

The state of the ground at this time of year means that a number of ‘interesting’ multi-terrain races tend to be scheduled, all putting the natural elements to their worse possible use! The Sodbury Slog and the Suicide Sixish are, perhaps as their names would suggest, two of these type of events.

The Sodbury Slog is a hilly, 9.5 country miles, multi-terrain race through the countryside of south Gloucestershire. Starting from Chipping Sodbury School the runners are directed onto a marshy Sodbury Common, where the (multi-coloured!) mud and fun starts and strategically placed bales of hay provide extra obstacles. The first climb then takes them onto the Cotswold Way, over the Roman encampment at Old Sodbury and down through the woods into the spectacularly scenic grounds of Little Sodbury Manor. After several watery excursions and a trip through Horton village, it’s back onto Sodbury Common and a wade through the River Frome before returning to the school for the finish and a dip into the very welcome hot tubs! Rather surprisingly 1,017 people thought that this was a pleasant way to spend a Sunday morning and, even more surprisingly, there were a trio of Stratford AC members amongst them. Kate Wright appeared to float over the mud as easily as she does over the tarmac, and she raced round to pick up the female O40s prize, recording 74:08 minutes for 85<sup>th</sup> place overall, while a resolute Allan Coldicott was a highly respectable 322<sup>nd</sup> in a time of 87:01. Sarah Odell recovered from being trampled on in one of the muddy crossings and, despite an impressive bruise on her ankle and calf, finished easily in the top half of the field in 461<sup>st</sup> place, crossing the line in 93:24 minutes. Julian Moorhouse (Birchfield) and Sula Young (Bristol Uni OB) were the male and female winners, taking 58:08 and 67:17 respectively, and amazingly enough everyone seemed to enjoy it so much that they can’t wait for next year!

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The only obvious advantage that the Suicide Sixish has over the Sodbury Slog is that it’s three miles shorter, but apart from that it’s just as unpleasant! The Black Country may not be the most obvious setting for such an event, but Baggeridge Country Park at Sedgeley has proved to be an ideal venue over the years for this very hilly, single lap 10K. Apart from all the usual mud, a near vertical hill at Himley Hall and a deep-water river crossing, the sting of this race is in the tail with the finish at the top of a long series of steep steps. As if all of that wasn’t bad enough, this year saw bitterly cold and wet weather and a slightly chaotic start out of keeping with the normal smooth organisation of this testing event.

The Stratford AC pair of Karen Holmes and Emma Bexson teamed up and ran round together, with Karen trying to get full fitness back the hard way after a long lay-off. The rather bedraggled duo completed the ordeal in an excellent 71:40 minutes, putting them into the 608<sup>th</sup> and 609<sup>th</sup> slots, with Mike Cornes (Mammoth Racing Club) and Jodie Simpson (Birmingham Uni) taking the overall honours in respective times of 38:58 and 43:50 minutes. The final results took a bit of sorting out afterwards since the torrential sleet at the finish not only provided a rather unpleasant end for the 663 runners, it also played havoc with the organisers’ written sheets!

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Fellow Stratford AC member John Butler had a marginly more sensible way of doing things – go off to the continent for the weekend and hopefully get away from the rain, taking in a couple of races while you’re there. On the Saturday afternoon he ran in a hilly 5K race at Lapugny in France, which took the field through some very

picturesque woods, and he finished 68<sup>th</sup> in a time of 28:52 minutes. John then followed this by getting up early on the Sunday and driving 25 miles across the Belgian border to a town called Ploegsteert, where he proceeded to take part in the Memorial Half-Marathon (the race is called thus because Ploegsteert was the scene of two fierce World War I battles). Unfortunately the weather was even worse than it was in the UK, and although the course was a flat one the wind and rain made conditions very difficult. John showed great persistence though as he crossed the line in 2 hours 10.15 minutes, and in the 8 half-marathons he has done in 2007 he has been bringing his times back down again each time. The Mickleton retiree has also done a 20- and 15-miler this year, as well as 30 other races, showing that life doesn't necessarily slow down when you stop work!