

Race Reports

L.F.R.C. Christmas Parlauf, TVTE. 21.12.2010.

John Stephens: The final Tuesday club before Christmas, so it must be parlauf time again. Despite the (well) sub-zero temperature, there was an impressive turnout to form 7 teams for the senior event, plus a team (Kyle and Kayleigh) form the junior section. Despite the absence of fancy dress this year, (but plenty of layers) there was a great festive spirit after the draw had thrown together some interesting pairings.

Following the mandatory course safety check and advice – ‘run wide on the corners lads to avoid the ice’ – along with clarification for us all of the more technical aspects of the event, particularly distinguishing anti-clockwise from clockwise, the field set off in an orderly fashion for the 8 lap journey (4 for Kayleigh and Kyle).

Peter and Jonathon took an early lead and indeed were never headed, although Alec and Tony did hold them close for 4 laps. The battle for 3rd and 4th was a close one between Les/Neil and Bill/Lawrence. Les and Neil eventually won out, by just 8 seconds. I think the running point came about 5 laps in when Les stripped down to t-shirt for top half of his body. I think this phased Bill somewhat and for sure if Alan and I (doing the recording and timekeeping) were already freezing up to then, we certainly were at the sight of Les striding (in the conditions) virtually semi-naked around Swaddlers.

The very solid pairing of Gordon and Dave ran well for a deserved 5th spot along with sound performances from the final two pairings Allan/Carl (6th but close run++ for 5th) and Stan/Mick (7th). Well done to one and all. Hopefully the event is now established in the club calendar, and as Neil suggested, weather permitting get some fancy dress going next year. Oh, yes with Alan and me dressed as Santas. Congratulations to this years winners, Peter and Jonathon – spend wisely but more importantly in a timely fashion as the vouchers expire in just over a week!

Merry Christmas to one and all. Here's looking to the New Year and hopefully a rise in temperature, the sooner the better.

Results

1. Peter & Jonathon (S)16:22
 2. Alec & Tony 17:08
 3. Les & Neil 17:52
 4. Bill & Lawrence 18:00
 5. Gordon & Dave 18:52
 6. Allan & Carl 18:54
 7. Stan & Mick 19:50
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N.E. Harrier League, Cramlington. 23.10.2010.

John Stephens: For reasons that will soon become apparent there will be a new sub-heading for 2010-11, NEHL reports – ‘View from the Rear’. Anyway, great to see the return of the Cramlington fixture (cancelled last season due to the snow and ice), an earlier start to the season presumably to cut a bit of slack in terms of quite a crowded winter fixture list, and despite a number of our runners having run at Kielder last week and one or two of us returning from injury, 16 turning out for the senior mens event.

However, pride of place has to go to the ladies – the Cheryls (Parkin and Stanley), and Amanda – who closed in a team in the ladies event to finish 16th. For those present, it was a pleasure and a privilege to witness a bit of club history (no, not Alan giving away his bottles of wine although I'm sure that will come), in being the first Low Fell Ladies team to feature in a cross country event. In terms of the extra numbers, hopefully to continue growing, it's a good job we got a new tent for this season. Indeed, a luxurious facility which had us all day dreaming of possibilities for the future installation of a bar area/bar-b-q/kitchen for a pan'o'soup, and almost reluctant to leave the relative comfort of the tent and toe the line. The new facility has the added attraction of being fairly quick and easy to erect and take down, so much so that we now have to go about undertaking a proper warm-up as the traditional club cross-country event preparation activity of ‘tent wrestling’ may well be a thing of the past. However, I wouldn't wish to appear premature on that one.

View from the Rear; owing to an unfortunate miscalculation, along with Jon (Archer) dragging me through a few places over the final mile at Prudhoe last season I found myself lining up with the fast pack at this the first event of the season. Looking along the line, a very thin one at that (both in terms of numbers, and somatotype) at the start it was difficult to see anyone who may be within a decade or even 15 years of my age. All the folks

I recognised usually finish around 4minutes or so ahead of me in races. The rest had already gone – monster slow pack, followed by a fair-sized medium pack. So it was around 300m into the race that I found myself at the back, last place, bringing up the rear. I guess it was too late to appeal at my pack allocation.

Out and well into the race for others, Bryan was enjoying an excellent start to the season coming home in 18th place, making light of the quite heavy conditions following the rain over the past few days. Jon (Archer) had an outstanding afternoon, recording the 5th fastest time of the day and picking his way through the field to finish 23rd. There were also some quite impressive runs from the remaining scorers, with Jon (62nd) having his first race since injury at GNR, Shaun and Lawrence (63rd, 83rd respectively) just a week after running at Kielder, and Dave (107th) having what must be his best run for the club so far. Gerald did well running from the medium pack to get through to 129th, with solid runs from Neil, Luke (both also ran at Kielder), Phil, and Alex (happy debut both!).

This brings me back to the long hard road/mud heap in trying to make my way through the field (all 305 of them) from the back. Always pleased to see George Routledge and no less so about ½ lap in, and then having a quick chat with Alan towards the end of the first lap. Pleasantries also exchanged with Dave and Chris during lap 2, and then a rather disappointed Les at the start of the 3rd lap – I think he was hoping that the 5 minute advantage may see him home before me. All I can say Les, is that it wasn't very long ago when you asked if you could run a lap of the track at Gateshead only to find that the request was one thing and whether your body could go with it quite something else. From this to competing over the course at Cramlington is quite a journey.

Anyway, plodded through to 188th, hamstring held out – quite impressed to pull it in the first place as I didn't think I could run fast enough to achieve this – and enjoyed the afternoon immensely rounded off favourably with a strong sugary brew. For me at least, it's going to be a very long winter. Still as the Romans would no doubt have said *nil desperandum!* Not sure what their cross country running was like but good at marching. To be honest they seemed to be pretty effective and efficient at most things they attempted. It'll do for me.

Hopefully see everyone and more at Farrington. Plenty of room in the tent. Les, don't bother with the crappy 'energy' drinks – just look at the colour and all those additives – just bring a flask of tea next time.

Tynedale Jelly Tea, 10 Mile Road Race. 05.09.2010.

John Stephens: Fantastic turn out (as usual) for this years jelly tea 10 – 14 from the club by my count. However, it has to be said a quite bizarre event this year even considering my own predisposition to become preoccupied deciding which flavour jelly to have most years, usually from about mile 8 onwards.

The day started quite normally, picking up Neil on Belle Vue and then Jonathon at Ovingham. Things started to go a bit awry when Neil declared that he hadn't entered and went off to try and get a late entry only to find there weren't any! Fair play I guess – a statement to this effect was on the entry form. Not to be deterred, Neil enjoyed a long run around Hexham and through to Ovingham completing an impressive 16 miles in the process. Looking good for Kielder.

As we jogged down to the start the sun got out, warm (about 15 degrees), with a SE breeze. Seemed overall that the latter eventually had more of an effect on the event than first assumed. It probably isn't exaggerating to state that Bill McGurk's traditional jog to the lead vehicle was as quick as the first quarter of a mile or so in the race. Then things took off a bit, to say the least. Not being at my fittest, I decided to take things a bit steady but with the (by now) quite strong breeze decided to try and get with a group for shelter. Phase one of this plan worked as I tagged on the back of a group, but found myself out the back door and running on my own after about 3 miles. In my efforts to plod on regardless I was fairly easy meat for a few young guys, but then had the good fortune to hook up with one of the Wallsend lads around halfway and although it chokes me to admit this, mainly because he was wearing a GPS set to give an audible signal each mile (as I soon worked out). This was quite handy, as the organisers had forgone the tradition of putting out mile markers this year – not a problem but I did chuckle to myself at the imagined parallel with the 'Blackadder' episode that involves a captain of a ship (name escapes me) who sails without a crew. Bet you can all 'hear' the adapted lines now – "Mile markers! On that point opinion is divided. Most races have them but we don't". Seriously though no criticism – a great race and long may it continue. I know these are times of austerity, but maybe a 5 mile marker for 2011?

Mile 8 and closing on a couple of runners which we pass and I'm down to blackcurrant or peach on the jelly front. I know, it's a tough call. Quite enjoyed the last couple of miles, even if the Wallsend lad had the temerity to run away from me off the hill at 9 ½ miles. A little respect for us older chaps would be in order. Anyway trotted over the line in 35th, one place up on last year but a minute and half slower and another 'personal worst' time, albeit very enjoyable – just enjoy ageing to be honest.

Elsewhere, times seemed to be down for most probably due to the head breeze rather than ponderings over selection of jelly flavour. Great performance for the Jons with Jon Archer finishing 2nd and Jon S claiming a top 20 placing in 19th. Walking and jogging back up the course good to see so many in burgundy vests looking strong, particularly in the ladies where we closed in a team with the two Cheryls and Caroline. Well done to everyone who ran, and thanks to Neil for the shout towards the top of the final climb.

Oh yes, nearly forgot – of course it had to be blackcurrant (again).

Watergate Trail Race. 30.05.2010.

Jonathon Stephens: Apart from the breeze but with temperatures around 12 degrees Celsius it was just about perfect running conditions for the third running of the trail race. There was a slight modification to the course this year to take both the start and finish to the area of the race HQ at Watergate – necessitating a pleasant stroll with a surveyor's wheel to re-measure the course a couple of weeks ago. Slight emergency when setting up in that there was no paper in the toilets – a veritable disaster in running. Thanks to Alan for the quick dash to that great British institution, the corner shop 'whot sells evrythin'.

It was good to see a fair turn out for the Junior Run (2K), which consisted of a loop around the lake pretty much as for the 5K handicap but taking the first bridge (more than ably marshalled by Keith) over the lake. Another 'new' feature this year was the addition of a lead bike for both events – more of this exciting development in due course. Basically we felt obliged to provide this facility following a recommendation by the race referee last year, who didn't seem too impressed at the time by my response – "Wouldn't really get a bike through part of the woods Kevin, but I'll see if we can get a lead horse for next year!"

Anyway, back to the Junior event. A competitive affair that witnessed the girls outdoing the boys with a win for S. Forster of Birtley (U15G) who looked very strong over the later stages of the race. In fact the first two places were filled by U15 girls with Blaydon's S. Montgomery finishing 12 seconds adrift of the winner. Special mention for our own Kyle Hope who finished 5th overall and 2nd U13boy. It was great to see a turn out that included a lot of really 'young youngsters', some running with parents. Hopefully something we can build on. Of worthy note at this point was that the lead cyclist looked in fine fettle, but all that was about to change.

1000, and the main event. Quick briefing to a field that looked pretty serious to me – couldn't run the old i-pod gag as no-one was wearing one. There was an early break away on the first loop by James Buis, and Graeme Taylor running as a pair with Neil Wilkinson and Nathan Reed a couple of seconds back. They were fair tanking on with the rest of the field spread out behind, and good to see Colin (Drummond, I knew the hairstyle would catch on Colin) well up. The front runners were running at such a pace that they managed to overtake the lead cyclist (yep, it was Allan out there on his velocipede) on the long run up to enter the woods. However, not to be outdone Allan managed to nose his way in front coming out of the woods, take a breather when the runners re-entered the woods at the bottom of the lake to eventually finish well ahead, but it has to be said looking a little worse for wear.

Back at the foot race, James was well ahead by the time they entered the woods for the second time and despite trying to go the wrong way – he, himself stated that the marshals clearly indicated to him where to go, but for some inexplicable reason didn't follow instructions for a nano-second. Anyway, he won very convincingly in the end in a quick 33:42, this just 2 weeks after running (and I think winning?) the Windermere marathon. George can confirm, I expect he will have been there – any marathon north of Watford and George is your man. Very impressive run by Graeme Taylor of Jarrow to finish 2nd and even more so by Sunderland's Nathan Reed to take third spot, 1st in the U20 classification. Great to see Neil (Wilkinson) leading the charge for the vets in 4th place. Colin continued his strong performance to finish an excellent 11th place, the new haircut/shave worth at least 3 places.

Overall this years event, thanks to the efforts of all volunteers involved, was a really slick affair. The race referee and officials were very impressed by the event. Now we just need to sort our publicity and get the numbers up a bit. Last word with Allan though – "We need a younger man for the bike next year, I'm not doing it!" Shaun, you're in the frame for start.

Next event in the series is the Angel Run in July. More marshals required please, with the added attraction of a post race beer at the Angel Inn.

Wilmslow Half Marathon (inc. English National Championships). 28.03.2010.

Jonathon Stephens: Saturday started off as a logistical challenge in that we (Laura, Isabella and I) had to pack the car to head off to Manchester. This would have been OK if we were just going down for the weekend, but since we were off on holiday on the Monday (from Manchester) we needed everything necessary for 9 days away. Normally this would be okay, but you couldn't believe (well, some of you may) how much gear a six month old baby needs!

Anyway, after the drive down on Saturday, a drive around the course (Laura is useless with directions – the half-marathon was at least 20 miles in the car) and an early night, I remembered to put the clocks forward which otherwise would have been a little embarrassing to turn up in Wilmslow as the race was starting! I had a short warm-up which involved jogging from the start to the finish (about ¾ mile apart) and using the 'facilities' there. Quite ingenious really; the toilets were packed at the start and there was no-one at the finish. Well, it would have been ingenious if I'd actually planned it.

Have to say that the organisation was super-slick on the day and the race was underway pretty much on time. First Brit in last year's London marathon, Andi Jones, took the lead from the start and quickly got away. A little further back, I attempted to settle into a decent pace and hoped to stay in 'the groove' and maintain it. The first mile went by in about 5m40s and the plan was to stick to around 5.40-5.45s. However, turning the corner after mile one, we were presented with a breezy head-wind which was to remain for the next 6 ½ - 7 miles. In places, the wind was quite blustery, and I remember the second mile taking around 6m20s! Disappointingly, I cleared the first 5k in around 18mins and I just kept telling myself that I would pick the time up on the second half, when the wind would be behind me. I made conscious efforts to keep pushing on through the windy sections as I knew it could take a lot of time away by relaxing too much. The wind didn't really cease until about the 8th mile marker and this is when I took the opportunity to break away from the pack that I was running with and start taking out other runners; I reeled at least ten in within the last 5 miles of the race which was great for confidence, and it kept me pushing on. I went through 10 miles in around 58.40 which was about 1.40 off where I wanted to be (and over 2mins from my PB); I'll put this down to the wind!

The last 5k of the race is where I have always struggled in my three previous attempts at the distance. This time though, I was confident in my training and knew that I would be strong. To be honest, I did feel a bit rough at about 11 miles after a slight uphill section but this passed after a couple of minutes and before I knew it I was at 12 miles! I had reeled a few more competitors in, and had a few more in sight so tried to up the effort. I put the confidence down to one session I did – ask my dad about the two 5k's in one day if you're interested! A great session for boosting confidence if done correctly.

I finished in 1.16.46; I had hoped for 1.15, but this was not the day for it I suppose. Still, this was a PB and therefore in the right direction. I'll be looking forward to the GNR in September, but am looking for some good improvements over 10k in the summer.

I couldn't be bothered to do a cool-down after the race so promptly got back to the hotel, got changed and went out for lunch! Then we were off on holiday the next day and I had a week off from the running. Well I ran twice...

Hartlepool Marina 5 mile. 28.03.2010.

Carl Watson: Mick Graham and I headed down to do the Hartlepool Marina.

To mention the conditions to be windy was an understatement. Regardless of where you ran, it seemed to be in your face all the way round.

Having previously raced this twice before 2006 and 2007 twice being at around 30 minutes. I was hoping for about the same time but with the conditions, better suited for wind surfing, times were obviously going to be a lot slower.

Happy with the way I ran, and Mick falling at the beginning of the race (funny no witnesses), but a great run by him, and not to mention Luke Scorer who also had a good run.

Start Fitness North East Harrier League, Prudhoe. 27.03.2010.

John Stephens: This years final NEHL fixture saw the return to the spiritual home for the concluding event. I know it's not everyone's favourite, but we don't seem to do too badly there on what is a 'proper' cross country course. Remarkably despite a few folks who couldn't make it for one reason or another, the club fielded 14

athletes across events, with Kyle and Kayleigh having cracking runs in the U-13 boys and U-15 girls events respectively. Hope to see you both out next year – no pun intended!

The senior men's event witnessed two first time outings this season from Colin and Dave. For Colin this was due to injury and I guess this is a good enough place to test recovery as any. Must have seemed longer out as Colin a) forgot pins for his number and then b) somehow proceeded to lose one of them during his warm-up. The initial thought of just using 3 pins was swiftly abandoned – usual breezy conditions, and we wouldn't want to upset the officials by losing a number or those at the finish funnel not being able to read it. Oh, yes also managed to forget his vest but we were able to provide one that was just the right size (not). However, I would suggest that any reports of a Low Fell runner using a burgundy spinnaker on the top part of the course are somewhat exaggerated.

As for Dave, this was his first ever NEHL – perfect place to start. Indeed his only cross country race prior to this was the National. Some people will do anything for a bag of chips – right, sorry, we didn't stop did we. Apologies once again, it'll be different next year. Anyway, evidently Dave just does big/proper races.

1317 and 30 secs, and having seen the slow pack lads struggle up the hill into the wind (at least it wasn't raining), the medium pack was off and running. Well to be honest most of us were trying to tuck in for shelter behind the enthusiastic (some may say impetuously foolish, but not me, very kind move, respect for elders etc) young runners at the front of the pack. Once off the top and descending into the valley, it seemed like a different place altogether. Although cool, the sun was out and bless, I even heard birds singing. The rain during the week had made for pretty heavy going and I was glad of the security of a set of 15mm spikes, although in one or two places the clarty factor was near maximal so as not to make much difference. Had made a steady start, but soon began to work through the field with the odd exchanged pleasantry (grunt) with the lads in burgundy who all seemed to be going well and enjoying themselves. None more so that Les who was his usual cheery self as I passed him and got another shout/exchange on the second lap as he was entering and I was leaving the lower fields just before the stream.

Of course Prudhoe is all about the hill (twice). A strategy of selecting first gear and going for a steady grind up each time seemed to go ok. I see that George in his capacity as official photographer must have got the message from Steve in standing on the hill for his photo-opportunity. A chance to record all the smiling faces. I think I'm looking forward to seeing them anyway and thanks for the much needed shouts George.

At the bottom of the hill for the second lap, caught Shaun and Lawrence who were having tremendous runs and seemed handily placed in terms of scoring. Towards the top, Jon caught me – the only fast pack runner to catch me this time (knew this would spell trouble, for next season anyway) – and he was rewarded with the fastest time of the day for a great run. Just as long as he doesn't wait another 19 years to run the event again. Got the shout I didn't really want at the top from Alan – “Well done John, 22nd” – so that although Jon went past me I did drift past a few tired souls off the top of the hill finish 19th and potentially start next year in the fast pack. I wonder if I can make an appeal on the grounds of age! With Scott having a great day out enjoying the hills to finish 12th and Jon 13th, along with super runs from Shaun, Lawrence and Neil we closed in the team to finish 3rd in Division 1.

On his return to action Colin ran a very sensible race to finish a highly creditable 143rd, as did Dave on his debut in finishing 154th. All those that started, finished which saw some strong performances (and very tidy in terms of numerical relationships for some – check out the results) from Brian, Les, Bob, and David (Wright). In addition Jane (Mooney) who trains with us fairly regularly on club nights cantered around to win the ladies race and seal victory overall for the ladies NEHL title, so congratulations and well done on that!

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who has turned out for the club over the country this season. It has been an eventful and quite exceptional year for us, not only in terms of finishing 4th in Div 1 but in also finishing teams in both the NE Championships (11th) and also the Nationals (57th – a solid Heinz Beanz score). In addition the NEHL Grand Prix introduced this year saw Jon finishing in 2nd place in the seniors and also some old geezer from the club managed to finish 5th in the Vets category. Now where is that pen and paper Dear sir, I must protest quite strongly at any attempt to promote a certain runner to the fast pack next year!

English National Cross Country Championships, Roundhay Park, Leeds. 27.02.2010.

John Stephens: Chatting to Geoff (Hume) it seems that the last time we managed to get a team out at the 'Nationals' may have been as long ago as 1987, which ironically is the last time I ran in them, albeit for another club. Alan (Elders) wasn't sure at all about this apart from that the club have probably put teams out at the nationals on just one or two occasions. It was against this background that 8 runners from the club along with two supporters (Lesley and Luke's partner/girlfriend – sorry but I'm very well known for having problems

with names) and Alan in support/administration role set off from WiNG on Saturday morning.

Arriving in good time, Alan picked up the numbers while we had a look at the course. For the senior men (12K min) – didn't like the sound of the 'min' bit – this involved 3 laps of a course that got quite heavy in a number of places by the start time and included the famous 'Hill 60' each lap – an experience not to be missed I can assure you. Although, ahem, supposedly attending in an administrative capacity, Alan saw the layout of the start pens and soaking up the atmosphere (you have to be there – some great footage from Lesley on club facebook site) and decided he would run a lap having sneaked his spikes out under the nose of June assuring her that he wouldn't be running due to a hip injury.

The start of the 'National' is like nothing else (again check out Lesleys video footage – don't miss the guy stopping to tie his lace about 20m after the start!). You are very much aware of being part of an unbelievable surge, with the first minute or so run at a fair clip before you need to settle down into a bit of a rhythm for the rest of the event. It really is a massive sea of colour complimented by a thunder-like sound of runners' footfalls. Obviously with major hill to climb there is a corresponding descent – cue Lawrence and his kamikaze downhill tactics. I think it more than made his day.

Jonathan (Archer) had an outstanding run to finish 115th, with the other Jonathon (Stephens) 2nd counter for the club coming in at a highly credible 354th in his first national, and the 'old man' (yours truly) coming third counter, followed by Lawrence, Dave, and Luke. This placed the club at the impressive 'heinz beanz' position in the team event of 57th. We were backed up admirably by Dave and Bob, with Alan duly completing his lap and then providing some much appreciated encouragement from the side of the course. Good to see more than a few clubs down from the NE even if some were a bit under strength, e.g. Sunderland, and Gateshead didn't manage to get a team out which was a shame with the runners they have. Anyway, left the door open for us and sneak 4th finishers of teams from the NE behind Morpeth, New Marske, and South Shields. Good to see Saltwell finish a team and also I think Birtley, as well as the inspirational George Routledge bringing up the rear of the field.

Fantastic day out with a great result. Thanks to everyone who travelled down to Leeds. Dave wouldn't be drawn on the 'enjoyment factor' of the race, well not just yet anyway – "Not sure John, but it was a challenge". Unfortunately due to the coach driver needing to be back in Gateshead for another job in the evening, the trip to the Wetherby Whaler didn't materialise, but we were ready if the opportunity came with Dave locating their phone number at an app on his phone – must be the new i-phone chippy application. Anyway, it only served to make the chips from Kells Lane all the more enjoyable, particularly being washed down with a couple of beers. Onto the final NEHL fixture at Prudhoe I guess to bring the curtain down on another cross country season.

Start Fitness North East Harrier League, South Shields. 20.02.2010.

John Stephens: Saturday turned out to be a beautiful clear, crisp afternoon at Temple Park. Although for the most in quite good condition the course was a bit boggy down at the bottom end. Fantastic to see so many turn out and represent the club, 4 runners in the U-13 boys, 14 in the senior men's event, 2 in the ladies. Along with a rather slick warm-up, our best result in terms of tent wrestling this season, thanks to Les we also had a functional cool-down to perform in the form of 'van pushing' as Les's van got stuck in the mud once parked up.

The lads set the scene for the afternoon with excellent runs, Liam leading the way in 13th and Kyle (bit of lace tying practice required Kyle), Jack and Lewis packing well. They are currently in a much deserved 10th place for their age group league.

Another monster NEHL turn out in the senior men's race, well over 300 in total with the club again being very well represented with 14 runners spread across the slow and medium packs. Looking to start out fairly steady, Jonathon opted to run the first lap with me and then clear off. Have to say one of my better runs at Shields and although not entirely fluent in crossing my nemesis of previous years, I would modestly describe my traverse of the ditch each lap as 'tidy'. Everyone looked to be going well as I worked though the field giving and receiving the usual pleasant if rather snatched words of encouragement to each other. A little disappointed not to see Sean out in his wellies, rumour has it he found them a bit tight doing his strides at the end of warm-up and so opted for something a little more functional in the form of fell shoes.

Up at the sharp end Jon worked through to finish an excellent 22nd, and Scott, fresh from a couple of days climbing in Scotland clearly enjoyed the course and conditions to record a very impressive 31st (whoa, steady there almost in the medium pack at a second attempt – good bet for Prudhoe though?). With another highest finish for Lawrence (55th), and the kit-kats again doing the job for Sean (85th), combined with my 35th, it was left to Ben to give by far his best performance in the NEHL to complete the scoring in 98th place. This resulted

in 4th place on the day and with one fixture to go keeps us 4th in Div 1.

There were very strong runs by the rest of the senior men with Neil starting his first race from the medium pack and working through to 106th place, Luke improving to place within the top 200, along with low 200 finishes for George and Chris. Good to see Brian out again, a very solid run from David, and further improvements from Les and Bob. Well done all, everyone contributing to a successful men's event result.

Great to see 2 ladies having a run out. Lesley was joined by Caroline this week, who in her first attempt at cross-country finished fairly comfortably in 103rd with Lesley again sticking to the task magnificently, literally running herself into the ground at the finish!

Onto Leeds and a run out at the Nationals next weekend and then the final NEHL fixture at Prudhoe. Great if we could get another good turnout there to finish off the season particularly if we were able to get a ladies team out. Thanks once again to one and all for turning out.

Absent Friends Trail Race, Billingham. 14.02.2010.

Carl Watson: I decided to venture down to Billingham and do the 5.2 mile multi terrain race.

A sunny but cold day welcomed me to the 2nd running of this race, however the previous day's rain made conditions very boggy, tough and testing. The winner, Brian Rushworth of Sunderland Harriers came home in 27.53, a fantastic time considering the conditions, and also beating last years winning time.

I was going relatively well until about 1.5 mile, with the option of following the outside track of the farmers field which was ankle deep of mud. I decided to jump on the already provided duckboards (Pieces of wood to walk on). Mud and wet, a combination for disaster, so I jumped onto the duckboards to get better traction ,and the obvious happened. Lets just say, to be blunt I went arse over tit.

I clattered my hip and knee against the side of the duckboards, and went down like a bag of whatever. It seemed to take forever to get back up. A load of runners passed me, at least 23 .My position, 25th, honest it was true. Well anyway I couldnt get back in to my running, and struggled with the pain of my leg, but finished it, totally enjoyable!.

Start Fitness North East Harrier League, Wrekenton. 13.02.2010.

John Stephens: There can be no better way to spend your birthday than running around the muddy tracks and fields, not to mention two acquaintances per lap with a certain Mr Hill, at 'Wrekington' – quite an appropriate typo I guess, at the Sportssoft results website. Thanks for the messages left at my facebook page, and apologies for dodging off early but who wouldn't in order to receive a birthday cake made by two of my grandchildren who clearly are very well brought up and diplomatic – just the one candle on top! Those girls know which side their bread is buttered on.

Overall it turned out to be a bit of a famous day for the club, with three competitors in the U13 Boys (well done Liam, Kyle and Lewis), two ladies, and 12 starters in the mens event. Unfortunately Scott was unwell and couldn't make this one, but did turn out to provide some encouragement at the most strategically important point, i.e. at the trig point on top of the hill. Jon and I managed to get there just in time to join in warm up – tent wrestling – and although not perfect it has to be said that we all did a much better job than at the Town Moor.

With over 300 runners in total, it was quite a sight to behold when the slow pack took off at precisely 1315. Conditions were quite 'clarty' and there were a number of fallers. One such event came just about 20 metres after the start of the medium pack (Graham Lancaster, Sunderland, I believe) much to the amusement of the rest of the pack – oh those caring, sharing runner types. Have to report that much laughter to the point of guffaws came from one of Graham's own team mates (no names, but he knows who he is) who laughed even more when I enquired as to whether he had tripped him up. However, Graham still managed to finish a couple of places in front of me, and provided some good company for the rest of the race.

Up front Neil had a great run, clearly a bit more at home on the mud than the snow and ice, finishing 18th and gaining promotion to the medium pack. The two Jons worked through to finish 24th and 28th respectively, Jon Archer posting one of the faster times of the day into the bargain. I think he is around 3rd or 4th in the senior men's grand prix. Shaun's new 'Kit-Kat' diet is clearly paying dividends with his impressive 55th place, and

with Lawrence (another 'best' performance) and myself filling the final two spots we were all home in 76 to lift the team to a very impressive 3rd place and up the table to 4th in the current standings for Div 1. Unfortunately George's knee didn't tolerate the heavy going and he was forced to (quite sensibly) retire. Great back up for the scorers from Ben, Luke, David, Les, and Alan. Another full event for Mr Elders there. Must be coming into form for the Nationals!

Some great photos posted by Lawrence (taken by Lesley) with one and all looking quite sprightly with Les clearly enjoying himself. Biggest smile of the day. Not only did Lesley take the photos but also donned the burgundy along with Vicky to run the ladies race. Fantastic to see two ladies out – just one more and we could get some team points on the board. Not sure if Alan's wine is still on chill, but will have certainly matured nicely by now. Also good to see Jane (Mooney, Morpeth) who trains with the club now and then, being based in Low Fell, continuing her fine form over the country this winter with another win.

On to Shields next weekend and hopefully another good turnout, maybe even get a ladies team out. Although I usually save my cr*pp*st run of the season for South Shields this isn't due to the course being particularly tough, it's fairly straightforward mainly run around parkland. Probably why I never run well there!!

Start Fitness North East Harrier League, Newcastle Town Moor. 30.01.2010.

John Stephens: With the majority of races during January being either postponed or cancelled due to the weather there was a certain irony in this the 2nd NEHL being run in snow following a fairly heavy overnight fall. This didn't seem to deter too many people at the club as 17 runners completed the mens event, which may be a record of sorts, along with a lone representative (Jack) in the Boys U-13 (see results). May have been 18 but for Lawrence reporting that one club member who was thinking of running may not turn up as he was waiting for a chair to be delivered. Clearly a front runner for 'the most original excuse for not turning out in the Harrier League' award. What a pleasant surprise to see Bill not noted for his liking of cross country, turning out for the afternoons pleasantries over the Town Moor. The tent was back, no comment necessary other than it was to our good fortune that conditions were bright, sunny, with the park hedge offering some essential shelter from the (light) breeze.

A new course for the Harrier League this year, very well organised by Elswick, the mens event consisted of 2 small laps (2.1 Miles each) and a large lap that took in the hills at the western edge of the Moor. Quite a biting little breeze from the start of each lap out towards Grandstand Road and the Blue House Roundabout. In a number of places the snow was fairly compact and made for quite good running but the surface did churn up a bit in some areas over the large lap. However, with a turnout of over 300 in the mens event the snow did provide a great background for a very colourful phalanx of vests across the course. Yep, bit of a steady start as had a bit of a look around to orientate myself over the first lap. Great to see so many athletes out from the club particularly a lot of the guys who have recently joined. All 'looking good' as I started catch some of the slow pack runners with the usual brief exchange of encouragement with the lads in burgundy.

On the final lap the first hill (quite long and steep) was a little bit of a surprise not just for the runners it seems – a few bemused looks from members of the public out sledging. Come on admit it, I bet I wasn't the only one on the approach to the hill who tried to convince myself that it wasn't runners but sledgers returning to the top, a somewhat fleeting lift of spirit before we turned through the gateway and started the ascent. Second hill was a breeze though with quite a nice run into the finish from there.

Excellent result as well – 4th team in Div 1. All time high in terms of NEHL, and enough to see us get off the bottom of the Division following a spirited but pretty disastrous result at Farringdon. Hopefully we can keep this going over the rest of the season. The afternoon was brought to a highly appropriate conclusion with a brew and a kit-kat in the café and a chat with the two Brian's (Bewick and Rushworth, Sunderland Harriers) and Alan (Elders). To his credit Alan ran the whole race. Whatever happened to just running a lap or two? The word is Geoff gets the shout on this, as Alan said he asked Geoff towards the end of the second small lap if he was doing the whole race and didn't quite get the answer he was looking for! Anyway, nice brew, tent down and home. Wrekenton on the 13th, South Shields on the 20th, and the Nationals on the 27th. February looks busy, but here's to some more turnouts like this.