

Bilsdale Fell Race 15th March 2020

With many races being cancelled this weekend due to the threat of the coronavirus it was unclear what effect this would have on the size of the field. However, the race went ahead under current government advice and despite the risks being communicated to competitors there was a good turnout. Exactly 100 of the 120 or so runners who had signed up for the race were not deterred by the risk and most had the attitude that this might be their last race for quite a while. This view was confirmed the following day when the government updated their advice on non-essential travel and social distancing.

The weather was near perfect being cool, clear and calm in the valleys; although there was a fair breeze on the tops and the ground was much muddier than normal making the going tough in places. The race was delayed by a couple of minutes when the RO got a phone call on his way to the start from Bob whom he had locked in the village hall! A quick return to free Bob and he was back on his way to get the race started.

In the men's race Lee Kemp set off at a cracking pace and appeared to already have a winning margin by the time he had reached Check Point 3 in 47 minutes. However, the leading positions in this race changed frequently as runners got tired or lost or both. The actual winner was in 6th place at this point nearly 5 minutes behind Lee. Fell running is more than just being able to run fast, though, and being able to navigate is a key skill. Navigational errors led to Lee losing the lead as he headed up to the Falconer Seat at Check Point 5 and then down to Check Point 6 when he ended up at Lordstones café despite specific pre-race instructions not to go here!

Oisin Brennan reached Check Point 5 first and held his lead all the way until Check Point 9. The chasing pack were never too far behind but five of these runners missed out Check Point 7 on their way to Carlton trig seemingly unaware of this. A poor line down into Scugdale allowed Will Carter to catch up with Oisin just after Check Point 9. Will then managed to pull ahead slightly on the long drag up to Cock Howe. Will held on to this lead down to the finish. It was nice to see how surprised he was to have won the race. Oisin came in second, an improvement of two places from last year.

The final sprint for 3rd place was the most exciting and enjoyable of the day for the finish marshals although it didn't look particularly enjoyable for the three runners involved! Peter Allen came in 2 seconds ahead of team mate Darren Smith, himself 2 seconds ahead of Barney Plummer. At the time this was thought to be the race for 7th place but the four runners who finished in 3rd to 6th places had to be disqualified for missing Check Point 7.

The race for 6th place was also close with Joe Blackett coming in 2 seconds ahead of Steven Pugh, both in the V50 category and also the first two V40's home. Joe was in

40th position at Check Point 1 and steadily worked his way up through the field throughout the race.

The women's race was more straightforward with the first three soon establishing themselves. Early on Ursula Moore and Fiona Brannen kept exchanging the lead with Nicky Spinks never too far behind. After the scout hut, Nicky overtook both ladies on the way up to the Falconer Seat at Check Point 5 and had a lead of a couple of minutes all the way to Check Point 7. However, Fiona wasn't finished and caught her up as they reached Check Point 8. They passed through the two final check points in Scugdale and on Cock Howe together with Fiona managing to descend quicker and win by just over a minute from Nicky who was first V50 and V40. Ursula came in 3rd a further 5 minutes behind. Nina Mason came in 4th with Kim Cavill in 5th.

The men's team prize was very closely contested. Durham University A&CCC were the pre-race favourites for this but a withdrawal and two disqualifications cost them dearly. The Esk Valley team of Steven Pugh, Martin Perry and Chris Vanderhoven pipped Pickering to the prize. The ladies' team prize was won by Swaledale made up of Tracy Hunter, Caroline Graham and Claire Stewart ahead of York Knavesmere.

Advance notice that Check Point 2 will almost certainly change next year to a point high up on the Cleveland Way as a few runners have worked out a short cut that misses out some ascent. This is compromising the AL category of the race! It will also help the trod round to the disused quarry to repair as it is starting to get damaged. There is still a huge variety of lines across the heather to find Check Point 8 which is definitely not changing!

A few words of thanks to finish. Thank you Lets Run in Stokesly for supplying the race numbers. Thank you to all the returning runners and the positive comments about the course and the day itself. I have again enjoyed looking at the Strava routes and comments. The flybys, especially the route choices over to Check Point 8, are well worth a look.

Thank you also 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. Many marshals volunteered to do the same jobs as last year which made the organising so much easier. There were three experienced ROs (Clive, Bob and Sid) advising me during the day which again was invaluable. Clive also organised all the prizes despite my best efforts to make this more difficult for him by re-ordering the numbers in alphabetical order instead of by age!

Finally, a special thank you to my wife, Elaine, and daughters, Sophie and Lucy, who helped me set up on Saturday, gave out the numbers at registration and sorted all the post-race food.

Hopefully we will all be racing again before too long. I hope to see many of you again next year. Stay safe and keep well.

Mike Quinn 19th March 2020