

SOUTH OF ENGLAND CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS **HILLINGDON, LONDON SATURDAY 24TH JANUARY 2009**

Dave Varney writes:

After winning the South West Championships at Bicton earlier this month, 11 year old Charlotte Cayton-Smith moved up a level to compete in the South of England Area Cross Country Championships at Uxbridge to produce a sensational performance which earned her a Silver medal. To put this into context, not only was she the only Cornish medalist, she can be proud to say that she was also the only athlete of any age group in the South West to win an individual medal.



The Championships are normally held at the Parliament Hill fields on Hampstead Heath but with the venue being used for the National Club Championships next month, this new course was found in Uxbridge. There was nothing spectacular about the setting but with the saturated ground conditions, coupled with frozen sections & a long drag to the the mid point of the laps, it proved to be a test for most seasoned athletes, especially as the longer

& older age group races built up. By the time the Senior races started, it was already a quagmire & with 311 Women & 672 Men competing, there was hardly a blade of grass to be seen at the end.



Dancing on Ice anyone?



Charlotte's race was the second off with over 220 competitors representing clubs from an area stretching as far as Norfolk to Cornwall. As they climbed away from the flat start, she was happy to sit back from the leading group, gradually making up ground as they reached the top. A long steady down hill saw her close the gap & chasing down the leaders for the final 800m circuit of the start & finish field. The icy conditions worked to her advantage as she ploughed straight through the frozen mud past the more reluctant third placed athlete, to get into a medal position & as she turned into the finishing straight, her determination took her past the second placed girl. For the last 100m it was a close chase before Charlotte's speed made certain of the Under 13 Girl's Silver medal.



The numbers making the long trip from the club were not large but there were other good performances given the conditions. April Hogg in the Under 15 Girls event found the sapping uphill drained the strength in her muscles but made up for this on the down hill to finish 31st from 220, with Ailsa Sharrock in the same race at mid position, finishing 115th.

< April enjoying the mud!

Ailsa looking tired near the end>





Lucy Kelvey also had a superb run in the 311 strong Senior race. From the start, she got into the top 50 & over the two small & two large laps of the 8Km (5mile) course, she held on to a 40th place, just losing a place as she was closed on the finish.

< Lucy enjoying the end of the race.

The Under 17 Men's race had a strong local contingent but all representing different clubs, Tyler Westby held the flag for the N&P club, finishing 116th. Former club athletes, Charles Gunning (Shaftsbury Barnet) was 23rd, just ahead of Dean Scott (Enfield & Haringey) at 27th with Cornwall Ac's James Waldie also in the top group at 38th. Another former athlete travelling with the team & finishing 25th in the Under 20 Women was Anna Sharrock



With four large laps & a distance of 15Km (9.4mile) the four Senior Men from the club had to draw on all of their reserves to complete the final race of the day. Apart from Gregg Hooper who finished inside the top half at 286th, there was no real enthusiasm at the finish, but still a real sense of achievement for Graham Hodgson (332nd), John Scott (405th, losing scores of places in the latter stages as he suffered from a lack of training following a recent injury) & Simon Howard at 570th



<Graham



Gregg>



<John doing his best to avoid the camera by hiding behind other competitors.



Simon keeping an eye on the mud below.>

Even the spectators could enjoy the mud!

