceeded to pull away. Didn't seem too long before we entered Corbridge (some slick marshalling and traffic management there – you tend to notice these things when you're older) and then starting the long drag up towards half way. I gather by around that point the lead 5 runners (including Jon Archer) had broken away from the rest. Indeed Jon (Stephens) said he ran most of the second half of the race pretty much isolated. Apologies to Brian (Hume) at this point as about half way up the hill he pulled alongside (on his bike) and made pleasant enquiries of my progress, although I'd taken a fairly steady approach all I could manage at that point was a cursory "yep, ok". Not particularly social it has to be said. Sorry mate!

Half way at 30:48ish and surely heading for a (very enjoyable) pw – first time I've taken over the hour to run 10 mile road race looked very much on the cards. However, felt quite strong over the second half, got away from the group I was in and from 7 miles onwards seemed to make fairly serious inroads to Neils group managing to catch one of the Elswick lads that dropped off the back at the little hill around 9.5 miles – well, you could smell the jelly at that that point. Mine's a blackcurrent please!

Finally pleased to finish in 60:47, for what was, yep, a pw (personal worst, if you hadn't guessed – hope Mike doesn't take points off for that!) but one that was bound to come along sometime. Managed to close within 20 sec of Neil who ran very consistently to finish 33rd – looking good for New York.

Up at the sharp end Jon Archer started his preparation for the Birmingham Half Marathon with an excellent run to finish 3rd (53:36), and Jon Stephens took 3 minutes off his best to record 57:46, in the process enjoying a little fuller conversation with Brian around the middle of the race. Behind me were some great performances, with a pb from Melanie, and the likes of Bill and Louise warming up nicely for the GNR on the 20th. Have to say that Stan looked the 'freshest' finisher trotting over the line in 1:40:25.

Full club results are up on the web site, which also includes a fantastic result in the team event where the two Jon's and Neil finished second. Oh yea, and the second memory lapse came at the School when I managed to leave my club vest in the gym which Jon Archer kindly picked up for me. Must have been in my haste for the jelly and tea ..... and lo the blackcurrent jelly was delicious and plentiful. More than sated on the trip back to Hexham to collect the car.

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### The Grisedale Horseshoe Fell Race AM - 10mi/5000' [16km/1500m]. 05.09.2009

Lawrence Johnson: I decided to do this race some weeks ago as I fancied getting back on the high fells in the Lake District after enjoying the Saunders mountain marathon in July.

So I put out an open invitation to the members of the low fell club to join me in this venture, I got various replies some not printable here, one said that he was doing his hair?? You know who you are, one was celebrating family birthdays, and some were doing the jelly race the following day so no takers then.

I started to research the race for some tips on the route etc. And found out it was supposed to be tougher than the Ben Nevis race which is on the same day only 4400ft of climbing instead of 5000ft of the Grisedale not having done either I didn't know how tough either was.

Me and Lesley arrived at Glenridding with an hour to spare weather was damp and just starting to rain. I registered for race and decided to run in shorts and vest top a decision I regretted quite quickly.

11.30 came and off we went very steady and straight up Birkhouse moor. After about a mile down came the rain a horrible misty drizzle I was soaked to the skin in seconds and with a strong wind now blowing I was freezing. After another mile we turned off the path straight up the side of Catsycam. I now decided to put on my waterproof but my hands were so cold it took me some minutes to get it on. There was a girl came running back down saying that she was not happy and was going back which seemed like a good idea and I nearly went with her, but a thanks to NFR runner Peter Reed he said just dig in and keep going so onward and upward.

We reached CP1 on the summit of Catsycam and by now we couldn't see more than 20m or so, and wind was gusting at about 50mph. We descended off Catsycam then on to a ridge SWIRRAL EDGE, the visibility was poor probably just as well as I noticed a very large drop to my left and the path was now only about a foot wide and getting steeper, rockier and slippier. Then we were climbing up rocky slabs to get on to the Helvelyn plateau. Once on the top we started to run again only to be greeted by 50mph gusts of wind. There was what we thought a CP but the guy sitting all wrapped up informed us he was not a marshal and just selling the big issue? We headed on trying to keep warm and I was trying to keep up with the guys in front. My legs by now were numb and I felt like I was drunk as we started the steep decent to Grisedale tarn, I remembered the advice I got from Rob Stephens NFR he warned me to keep left so not to end up in the wrong valley. Out of the clouds we came and smack on the tarn and the CP2 phew! By now I had started to thaw out, we crossed the river and started to climb up St Sunday crags I had my second wind and started picking off runners on the way up and leaving my companions from Helvelyn behind. After the CP3 at the summit I headed down with a couple of runners who were now following me. I found the drop off down a scree slope (Thanks again to Rob Stephens NFR as he sent me a photo of where the drop off is) Now it was time to play the two lads behind me said DOWN THERE!! I said hope you have got good grips and off I went jumping, sliding, running what a rush I never saw the two lads after that?? 2000ft of downhill heaven.

After another river at the bottom and CP4 with a well done from some youngsters it was the sting in the tail 8.5miles into the run and a sheer climb of 1100ft hands and knees stuff and I was still passing other runners I got to the top CP5 crossed a wall then turned the wrong way, so I decided to just keep going as I could see Glenridding and the finish and it turned out to be the same distance just had more bracken to run through.

Got to the finish in a time of about 2 hrs 48 mins to see Lesley waiting with the camera and a smile. I was happy to get round under 3hrs which was my target.

It was without doubt the toughest race or in fact physical challenge I have done (if you think marathons are tough give this a try) I was cold, wet and knackered would I do it again? Yes in an instant looking forward to some company from the club next year??

LAWRENCE JOHNSON

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### North York Moors 'Tees Forest' Trail Race Series 2009.

Carl Watson: Well: Finished the N.Y.M. Tees Forest Trail Race Series, only missing the 1 out of 6 in total, the last been the handicap race at Newham Grange on a country trail track .

So no sub 16.00 minute 5 k for me, or was I just dreaming of doing that.

But anyway back to reality, this was a well organised and friendly affair, arranged by the hosts NYM. So if you fancy something different, you should give it a try next year, as I will be, and trying to claim the 1st placed vet instead of my 2nd placing this year.

So, off to spend my winnings at UP and RUNNING .

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### Sunderland 5k. 22.07.2009.

John Stephens: Apparently holding one of the quickest courses in the UK, the Sunderland 5k is a good opportunity for those seeking a new PB. The route comprises of what is basically a loop of a small lake/pond (when does a pond become a lake?) and then a larger loop, taking in the two lake/ponds at the Silksworth Sports Complex. Fortunately the ski-slope does not form part of the course...

Seven Low Fell athletes made the short trip south to this year's event on which turned out to be a windy and overcast evening.

On the start-line we were all told by the organiser that we would get PB's – the guy next to me asked for this in writing but was declined. Once we were underway, the first 800m or so was as frantic as ever; a large number of runners (some a bit over-eager) trying to get a bit of space on a path about 10ft wide. I found myself on the receiving end of some 'elbow action' as about 40 runners passed me down the opening descent. Getting around them proved difficult and I found that there was as much 'skipping' involved, by trying to avoid others' feet, as running.

As soon as we turned the corner to follow the route along the far side of the pond, we were met with quite a strong headwind; tucking in behind groups and then picking them off was the order of this lap. The first smaller lap was over with quickly and it was then time to face the headwind for about a mile on the second larger lap. By this time I had overtaken a few more competitors and found myself settled into a group of three. By 'settled' I don't actually mean by any stretch that this was comfortable! On approaching the large lake, the leaders were already on the other side of it; Mark Hood (Sunderland) ended up eventual winner in 14:45 followed by Serod Batochir (Morpeth and Mongolia) in 14:57. The Ladies race winner was Emma Raven of Chester-le-Street in 17:14, who

had incidentally out-kicked me in the car park of this year's Blaydon Race in June.

The closing 400m of this race tends to be quick – it follows a narrow path (about two-man wide) which means that overtaking is difficult. So what happens if there are people trying to get past you? You just have to run harder or get trampled!

I was pleased to take some 'scalps' from a few more fellas that would normally finish in front of me and a PB is always welcome.

Dave (McAtomney) was our second runner in, followed by Dave (Nicholson) Melanie (Evans) – 9th lady, Mike (Stacey), Brian (Hume) and Geoff (Hume); well done to all.

On a separate note, well done to Gerald who competed in what I think was his first open-water swim as part of the Sun City Triathlon on Sunday. When I saw 'Sun City Triathlon', I was thinking of somewhere exotic, which might have been much better for sea-swimming. But no - it was Seaburn, so that'll be the North Sea then! Brrr.

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### Saunders Mountain Marathon. 04/05.07.2009.

John Stephens: First weekend in July so it must be SLMM time, with this years event being held (to quote the 'welcome' information) "over the rocky, mine strewn Coniston fells and north into the upper Duddon and Esk valleys" – and indeed it was. 'Brutal' I think the term is.

Having secured a bit of an early finish at work, Neil, Laurence and I travelled across to the event base at the John Ruskin School, Coniston enjoying the scenery and the heroic effort of Andy Murray on the way. Met up with Shaun and Aiden (who were pairing up for a go at Carrock Fell class) and went about putting up the team tent for the overnight stay before the start. Just as we were putting in the final peg, Paul (Shaun's brother, unable to secure an early work finish) arrived with remarkable timing. Paul was teaming up with Laurence in the Carrock Fell class also, whilst Neil and I were going to give the Kirkfell class another go.

After a good feed at Wilfs (event caterer, excellent) and a quick look at the gear courtesy of Pete Bland Sports – it's ok Shaun, mum's the word on that one – what else is there to do on a Friday night in Coniston than head off for a pint of the local brew. Not sure if this was a taster of things to come but we certainly did seem to (initially at least) have a navigational problem in locating a suitable establishment that was to our liking. For Neil and me this certainly wasn't to be the only navigational problem of the weekend.

Conditions over the weekend were much better than last year at Helvellyn (very wet, cold, windy), but didn't seem so when we went up to the start at the Copper mine Valley, about a 20 minute walk from the event base. From the start Neil and I were due to navigate up to the first check point beyond Levers Water, I say 'due' as we somehow ended up at Low Water (about 1K SW of where we should have been. Clearly we were going to have a bit of a problem adjusting to the 1:25000 maps being used this year (had a tendency to misjudge distances ++ on day 1) – reasons to be cheerful about 1.5 out of 10 at that point. Still the benefit of such a calamitous start is that things can only get better. At least the sun came out and sprits lifted to at least 2 out of 10 when we finally got to our check point even though wasted about 45 mins with the cock-up. The terrain certainly was rocky over the rest of day one with a seemingly continuous series of ascents and descents that were pretty savage with the added bonus of quite a lot through boulder fields. Some of the points up around Black Crag and Cold Pike were really quite challenging e.g. 'pond between knolls' at Blake Rigg – yep, great guys, but which one? There are at least 5 up there, it's a pretty damp place. Anyway towards the end of our first day stint confidence was picking up (6.5) as we started to get our heads around the map scale and the terrain. Still, somewhat less than chuffed with 59th place it has to be said as we arrived at the overnight stop at Turner Hall Farm.

Meanwhile, in Carrock Fell Class, Paul and Laurence were having a grand time, with Laurence doing his usual downhill kamikaze which strangely Paul seemed loathe to join in (I wonder why). Anyway Day 1 saw them finish in a highly credible 71st position. Once we had got the tent up, managed to catch up with Paul and Laurence to get the chat for the day which soon turned to some concern over the whereabouts of Shaun and Aiden. Needn't have worried as in they trotted in after a long day out on the hills – has to be said probably the most impressive performance of the weekend from Aiden.

On the way Shaun was able to garner some valuable insights into the linguistics of the naming of certain land features e.g. decided to descend from the ridge around Great Carrs via Hell Gill. Clue is in the name apparently – not a very nice place. Have to confess, very guiltily, that Neil and I overheard a team planning to ascend through the very same Gill after coming off Red How the next day and didn't say anything to them (well I guess it is a race) but did think "maybe not the best plan". Anyway, very sensibly Shaun and Aiden opted not to do the route the next day but to take a more leisurely stroll back to Coniston and give us a cheer in later in the day.

As usual the overnight stop is 'cosy' to say the least. Two men into one very small tent – answers on a postcard please. However, after 6 plus hours on the fells you could virtually fall asleep standing up. So after a slap up meal, becoming a bit of a set meal with us – tomato soup with crutons, followed by vegetable risotto, and a brew (lots of fluids actually – bit dehydrated) we got to sleep for about 2200 and slept soundly until around 0600. Not so great for Laurence apparently who followed up his paltry 4 hours sleep on Friday night with 'em, not much more on Saturday – apparently the cue for the toilets is pretty non-existent at 0200 though!

Day 2 starts with a chasing start for the leaders of each category from 0715 with the rest going off between 0805 and 0815. The crack was that Neil and I were on a chasing start as we were 'chasing' about half the field in our category. So following a breakfast of vegetable pasta with olives, and yes you could taste the olives, we packed up and shipped out. The outstanding memory of day 2 (besides the beautiful weather – which I'll return to shortly) was a long trudge up to Hard Knott to pick up a point, traversing around the Steeple to descend 500m into Mosedale, through the beck and then ascend 500m to the summit crag at Little Stand. Quite a train of competitors at that point from our class and very little chat!

Ah yes the weather – really great, necessitating the use of sun cream but also raising the spectre of dehydration. To augment water supply Neil had gone for a titanium mug to drink from any fast flowing stream (above 300m, usually ok, so we were reliably informed) whilst I opted for the slightly 'greener', recyclable (and cheaper) option in using a Heinz beans can (sans beans of course). Said can has now been deposited in the recycling bin and was fine. Unfortunately Neil's super duper mug got a bit bent (although still highly serviceable) during a fall – one of many for both of us as they're pretty mandatory events as you can imagine. Reasons to be cheerful rating hovering somewhere between 7 and 9.5 for all of day 2, as we managed to adjust to the map a bit better finishing 6th for the day which lifted us to a very respectable 36th overall in our class. Very pleased to see Shaun and Aiden at the finish, and even more pleased to get rehydrated. Paul and Laurence weren't too far behind, finishing 62nd, day 2, Carrock Fell class which lifted them to 66th for the overall event. Finally came the eagerly anticipated refuelling courtesy of Wilfs which then continued all the way home and well into the evening. Burn a lot of calories over the two days. Laurence was going to weigh himself when he got home but probably put most of any weight loss back on by then – hope so anyway. As Paul observed at the overnight stop "You don't really see anyone who is obese at this type of event". I wonder why? Maybe the NHS/government should be investing in this type of thing for some kind of crash course fat camp? You can certainly see the appeal – plenty of fresh air and exercise for sure.

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## Tynedale 10k. 01.07.2009.

Jonathon Stephens: A total of seventeen Low Fell'ers 'embraced' the heat and humidity to complete this year's ever-popular Tynedale 10k. With the humidity feeling more like Thailand than Tynedale it was guaranteed that the going would be tough.

After a short 'warm-up' the crowds descended up the mile-long hill (at least we only run down it!) to the start line at Ovington and we were all away by 7.30 on the dot. Adam (Knox) put in a bit of a sprint and wound up leading the race for around 200m, possibly being deceived by the sharp downhill start. A bit further down the field, I found myself being sharply overtaken by a young guy from Glasgow Uni who seemed adamant to get past and duly made his way to the front.

Being slightly naïve of the conditions, I pushed on a bit in the first two miles with Les Smith (Heaton) and ended up going through in less than 11 minutes. Slightly further back, John (Stephens) was possibly feeling the conditions a bit after having to take a short 'nausea-induced break'. Still, in true distance-runner fashion, he decided to push on.

Although normally a quick course, there are a few noticeable gradients during the second half of the course which seemed to be slightly exaggerated by the conditions. A bit of help came from the good

local support which always gives you a little push. At around four miles in, I started to feel a bit 'off' and it felt like I was jogging. At this point, Les Smith and Rob Hand (Durham City) made good company and we pushed each other on. We managed to catch the keen young man from Glasgow (more likely he had slowed down more so!) but in turn we were also caught by 'Scary' Mary Wilkinson (Bingley). I don't know why she is 'scary', but she did look comfortable as she cruised past! Mary went on to finish as first woman with an excellent 35m21s.

Those who ran may have noticed the absence of the fifth mile-marker (or at least I did) and after running for what felt like an eternity after the fourth, the sight of our club support informing me of "500 to go" felt like a blessing (thanks!).

David Kirkland (Alnwick) continued his good-form to take the men's top spot in 32m27s. A bit further down the field I finished 15th and, although slightly disappointed by the time, was pleased to finish among guys who have comfortably beat me this year. John (Stephens) recovered from his short break to finish as first V50 and 23rd overall. James (Skilling), Neil (Morris) and Adam (Knox) all followed in closely together in 41st, 43rd and 47th place. Well done to Anna (McClellan) and Cheryl (Stanley) who made up or female contingent. Club results are [here](#).

The pie and peas supper that followed seemed to go down a treat along with a good sugary cup of tea. If there was an award for 'Best-Dressed Gentleman' it would have to go to Neil who managed to slip in to a nice trouser and shirt combo for supper and a pint; he sets future precedence for all of us!

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### Watergate Trail Race & Allendale 8. 30/31.05.2009.

John Stephens: Scorchio! Indeed it certainly was. Last weekend apparently was the hottest May weekend for 20 years, making for picturesque scenery yet character building conditions at both events.

Scorchio 1. The second running of the clubs Watergate Trail Race (approx 10K – well b\*\*\*dy near enough from my and Allan's measurements) witnessed a smaller size entry and a total contrast from the rather damp conditions of last years first running. However when all is said and done, it turned out to be a grand day thanks to the efforts of everyone who turned out to marshal/help out and also the added bonus of a first shot at a family / young athletes run this year.

Allan and I were joined by Laurence for the 0600 start to set the course up. It's surprising how many people access the park – dog walkers, cyclists, walkers/joggers – at that early hour. Some great crack with all and sundry apart from one dog owner who had seemingly gotten out of the wrong side of the bed and didn't have a good word to say about runners or public events in the park. Yep, I know, a really extreme idea – a public event in a public park. Still, takes all sorts. The lady's main bug bear seemed to be (despite me highlighting that we were in the process of setting up the course) that there were no notices (Allan was putting them up at the time). Had to chuckle but of course too well mannered to point out that she didn't seem to read notices anyway with her dog running around off its lead – plenty of notices to ask dog owners to keep their pets on leads in the park. Have a nice day!

Usual query from the race referee about a lead cyclist for the main event. Same answer as last year – a cyclist wouldn't get around the course. We are considering using a lead horse next year. Seriously, the officials did a great job once again. A few scares with a couple of marshals finding their positions or not as the case may be. Classic had to be the radio conversation between me, Allan, and Keith re the whereabouts of Dave. Keith assuring me that Dave was in position which I did question being at his spot and no Dave. Phil eventually tracked him down walking through the woods in a direction well away from his post.

Anyway, on to the main event. An impressive run by Lee Millmore of Birtley A.C to win the race although Elswicks Stephen Gray was closing fairly rapidly towards the finish. There was also an excellent run by Adam (Knox) to finish in 5th place, if somewhat bizarrely beaten by A Fox from Morpeth. Puns aside an outstanding run from the first lady finisher to finish in fourth, with the second lady (and last years winner) Jane Mooney finishing in 7th place.

Sincere thanks to everyone for their help with the event. Here's to similar weather but a larger field next year.

Scorchio 2. There was a 'magnificent eight' representation from the club at the previous days Allendale 8. Neil, Paul, Jon, Gordon, George, Mick, Cheryl and myself (with support from Vicky and also Paul's family) travelled to take part in this scenic event that has been quite accurately described as a fell race on tarmac. Chatting to one of the race organisers this week, apparently someone complained because they didn't view it as a PB course. Takes all sorts. Maybe they're kind of missing the point on this one – just run and enjoy!

The Allendale fair is a great all round event with plenty to do after the race. Loads of stalls and other events to watch including 'Allendale's got talent' convincingly hosted by dummies of Simon, Amanda and Piers. I was fortunate to witness (again) the performance of the 'Allendale Clapton' – Bill, you missed a treat.

At the race start, good turn out and after a brief bit of pre-race patter from Brendan (race organiser) we were off. The field quickly strung out as Jon cleared out by the first mile and the race became a bit of a procession. If you're going to win, may as well mark down your intent from the off I guess! Great run from Jon, looked very strong all the way and I should know as I just about saw his back all the way finishing 40 secs adrift in second place. Although scenic, very hot conditions. The two water stations were very welcome. Apparently (report from one of the organisers) there was a bit of a water fight between some of the young ladies 'manning' the second water station who subsequently and inadvertently treated runners further down the field to some sort of 'wet t-shirt' display. I thought some of the later finishers looked a bit shocked but had put this down to the heat. Not something we encourage from our marshals at Low Fell it has to be said.

With Neil finishing 7th and Paul 25th we retained the team prize won last year. There were also strong runs from Mick, George, and Cheryl, particularly impressive for Cheryl's first run at Allendale. Special mention for Gordon who helped out as a guide for a blind runner, or is it more pc to state 'visually impaired'? I'll stick with blind as the runner in question, Louise (visiting from Wakefield), was a great personality and a bit of an inspiration who basically 'called a spade, a spade'. Would probably tell me not to be 'so soft' for the inspiration bit. Anyway, Gordon was rewarded with a spot prize of a pretty nifty looking portable barbeque set. A perfect end to the report would be that we stopped on the way home and had a B-B-Q, only it would be a bare-faced lie however poetic.

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### Lochaber Marathon. 19.04.2009.

Dave McAtominey: Sadly, Mick was unable to partake due to a knee injury. Hopefully he can make up for it at Edinburgh next month. He came up with Cath for the weekend anyway, for the holiday and to give some support.

George turned out for his umpteenth marathon, a week before he does London and only for weeks after a 39 mile ultra – mental!

I had a mare! My aim was sub 3 hours which was feasible, based on current times over shorter distances and training had gone well. It was a fine day, perfect conditions @14 degrees. I was going well, quite relaxed, although slightly behind sub 3 hour pace, doing 7minute miles, reached half-way in 1.33, hoping to get under 3.08.

The wheels fell off big style at @ 17.5 miles. Hit the wall. There was no warning, I felt ok, it was just like switching the lights out, my ticker went mad and I stopped dead (I actually thought I was in serious trouble!). I got going again but was reduced to ever slower jog / walk to the finish, which I made (just in time to collapse) in 3.26.19. I've never felt so rough! 87th from 359 finishers I think.

I'd been around 2 miles ahead of George at 14 miles and fully expected him to pass me at any point after 20 miles, as others were doing. He hadn't and Mick & Cath were concerned for both of us. He eventually came through in 3.59, suffering from cramps. Mick told me and I naturally assumed the "cramps" were as a result of the toast, porridge with jam, beans and sausages, tea / orange juice and mars bar, he'd consumed 3 hours before the start, like I said- mental! But I was wrong, that hadn't bothered him!!!! He'd suffered cramp in his thigh and was reduced to a walk by 18 miles. Still doing London though!

So disaster all round! We did have a good weekend though, a good laugh with some great banter.

That's 2 attempts for me with similar results, worse this time. Never again. I'll stick to the shorter stuff from now on. Hopefully the training will show some benefit later on after some recovery time.

DMc

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### Guisborough Moors Fell Race. 12.5mi/2600' [20km/790m].

John Stephens: "Thanks Dave. We'll be down on Sunday to enjoy the views." How accurate the rather tongue in cheek e-mail reply to Dave Parry (race organiser) following enquiry as to entries on the day turned out to be for this years Moors event – 12.5 miles and around 2600ft total ascent. Lawrence, Neil and I lined up in glorious sunshine, a perfect spring day and all set 'to enjoy the views'. After the customary bit of Dave crack (e.g. "anyone drops out, you must come and tell me – I don't want to be wandering around the moors looking for you all night"), we were off.

From the start at Guisborough Rugby Club, it's straight up through the woods to the moors – about a mile climb. Good firm footing – in fact bone dry for most of the course unsurprisingly considering the good weather of late. First casualty on the climb (unfortunately) was Neil who felt his calf 'go', well more a 'ping' from our conversation afterwards – differentiation between these two highly technical terms being crucial in medical significance and beyond the scope of this report. Anyway, Neil did the sensible thing in coming back down and performed superbly in fulfilling a 'meet and greet' role at the finish.

Once on top of the moors you really can enjoy the views on a day such as this, as you traverse the moor towards Percy Cross Rigg Road, and then after about 1K on the road, follow a fairly sharp descent to Lonsdale Farm. Going pretty well – always discernable if there aren't too many folk around you – but in the company of three people who are clearly far superior/crazier than me in terms of descending ability. From Lonsdale Farm, there is a long drag up to Captain Cooks Monument, whereby I managed to close down and catch my erstwhile colleagues and thereby establish the pattern of events for the remainder of the race – them getting away from me on the descents and me closing down the gap on the climbs.

Took a welcome drink at the water station at Gribdale car park, as we then tackled the sharp ascent (you can walk bits faster than [attempted] run) to make our way out towards Roseberry Topping, ascent of which is via the 'stone staircase', touch the trig point at the top, take a second to take in the view – breathtaking, and not just due to the climb – and a case of "cheerio lads" as my companions hurtled back down leaving me somewhat in their wake. Back up over Little Roseberry, perfect timing as Lawrence (as he goes out towards Roseberry Topping) and I exchange pleasantries and a cheery wave – probably more so from my side as I'm on the final leg of the event, east across the moor with one more ascent at Highcliff Nab to get back on the forestry paths and homeward bound through the woods.

Final descent, and my colleagues (unsociable lot) are intent on b\*gg\*\*i\*g off and leaving me again! Final descent also brings the second valuable lesson of the day, the first being if injured early on in an event like this don't mess about trying to run it off – drop out, there's always another race, another day. Lesson two then is don't believe anything anyone on a horse tells you! On the middle part of the final descent, trying to strike a healthy (risk management) balance between speed, aging joints, and rough terrain, when I meet aforementioned jockey and trusty steed coming the other way. The report from the jockey, and I quote, is "the bloke in front is dying". Well this required a risk management re-evaluation resulting in an attempted increase in velocity that to be honest I had no hope of sustaining in an upright position, but did result in a rather heavy headlong fall into roots and brambles!

Anyway, much to my surprise, back on my feet in a blinking of an eye on my way despite being a bit sore, bruised (pride anyway) and leaking a bit of the red stuff from a few anatomical points down my left side. Should have know better – hadn't fallen up to that point in the race (good conditions) – you've not really tried in a fell event unless you fall at least once. To digress one moment, there is a confession to make here. Last year I took part in a national survey, re health in middle aged – elderly population (no need to snigger, it's true). One of the questions was 'have you fallen in the past year?' followed by a request to state number of falls. I entered 'yes' and then the number of fell races I ran last year – understand the nature of the question and where the researchers were coming from, but couldn't bring myself to lie and there wasn't space to qualify responses. Hopefully the researchers will look at my other data (funny looks when they took my pulse, BP, lung function, etc and told me the British Heart Foundation had no wish to speak to me) and dismiss me as an 'outlier'. The wicked part

of me hopes a few more runners attended – lets see the skew on their glorious 'bell curve' for that then!

So, back to the glorious spring day in Guisborough. Despite fall, fantastic course, fantastic organisation and enjoyed every minute. Pleased to finish 18th, particularly to be greeted by Neil – sorry mate if I bled on your jacket. Great run by Lawrence to finish 74th, 12th in his category and thanks for the 'fruit flakes', a great source of nutrition for events such as these.

At the sharp end of the race there was a tremendous battle for 1st and 2nd with Jim Bulman (NYM) winning by just 5 secs from last years winner, NFRs Charlie Stead. Outstanding run also by Phil Sanderson (also NFR, Vet 0/40) to finish 3rd. The team event was deservedly won by NFR, with NYM second. Hope to get back down for next years event – perhaps we can get a team entered ourselves.

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### Doctors Gate Fell Race 6mi/1050' [10km/320m] (29.03.2009).

Lawrence Johnson: After having a good run on Saturday at NEHL South shields doing a P.B. of nearly 2 mins, I thought I should strike when the iron is hot and do another race on Sunday. So off I went to Hamsterly to do the Doctors Gate fell race.

When I arrived on my own (everyone else seems to be getting ready for marathons), the weather was glorious, not a cloud in the sky. I signed up for race and lined up for the start at 11.

Off we went up the first climb then dropping down again and through the river, only to start up the next climb which was steeper and longer, it was single track through the forest, my type of terrain.

Out on to a forest track for a short run along the flat then back onto single track and up the main climb about a mile up onto the moors.

At this stage I was feeling good (the long hill training on Tuesday paying off??), once on the moors it flattened out, and I tucked in behind four or five runners and waited for the downhill part.

Sure enough we turned left on to a single grassy path through the heather, and as usual I let off the brakes and went for it. I passed the first two no problem, the third was from NFR, and wasn't budging off his course. So as a large grassy area was just ahead, I leapt over a patch of heather, only to find out that it was very boggy, and as I landed doing some ridiculous speed I sank up to my knee. Then it got interesting. I think I did a double summersault with tuck landing in the pike position? This I thought this was the end of it, but oh no Mr. NFR runner, who I had just literally flew past, couldn't avoid my Gymnastics, so joined in landing head first in the heather (think I won on technical ability but he may have edged it on style). We got up, I said my apologies, and off I went again trying to catch the next two runners before I ran out of hill.

The next two runners must have had wing mirrors and seen my attempts at taking out the opposition, so as I caught them they moved to one side and let me pass (wimps).

By the time I got to the bottom of the hill I had put a good distance between myself and the chasing pack (or perhaps they were keeping out of my way LOL).

Now I had the next group in site, four runners. I dug deep and gained on them until I was tucked in behind. The first was a lady, but she made it easy as she stopped to fasten her lace. Next another NFR runner I sailed past just two left. We came to the last climb which consisted of some wooden steps made of railway sleepers. To my surprise I shot up them (me fast uphill!!!), straight past the last two who were now walking. Out of the woods down the last hill, and a quick check over my shoulder in case they had recovered, but I was still pulling away across the finish.

A brilliant race. I felt great all the way including uphill.

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### N.E. Harrier League, Prudhoe (28.03.2009)

John Stephens : An unprecedented 25 runners from the club turned out for the final NEHL fixture at Temple Park. Celebrations all round, this being the centenary year for the Harrier League and also another win to clinch promotion to Division 1 as Champions, just pipping the Strollers to the title in what has been a bit of a 'nip and tuck' affair all season. Good to see Steve has been sharp in getting the 'team photo' up on the web, trophy and all. True to Low Fell form – we can't be expected to drop the 'motley crew' moniker just because we won – whilst our good friends at Wallsend (fantastic to see them take Div 1 championship – well done lads!) were well organised with cameras we did the business with an assortment of mobile phones. Great composure to the picture you have to admit, flanked by the 'no entry' sign and another giving direction to the toilets and something called 'bodyshape' and 'bodytime' – maybe its somewhere where I can get one, in another time dimension!

Twenty two club athletes (maybe we can give ourselves this nomenclature without laughing too much) toed the line for the senior event, which again saw a record breaking field. HA! HA!, of course this was nothing to do with the freeloaders, I mean runners, from all over the NE crawling out of the woodwork to receive their centenary memento provided gratis by Start Fitness. Seriously though, excellent souvenir for the occasion and, as stated at the presentation later in the afternoon, the support for the League from Start Fitness really is second to none.

Although unseasonably cold and windy, at least it did stay dry for the event, over the usual 3 laps around Temple Park with the going 'good', pretty firm enabling a fair proportion of the field to run in flats or trail shoes. The afternoon didn't start too well though, with a return of 'tent wrestling' to the afternoons agenda – 'very poor' effort it has to be said, but maybe more than a hint of too many cooks on this one. Personally, the tent erection somewhat set a theme for the afternoon whereby I proceeded to have easily my 'crappest' run of the season. Went better at Wrekenton, getting over the 'flu. The afternoon out in the field was bookended nicely when we made a right pigs ear of taking the tent down. Wouldn't be surprised if our exploits didn't turn up somewhere on youtube.

However, you can always depend on your team mates! Excellent performances across the board with our first six in 50 places. Just reward for effort, particularly for Dave (Mc), Jim, and Dave (Nicholson) who will all start in the medium pack next year, along with a very impressive run from Gerald to fulfil the captains role and start in the fast pack next season. Have to say across the board for all those who turned out, a big thanks! Folks really did take the club strategy to heart – race instructions for this, as with all other events is always the same, "just stick to the task, and enjoy". Not sure that Carl was with me on that one to be honest when I passed him on Saturday. Great to see Allan (Clark) back in action and getting around the course when I think most of us thought he may just go for a lap, well but no, to be perfectly honest none of us really though that! No truth in the rumour that George Routledge has got footage of himself passing Allan up on his youtube site.

Can't finish without another acknowledgement for our intrepid U-13 squad which has now grown to 3 with Kyle and Kayleigh being joined by Lauren for Saturdays event. Well done guys!

Finally a big thanks to everyone who has turned out this year whether to run, or cheer on, or just watch. For the runners a particular thanks to all those who have competed but maybe not scored – this has played as much a part in the success this year as those that have scored. If you don't believe me, just talk to Lawrence, our number 1 blocker! Bit lost now for something to do on a Saturday afternoon until November and hope to see everyone (and more) at Blaydon for the start of the 2009/2010 season. Cheers.

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## Dentdale 14 (14.03.2009)

Dave Mc : As part of our marathon training for Lochaber on 19th April, Dave Mc and Mick Graham visited the remote village of Dent on the Yorkshire Dales on Saturday 14th March for the 25th Anniversary 14(.3) mile race and a hard training run.

Mick opted out of the Prudhoe XC (1st miss) and DMc (not an XC fan) opted out as usual! Point here to congratulate all who have taken part in the Harrier League to date, tremendous team and individual performances give the club a great chance of promotion with 1 race to go. Anyway, we'll both be there on 28th, for the glory and the t-shirts. It's fairly flat there so I might even enjoy it – maybe, well em y'kna.

Back to Dent. It's a long drive, buried deep in the Yorkshire Dales, but in Cumbria? No wonder I thought we were lost. We approached down winding roads and up and down lots of hills – oh dear, what are we in for?

Mile markers were posted as Dent came into view, 4 and 5 before the turn into the village. Parking was at a premium, but everything was well organised – they've got this off to a T now. Steve English and Dave Leng were spotted already parked up and greeted us with a laugh and "what you doing here? It's a toughie this! Ha,ha. Watch out for the hill at 13 miles, oh and there's a big climb in the first mile". Cheers lads! It was windy too, not gusting, just a constant strong breeze coming down the valley towards the start / finish area.

Our plan was to try and run the race at our respective marathon paces, pushing on from half-way and finishing strong. No warm up was done to ensure that we couldn't tear off and we buried ourselves in the crowd which forced us to jog the first ½ mile or so. Just as well, they were right! A sharp left turn and wallop! A big hill, quite steep of 400 – 600 meters I recall. The first mile was just over the top, completed in 7.35, which surprised me as it's never that easy from my house and up Nursery Lane from a cold start!

A gradual downhill from that point along a winding road to 3 miles, in 20.43 (under 7s which is what we wanted) and then a gradual climb up to the main road at 4 miles. Myself and Mick had worked through a group to the front and those that were hanging onto us dropped off at that point. We were comfortable and chatting, plotting our move on the next group about a minute or two up the road. It was clear that several had not been as cautious as we were and splinter groups were forming from those that couldn't hold their early pace and were coming towards us quicker than we thought, without any extra effort on our part . "We'll catch them all by all by half-way" I said.

By 6 miles and passing the crowd at Dent we already through that group and looking at the next "pack" which was only 3 runners or so. The field was rapidly spreading out. The course is generally flat at this point, with only gradual climbs until 8 mile when there is longer drag of around a half mile. Towards 9 then and a drinks station. On approach I noticed that it had gone quiet and realised Mick had dropped off a bit, in what was bit of a bad patch for him. I thought I'll tire myself now then.

Fortunately, neither of use suffered too much. I was still gaining on those in front. At the turn for home at Cowgill (10.5 miles), the headwind was noticeably stronger than it was from the start and the trend was upwards in gradual short climbs, punctuated by flat straights and small downs. Still gaining on those in front, I passed a group of 3 at 11 miles and settled in with a Mornington Chasers runner. I felt at ease, but he was breathing hard. I asked him if he knew the course and where the "real" hill was as we passed 12 and up a small rise. "That's not it" was the reply.

We turned a bend and there was a sharp climb of around 100 metres at the top of which I accelerated away and round the next bend. Doh! A bigger hill! I deliberately slowed, not knowing what was to come and Mr Mornington caught me up. This was the half-marathon point, reached in 1.30.25, about right I thought. One small rise further and Dent was in sight – downhill. YES. I went for it and passed another 2 runners, 1 on the slippery cobblestones of the old village.

Finished 36th in 1.37.47. Mick followed just over a minute later and 6 places behind, showing his usual tenacity in making a great recovery from his "wobble".

We were both pleased, as course and conditions allowing, times were probably worth a bit more and hopefully an indicator that our training has gone well (John, I promise, I have done the sessions or at least a version of them) and of what we can do on what Mick describes as a flat course at Ben Nevis – doesn't seem logical to me, but he's from Dunna and I'm not arguing!!!

A quick change to warm down and we jogged back through the finish to welcome first Steve and a bit later Dave, who'd both suffered a bit. "We've not ran 14 miles for ages", they said beforehand. "No bloody wonder" we said at the finish!

Back to the car and just in time for Hull to take the lead. "It can't all be good" was what I think Micky said, it was hard to tell in between the expletives!

All in all, a good day, great event on a good course and very well organised. I've got the energy to type this so must have recovered ok, ready for our next expedition. Hexham to Gateshead, via the

Dun Cow, I think he said.

Give it a go, it will suit those fell runners and assorted nutters among you...we have a few.

DMc

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### N.E. Harrier League, Prudhoe (14.03.2009)

John Stephens: Due to the NEHL centenary celebrations planned for Temple Park in two weeks time, Prudhoe surrendered its traditional place as the final league fixture in the cross country calendar to be the penultimate this time around. However, what never changes is the Prudhoe micro-climate – breezy and cool – that necessitated a return to gloves and hat despite the sunshine. Another feature that never disappoints here is the course, ‘real’ cross country with the full length of infamous hill to be climbed each lap in the senior race. One slight change this year was the start and finish – a loop around the field at the start and a new finish in the ‘lower’ field, which seemed to work really well.

A potential banana skin for the club to threaten our so far successful season through unavailability of some of the NEHL regulars such as Neil and Mick, proved unfounded as a total of 16 runners from the club turned out to provide representation in 3 races at the fixture. It was fantastic to see us represented in both the girls and boys U13 events by Kyle and Kayleigh respectively who both ‘stuck to their task’ admirably. Well done!

It was a good job with the number of runners that Gerald elected to leave the club tent at home – no volunteers to collect it from Whickham on the way home which with our tent erecting skills, is probably where it would have ended up had we tried to pitch it in the wind. Our decision to go ‘alfresco’ on the changing facilities front made it necessary to actually warm up rather than settle for a customary bit of tent wrestling, one of the lesser known dynamic flex drills in the UK Athletics coaching manual.

Anyway, after watching the slow pack battle into the wind around the field, a sharp whistle blast and we (medium pack) were away. The slow start into the N.W. wind around the field meant that bizarrely the wind was largely behind you on the downhill sections of the course and in your face on the long uphill drag – again with Steve in his traditional ‘strategic’ position at the top of the bank (hope the pictures are a bit less harrowing this year), and a good shout also from Allan. Gerald got off the mark quickly, as Jon and I settled into the task of picking our way through the field. Have to say, as I caught runners all our guys were going well, although Lawrence didn’t have as much to say as usual, probably because I passed him on the hill. Not a great place for any kind of conversation other than “Keep it going Lawrence”, “Yea, go on John”.

Up front though, Bryan (Kelly) was having a terrific afternoon, running very strongly in a very attractive pair of spikes to eventually finish 13th and first scorer for the club. No truth in the rumour that Gerald is going to clean up the spikes and take them back to ‘Start Fitness’ and go for a refund on the grounds that they rubbed Bryans feet. Need a bit more use out of them mate? – see you at Shields on the 28th then! With Gerald, Dave (Nicholson), Jon, Colin, and myself completing the scoring team in 88, absolutely delighted to get our second victory of the season. Have to say I did experience some form of angina attack on entering the final loop of the field to the finish when Alan shouted my position as 24th. The Elders abacus proved to be highly accurate as I caught a few more places and finished a nerve shredding 21st which proves there must be a god of some sort. The thought of running in the fast pack as an 0/50 is not particularly appealing – recipe for a rather lonely run, Johnny no mates for sure!

Everyone who ran performed really strongly, with Kris, Shaun and Lawrence (both with testicles anatomically correct – I just know ok, don’t ask), Dave (Wright, another first time spikes wearer – taking things a bit seriously there Dave), George, the ever reliable Brian and Geoff, and Anthony backing up the scorers by denying points to other teams.

So on to the final fixture at Temple Park and hoping for a great turn out. Irrespective the result there, this has already been an excellent season for the club. Go for the same strategy – stick to the task and enjoy! Rumour is that Alan may run more than one lap and there may even be a return for Allan to jog a lap. As always, NEHL – not only the best way to spend a Saturday afternoon, but the only way.

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## Kielder Borderer Fell Race (08.03.2009)

Shaun Dunlop: Lawrence and I turned up for this 17 mile classic of the English fell racing calendar – billed as having the most remote checkpoint of any fell race in the country, as well as the chance of international travel (i.e., crossing the England/Scotland border on numerous occasions).

Spring sunshine, the sight of a woodpecker in Low Fell, and cloudless skies accompanied our departure from Gateshead at around 8 o'clock in the morning. The running gods were clearly smiling on us ..... or so we thought. Kielder clearly exists in its own microclimate – the snow started as soon as we left Bellingham, and the temperature dropped to zero, and felt considerably colder given the wind chill. Halfway through the pre-race safety briefing at the entrance to Kielder castle the hail started, which lasted for the first hour or so of the race, occasionally turning to snow. This is the first race I've ever run while wearing leggings AND waterproof overtrousers and still not felt particularly warm at any point.

We had planned beforehand to run together and treat the race as a training run for the Saunders in July as this race requires a degree of map reading and navigation.

The first few kilometres were good going, with the route initially marked with tape (as are the last few kilometres) up to the fire tower, halfway up Grey's Pike. The route up to Three Pikes and the steep descent (Lawrence's forte) along the fence line and across the burn to East Kielder Farm were easy enough to follow. The tricky bit came in deciding where to cross the Kielder Burn to get to Kielder Head and the first manned checkpoint. Had we listened more carefully to the briefing at the start, and been a bit more familiar with the course, I wouldn't have tried to cross the "testicle deep" freezing cold, fast flowing 5 metre wide burn at the point that I did.

Fortunately, the North of Tyne Rescue Team marshall came down to the burn and asked us to shout our numbers across to tick us off and save us crossing, and I left the water to find a (slightly) easier crossing point further upstream. After crossing, we had a hard, and slippy, slog up through the forest to the next checkpoint at Grey Mares Knowe, manned by NFR's Phil Green. From now on, for most of the rest of the race, the route was very exposed to the elements, and not at all obvious at times. "If you get lost", said Phil, helpfully, "just follow Terry from NFR just in front of you. He knows where he's going."

The route to the next checkpoint, across the Carry Burn and up to Knox Knowe cairn got boggier and colder with every step. By the time we reached the checkpoint and gave our numbers in, my fingers could no longer turn my compass dial, they were that numb. "It's okay," said Lawrence, "we'll follow that NFR runner, like Phil said.....". Fifteen minutes later, we were completely lost!

After some time consulting maps, and backup GPS devices, we realised we were way off route. Lawrence, Graham (an unattached runner we had been running with for the past hour or so) and myself decided on a "shortcut" to pick up the route again at Wylie's Craigs on the border. "Look", I said, "we can follow that grassy path on the other side of the valley up to the crags". The "grassy path" through the waist deep heather turned out to be fresh, lush-green and occasionally thigh deep bog! Not your classic shortcut! Undeterred by our now wet and frozen extremities, we pressed on, eventually spotting the Kielder Stone, our next checkpoint dead ahead. Still a good 10 minutes from the Stone, we noticed the fluorescent-clad marshalls there run off up the hill and disappear! The sweeper at the back of the field had overtaken us during our "detour" and assumed everyone had passed through and told those manning the checkpoints to leave their posts and return to the event centre. We were on our own, with some of the most remote parts of the race, over Peel Fell and Deadwater Moor still to come! Leaving Kielder Stone, we encountered the old border posts for the first time, that we should have been following for the last 2km or so. Waist high heather shrank to ankle height, but it was still just as boggy. None of us could feel our fingers, as the hail started up again as we climbed to the top of Peel Fell. The largest hailstone I've ever encountered hit me smack in the middle of the eye, and Lawrence, despite his "Lance Armstrong shades" was convinced his contact lens had frozen to his eyeball! The three of us decided to stay as a group – this was not the sort of conditions you wanted to be running on your own, especially as there was no longer a back marker following on behind. We could see the masts on the top of Deadwater Fell in the distance – our final checkpoint – and contoured around via Mid Fell to avoid losing too much height. At Deadwater Fell we caught up with the sweeper (who had slowed down when he saw Lawrence's fluorescent jacket – which makes even my cycling gear look dull and drab) and the Rescue Team Land Rover and began the long taped descent to Kielder Castle. It's incredible how painful your feet feel running on tracks

and roads again after 4 ½ hours or so of running on mud, moss, bog and heather!

The sight of the Castle, and the knowledge that a hot cup of tea and slice of cake waited inside it for us, was a welcome relief. It turned out that we weren't quite last – a few others had also taken an “alternative path” at some point, and finished a few minutes behind us. We had to raise our hats to Graham who we had run with for much of the race, who told us he was running in his first ever fell race! As Lawrence said as we finished, “.....that was a lot harder than the Edinburgh Marathon!”

The next time this race will be run is in 2011. I'll certainly be running it again; but hopefully in a bit less than 5 hours!

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### Kielder Borderer Fell Race (08.03.2009)

Lawrence Johnson: I persuaded Shaun Dunlop to enter the Borderer as a way for him to help me to improve my navigational skills for the Saunders MM which he kindly agreed to do. When I looked at the weather forecast on Saturday it was supposed to be clear but windy so as we approached Kielder on Sunday and there was hailstone coming down sideways there was some nervous laughing in the car. When we arrived at the castle the hail had stopped but the biting gusting wind hadn't. We entered the race and made a quick decision that it was leggings and windproofs from the start. The race started promptly at 11 just in time for the hail to start again. Our plan was not to race just to practice our navigation going at a steady pace. We started well passing a few on the first climb (thanks for the hill sessions Jon) up to greys pike at 450m then dropping back down to Kielder head where we must have missed a shallow river crossing as when we got to the check point (which was on the other side) the river was running very fast and was waste deep. Shaun had just entered the river when a marshal came running across and took our no's so we could go further up the river and cross safely.

Then came the next big climb up through the woods to the peak at 520m we had passed another two runners on way up so we were still in good shape. At this check point Phil Green was marshalling (NFR Runner) Told us just follow the NFR runner in front. But Shaun did not want to follow him and had already plotted our route to the next check point.

Shaun's route was spot on, and took us straight to the check point at Knox Knowe, still at about 500m. This is where it went a bit wrong, the NFR runner that had been in front, shot straight off without using his map, so wrongly we assumed he knew the way, so we followed, only to lose sight of him after about half a mile.

It was Shaun who realised we were in the wrong place so we sat down and Shaun plotted our new route. We had picked up another runner called Graham who was not a club runner and this was his first fell race!! He was more confused than me. We set off on our new heading down a valley across waist deep heather which was energy sapping. We descended into a ravine using heather like climbing rope crossed another river and then had to climb out using the heather again. We traversed around a hill until we could see the next check point about half a mile away but once again it was waist deep heather. We could see the marshals but to our surprise they started to leave setting off up the hill. We arrived at the check point to find that the marshal had left.

It was very cold by now and Graham seemed to be struggling up the next hill up to peel fell which is 600m. As we got to the top the wind was now worse than ever and I was struggling with the cold so out came windproof no.2. I needed help to get it on as it was so windy. We decided to start running to make up some time but the ground was so boggy that after a few hundred yards my legs were shot. So it was run a bit walk a bit. Shaun was making the pace and guiding us towards the final ascent up to dead water fell. We could now see the marshal who was supposed to be behind the last runners?? He must have seen my luminous jacket as he waited at the top of Deadwaterfell. From here it was all downhill but still very technical and boggy we made a brave effort to run the rest of the way at one point Graham ran past us but we were not having that after waiting for him! Me and Shaun ran on and finished together a few yards ahead of Graham phew!!! When I asked if we had won I was told we were just outside the top three LOL.

We then went for our cup of tea and cake only to find that there was only one piece of cake left DOHH!!

So on the whole an enjoyable day out very cold but definately character building the only thing I am

sorry about is that it is only on every two years so roll on 2011.

Oh and my map reading didn't go well I relied on Shaun but I did take notice of what he told me and learnt a lot about navigating and myself.

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## N.E. Harrier League, Cramlington (28.02.2009)

John Stephens: Spring was very much in the air at Cramlington this year. Bright, sunny conditions, the skylarks were out and the 'tented area' in the bowl resembled the camping area of a small festival site. Bit of a false dawn on the club tent front – thought we had erected said tent in record time only to find one of the poles was in the 'wrong' place. Still, didn't really detract from a well co-ordinated effort from all present.

The heavy conditions were very different from last season (ice, snow, frozen solid), the technical term I believe being 'dead clarty'. This necessitated a slight change from last years course, adding a bit more to the distance. The latter point is debatable, particularly from Lawrence who (according to his Garmin gps) reckons it was shorter. Not being one who is overly confident in such technology – interrupted signals due to the tress etc etc – I still think this years course was slightly longer. Although very much a fan of technology, my personal opinion of such devices is well known. Why anyone wants to wear a gps running 3 laps of a 2 mile loop around an old coal mine site is beyond me – course is well marked and marshalled, well organised start and off you go. Simple sport, why complicate it. Most pictures I've seen of [Haile GebreSelassie](#), he's not even wearing a watch!

Ok, rant over, back to the race. With a few of our slow pack runners being unavailable, bit of a stiff challenge for the club this time out in that we were a bit reliant on the medium pack runners getting through the field to score. Jon Archer achieved this without too much problem in completing (another) excellent club double and winning the overall race (Kris Russell achieved same result for us last season) and from the medium pack as well. Sweeping past Blaydon's Dan Flint in the final 200m, Jon went on to win by just 5 secs, but they all count! And yes Jon, NEHL is just like the Tour de France you have to wear the yellow vest next time out at Prudhoe. As an aside, great to see Dan out running the Harrier League again even if (from reports) he did get a bit of stick from certain sections of spectators e.g. "Bloody hell, look, it's Danny Flint", and when he was in the lead "Hey Dan, are you sure you can remember what to do?"

Anyway the rest of us mere mortals were left to flounder around in the mud, with Jon (Stephens), Colin, Neil, Gerald and myself getting through the field, packing well to get a scoring team of six with final placing of 102nd, and finish 2nd in Div II. Special mention to Colin, who had a very impressive run in his first jaunt from the medium pack and also Gerald who was carrying a slight hamstring injury. Bit of an eventful week for Gerald who managed to injure himself twice – one DIY inflicted and the other tripping over his dog. Cath – the fish pond will have to wait until the end of March!

With the size of the NEHL fields seemingly getting bigger with every race (well over 300 runners in the senior mens event at Cramlington) it makes it all the more impressive that we get runners out consistently at every event. With the very heavy conditions there seemed to be quite a few drop-outs at various points around the course, but hats off to Lawrence (gps and all), Brian, George and Geoff who put in very solid 'shifts' to support the club. Alan was true to his word and increased his input 100% from Wrekenton, completing 2 laps of the course and then providing some very welcome encouragement for the rest of us.

Unfortunately I am unable to provide a report on the taking down of the tent as I had to get away sharp to give my daughter a lift to work. However, a quote from a reliable source -*Forgot to mention that this week the tent was taken down in an impressive time. I think Wallsend were left stunned and Saltwell left speechless.* I'm also unable to report on the Northumberland County Schools XC Championships which was run in conjunction with the Cramlington NEHL, but which we did have some interest in as Rory (Neil's son) was running. Finally, if anyone woke up with a headache, short of breath with a nasty cough on Sunday morning, don't worry it'll just be the altitude sickness kicking in! (Well ok, could have been the single malt in my case.) The second place on Saturday leaves us well up in Division II and with two races to go, in a bit of a close contest with Gateshead and the Strollers. Still as always, the best way to spend a Saturday afternoon so lets keep it going.

You Tube Video footage of the race [Here](#).

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### N.E. Harrier League, Wrekenton (14.02.2009)

John Stephens: Wrekenton really does seem to be our 'lucky ground' as far as the NEHL is concerned. For the second year running the senior men's team placed 1st in Div II over a course comprising an interesting mix of snow, ice and mud. More than a few fallers during the afternoon I believe. Anyway, we were well represented with ten hardy souls from the club toeing the line for the challenging 3 lap, 9.5K event.

Jonathon and I managed to time our arrival to perfection, getting there just as Gerald finished putting the tent up. Seemed to be a few of us not quite feeling up to par, including myself, suffering at various stages of the 'man flu' that is currently doing the rounds. However this didn't seem to deter Colin who, donning his usual line in natty headgear (whatever happened to the 'Low Fell' knitted hat?), led the club home splendidly in 19th place. Apparently Colin did experience some problems towards the end of the first lap – namely a nose bleed on finding himself in 5th position at that point.

Adam found the conditions very much to his liking having an excellent afternoon to finish in 27th position from the medium pack. Bets could be off in terms of promotion to the fast pack at Cramlington. Jon and Gerald had a bit of a battle over the final lap with Jon eventually running out a narrow 1 second advantage. I think it must have been the nervous energy and excitement of the mighty Swans impending FA Cup appearance against Fulham that must have blunted Gerald's finish on that one. The 'old dependables' (Mick and me) completed the scoring, so that we had a full scoring team in within 76th place and win Div II by a fair margin – enough to say that this must rank as one of the best performances by the club in the Harrier League.

Neil and Lawrence ran strongly to finish well up the large field of 300 runners, I believe, as reported in the Chronicle – if it's in the 'Ronny Gill' then it must be true. Journalistic evidence of the highest level! George and Dave completed the club representation with solid runs, Dave all the more remarkable as I believe he ran in flats – this man knows no fear! Great to see Allan out again after his op. Even managed a couple of miles jogging around the sports fields to provide a bit of welcome encouragement for us all. Actually a number of good shouts (Steve English being one of them) around the course. Not one to complain as any encouragement is welcome, particularly in those conditions, but I must question the accuracy of Alan (Elders) counting – or maybe the old abacus froze up.

Half way through the season and although we can't afford to relax, the club does look in a handy position in Div II at this point, but we'll need to keep getting folks out. Cramlington in two weeks, and another great afternoon out in prospect – highly preferable to roaming around the MetroCentre or similar meaningless weekend pursuit. Finally it is my honoured duty to report a PB, by some margin it has to be said, in taking down the club tent. Indeed 'slick' is the term we are looking for here. I was mildly surprised that this monumental achievement didn't find its way into the Chronicle. Perhaps it was reported in the Journal earlier in the day.

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### V.A.A.N.E. Cross Country Championships (31.01.2009)

John Stephens: There was a good turn out for the club at this year's NE Vets Championships held at Holy Cross both in terms of competitors and also support. Thanks to George and Allan who braved the biting easterly wind to give us all a very welcome cheer on. It was particularly good to see Allan out and about after his recent 'service, MOT and (hopefully successful) engine tune' courtesy of the NHS ..... and yep, knowing Allan very well, Neil, Bill and I did frisk him to make sure he hadn't secreted any running gear about his person when we picked him up on Saturday morning!

Good overall turn out for both races – Race 1; Ladies and also 0/70 Men's over 5K and Race 2; the rest of the Men's categories over 10K – from a bit of e-mail traffic with George Routledge, entry up 100% on last year. The going was soft over a 2.5K loop course taking in a bit of rough tracks, sports fields and parkland to make for some relatively quick running despite the low temperature. One long drag with a sharp bank to ascend at the top of it, but apart from that not too much in the way of climbs.

Stan was our only representative in Race 1, and ran a very solid race to finish a highly creditable 6th in the 0/70s. Good to see Ted (Joynson) out and completing a fairly tough event given the cold conditions, and winning the 0/85 category – absolutely unbelievable. I'm at a bit of a puzzle as to how Ted gets round any course as his sense of direction (or lack of it) really is the stuff of legend. On giving him a bit of a cheer-on whilst warming up, I got a very quick "Which way do I go now?" – echoes of our trail race last June, as reported at the time.

Anyway, Race 2 witnessed a 7th consecutive win in the overall event for Brian Rushworth – an incredible record. In fact the 0/45s seemed to be a very tough category with Brian winning and Rob Hand (2nd overall) both from that category and fairly comfortably seeing off their 'younger' rivals. All the more impressive then for Neil to finish 8th (and 19th overall) and Mick 18th (51st overall) in the 0/45s, particularly as I know Mick wasn't feeling too good and not very happy with his run as a consequence. I believe Dave (Mc) also started, but was forced to drop out after a lap – still made it onto the film of the event (check out GEORGEROUTLEDGE at youtube) for posterity. I'm sure it's Dave you can see in the background at the fairly early part of the footage after he dropped out, cleaning off his spikes!

From my side, I 'enjoyed' (not quite the term I'm looking for, but you know what I mean) a great little battle with Mike Jones (South Shields) and Les Smith (Heaton) which literally ran the full 4 laps. Managed to draw on the number 1 Stephens strategy - 'attrition', basically just keep working and grind 'em down. Not very attractive but can be quite effective. Anyway, just managed to edge out Mike and Les to finish a pleasing 9th overall and claim 1st in the 0/50 category. Dave (Nicholson) just missed out on 'a podium finish' with a great run for 4th in the same category (and 32nd overall).

However, it has to be said the stars of the day were the all conquering 0/60s squad, where, brilliantly led home by Brian (3rd in category), Bill and Geoff did the business to record an excellent win for the club. Well done lads!

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### [N.E. Harrier League, Farringdon \(10.01.2009\)](#)

John Stephens: Conditions that can only be described as 'Arctic', accompanied this years trip across the Wear to Farringdon. The somewhat softer going of last years fixture was replaced by freezing temperatures and a hard and slippery surface for much of this enjoyable and quite challenging course, with its climbs, and (in a number of places) quite narrow tracks. The conditions didn't deter anyone from the club or indeed from the NE with an excellent turn out all round – a bakers dozen from the club, with 319 finishers in the senior race.

We were fortunate to have a bit of shelter in the form of the club tent, whose erection (am I allowed to say that?) also served as a useful warm-up activity, accurately described by Lawrence as 'tent wrestling'. Hope to see that one in the next edition of UK Athletics coaching manual with Low Fell RC accurately cited.

Full respect and thanks must be given to the officials – much colder hanging around than running – who didn't waste anytime getting the slow pack away sharp on 1315, with Colin and James well placed as the group left the park area via the first climb. Two and a half minutes later and we (medium pack) were off. Although bitterly cold, things soon warmed up, particularly with Jon (Stephens), Gerald and me closely grouped together – could literally throw a blanket over the three of us for the whole race. In the end the younger legs held the advantage in an exciting, (although it has to be said with no respect for their elders), finish and with Neil finishing around 30 secs later, it made for an excellent team finish - 2nd position in Div II. We were well beaten by Gateshead (40 points adrift) but edged out the Strollers by 8 points who were 3rd.

The large field did make passing a bit difficult in places particularly 'working through traffic' but it was good to see all 'the lads' coping well with the conditions particularly Ben and also Adam who are relative beginners to the noble art of cross country running. Lawrence was up to his usual tricks – caught and passed him on a climb only to see a blur of burgundy fly past on the downhill with a friendly wave and exchange on the next climb as I passed him again. A relative quick learner in the 'getting through traffic' stakes is Jon who almost put me in the hedge as he passed me on the penultimate climb, but at least I got a "sorry Dad". Brought up well that lad!

Talking of father-son teams, Aiden had a very strong run in the U-17s to finish in 20th position.

Taking in that race on our 'cool-down' (the term is used relatively), Aiden certainly looked better than I felt on the long climb.

The problem taking down the club tent reported at last years Farringdon fixture was repeated this year. We do well with the pegs and packing away, but I feel that we have yet to work through our strategy for taking out the poles. Fortunately the Wallsend lads weren't around to 'extract the urine' this year (is there a separate tent pitch area for Div I?). Anyway, still the best way to spend a Saturday afternoon. Alan Elders wine is still gathering dust though!

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