

Bilsdale Fell Race 2019

The inaugural Bilsdale Fell Race was the first AL fell race to be held on the North Yorkshire Moors. 120 runners set off in much better weather than the storms of the previous two days to take in seven climbs totaling about 4000 feet in 15 miles.

The first climb is the biggest leading all the way to the top of Round Hill (CP1), the highest point on the moors. From here it is fast running down to the road crossing. All but one of the runners followed the road round to the disused quarry (CP2) and onto Cold Moor (CP3) although there were a few different routes used to negotiate the Wainstones. The last runner made it through the 90 minute cut off with nearly 10 minutes to spare. The "W" section from Cold Moor to Carlton Trig is the toughest part of the race with two big descents followed immediately by two big ascents and most runners were walking up the second road past the water station. Descending the steep gully to the stream (CP5) took a few runners by surprise and was one of the main talking points after the race. Other routes are available!

Fatigue and route choice played a big part in the latter stages of the race with a huge variety of lines across the heather to find CP8. Sadly, seven runners missed a checkpoint and had to be disqualified with CP9 at Scugdale Hall the main culprit. The final sting in the tail is the climb out of Scugdale (CP9) up to the cairn on Cock Howe (CP10). The final descent back down to the village hall was enjoyed by those runners whose legs were still working! It was nice to hear lots of positive feedback about the race at the finish especially as many competitors commented that this was the toughest race they had ever done. Hopefully this will give them the confidence to try similar races further afield.

At the head of the race the first few runners soon established a decent gap over the rest of the field. Oisín Brennan opened up a small lead descending steeply down to the stream at check point 6 with Neil Crampton, Jayson Cavill and Luke Piper close behind. Jayson reached the gate at check point 8 just ahead of Oisín and stayed in front dropping into Scugdale where Luke and Neil closed up behind him. The finish was extremely close with Neil just pipping Luke to the line by a mere 2 seconds after getting to the last stile just in front and holding onto the small gap opened up here. Jason came in third with Oisín fourth.

In the ladies race Katie Iliffe opened up an early lead over Katie Kaars Sijpesteijn and these positions stayed the same throughout the race.

The men's team prize was very closely contested with both Durham University A&CCC just taking this from Durham Fell Runners. Both teams had 3 runners in the top 10. The ladies' team prize was won by Scarborough Athletics Club.

After the prize giving there was a worrying period when a runner failed to appear at the finish having been through CP9 over an hour ago. Thankfully he was located on his way to Osmotherly and safely collected before making his way home.

A few words of thanks to finish. Firstly, thank you for all the positive comments about the course and the day itself. I have enjoyed reading the race reports and letters some of you have taken the trouble to write. I have also enjoyed looking at the Strava flybys especially the route choices over to CP8. These are well worth a look.

Secondly, thank you to everyone who gave up their time to help out on the day itself. It was a huge team effort with many people giving up their day to help with registration, kit checks and marshalling. There were three experienced ROs (Clive, Bob and Sid) advising me during the day which was invaluable. Clive also organized all the prizes as well as helping in numerous other areas before the race.

Finally, a special thank you to my wife, Elaine, and daughters, Sophie and Lucy, who not only put up with all my bright ideas but also helped with registration and sorted all the post-race food.