

## **British Fell Relays 2014 - Old Cheviot reports**

"I reckon we'll be ages on the Nav Leg - so don't rush to get changed." With those cheery words, Paul Hainsworth zipped off with Geoff Davis. Old Cheviot mooched about, watching runners come in and out of the changeovers, before deciding he had better get ready in good time. It was just as well he did - Paul & Geoff came back earlier than expected. OC just had enough time to nip into the changeover pen, before heading off on the anchor leg as lead NFR team. No pressure, then, on his aged bones.

The Relays were held in the out-lying Howgill fells, south of Sedbergh. The fellside was in view from the event centre, giving great viewing of the legs. The cream of British fell running was there, complemented (naturally) by 3 teams from NFR - open, male vets, and ladies. The forecast had threatened heavy showers, but in the event these held off for most of the day.

The first leg was a circuit over Calf Top and Castle Knott. First runner back was British Champion Rob Hope (Pudsey & Bramley) with a considerable lead on Dark Peak. NFR runners were John Butters, Phil Green (vets) and Nina Cameron. All had good runs, and our leg 2 pairings were soon underway.

Leg 2 turned out to be a surprisingly long leg, taking in the peaks of leg 1, then heading further north for some extra miles with tricky navigation thrown in for good measure. It was on this leg that Dark Peak opened up an unassailable lead. For NFR, David Armstrong and Jason Taylor were first back for the vets. Kim Taylor and Lisa Taylor followed for the open team, with Steph Scott and Katherine Davis hot on their heels.

Leg 3 was the navigation leg. It wasn't as long as the pairs leg and with good visibility, did not present any difficulties to NFR's nav-ers. Geoff & Paul were first in for the vets. Andrew Higgins and Frank Shillitoe whizzed round for the open team almost closing the gap on the vets, while Sue Mitchell and Susan Davis had a solid run for the ladies.

This left leg 4 - which was almost leg 1 in reverse. Old Cheviot toiled up the first steep ascent, even managing to pass a few runners. By now, the forecast showers had arrived. The top was in cloud, it was blowing a gale, and chucking it down with rain. Seeing no reason to hang about, OC struggled on to Calf Top, before beginning the descent down Middleton Fell. It was here that George Nicholson passed him for the open team. OC briefly contemplated chasing him down. But as George rapidly vanished into the distance ('finishing like a train' according to the commentator), he realised it was a fruitless exercise. Instead he settled for a steady run-in. Karen Robertson came in not long afterwards for NFR ladies, having run a fast anchor leg and picking up several places.

At the sharp end, Dark Peak were comfortable winners. Calder Valley finished second (and first vets) and Borrowdale third. Ambleside Ladies won the ladies' race. NFR were never going to trouble the winners. But it was a grand day out in superb scenery with fantastic running. There was also the added bonus of the race commentator who was 'a bit of a card'. When he wasn't extolling the virtues of Howgill Harriers ('they're in 33rd place - come on lads!'), he was taking the mickey out of teams who were late for their changeover ('have you been having a fag?') or dared to wear longs ('I know we're keen on safety, but you are the first man to be wearing leggings!')

The whole event was superbly organised by Howgill Harriers and Dallam - to whom many thanks are due. Also, thanks to Elvet Striders for the use of their tent. The results are available at: <http://www.sportident.co.uk/results/2014/BritishFellRelay/> .