

Westward League – Exeter, Sunday 7th December 2008

Dave Varney writes:

Thawing temperatures turned the gently sloping cross country course at Exeter into a mud bath & made it into a deceptively tough venue for the third Brooks Westward League, incorporating the Devon County Championships.

Halfway through the six match series, several Newquay & Par athletes & teams are still in good positions for the top three placings & will be looking to consolidate these in the New Year.

First off were the Women & Under 17 Men. The club still has no athletes in the latter category but another third place for the Women's team & an age group category win for Caroline Steven keeps them in contention for the trophies.

Lucy Kelvey continued her excellent start to the winter & putting her as one of the leading Women in the County, which is encouraging with the County Championships being held at St Austell on Saturday. She came in at 10th in the League & with Caroline at 16th & Anna Sharrock 21st, the team took third behind Exeter Harriers & Cornwall AC. Nicola George was at 23rd, Under 17, Philippa Brett, 66th & W60 athlete, Ann Horton at 73rd.

The Under 13 Girls went into this match heading the table but with a few of their top contenders missing, including Charlotte Cayton-Smith, who leads the individual table. They were on duty for Tretherras School for the National School Cup Final in Leicester, where they finished 9th.

Such is the strength of this age group that there were still five top quality young athletes who turned out to keep the team title in reach, especially as closest rivals Penair School were also at Leicester. All five ran out of their skins & after a terrific 7th from Lowenna Hawkey, the other four all packed in & swapped places over the final stretch, the final positions being Lucy Bowden at 11th, Diana Chalmers, 12th, Ashley Smith 13th & Maria Brett 14th. The Plymouth trio squeezed in front on the day by 4 points but the girls second place will keep them well ahead of the other teams.

The Under 13 Boys also have a team placing possibility with another third. Danny Old made up an enormous amount of ground over the second of two small laps, half way down the field, he gradually climbed to finish 5th after a storming finish. James Craddock & Corey Cross chased each other to the line for 11th & 12th with Josh Dray's debut at 18th.

The Devon Championships swelled the overall numbers & provided extra competition from athletes not affiliated to the League. This proved the case in the men's race half way through the day & a quality race to watch. Unfortunately, N&P were short of numbers & are now out of the team trophy chase but with John Horton chalking up a second in his M60 veteran category, he's well in the running for a trophy. Graham Hodgson was first home at 60th, John was 105th overall & John Bowden at 126th.

By the time the under 15's ran, the course was like a quagmire. The Girls were already heading the table & looked strong on paper. The leading pair of April Hogg & Exeter's Rosie Chamberlain set off with an Erme Valley girl in close contention. April did the fore running with the other two on her shoulder but as they dropped to the final loop to complete the two lap course, Rosie forged ahead to gain an overall advantage over April in the League with two wins against one in her favour.

April had the satisfaction of leading a victorious team home with a plucky run by Amy Sweet at 5th, suffering from a tight hip & closely followed by a strong run from Ailsa Sharrock in at 9th with the ever present Hollie Startup, at 27th.

The Boys need some support as they were unable to field a full team again but Hobie Martin at 14th & Josh Steven at 23rd both put in good performances.