

## South of England XC Champs – 27<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Stanmer Park, Brighton, was the venue for the southerners this year, with the usual venue of Parliament Hill being reserved for the National XC a month later.

Largely due to the travelling distance, recruiting teams for this fixture had proved difficult. Add to that a horrific weather forecast, roadworks on the motorway, a few bouts of illness, some personal circumstances, and an injury or two, and our squad of 8 men and 5 women was reduced to just 3 and 4, respectively.

Still, after the ordeal of putting up the event shelter in rather unfavourable conditions (i.e., we had to catch it after it took off), the hardy bunch that remained was rather looking forward to their run.

For both sexes, the course was run over a mixture of grass, woodland, and compacted mud paths, the former surface requiring long spikes, especially with it being wet and slippery, while for the latter, trail shoes would have sufficed. This meant that positions switched frequently throughout the race, depending on who was faring better over which type of terrain.

The ladies race was 8k this time – one small loop and two medium - with total elevation of 778ft, and a delightfully muddy downhill finish.



Being quite similar in speed over other, more local, XC races, we knew it would be a close-run race for us. We didn't expect to place, by any stretch of the imagination, but hoped to not come last as a team!

I was first back, in 44:17, with Paloma Crayford not far behind in 45:11. Amazingly, this was only Paloma's third XC race, after the Reading and Tadley TVXC fixtures (clearly she is not afraid of mud!) and she employed her usual strategy of starting off steadily and overtaking later on in the race. If only we could all be so sensible. Completing the team were Sally Carpenter, in 47:10, and Claire Seymour, in the throes of marathon training, hot on her heels in 47:16. This was Sally's first experience of an XC championship race, and, she vowed to throw away her trail shoes in favour of some more grippy spikes, having been frustrated with the slipperiness of it all. It is definitely worth the investment!

When the official results were released, we were delighted to have come 39<sup>th</sup> out of 40 teams listed, and not last! I can only assume that there were a lot of incomplete teams, as there were at least 60 runners behind us.

Thanks to Renée Whalley for these photos.



The men's course was, controversially, given the recent uproar about sexism in these long-standing races, 15k, almost double the distance run by the women, with a cut-off time – the men were to have started their third lap by 55 minutes. I think this was run over 1 small loop and 3 large. I say, think, because by this time the weather was so fierce, that all I could do to avoid post-race hypothermia was stay inside the tent and watch from a distance. The overall elevation gain was 1519ft though, according to Strava records.



First back for the club was David McCoy (the younger) in an excellent 1:03:00. Brendan Morris was just a whisker behind in a 1:03:16, and Ian Giggs, on his way back from Peacehaven parkrun (his 226<sup>th</sup> different parkrun event), ran a very good 1:16:54, with still over 100 men behind him in this considerably reduced field, and despite being soaked to the skin. With 6 needed to score, they were short of a full team, but all three were pleased with their runs regardless.



Thanks to Pete Morris for these photos, and to everyone who made the journey to both represent and support the club at this fixture.

Note: For more information on the petition to equalise distances of XC races for men and women in England, visit [38degrees.org.uk](http://38degrees.org.uk).