

Horwich's great success

LOCAL runners came within a whisker of sweeping the board in one of the toughest fell running challenges in Britain.

The 40 mile Old County Tops race includes more than 10,000 feet of mountain climbing to link the former prime summits of the old counties — Helvellyn in Westmoreland, Scafell Pike in Cumberland and the Old Man of Coniston in Lancashire.

Since boundary changes in 1974, all the mountain tops have been in the county of Cumbria.

The race, organised by Horwich man Leo Pollard of the Achille Ratti Club, is infamous for its toughness and usually has a high drop-out rate through exhaustion.

But this year's event was even more of a tester, with weather conditions more akin to a rainy March than a flaming June.

Because the event is so long and over such tough terrain, runners compete in pairs and have to stick together throughout.

Horwich's John Hope and his partner John Nixon of Adlington — both members of Achille Ratti — put in a fantastic performance to finish second overall in 7hrs 40mins.

They were just 12 minutes behind Keswick's Colin Valentine and his partner Tim Laney.

But the two Johns were first by a huge margin in the category for runners with a combined age of 80 plus.

Combined

While nine of the 49 teams retired before the finish, Penny Dickinson and Sheila Anderton — two women from Dunsar — showed clean pairs of heels to many of the men and won the ladies' race in 11hrs 38mins.

As well as organising, Leo Pollard also competed with Leeds partner Pete McHale — and the pair won the 100 plus combined age category with a time of 12 hours.

Superb Horwich RMI Harriers performances came from Marie Hurst and partner Eddie Swift and husband and wife team of Colin and Pam Matthews. They were all competing for the first time.