

It was with great pleasure that Congleton Harriers were able to stage the Cloud 9 Fell Race after its enforced absence from the calendar due to Covid. With the uncertainty caused by Omicron it wasn't until January that the club was confident that the race would be able to go ahead. By the time the decision was made, however, timescales were shortened with about four months of planning and preparation work crammed into two.

To add to complications the rebuilding of the leisure centre meant the race was without its normal base and a different temporary location needed to be found. Thankfully, Berisfords stepped up and allowed the club use of their premises as a temporary HQ.

A close eye also had to be kept on the race route, as at one point over the winter the council temporarily shut one of the footpaths used by the race due to flooding. The footpath was thankfully re-opened, but the continued rain and a large puddle the size of a respectable village pond had the race committee worrying about viable options for re-routing the race. Thankfully the path remained open, but the lake remained giving the runners an extra water feature to contend with.

Come the day of the race, the weather was perfect for running, chilly but with bright skies. All the preparations came together, the runners gathered at race HQ to get their numbers and chip timing ankle bracelets before making the short journey to the Biddulph Valley Way to line up at the start. The race was started shortly after 11.00, once the way had been checked to ensure there wasn't going to be any collisions with cyclists, horse riders and walkers.

After the first mile or so there were four clear front runners vying for the lead pushing out across the fields to Weathercock Lane and the start of the steeper stuff up Acorn Lane and onto the Cloud itself. By the time the leaders reached the top and the start of the navigation over to Bridestones there were two runners in contention Jack Scott (running for Innov8) and Congleton Harrier's Tom Fellbaum. Shortly before 12.00 the marshal team at the last checkpoint at the Brookhouse Lane/Bromley Road intersection messaged the team at the finish line to get ready to receive the two runners back.



Jack Scott and Tom Fellbaum

Photo Bryan Dale

Scott had managed to maintain his lead throughout, despite the valiant efforts of Fellbaum to reign him in, to win the race in 57.05. Fellbaum was 2nd in 57.42 followed by Allen Bunyan (Macclesfield Harriers), 3rd in 59.34, Arran McCloskey, 4th in 1.00.54 and Bern Light (Buxton AC), 5th in 1.00.59.

The first woman back was Nicola Bowen, 23rd overall in 1.10.10 followed by Rachael Brown (Trentham Running Club), 2nd (24th overall) in 1.10.43, Faye Sharpley (Macclesfield Harriers), 3rd (44th overall) in 1.14.31, Kerry Riley (Macclesfield Harriers), 4th (52nd overall) and Gemma Cox, 5th (57th overall) in 1.16.43.



Rachael Brown and Nicola Bowen

Photo: Bryan Dale

Age category winners were:

M40 – Matthew Taylor (South Cheshire Harriers), 10th in 1.03.39

M45 – James Lewis, 9th in 1.03.24

M50 – Andrew Godwin, 28th in 1.11.13

M55 – Mike Hill (Wilmslow Running Club), 37th in 1.13.36

M60 – Bob Foreman (Matlock AC), 32nd in 1.12.53

M65 – Allan Bocking (Cheshire Hill Racers) in 1.25.39

F40 – Caroline Smith (Mow Cop Runners), 82nd in 1.20.14

F45 – Allison Grundy (Tattenhall Runners), 59th in 1.16.57

F50 – Alison Wainwright (Dark Peak FR), 103rd in 1.23.38

F55 – Emily Sanders (Ashbourne RC), 104th in 1.23.30

F60 – Sally Gilliver (Wilmslow Running Club), 91st in 1.21.41

F70 –Shelagh Swinnerton (South Cheshire Harriers), 278th in 2.01.35

In amongst the 281 finishers there were a further four Congleton Harrier racers. Emily Nott finished 105th in 1.23.52, Nick Brough was 151st in 1.28.30, Ellie Dick, 187th in 1.33.21 and Sophie Molyneaux, 235th in 1.44.32.



Ellie Dick, Sophie Molyneaux, Nick Brough

Photo G Cooper

One of the reasons this race remains popular is the encouragement provided to all the racers by all the marshals dotted around the course. This year was no exception and there were many heartfelt comments of gratitude fed back afterwards by the runners about how much they enjoyed the race and the support provided.

If interested in joining us, there are official club runs on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday all setting off from the Congleton Tennis Club. The club is always keen to see new members whether you are a speedy racer or more of a social runner. So, if you are thinking of thinking of joining then just come along to one of the regular/ club runs for a few weeks and try us out for size; you will be made to feel more than welcome with no obligation to join. You can find full details on our Congleton Harriers website: Congleton-harriers.co.uk. You can also connect with the club on Facebook where details of club activities are posted regularly.