

## **Hodgson Brothers Mountain Relay - 5<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

This was my first year taking the team captain reins for Northumberland Fell Runners at the HBMR. My esteemed predecessor John Duff had asked me if I'd be up for carrying on from him last year, my qualifying criteria being that I was fast enough to make it into the team, was at plenty of local races, and knew a lot of the "young fast runners". Whilst just knowing the young fast runners doesn't technically make me one myself, I was quite happy to settle with *fast enough*.

I had competed twice in the Hodgson relays (2022 & 2023) and both occasions were amongst the most enjoyable races I've been to, and so I was more than happy to have a go as team captain.

In 2022 we came 19<sup>th</sup> overall (Will R, Kriss A, Roger S, John D, Adam M, Mark C, Andy H, and me), which was a mega result, and NFRs highest finish at the Hodgsons. At that time, I was already wondering how much higher we could finish. There is phenomenal individual talent within the club, but rarely do we see it all together at the same time. The captain's challenge is to coordinate the strongest team possible, working around various injury dropouts, and try and match the most effective pairs for each leg.

=====



2024 team - L-R - Craig Jones, Jarlath McKenna, Ewan Richardson, Danny Grieves, Will Robson, Joe Stringer, Michael Lumb, Tom Suddaby. I did encourage everyone to consider some little green shorts and will continue to do so!



*Luxury team transport and driving courtesy of Emma*

### **Leg1. Joe Stringer & Michael Lumb**

My rationale was to put the faster runners on the longer legs, where they could make more of an impact. My better results tend to come in the shorter races, so I put myself on the first leg along with Michael. The times I've raced with Michael he's usually ahead of me, however he had been struggling with consistent training in the last few months with injury, so I thought that would mitigate any significant gap in ability between us.

After a rapid start along the road, we hit the climb and already Michael was starting to drop me, I dug in and did my best to stay in contact. I felt decent as the leg went on and was able to keep my foot on the gas after the Angle Tarn control. We had a strong descent and a fast run into the changeover at Hartsop. We finished 16<sup>th</sup> on the first leg, a few minutes down on the top teams but still in a great position. I was delighted with the performance which was just less than a minute down on Will & Kriss' 2022 time.



*Trying to keep up with Michael!*

## **Leg 2. Jarlath McKenna & Craig Jones**

Michael and I passed the baton, and left leg 2 in the very capable hands and legs of Craig and Jarlath, who I was confident could pull back a few positions, which indeed they did. Craig is easily one of the strongest runners in the Northeast fell running scene, and his description of trying to cling on to Jarlath for dear life, gives you some idea of the level Jarlath is at.

Conditions were ok but not ideal for leg two, with a bit of clag and wind. Still a million times better than the ultra-grim zero visibility weather Jarlath and I had on a recce a few weeks earlier. Despite the pointless recce we had, Craig and Jarlath's navigation was spot on for first timers - expertly contouring Thornthwaite Crag and taking a good line between Stoney Cove Pike and the tarn control.

Craig and Jarlath finished 12<sup>th</sup> on their leg moving us up to 10<sup>th</sup> team overall, before heading off for a casual 2 hour cool down jog back over the fells to Patterdale.



*Jarlath and Craig final Leg 2 descent*

### **Leg 3. Danny Grieves & Ewan Richardson**

Danny and Ewan were the latest additions to this year's team, both come with proven fell running pedigree, and a lot of experience in super long races and the Big Rounds. On the bike Danny was national 12-hour champion, and at one point the 100-mile record holder, before dipping his toe in the fell running world and inspiring a bunch of other North East cyclists (myself included) into doing daft things like the Bob Graham Round, after his successful 2019 round.

Ewan equally has some big round exploits, and great race results, to his name, including 7th at last year's gruelling Cheviot Goat. Although he'd been struggling a bit with injury in the last year or so, thankfully he is firmly on the comeback trail now.

Strong winds and some clagged out tops did not create optimum conditions for leg 3 but again Danny and Ewan's navigation was spot on. They both put in a solid shift, arriving at Hartsop Hall bloodied, bruised, and muddy arsed, after hitting the deck giving it everything on the downhill. They were both still smiling though, and you can't do much better than having a good time!



*Leg 3 - Smiles during and after*



## **Leg 4 Will Robson & Tom Suddaby**

The team slipped a few places after Leg 3 so it would be down to Will and Tom to finish strong on the glory leg. There's no need to introduce Will, who has won every Northeast fell race there is (apart from one apparently!). Tom is one of the newer NFR members who I first met at the 2023 Falstone Falcon Fell Race, when he glided away from everyone and took the win. I got my revenge at this year's Saltwell Harriers race in Stanhope, but Tom assured me he was in good form for the relays and didn't seem phased about being plonked on one of the longer harder sections, and potentially be in for a legs ripped off type scenario!

As it turned out, Tom was looking way too fresh and smiley when they arrived back at the Patterdale playing field, Will on the other had clearly had to dig in, after not feeling that great during the leg.



*Will and Tom arriving back into Patterdale*

## **Conclusions**

In the end we finished 25<sup>th</sup> team overall. Which is a mega result against some of the top fell runners in the country, in one of the most competitive races there is.

Unfortunately, we didn't quite manage to bag the North East team bragging rights, which Durham just snatched from us, finishing less than one minute ahead. Durham team captain Chris Alborough messaged me afterwards – apparently this is the 6<sup>th</sup> time Northumberland and Durham have raced against each other at the HBMR, and after 2024 both teams are now level, each beating the other on 3 occasions. It certainly sets the scene nicely for next year's race!

Overall, a really strong performance for NFR, and a great day out at one of the major and best fell running events. I still have big ambitions for this race, and some top transfer targets on my watch list. I have been regularly up in the DMs of several injured big names, and NFRs who do crazy things like move abroad for work, to prioritise their career over amateur sport! Huge thanks to everyone who ran and supported us. A very promising start to a new era of Northumberland Fell Runners at the Hodgson Relays.



**[Full results here -](#)**

**<https://www.sportident.co.uk/results/HBMR/2024/HBMR/>**

Joe Stringer, October 2024