

Bradford Millennium Way Relay

Or The Birth of a Long Distance fell relay

St. Bede's A.C. is a small running club formed in the early 80s as members of the St. Bede's Old Boys football team decided they were too old for regular football and wanted to stay fit. The club initially concentrated on road running but quickly developed into an all round out of stadium athletics club. Through the 90s the club dabbled in organising road races and staged fell races for the Yorkshire vets championships and cross country races in the West Yorkshire Cross Country League. In 2001 the club had started organising the John Carr 5K race series and was looking at another outlet for a race at the local level.

The Bradford Millennium Way Relay was the brainchild of one of our retired members Colin Huntley who was also a keen walker and had found out that a group from Bradford Council were launching a long distance walk along the lines of the Calderdale Way and the Leeds Country Way. His suggestion was to use this route as a relay race in a similar way to the Calderdale Way Relay. A period of negotiation with the route organisers and a number of discussions came up with the idea of a summer relay race which would give us more daylight and the chance to hold prize givings outside. This led to a mid June date (this year it is Sunday 15th June). The route itself is shown as a 48 mile route which led us to the idea of 5 legs of as near 10 miles as possible. This route, although having Bradford in the name, does not actually get within four miles of the centre of Bradford and is a circular route starting about five miles north west of the centre on Baildon Moor. The circle then goes clockwise taking in Denholme, Oxenhope, Bronte Bridge, Laycock, Steeton, Silsden, Addingham, Ilkley and back to Bingley.

Then there was the problem of where to start and finish. The actual route is designed to start and finish at the Bracken Hall Centre on Baildon Moor but there is nowhere there for changing and results. Fortunately the route passes fairly close to the Bradford & Bingley sports club in Bingley and after some negotiation we were able to be based there for the start and finish. Once that was decided we could plan the handover points. When thinking about the race we had worked on the basis of going for a maximum of 50 teams which means finding parking for up to 100 vehicles at each handover point. After going round the course and determining where the road crossings were we realised that we would have to make the handover points where they are, as these places can just about cope with this number of vehicles. This left us with slightly longer first and last legs but each leg has its own challenges.

The first race was organised on 30th June 2002 and had 20 teams competing, mainly from clubs that don't specialise in fell running. As we wanted this to be slightly different we provided four main prizes. First Men's Team, First

Vets Team, First Mixed Team and First Lady's Team. Where we are different is that the Vets team can be anyone male or female in the vets category. The Mixed category requires one man and one woman to run each leg. We felt this would give more interest to the event allowing some of the smaller clubs to possibly compete effectively. Since then we have introduced an Open category for any combination of men and women.

That first race was won by Wakefield Harriers Vets team followed by St. Bede's Mens team. Ilkley Harriers took the lady's prize and Valley Striders the mixed.

At the end we were much encouraged by the positive feedback from all competitors and so it was quickly agreed that this would become an annual event.

In 2003 23 teams competed and the race was won by Keighley and Craven's Male Team with the other three prizes going to the same clubs as in the inaugural year. Particularly impressive was Valley Strider's mixed team finishing 6th overall after a fine last leg by Tim Towler and a certain Tracey Morris.

This was the year when the AVOS team from Belgium made its first venture into fell running.

In 2004 25 teams competed and again Keighley, Wakefield and Valley Striders won the Men's, Vets and Mixed prizes with Keighley also taking the ladies prize. The AVOS team returned after the success of the previous year.

In 2005 30 teams competed and Horsforth Harriers took the Men's prize with Keighley prising the vets prize off Wakefield. Keighley again took the ladies' prize and Valley Striders retained their hold on the Mixed prize. This was also the year when the weather took its toll. With temperatures well into the 80s dehydration became a problem particularly on the third leg with two competitors receiving treatment at the end and one requiring hospitalisation. We had

provided additional water on the course but even so this was not enough particularly those who refused water and later suffered. The AVOS team was back with a few extras.

In 2006 Pudsey & Bramley led home the 40 teams with Valley Striders the vets winners, Bingley Harriers took the lady's prize and Chapel Allerton Road Runners the Mixed team prize. For the first time we awarded an Open Team prize and that went to the Loopcircuit Oost-Groningen team, one of four Dutch and Belgian teams taking part. We also had a guest appearance of two New Zealand middle distance representatives competing as guests on leg 4 and setting a record time.

In 2007 we had chosen the date of 24th June and had started taking entries when the Jane Tomlinson 10K was announced in Leeds and our numbers of entries fell to 32 teams. Keighley won the race with Wakefield regaining their hold on the vets prize. Ilkley regained the ladies prize and Loopcircuit Oost-Groningen the Open category. Accrington Road Runners competing for the first time took the mixed team prize with much celebrating. Again we had three foreign teams competing. A special mention goes to Andy Nicoll of Bingley Harriers who, having competed on the first leg for Bingley went on to run the rest of the route in a total time of 10hours 14 minutes which was only 55 minutes slower than the last team!

We pride ourselves on being the fell relay that allows the smaller clubs, that don't necessarily compete much on fells, to experience a friendly, well organised event that can be a step up into the more traditional relays. The terrain may not be the toughest of fell courses, but each of the five legs provides varied and occasionally tough running. We have been well supported by a lot of local clubs but there is always room for more. If you are interested in getting a team together please contact Mikemoss@blueyonder.co.uk



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