Mike Parker reports from last weekend's National Championships held in Wellington.

I managed to produce two good performances in Wellington last weekend at the NZ Champs. I arrived Thursday early afternoon settled in and tried to get some rest. Early Friday morning, I did a light session of 30 min with the race at 12:30pm.

 After waiting in the call room for 15 min, we were escorted out onto the track, just in time to see the last two laps of the women's track walk and young Courtney Ruske of Canterbury win her first national title. Courtney walked a good race to beat defending champion Rosie Robinson and former titleholder Kate Newitt.

 I couldn't help but notice once we were allowed onto the track how soft it was under foot. Good for running no doubt, but potentially tiring for our race walk especially over the final kilometre.

At the gun I got away fast, but not as fast as Matt Holcroft though who was already stretching out in front. I wanted to make it as hard as I could for everyone else though. I was conscious that a couple of walkers were hanging onto me in the early laps, eventually their breathing faded away and the sound of their footsteps faded. I noticed over the final three laps that Matt was no longer pulling away from me and at the bell maybe I had taken a few metres out of him but he was still a good 150 metres clear. My main concern at the bell was how much distance I had managed to put on whoever was in third place ( I was well around the top bend before I heard the bell ring again). So it was one more battle against the wind going up the back straight and then to the finish.

    My finishing time 13:44.07 my 5th quickest time and there was no more than one second variation on my lap times. Barry Magee who I was rooming with, recorded my laps and was impressed with my consistency of effort.

 Saturday was a welcome rest day. The 20 km started early Sunday morning. The 20 k was held out in Trent ham close to the military firing range in the grounds of the old camp. Saturday had been bitterly cold and very windy. Apart from watching the Shot Put contest between Jack Gill and Tom Walsh I didn't hang around to watch other events. I dreaded that these cold conditions would continue during Sunday's race.

Sunday morning I arose at 04.30 to prepare for the 20 km starting at 08.00hrs. When we got out to Trent ham it was still dark and cold but there was no wind and no sign of rain. By the time the race started it was cool, windless and dry - perfect conditions for a 20 k.

    At the gun Matt Holcroft once again got away fast. Graeme Jones was also away at a solid pace. I decided to let him go and try to close him down over the final few laps of the 16 circuits we had to complete. He was about 250 metres clear of me at 10 km and although I managed to pull him in a little between 10 and 13 km he was just too strong for me. I produced a very good final 5 km to close right in on Matt at the finish. Graeme had been three minutes adrift of Matt at 10 km and at the finish was just over a minute behind. At the finish I was some 4 minutes behind the winner, far closer than I had thought I would be to winning the race. I was a little disappointed, as I had hoped I would head Graeme Jones off again. My final time, though, of 1:46.36 was the best I have managed for some two and a half years and was another highlight. In fact for me the big battle during the race came from an unexpected source in the women’s section. Courtney Ruske shadowed me for some 19 km before springing to life and putting some 25 seconds on me over the final kilometre in the process slashing her P.B. by some 5 minutes and like Matt securing a championship double.

Another outstanding effort of the walking events was Jared Free’s 49:26 in the men’s 18 10km event. Considering Jared was only 16, he shows great promise for the future and was recently just a few seconds behind me in the Auckland 3000 m walk champs.

                                                              Mike Parker     (Edited by Frank Smedley)