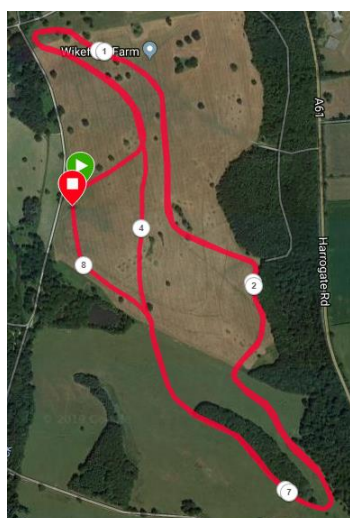


ECAA National Cross County Championships 2019 – Harewood House, Leeds.

Saturday 23rd February saw the biggest Cross-Country event of the season: The Nationals. With 8,600 athletes entered over the days numerous races, it promised to be a spectacular occasion.

The Course

The event this year was held at Harewood House near Leeds. The course being the same as the Northern Championships in 2018 and consisting of two 4k laps for the ladies, and two 6k laps for the men.



←The Ladies

The Men →



The course was challenging but, with the ground being fairly firm, still allowed for quick times to be ran. The uphill sections being more gradual with long downhills allowing for time to be recovered.

The Ladies

The first event with Blyth participation was the Ladies race. The field contained over 1,000 starters including Olympians and International Triathletes alike. Toeing the start line for #teamblyth were:

Gemma Harmon, Sandra Watson, Gwen Forster, Helen Morris, Anita Brabazon, Anne Craddock & Claire Mason.

Watching the start of the ladies event was a sight to behold with the field snaking out over at least a KM.

After all was said and done the Ladies came home as follows (unfortunatley Claire was DNF);

SENIOR WOMEN

To see team results select "Teams"

☐ Teams ☒ Individual results



POS	NAME	BIB	TEAM/CLUB	GUN TIME
607	Sandra Watson	4186	Blyth RC	00:42:03
757	Gwen Forster	4182	Blyth RC	00:44:54
852	Helen Morris	4185	Blyth RC	00:47:24
907	Anita Brabazon	4180	Blyth RC	00:49:14
920	Anne Craddock	4181	Blyth RC	00:49:57
927	Gemma Harmon	4183	Blyth RC	00:50:29

U20 Men

Next up was Joe Wren in a very competitive field in the U20 men's race. The U20 race took place over approximately 10km comprising of one short lap and one large lap. The race was eventually won by Morpeth's Rory Leonard.

Joe's time of 36:36 represented an average pace of 6:40 per mile which is certainly not too shabby in the slightest. Joe finished 178th in the field which just goes to show the standard of the race. There is certainly much more to come.

Senior Men

The final event of the day was the Senior Men's championships.

With the season drawing to a close the talk pre-race was of the standings for the club's XC competition. With attendances being consistent throughout the season the top three in the standings were all wondering exactly what they had let themselves in for by also planning to run Craggside the following morning.

After a quick recce of the course we all lined up in our pen along with the other 2,000 men from across the country. My experience of the course from 2018 meant I had a plan in mind for the race. Simply put, given my poor performance at Thornley Hall, the plan was to take it steady for a couple of miles before gradually lifting the pace heading into lap 2.

The uphill start and huge crowd certainly helped put that plan in motion as I ended up passing the 2-mile point in approximately 15:40. Mile 3 consisted of a long downhill section which was handy for lifting the pace and recovering from the long uphill drags of the first 2 miles. This section was followed by a short and nasty climb uphill followed by an immediate 180 to run down the same hill towards the start/finish. This was by far the hardest part of the course and the crowds had gathered to encourage all the runners along.

Heading into the second lap my goal remained to keep steady and work the uphill. I could see Steven French ahead in the distance and tried to ensure that the gap between us didn't increase.

To my surprise I had closed the gap at about 5.5 miles and just before hitting the long downhill section for the second time. It was at this point on the first lap that Steven had put the gap between us and as soon as we crested the hill, we gave each other words of encouragement and he set off again!

This time however I knew the end was near and a bit of competitive instinct kicked in. So, I picked up the pace and tried to keep the gap between us a bit smaller with the goal of putting a huge effort on the last hill to pick up some places.

Approaching the bottom of the last hill I had managed to keep the gap to around 5 seconds. I knew we were approaching the last half a mile and so put in a surge to the top of the hill, made the 180 turn and spotted Joseph Dungworth (today known as Robert Sharratt) about 100m ahead. I was pretty sure the gap was too big to pull back but, with only the downhill and the finish left, I set about trying to close it whilst trying to keep Steven behind.

Turning into the finish I was reminded that I had some mini-eggs in my bag by the Ladies cheering us in. This incentive was enough to lift the pace and pick up a few more paces in the final straight to finish in at time of 54:39 with Joseph finishing in 54:09 and Steven 54:56.

The other Blyth finishers were as follows:

SENIOR MEN

☐ Teams ☒ Individual results



To see team results select "Teams"

POS	NAME	BIB	TEAM/CLUB	GUN TIME
372	Joseph Woods	6361	Blyth RC	00:43:31
1217	Henry Madden	6357	Blyth RC	00:51:45
1434	Robert Sharratt	6359	Blyth RC	00:54:09
1473	Craig Harmon	6356	Blyth RC	00:54:39
1491	Steven French	6355	Blyth RC	00:54:56
1848	Michael Ashby	6353	Blyth RC	01:02:22
1890	David McGarry	6358	Blyth RC	01:04:37
1964	David Stamp	6360	Blyth RC	01:10:38

As can be seen there were some cracking times from everyone on what is an extremely challenging course. The Nationals is the pinnacle of the XC season, and everyone should be extremely proud of what they achieved.

With just one race remaining in the season it remains all to play for in both sections of the XC competition. Personally, my XC season is over but I will see you all at Alnwick, remember to smile for the camera.

A huge thanks should also go to Dave K, Rob Hall and Rob Sharratt for coming down to cheer us all on! Thanks gents!

Cheers

Craig

P.S. Thanks should go to Heaton for allowing us to share the tent, and of course to all the other North Eastern clubs who were providing encouragement out on the course.