

RACE REPORT

SENIOR HOME INTERNATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Not long back from the sunny UK Intercounties in Wales, a small delegation of Northern Irish ladies (incl myself as honorary Norn Irish) travelled this time to the Scottish mountains to participate in the Senior Home International Championship. This race took place on the 22nd of May near Alva, Scotland, covering 11.5 miles and 3000ft of ascent/descent over the tops of the beautiful Ochils.

The race was being incorporated with the British Athletics up and down trial races for the Europeans in Portugal later this summer. Before I elaborate on this adventure, I will go briefly mention the Uphill Only race that took place the same weekend.

Myself was the only one out of the four who was keen or crazy enough (this is yet to be decided) to make her way down a day earlier to participate in the British Uphill Only Mountain Running Championship. Surprisingly, I was the only entry with a Dutch passport. This race was held on Friday the 20th of May, starting in Rowardennan, Scotland, and running to the summit of Ben Lomond. Well... that was the plan. Being true to its reputation, the Scottish weather drastically changed approximately an hour before the start of the race. And not for the best. Whilst I was hiding from the torrential downpour in my little rental car I was not just procrastinating, but also simply contemplating, a warmup. It was soon clear that most of the other participants were less indecisive and from the comfort of my warm car I saw these gazelles flying past. They were not running, they were flying. And this was their warm up! Under no illusion had I signed up to this race other than for personal achievement (and for some reason I thought enjoyment) – but watching the top athletes of England, Scotland and Wales moving with such grace and speed, I soon realised the talent in this field was exceptional. Angela Mudge, who had taken it upon her to organise this weekend of races, made the decision at the start to shorten the course ever so slightly due to the (by this stage quite dangerous) weather. I battled the 4.2miles, 3000ft ascent in 54min25sec to the (very near) summit of Ben Lomond through a lot of rain, a fierce bit of wind and a substantial amount of hailstones. Could not have been happier with this achievement. At the summit, the challenge wasn't over though, as we had to put full winter gear on and obviously make our way down on the slippery track with tired legs. This did however become a lovely social run between marshals and runners and even accompanied by some clear views and sunshine returning to the start! Safe to say, no photos were taken.

The following morning Elizabeth arrived and after the necessary coffee consumption we made our way down to Alva to the start of the race. The race was going to start an approx. 30 min walk with 700ft of ascent from the registration. Elizabeth and I had a wonderful jog that morning but couldn't get on the right side of the glen (literally) hence never even made

it to the start! It was a good thing that the race route was going to be well marked on the day...!

In the afternoon the team was complete with the arrival of Ciara and Karalee. Again, we made the short journey to Alva and better luck this time, we found the right tracks leading to the start. Rather exhausted from the day before, I let the girls go on adventure and took the time to inform Mrs Sandford about the previous day.

In the evening walking running encyclopaedia Elizabeth talked us through all the runners and their ins and outs. Any questions, about any runner, she is the girl.

On race day we were accompanied by Ian Taylor, who had kindly collected our race numbers and met us at registration. We made our way to the start in good time as it took at least half an hour to recover from the hike up to it. As predicted after witnessing the speed on Friday, this small field was not any less impressive. At the start you blinked your eyes, and the front runners were half a mile uphill on the track. We all knew it was simply a tremendous pleasure and honour to be at the start, representing Northern Ireland, in such a great, important event. Many times we were complemented as a team to make the effort to participate in this event. The weather was great, the atmosphere was superb. The course was tough, fast, and long. Beautiful set course through bog and proper fell, all well-marked and marshalled and a smiling Ian Taylor at the bottom of the longest climb. Us girls couldn't have wished for more! Even though it was by default (Wales had three runners and therefore missed out in the counting) – we got the Bronze medal. And we deserved it!

01:47:44 Martsje Hell N. Ireland

01:51:17 Elizabeth Wheeler N. Ireland

01:53:00 Karalee McBride N. Ireland

01:58:22 Ciara Coffey N. Ireland



LADIES TEAM NI - With seven kids between us and a lot of grey hairs! Proud owners of the Senior Home Intercounties Bronze Medal 2022