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Over 2,000 elves, snowmen and reindeer spotted on Weston's beach

Anyone who'd had one too many at the Christmas party the night before could've been forgiven for thinking they were having a moment on Sunday if they happened across over 2,000 runners taking part in Weston Athletic Club's annual Christmas Cracker races on Weston-super-Mare beach.

Reindeer, snowmen, Christmas trees, penguins, elves, angels and Santas lined up in their droves to take on the Christmas Cracker 10k and junior Mini Cracker 2k races on Sunday morning. Heavy rain overnight, a tide that had just turned before the race start, and strong gusty winds made for more challenging conditions than normal, but the gloriously festive runners were not so easily put off.

The first three runners to finish the 10k race all put in spectacular performances, and first to cross the line was last year's runner-up Tom Lander in 35.16. It was two Devon runners who took the spoils for second and third spots with James Pugsley from Bideford AAC finishing in 35.26 and Peter Monaghan from Torbay AAC in 35.46.

It was a close-fought battle in the women's race, with Annabel Granger of Bristol and West AC everyone's favourite to win, having won the race for the past five years. Neck and neck in the closing seconds of the race, Annabel looked set to make it six wins in a row, when Julie Dixon of Bideford AAC found a last burst of energy to edge in front and win the race in 39.26 with Annabel crossing the line three seconds later. Annabel's club mate Fiona Marks took third place with her 39.42 finish.

Meanwhile, in the junior race over 100 eager runners lined up to take on the 2k out and back run along the beach. First boy and girl to finish both conquered the course in under eight minutes with Oliver Andrews finishing in 7.30 and Millie Redman in 7.54. Seb Leaney was second boy to finish in 8.12 while Steph Brooks enjoyed her fourth win in four years with her age category victory and 8.19 finish. Third placed spots went to Abigail Taylor in 8.28 and Jamie Elsdon in 8.24, with Jamie also winning his age category.

After the races, Weston Athletic Club's President Dave Jones presented a cheque for £10,000 to Weston Hospicecare's chief executive Paul Winspear. The club has supported the hospice for many years, and this year decided to make an additional donation to mark the club's 40th anniversary. Added to this the club donated £1,500 from its Mendip Muddle race in October and £2,300 raised by the 'Penguins in Training' group who took part in their first 10k together.

Malcolm Gammon, Weston Athletic Club's race director said: "I am really pleased with how this year's event went. The weather turned out fine in the end, and it was great to see so many people enjoying the race and entering into the festive spirit. How some of them get round in such elaborate costumes is beyond me.

"I am especially pleased that we were able to donate £13,800 to Weston Hospicecare this year

and I hope that many thousands more will be raised by our runners through sponsorship support.

“Finally I’d like to thank all of our volunteers who made the event such a success this year. Without them it wouldn’t be possible.”

Entry for next year’s Christmas Cracker and Mini Cracker will open in July, but for runners who can’t wait that long, the club’s next 10k race takes place in Kewstoke on New Year’s Day. The Hangover 10k starts at 10.30am and runners can enter in advance at www.westonac.co.uk/hangover or on the day from 9am at Kewstoke Village Hall.

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For more information and photos contact vanessa.andrews@westonac.co.uk
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