

8. TRC Teams

We're all in this together

Sooner or later, a sports club wants to be more than the sum of its parts. From its earliest days, TRC has put together teams to compete in events. As with the Olympics, for the TRC teams, it is (usually) not the winning but the taking part that counts but we have had our share of glory, most notably in the Greensand Ridge Relay.

The Nationals and SEAA Cross Country Championships

The South of England Athletics Association organises an annual cross country event at Parliament Hill, London and every few years, the National Championships are held there. It is the iconic cross country course with sweeping views over the London skyline and a course to test the best runners in the country. TRC usually enters a team.

Nothing compares to standing on the start line, herded into pens with 1500 other runners and the first hill straight ahead. For spectators, the sight of the vast width of athletes charging up the hill is equally spectacular.

It is a mental as well as a physical challenge. The climbs and descents are gruelling and more so when, as is usually the case at the end of January, the mud is shin deep. And that is just the first lap. By lap three, the mud has deepened to a quagmire.

The Chiltern League

Rick Ansell writes:

On a Saturday in October runners gather in parks, sports fields and if they are lucky, some urban countryside for the first round of the Cross Country League. England is divided into various regions for this and for Tring we run in the Chiltern League which is the biggest of them all with over 1,000 runners/athletes taking part. The process is repeated on four further Saturdays in November, December, January and finally February when we emerge from the Cross Country season again.

There are races for all ages from U13 to senior, male and female but Tring with no Junior section competes, with the occasional exception, only in the senior races. The courses are generally typical cross country, multiple, fairly short laps, the course becoming increasingly muddy as the afternoon goes on and the last race, senior men, gets under way.

The quality is high with national or certainly regional standard athletes leading the field, though the tail is long and as the afternoon light fades there will usually be one elderly gentleman hobbling round as the marshals collect in the tape behind.

The scoring system is beautiful in its simplicity: if there are 285 runners in the race the winner gets 285 points, the second 284 and so on down to that elderly gentleman who scores what could be a crucial single point for his club. The scores for each club in each race are added up and a total is arrived at. Only the first ten men and first six ladies in a club actually have their points taken, though by finishing eg 12th for your

club and beating the tenth runner from another club you reduce their score by one so you still contribute to your club's place in the League.

The Chiltern League has two Divisions with the bottom two clubs in Division One being demoted and replaced by the top two clubs in Division Two. Tring yoyo between the two Divisions, always scoring well in the lower but lacking junior runners to gain the necessary points to stay up in the First Division consistently.

The League was established in the 1959-60 season, long before Tring had come into existence, at least Tring Running Club. Back in the 1980s and early 1990s the League's two Divisions would race at separate venues and in the 1990s Tring organised three events for Division Two based at the Cricket Club in Berkhamsted and using the hills and woods of the Common for the course. It was not generally a popular venue except with us. Other clubs complained there was too much mud and too many hills.

As the League grew further it became increasingly difficult to find suitable venues: places with easy access to a suitable course but with sufficient parking for all the cars, and so the decision was made to join both Divisions into one mega event which could now be held at just a handful of venues. This handful has been whittled down so that nowadays the events use the same five venues each season: Oxford Horspath, Keysoe in the Bedfordshire countryside, Stopsley Common in Luton and two separate venues in Milton Keynes: Teardrop Lakes and Campbell Park.

In the days before each event the club captains send out increasingly desperate emails begging for participants and usually there is a good turnout of 30-40 members. The famous Tring Tent is erected, often inside out, shelter is created, bags deposited and warm-ups done (usually this means standing round chatting with hands in pockets).

The serpentine loops of the course make spectating easy and raucous support is given by the ladies to the men and more restrained support by the men to the ladies. As people wend their way, satisfyingly tired, back to the tent from the finish line, the whole reason for the afternoon becomes apparent. Boxes of tupperware are produced and opened and the baking skills of the club are sampled. Lemon drizzle is compared to chocolate brownie and veggie and vegan members extoll the virtues of healthy cakes.

The ritual of taking down the tent is performed, on windy days looking more like a dance of the veils. A quick check is made that Brian Evans hasn't been wrapped up inside it by mistake and we troop homeward to nervously await the results and see if we are in the promotion or relegation zone depending on the Division we are in for the year.

British Athletics Fell and Hill Relay Championships

Rick Ansell writes:

Tring's first foray into the FRA National Relays came in 1997 when interest and competence in fell running within the club had grown. It was Kevin Harding who suggested we enter a team. Four big men crammed into my little Peugeot 205 and we headed north to Barley at the foot of Pendle Hill, Lancashire. Dave Fryer and Richard Collison and I think Gareth Owens camped in an autumnal campsite and in the

morning made our way to the village. I ran the navigation leg with Kevin and as we finished Mike Rose, FRA Secretary, came up to me and told me he had disqualified Tring as I was not First Claim for the club. He had warned me that he would. We were in about 50th position at the time and not really threatening the leaders but rules are rules. At least we were all able to complete our runs. It was as a result of this that I changed to First Claim for Tring.

In 1998 the Relays were in the Lakes. We drove up after competing in a Chiltern League race at Woburn Sands and all stayed with Kevin's brother Quentin in Caton near Lancaster. Dave Fryer snored loudly all night so it was a fairly sleepless team that assembled in Braithwaite. I was on the navigation leg again with Kevin and remember having a hard time of it. I remember Boff Whalley coming in on his leg and people quietly congratulating him on emptying an ice bucket over John Prescott at the recent Brit Awards. Boff was, of course, a pretty good fell runner when he wasn't tubthumping.

In 1999 we managed to persuade the club to pay for us to hire a mini van and the six of us piled in and drove to Scotland to do the event from Alva. Mike Mitchell was in the team that year, making a rare appearance on the fells in a break from his quest to complete 100 marathons. Once again I was on the navigation leg with Kevin. I'd just lost my job and my mind was elsewhere. I think we were about ten minutes off the pace.

I think it was 2000 that we went to Llanberis for the Relays. I was again down to run the nav leg with Kevin. It was always stressful running with Kevin as he was a good five minutes an hour quicker than me at that time. The team wasn't competitive and we both had our eyes on the following weekend when we would be running a mountain marathon and I think Kevin was imagining a steady run which reassured me.

I pulled off my Helly top just before we set off and he looked at me and asked: 'Are we going to go hard then?' 'Well, I'm going to run as fast as I can,' I replied. It was one of my most satisfying runs. We stormed through the field. I matched Kevin on the climbs but he had to wait for me at the bottoms of the hills. He did all the navigation, I just focused on his heels. I collapsed in a heap at the end: 'I enjoyed that,' he said with a glint in his eye, and I knew that he had had some exercise and we had run well.

In 2006 we ran in the Pennines. Kevin got the team off to a tremendous start coming back in 16th place. Steve Long and I went out on the second leg and I struggled desperately to keep up and we lost 20 places. Alan Rosen and Tony Ruberry went out next on the navigation leg. Several teams missed a control that was somewhat hidden on the map but Alan's navigation was, of course, impeccable and they made up a place before handing over to Alan Whelan who brought us home in 36th place overall.

In 2007 Michael and Alan set us off on the long leg and had a steady run coming back 57th. I was on the second short solo leg and made up to 41st before handing over to Kevin and Nigel Bunn who had recently joined the club and was much better matched with Kevin. They came back with the team now in 35th place and handed on to Steve Long who had an outstanding run finishing 9th for the leg and pulling the team up to 29th overall. One of our best results.

Two years later we were in the Western Lakes. John Manning ran the first leg solo and handed on to Ross and Nigel Bunn who made up a massive 66 places. That year I ran

the navigation leg with Simon Barnett. We had a slight disagreement early on as to the direction of east. I had to explain that if Simon looked at his compass the red end of the needle would be pointing north and that east would be at 90 degrees to this. That settled we made good progress despite some thick clag, making up a further 35 places. Brian Layton was on the glory leg and brought the team home in 54th place.

I ran with Simon on other occasions doing the navigation leg. Once, when the event returned to Pendle, Simon was flying and I struggled along behind. We made a mistake on the run in and lost a few minutes but had at least found all the controls which several other teams had failed to do. I was past my best then and Simon was stronger by far.

At Barbon we ran together again and again managed a respectable finish as several teams ran straight past a control hidden behind a group of rocks. That year the Brownlee Brothers were out for Bingley, having made a name for themselves in international triathlons. They got a lot of stick from Selwyn Wright on the commentary about having to clean their own shoes after the race, piss up against the wall and generally be fell runners rather than international superstars. They started life as fell runners and to be fair probably always have been at heart.

There were runs with Michael Burgess too, once from Langdale on a glorious sunny October day. Michael was impressed with my navigation. I never let on that I never actually looked at the map but just clung on to the guy in front who I knew would know where he was going. Michael twisted his ankle descending back into the valley and we had to limp home.

Over the years the memories all get jumbled and I never kept very good records. But they were all good weekends out with the club. There is always something special about running with someone instead of against them. There's a little bond that always remains.

Rick's Relays

Rick invented these so he has written the official history:

Many years ago I was a member of Dark Peak Fell Runners. This was at a time when fell running was in, if not its infancy, its adolescence. Dark Peak prided itself on its quirkiness and anarchy. Although they now have several international standard runners they still haven't quite outgrown this adolescence. It was they who first came up with the idea of running about the moors in the dark with torches (hand held in those pre-headtorch days). This was ostensibly practice for the Derwent Watershed or High Peak Marathon, a 40-mile overnight winter race round the moors.

Anyway, members were always on the lookout for the esoteric and someone came up with the idea of the Burbage Baffler. This was an event that proved amazingly difficult to explain to a bunch of fell runners and even more difficult for them to understand. With the result that there were not many teams who managed to complete the event successfully.

The idea was to have a team of four who would subdivide into two pairs. The first of these two pairs would stand back to back on Burbage Bridge at the top of Burbage Valley, one of the Peak District's premier climbing venues, and on the word go they

would set off in opposite directions, one to run along the Edge and the other round the opposite side of the valley over Higger Tor.

At some point, at least in theory, the two would meet when the paths converged at the foot of the valley by Toad's Mouth. If the two were not well paired then the faster runner would have started to ascend again heading towards his or her partner. When (and if) they did finally meet the two would turn round and retrace their respective steps to the start whereupon the other half of the team would repeat the process. Some felt that this was then the end of the race but the first pair now had to do a second lap, each person running the opposite side of the valley to the first time and then finally the second pair would do their second lap. Each complete loop was about 5km with some pretty rough going in places.

Teams had to include one lady, one 'Wart' (stalwart, ie someone past their running prime) and one whippet and one other. Prizes (usually things like a loaf of stale sliced bread) were highly coveted and would be awarded to the fastest team (boring) and to the Most Together Pair (much more competitive). In theory each pair should have arrived back at the start at exactly the same time. Even if one person was much faster than the other and had got well started on their partner's half of the course before meeting, they should have been much faster on the return too and so arrived back at the same time. Because of the topography it was impossible, as you approached the finish, to see a partner arriving from the other side so you couldn't loiter about waiting for them to hove into view. The time between the arrival of each half of the pair was measured on each of the two 'laps' and the pair that had the lowest aggregate time was awarded the very prestigious 'Most Together Pair Prize'.

I was away working abroad in these years and never actually got to experience the event but I always thought it was a brilliant concept and a way to get runners of all abilities competing with and against each other on a (well, not so level) playing field (alright not exactly a playing field, either).

When I joined Tring I began to think it would be good to organise a Baffler-style event to lighten up some of the local club runners who all seemed a bit po-faced and very focused on running very fast round and round muddy playing fields and then discussing shoe makes. In order to see how it would work I decided to organise an event on a summer Wednesday in Tring Park.

An approximately two-mile loop was designed starting from the footbridge and ascending to King Charles Ride and with a couple of packs of flour I was able to mark the main turns. The event seemed to be enjoyed by those who did it. I never quite got round to organising an inter-club event but it did become an annual summer fixture. In the first years I carefully timed the difference between the pairs and a bottle of wine was presented to the Most Together Pair but as the club, grew timing everyone and knowing who was paired with who became too stressful. People seemed to enjoy themselves just as much without the motivation of the wine so it became completely non-competitive.

After a few years someone suggested it would be fun to have something like this in the winter to break the monotony of dark Wednesday evening runs. At this time only about half the club were regularly running off road in the dark so Tring Park seemed a bit too ambitious and a winter loop was found starting from the canal bridge in Marshcroft Lane with the lap being down the towpath to Tring Station, back down Station Road

and up Marshcroft (or vice versa if you went the other way). This meant that if one pair member really didn't fancy anything off road they could just do two of the road sections but it also gave the opportunity for people to try a mild off-road section along the towpath in the dark if they felt adventurous. This worked well for a couple of years by when more Wednesday winter runs were off road and people were ready to run the summer course in Tring Park with torches, the route lit by glow-sticks procured from MoD Stores by a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces. I won't name him in case he gets into trouble ...

The event has proved easy to explain to members of Tring but they have never got hold of the correct name, a Baffler, and Rick's Relays is what it has become.

The Calderdale Way Relay

From 2005, Steve Long organised the club's entry to the Calderdale Way Relay. The CWR is run over six legs with a pair on each leg across the moorlands of West Yorkshire. The traditional date was early December so the conditions were often very wintery (after postponements due to severely bad weather, the race was switched to May from 2015, making it far less interesting).

The logistics of the CWR were extreme: getting the right runner to the right start at the right time and ensuring finishing runners were not left in the cold, often on snow- or ice-covered Pennine roads. Steve proved to be adept at this, working out with painstaking care the optimum pairings, target times and transport logistics. Tring's first foray into the event was a joint venture with Milton Keynes AC as neither club could muster a complete team. After a successful first year, Tring were able to field the necessary 12 runners and thereafter consistently beat MK.

Steve always found a suitable place for the team to stay and the day before the race was spent recceing the routes. A meal and drinks in the local pub on the night before race day always ran the risk of impairing peak performance the next day!

The race was dominated by traditional fell running clubs from 'up North' but Tring performed well up the field. We were commonly placed in the top quarter of the field. We peaked in 2011 finishing 14th out of 86 teams in a club record time of 6 hours 50 minutes. The team comprised Ross Langley, Luke Delderfield, Kevin Harding, Michael Burgess, Alison Harding, Kirsty Barnett, Steve Long, Alan Whelan, Jim Sinton, Sarah Hill, Henry Keighley-Elstob and Greg O'Callaghan.

The Greensand Ridge Relay

The Greensand Ridge Relay is a handicap race for teams of six competing over six legs. It is run over an off-road course between Leighton Buzzard and Northill near Sandy. Steve Long has long been the mastermind in planning the composition of the Tring teams and is the inspiration behind TRC's vast success in the event. It is probably the club's most popular team event.

Tring typically enters several teams and aims to cover all the categories (Open, Mixed, Women). On the day, there is a tremendous team atmosphere at each of the changeover points. As a runner, there is also the trepidation of not knowing exactly when you will take the baton. It is great fun and has a perfect ending at the pub for the award of the trophies.

TRC has won the handicap race in four of the last eight years and the women's team has won the pace race in four of the last six years (writing in 2020 when the race was cancelled due to the pandemic). The club also holds the record (in 2018) for most time gained against handicap.

TRC's winning streak started in 2012 and that year Steve Long wrote a detailed account of the race for the club newsletter. It splendidly conveys the twists, turns, ups and downs of the event as well as containing plenty of local detail on the individual club members. The then newsletter editor, Dave Jones, couldn't resist adding a postscript in his own inimitable style! See appendix.

Appendix. Greensand Ridge Relay report – 23rd June 2012

Steve Long writes:

This year it was competed by a record number of 40 teams, but retained the 'small and friendly' feeling it prides itself on. Tring RC entered four teams, two open teams, one ladies' and one mixed.

The handicap works by allocating a par time to each runner based on which leg, gender and age. The par times are derived from historical results for the race. The method of deriving the par times is not published, but it looks like the par time is the median of fastest and slowest times. Each team has an individual start time which will get it to the finish at 5pm if everybody runs to par. The first team over the line is the winner. There are also categories for fastest team and fastest ladies and mixed teams.

Leg 1 – Leighton Buzzard to Stockgrove, 5.6 miles

First Tring team away is the Tring Big Game Hunters at 11.43am, represented by Colin Rees. This team came together because Brian Layton thought a team of good over-60s would benefit from the handicapping system and could possibly win. The team was lacking a certain Mr Tom Griffin, away on holiday, but the team still looked strong. Would they win? Read on.

Colin has come back from running retirement to run in this team! First race in three years and he has a good run, only losing one place, to a fast MK Ladies team. He finishes in 5th position overall. Next team away is the Tring Gazelles at 11:52. Katie Ferguson has a good run, beating the club record held by Hilary by about a minute. Places can be hard to make up in the early stages of the race, before the handicap starts to unwind, but she makes up two places finishing 7th.

Third away are the Tring Zebras at 12:08. Nigel Kippax is looking to beat his time from last year and he does this, even going 6 seconds faster than Katie. Nigel started in the thick of it, passing two teams and being passed by another two, holding 19th place.

Last Tring team away is the Tring Rhinos at 12.21. Ross Langley, freshly back from his honeymoon, sets out with great expectations, but 10 days without running takes its toll and Ross struggles to live up to his own expectations. Nevertheless, it is a strong run, making up four places, and a new leg record for the club.

The leaders after leg 1 are the 'MK Nearly 70s', a team of five O-70s and one O-60, with a massive head start on everybody else. The MK Ladies have passed three teams to gain 2nd place overall and are looking very strong.

Leg 2 – Stockgrove to Woburn, 3.9 miles

Tony Hill storms into Woburn in 2nd place, having seen off the MK Nearly 70s (whose challenge sadly faded) and two other teams, and got the better of his pacemaker – think ‘engine management system’. He doesn’t catch the MK Ladies, who have taken the lead and are looking pretty uncatchable at this point. Currently 5:57 ahead. Could anybody close the gap? Jane Porteous runs well for the Tring Gazelles, neither passing nor being passed, and still in 7th place. Nigel Bunn runs leg 2 for the Tring Rhinos and catches and passes the Tring Zebras, making up a massive 13 places in all and bring the team up to 13th place. As a last-minute stand-in Nigel needed to fit into the team in the most convenient way and wasn’t necessarily running the optimum leg, although the Rhinos have strength in depth. He records club and race age-group records for the leg.

The Tring Zebras are represented by Shirley White, who does her team proud by holding 19th position. She is passed by two teams but passes two other teams in return.

Within the sub-categories of fastest team, fastest ladies and mixed teams the positions are not obvious during the race as teams are not racing head to head but staggered by the handicap. So I am not trying to describe the progress of teams in those categories because it is not apparent until the times have been worked out at the end – unlike the handicap positions which are very obvious!

Leg 3 – Woburn to Millbrook, 9.1 miles

This is where it all starts to happen, handicap-wise, as the late-starting fast teams begin to catch up, and the early-starting slow teams begin to fall by the wayside. The leg is long, usually 8.1 miles, but a mile longer this year due to the M1 footbridge being closed and a diversion being in place.

Peter Alford, running for the Big Game Hunters, is immune from everything going on behind him, and runs a solid leg to maintain 2nd place behind the MK Ladies, now 7:27 ahead and going away.

Alison Harding keeps the Tring Gazelles ahead of the Tring Rhinos with a fantastic run, gaining three places and taking the Gazelles into 4th place. Working Alison’s pace back, if the leg had not been lengthened she would have set a new club record as her pace was quicker than Sarah Hill last year.

Michael Burgess had been doubtful to run, having hurt himself somehow running as sweeper in the Fun Run, but now he excels himself, gaining the most time on handicap of any Tring runner and making up eight places, pushing the Tring Rhinos into 6th place. Simon Barnett has a big ask in the Tring Zebras, as the M21-39 handicap is tough on leg 3, where the par time is pulled down by the fastest runners in the race. Simon runs a good leg making up two places, passing three teams and being passed by only one. Now in 17th place.

Tring teams 2, 4, 6 and 17. Gazelles 2:58 down on the Big Game Hunters, Rhinos 2:20 down on the Gazelles and 5:18 down on the Big Game Hunters.

Leg 4 – Millbrook to Maulden Woods, 5.7 miles

The really fast teams are pushing into the top half of the field now, but there are still some slower teams up there, balancing the effect to some extent. The question is, can Brian Layton hold on to 2nd place for the Tring Big Game Hunters, or even catch the MK Ladies? According to my estimates, the answer will be no, he will be caught by the

Rhinos team on this leg, but the Rhinos are slightly behind schedule. The Gazelles are ahead of schedule – they have held off the Rhinos on leg 3 and there seems a realistic chance that Bryony can catch Brian on leg 4. As it turns out I am able to catch all the teams ahead of me except the MK Ladies. After I pass Brian I look ahead for the MK Ladies but the black and orange vest never comes into sight. I make up four places, pulling the team up to 2nd place. Brian holds off Bryony, losing just the one place, down to 3rd. Bryony is making up ground on Brian but can't quite catch him. She passes enough teams to hold on to 4th place overall. Bryony's time is good enough for a club record, over a minute faster than Mary's time last year, and she also gains a race record as the first run by a W17-20 on the leg. No less deserved for this fact though.

John Manning runs the leg for the Tring Zebras, and records a fine time, making up four places. Now in 13th position, the team's highest for the race. Tring teams 2nd, 3rd and 4th and 13th! The MK Ladies' lead is now being eroded, now down to 4:59.

Leg 5 – Maulden Woods to Deadman's Cross, 5.6 miles

We are getting into the end game. For the Tring Rhinos there is now an awareness of the threat from behind as much as the need to catch the MK Ladies. Teams like the AFF Nice 'n' Easies and the LBAC Buzzard Bolts are tearing through the field, and the LFR Silver Foxes are making a late charge.

The MK Ladies have a 16-year-old on leg 5 and we assume she must be good. The rumour goes that she is a track runner who has never run off road and has a chaperone to accompany her round the course. So can Kevin Harding catch her up for the Tring Rhinos? This is the beauty of the Greensand Relay: fair competition between all ages and genders. The handicap is a great leveller.

Kevin cannot quite catch his quarry, despite setting new race and club records, but he is close. The gap to the MK Ladies at the end of leg 5 is narrowed to 1:09. It will all be down to the final leg, in more ways than one – the AFF team has made massive gains over the last few legs, with their young leg 5 runner narrowing the gap to 2:05 behind Kevin!

The Big Game Hunters lose a place to the AFF team. Bill Salkeld runs a solid leg but can do nothing about the AFF young gun. BGHs down to 4th place. Bill is another runner who has been motivated to train for the event and has even been spotted on a Wednesday evening club run. Like Colin, Bill is sporting a Tring JC vest – now retro enough to be cool!

The Tring Gazelles are also suffering the fast teams catching up. Hilary loses six places to hard-charging teams like the AFF Nice 'n' Easies, the Buzzard Bolts and the LFR Silver Foxes. Despite losing places Hilary records a new club record, lowering Alison's time from last year by over a minute. New position is 10th. The Tring Zebras in the form of Maria Cook suffer a similar fate to the Gazelles, being passed by the Buzzard Bolts, previous winners Rootsy's All Stars from B&C, AFF Bits 'n' Pieces (a quality team despite the name), and the LBAC Buzzard Belles, previous winners of the Fastest Ladies team. The Zebras are 17th.

Leg 6 – Deadman's Cross to Northill, 4.7 miles

It is down to the wire. Can Paul Allen catch the W17-20 MK Lady (another track runner unused to off road, we are told), and can he stay ahead of the AFF runner (the leg 6 record holder, the AFF captain is proud to boast as we wait at Northill). We arrive at the finish ahead of the organisers, and they remark that we can't be expecting our runner already – 7 or 8 minutes, we say.

Who will run into sight first, Paul in the blue and white of Tring, MK in black and orange, or AFF in red and white?

Hurrah, it's a blue and white vest, Paul has won it for Tring. It is 16:09:11, the earliest finish in the history of the race (most time gained against handicap).

Second is the MK Lady, who has held off the AFF challenge, the AFF Nice 'n' Easies arriving 3rd.

Who will be 4th? The Big Game Hunters were close to being caught up by the rapid LFR Silver Foxes at the end of leg 5. There was a late team change – Peter Hamson was forced to drop out and Trevor Lark took his place, spoiling the 100% 0-60 team composition, but adding some speed and northern grit. Trevor now has his work cut out. He recounts that the Silver Foxes' runner came past him, but had apparently shot his bolt too early. Trevor hung on and dug in and was able to re-pass and throw off the LFR challenge before the end of the race, bringing the Big Game Hunters in to finish in 4th place, in a time that would have won the race last year.

The Tring Gazelles, having faced a rush of fast teams on leg 5, have an easier time on leg 6. Alice Ely holds position. She sets a new club record, shaving 12 seconds off Kirsty's time from last year. The Gazelles are 10th in the race, but perform strongly in the Fastest Ladies' Team category, placing 2nd only 6 minutes down on the winners after 34 miles of racing. Maybe next year ladies!

The Tring Zebras also have a relatively trouble-free leg 6. Kirsty Barnett puts in a strong performance on her way back to fitness after delivering Lizzie to the world, losing only one place and bringing the team in to finish in 18th place overall. More significantly the team is 2nd in the Mixed Team competition. They are about 18 minutes down on the Mixed Team winners but perhaps this will be a category that Tring can win in future years too.

All in all it's a good second outing in the Greensand Ridge Relay for TRC. It's a highly enjoyable day with good off-road running, the excitement of the handicap, the enjoyment of running in teams and the added spice of competition between the Tring teams. Brian was not wrong when he thought his team of over-60s could win, the only problem is that several teams have upped the anti this year. The first 8 or so teams were in with a realistic chance of winning this year, based on winning times in previous years. What will happen next year then, with the anti being as upped as it is? It could be interesting.

Editor's (Dave Jones) note:

Not mentioned in Steve's report above was the gallant attempt by another Tring Team – Team Hippos, comprising Dave Jones, Jonathan Mulcahy, Mike Gaunt and Three Bellies. Setting off full of enthusiasm, Team Hippos unfortunately passed a kebab van on the way to the start and decided on some preloading for the long journey ahead. Then Jonathan needed a dump and Three Bellies noticed that Wetherspoons were doing a full English breakfast, including a pint of John Smiths for £4.99. Dave, having not had his latte that morning, was just bloody hopeless. So, despite the immense training, planning, commitment and effort, the day was spent eating bacon, drinking beer and discussing Lord of the Rings. It turns out that Smeagol and Gollum are the

*same character and Legolas and Aragorn too, I think. You'll have to ask Jonathan ...
Next year we'll get to the start.*