



Welsh Castles Relay 2026

Macclesfield Harriers at the 2026 Welsh Castles Relay

The 2026 Welsh Castles Relay saw Macclesfield Harriers make their debut in one of the UK's most unique and historic running events. Over two days, twenty runners covered more than 200 miles across Wales, travelling from Caernarfon Castle in the north to Cardiff Castle in the south and tackling everything from fast road stages to demanding King of the Mountains tests.

For many of the team, the event was an unknown quantity before the weekend. By the time the final runner crossed the line in Cardiff, it was safe to say the Welsh Castles Relay had more than lived up to its reputation.

Macclesfield Harriers finished 12th overall out of 65 teams in a combined time of 21:10:49, finishing 3:01:55 behind overall winners Salford Harriers and more than 26 minutes ahead of local rivals East Cheshire Harriers.

After ending Day 1 in 16th place, the team produced an excellent second day of racing, recording the 11th fastest aggregate time and climbing to 12th overall by the finish.

There were strong performances throughout the team, with several runners recording top 15 stage finishes. The standout individual result came from Alicia Roberts, who stormed to 1st Lady on Stage 17, taking home the coveted Yellow Jersey and giving Macclesfield Harriers a stage winner in their first appearance at the event.

However, the Welsh Castles Relay is about far more than individual performances. The event is unique in that runners spend almost as much time supporting teammates, navigating Wales, marshalling, driving and cheering from roadsides as they do racing. Throughout the weekend Harriers could be found handing out water, ringing cowbells, shouting encouragement from car windows and following teammates from stage to stage.

For many, those moments became the highlight of the weekend.

A huge amount of work went into making the club's first Welsh Castles Relay possible. Special thanks go to Matt Lynas and Owain Morris, whose months of planning, organising and problem-solving ensured everything ran smoothly. From entries and accommodation to transport logistics and team coordination, their efforts allowed twenty runners to enjoy a memorable weekend of racing.

The weekend was also made possible by the support of club members who were not racing. Club stalwart Rob Gittens and the other runners spent much of the weekend helping with transport, supporting runners across multiple stages and joining the team in Newtown on Saturday evening. His contribution was another example of the team spirit that was evident throughout the relay. What began as an opportunity to experience a famous relay quickly became something much more. The camaraderie, support and teamwork on display throughout the weekend showed exactly what makes the Welsh Castles Relay such a special event.

For many of us, it was our first taste of "The Castles". Hopefully, it won't be our last.

The following pages tell the story of Macclesfield Harriers' first Welsh Castles Relay through the eyes of the runners and supporters who made it happen.

STAGE I, CAERNARFON TO PENYGROES 7.8M

DAVID CHAMBERS 24TH 54:26

David Chambers had the honour of getting Macclesfield Harriers' first ever Welsh Castles Relay campaign underway from Caernarfon Castle.

"It was a great atmosphere starting at Caernarfon Castle with lots of clubs there excited about the start of the event, although a bit intimidating with the pressure of trying to get a good run in to start us off and looking around at the quality of the field. That wasn't helped by the WhatsApp messages the night before listing all the elite runners from other clubs!"

Before the race began, runners were paraded around the castle behind the previous year's winners before being released onto the course.

"We got paraded round the castle first by last year's winners so it was an easy jog for the first quarter of a mile before being released to run at race pace."

The route started with a scenic coastal section before revealing some tougher terrain.

"It was a nice flat scenic route along the coast to start but with some unexpectedly steep hills in the middle of the stage."

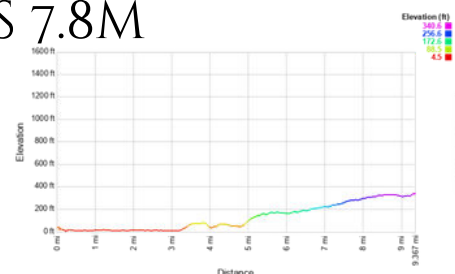
Support from fellow Harriers and wife Gwen, who was also marshalling, helped along the way. "It was great to get the extra support from Macc Harriers who were marshalling this stage and my wife Gwen. It was a great atmosphere with loads of support on sections of the route."

David finished strongly, moving through the field and handing over in a solid position.

"I overtook a few runners so was happy to make a reasonable start to our campaign!"

Having completed his leg, Dave spent much of the weekend supporting teammates across Wales. He caught up with Mark Burley on his KOM stage, saw Charmaine Wood finish strongly in Dolgellau, managed a roadside shout of encouragement for Ben Greene and found a lay-by to cheer on Robert Whitby during the final stage of Day 1.

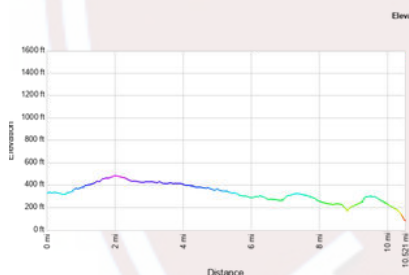
The weekend concluded with a team meal in Newtown before Dave returned to support more Macclesfield runners on Sunday. 'Great meal out with the team in Newtown, and had time to see Ciaran start and finish his stage, and Harry start his on the Sunday – both also running really well on tough stages.'



STAGE 2,

PENYGROES TO CRICCIETH 10.7M

RUTH WILKINSON 24TH 1:08:38



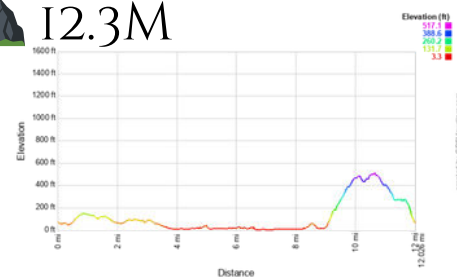
Stage 2 started at a pretty brisk pace before things settled down as we headed up a gradual incline along the cycle path. I found two other runners moving at a similar pace and we formed a nice little pack, staying together for most of the stage until the final climb into Criccieth.

On the climb, I managed to open up a small gap and spent the last stretch trying not to look back, just hoping the heavy breathing behind me wasn't getting any closer. Thankfully, I managed to hold them off to the finish and was very grateful for the downhill run-in at the end.



STAGE 3, CRICCIETH TO MAENTWROG 12.3M

BILLY HICKS 17TH 1:12:24



Billy Hicks took on Stage 3 from Criccieth to Maentwrog the first of the Welsh Castles Relay's designated King of the Mountains (KOM) stages. The route offered a fast opening section before saving its toughest challenge for later, with a significant climb around the 10-mile mark testing already tired legs. Billy produced a strong run to finish 17th in a high-quality field. The standard of competition was highlighted by the presence of Olympian Clara Evans-Graham, who was using the race as part of her preparations for the European Marathon Championships and went on to set a new women's stage record. Despite the challenge of the course and strength of the field, Billy thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"Great fun with fab support all around. Flat and (too) fast for the first part, then dead legs going into the climb at the end. Great fun."

Like many runners throughout the weekend, Billy highlighted the fantastic support on the course, which helped make the Welsh Castles Relay such a memorable event.

STAGE 4, MAENTWROG TO HARLECH 9.5M

FINLAY LAM-GALL 25TH 1:02:37

For many runners, the Welsh Castles Relay is about far more than just the miles covered between start and finish lines. For Finlay, taking part highlighted everything that makes the event so special.

"It's the first running event of its kind that I've taken part in. I can't think of a more engaging way to spend time with and get to know club mates. Supporting runners, marshalling, stage hopping, running, analysing, navigating and constantly refreshing the results all added up to a fantastic weekend, which I'm so pleased to have been a small part of!"

The relay's unique mix of competition and camaraderie left a lasting impression, with teams throwing themselves into the event both on and off the course.

"I found it really motivating seeing such strong performances across the team and also seeing how invested all the clubs were in the race. Whether it was support for fellow competitors, fancy dress, the cheer tunnel in Newtown at the end of day one, or the decorated cars and signs, there was a great balance between being competitive and inclusive. I hope it's the start of a long connection between the club and the race."

Finlay also wanted to recognise the huge effort that goes on behind the scenes to make a weekend like this possible.

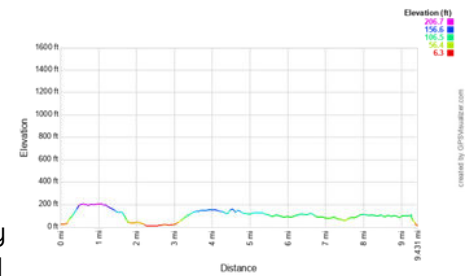
"Big thanks to Matt, Rob, Owain and the whole team, including the drivers, supporters and everyone else involved, for making it happen."



STAGE 5, HARLECH TO BARMOUTH 9.6M

ANDY BEAVERS 8TH 57:26

Macclesfield Harriers' highest stage placing of the weekend came courtesy of Andy Beavers, who produced a superb run to finish 8th. All 4 seasons were experienced within an hour in the build up to leg 5. Arriving in Barmouth the surf was up with a very stiff wind coming off the Irish Sea. The train up to Harlech was battered by both wind and rain and this suddenly felt like an iffy idea. In Harlech I met up with the excellent road support of Rob and handed over my kit - waterproofs, fleece, wooly hat - all the stuff that would be required when I arrive cold, wet and miserable at the finish. And then a break in the cloud, an easing of the wind, the sun emerged and Harlech became tropical. 15 degree temp swing in minutes with hot sun blazing down and steam rising from the tarmac. It was into that environment that we were dispatched for what was badged as a slightly undulating run to Barmouth but definitely felt predominantly uphill early on. The early climb probably worked to my advantage. Admittedly the Salford lad bolted off the front and was gone for the day but the climb stretched the field and created a gap to some of the flat earthers. Once height had been gained it was then undulating and a great battle with the Leeds representative ensued. Every time the road went up I thought I'd shaken him off. When it flattened or went down he reappeared on my shoulder. The support along the road was excellent with club cars yo yo ing through the field to cheer and pass out much needed water (regardless of club affiliation). As Barmouth approached I became more nervous about my Leeds friend, being acutely aware that there was more down than up on the road ahead. I pushed on and tried to open a bit of gap but was still expecting to be done on a sprint finish at the end. Only there wasn't a sprint finish at the end. Just a very steep, badly paved and crumbling public footpath from road to beach. Another plus for the fell runner and 8th place was duly secured! Rob met me and delivered a bundle of completely unnecessary warm clothes and due to a small amount of confusion around the phrase "the finish is at the far end of the prom" we embarked on the very long walk from the far end of the prom to the car (which was at the other far end of the prom). Great event and thoroughly enjoyed the day. Fabulous to see the running community on full show and doing something that brings so many clubs together. Only regret is the lack of suncream (albeit at no point until the start line did it look like it would be required).....



STAGE 6, BARMOUTH TO DOLGELLAU 9M

CHARMAINE WOOD 40TH 1:05:10

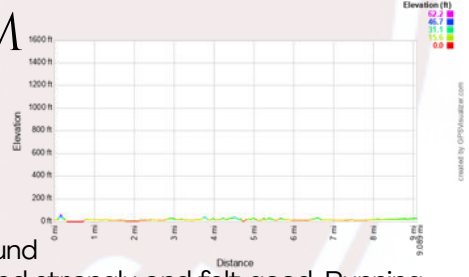
I ran Stage 6 from Barmouth to Dolgellau, a 9 mile leg with a revised start due to roadworks.

The sun came out just before our start by the bridge and I loved the atmosphere around the event and at registration. Everything felt nice and chilled before we set off. I started strongly and felt good. Running over the sea was a real highlight and the route was very picturesque, traffic-free and very flat.

Perhaps it was a little too flat at times, as keeping the momentum going was tough. However, knowing your teammates are eagerly waiting for you and checking the results makes you dig that bit deeper.

A fantastic welcome awaited at the finish in Dolgellau from teammates David and Ruth, along with my husband James, who spent the day chauffeuring both myself and Ruth Wilkinson around the course.

It was an honour to be part of such an incredible team and event. Thank you. 😊



STAGE 7, DOLGELLAU TO DINAS MAWDDWY IO.IM

MARK BURLEY 10TH 1:00:07

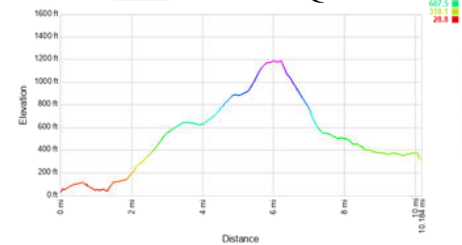
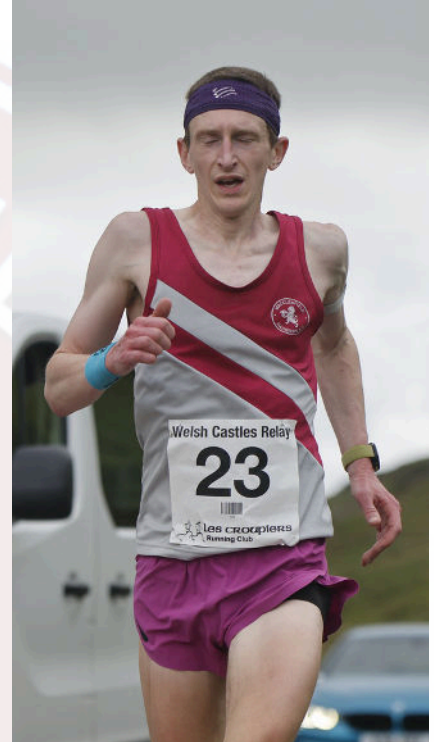
I was disappointed to miss the Ennerdale Horseshoe Fell Race on Saturday, one of my favourite races, but the prestige and history of the Welsh Castles Relay made it an easy decision to give it a go. Having entered for one of the hilliest stages, I was pleased to discover the leg started in Dolgellau, a town I already knew from the Cadair Idris Mountain Race. Heavy rain greeted my arrival, although thankfully it cleared before the start.

I knew there was a significant climb on the route, but hadn't fully appreciated that the profile was essentially 10km up followed by 6km down. The field spread out quickly and there was little overtaking on the climb, although support from teams at the roadside and passing vehicles helped keep everyone going.

The long ascent on the A-road was tough, but once the route reached the mountain pass the scenery became far more spectacular. Reaching the summit felt like a turning point and I knew the hard work was largely done.

The descent was fast, steep and demanded full concentration. In fact, I recorded my fastest mile, two-mile and 5km times of the year on the way down. By the time the torrential rain arrived, I was already committed to the finish. A late pass on a Leeds AC runner, who had been in sight for much of the race, provided the perfect way to finish.

After racing again in the Brecon Beacons on Sunday morning, I made it to Merthyr Tydfil in time to see Matt Lynas set off on Stage 18. The atmosphere at every transition point was fantastic and the Welsh Castles Relay proved to be a brilliant event to be part of. Hopefully Macclesfield Harriers will be back again in future years.



STAGE 8, DINAS MAWDDWY TO FOEL IO.8M

BEN GREENE 18TH 1:06:11

Ben took on Stage 8 in challenging conditions, with heavy rain greeting runners at the start of the leg from Dinas Mawddwy to Foel.

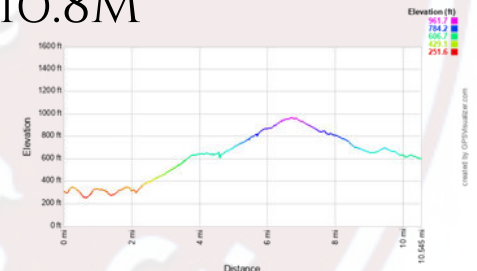
"The stage started in heavy rain, with lots of runners questioning 'how is this not a mountain stage?' on the seven-mile climb over to Foel. I think that shows how tough the Welsh Castles course is when a 275m climb isn't considered that hilly!"

Despite the weather and relentless climbing, support along the route helped keep spirits high.

"The support on the climb was great, with support cars cheering and ringing cowbells as they passed. A bit like a running version of the Tour de France."

The combination of tough racing, spectacular scenery and fantastic support left a lasting impression.

"Overall, a brilliant event. Well done to all Harriers who took part and a huge thank you to Ellie for supporting me and making the weekend possible."



STAGE 9, FOEL TO LLANFAIR CAEREINION 8.5M

HANNAH HICKS 19TH 52:45



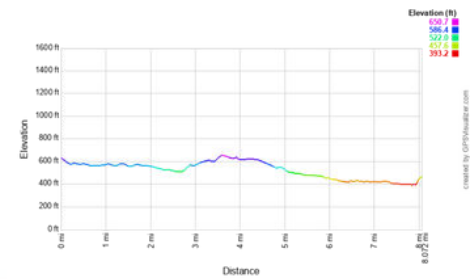
Hannah travelled to Wales with husband Billy Hicks and daughter Poppy to take part in Macclesfield Harriers' first Welsh Castles Relay.

Despite a wet start to her stage, Hannah thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"The atmosphere was brilliant and, as Billy said, it felt a bit like a running Tour de France."

One disappointment was not getting to spend more time with the rest of the team as runners and supporters travelled between stages across Wales.

"I had a great time and loved the event. We were both a bit sad we didn't get to see more of the team."



STAGE 10, LLANFAIR CAEREINION TO NEWTOWN 13.1M

ROB WHITBY 32ND 1:23:35

My Welsh Castles weekend began with a busy morning at Silkton Barbers before heading straight to Wales and meeting up with teammates in Welshpool ahead of the start of Stage 10.

The planned 5:50pm start became closer to 6:10pm as we waited for the Stragglers team to arrive, followed shortly afterwards by South Wales Police. The delay gave me time to retie my laces several times and make a few extra visits to the toilet. I always thought the police were supposed to be chasing the Stragglers, not arriving after them!

As one of the relay's designated King of the Mountains stages, the route opened with a long climb before settling onto flatter roads. Early on I felt comfortable and was enjoying the fantastic support from teammates and spectators along the route.

It was during the race that I really began to appreciate what makes the Welsh Castles Relay so special. Having arrived later in the day, I hadn't fully appreciated the scale of the event until I was out on the course, with support cars, runners and spectators spread across the Welsh countryside.

Unfortunately, stomach problems made the second half of the stage a real struggle, but there was only one option, keep moving. As the final runner of Day 1, I was determined to get the team to Newtown and not lose to much time. It wasn't the run I had hoped for, but I was proud to complete the stage and finish the day for the team.

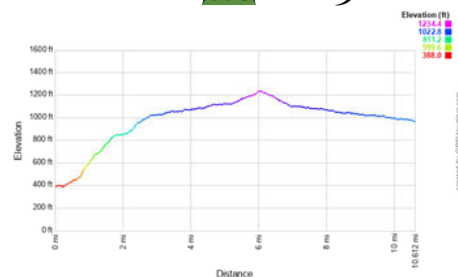
Sunday was spent supporting fellow Harriers across South Wales. Highlights included seeing Alicia Roberts take the Yellow Jersey as 1st Lady on Stage 17, watching Matt Lynas finish strongly on Stage 18, and making it to Cardiff Castle as the relay came to its conclusion.

My own race may not have gone to plan, but the weekend was about far more than one run. The support, teamwork and camaraderie across the club made it a genuinely special experience and one I'd love to be part of again.



STAGE 11, NEWTOWN TO LLANBADARN FYNYDD 10.5M

CIARAN WRIGHT 24TH 1:07:45



Ciaran's Welsh Castles weekend began with an early start on Saturday as part of the team marshalling the opening stage. It provided a different perspective on the event and an opportunity to watch the front runners in action, while also cheering on David Chambers as he got Macclesfield Harriers' first ever Welsh Castles Relay campaign underway. Once marshalling duties were complete, the day was spent stage-hopping across North Wales supporting teammates. Highlights included watching Ruth Wilkinson, Billy Hicks, Finlay Lam-Gall and Mark Burley put in strong performances, while also catching glimpses of some of the elite runners competing at the sharp end of the race.

Sunday morning brought Ciaran's own challenge on Stage 11. The route began with a relentless climb that continued for more than six miles. Having studied the course beforehand, he paced the ascent carefully before switching focus to a hard push over the second half of the stage.

Despite tired legs from the long climb, Ciaran finished strongly and was welcomed into the finish by teammates Robert Whitby and David Chambers.

Reflecting on the weekend, Ciaran highlighted the support from spectators, teammates and other clubs as one of the event's standout features.

The combination of racing, supporting teammates and travelling the length of Wales made for a memorable first Welsh Castles Relay experience. For Ciaran, the best part was the camaraderie that comes from being part of a team, cheering each other on and sharing the experience together.

STAGE 12, LLANBADARN FYNYDD TO CROSSGATES 11:2M

HARRY HAMMON 11TH 1:03:31

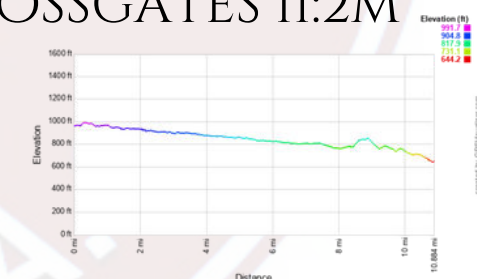
After travelling down on Saturday evening for the team meal and overnight stay in Newtown, it was time for my Welsh Castles debut on Sunday morning.

The Welsh Castles Relay was a great experience and nothing like I'd ever done before. It's a totally unique race.

I really enjoyed my leg. The slight downhill profile made it even faster and it was great running alongside some amazing runners from clubs across the country.

The encouragement and support from spectators and every team along the route made the overall event truly memorable.

A brilliant weekend and a race I'd definitely like to be part of again.



STAGE 13, CROSSGATES TO BUILTH WELLS 10.6M

EWAN EDMONDSON 10TH 1:01:14

It had been 13 years since Ewan last ran the Welsh Castles Relay with a previous club, making his return to this historic event particularly special. Having grown up watching the race on Welsh television, the opportunity to compete again was one he had been looking forward to.

Like many Welsh Castles stages, the start was anything but conventional, with runners gathering outside a small petrol station café in a Welsh village before setting off.

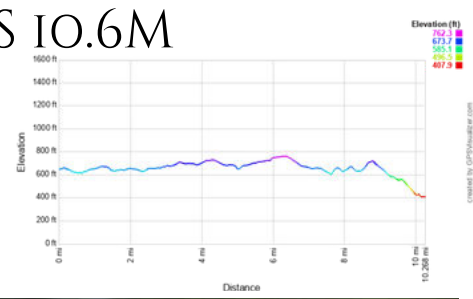
For Ewan, one of the unique challenges of the relay is putting personal expectations to one side and racing for the team. With little knowledge of the runners around him and only a basic understanding of the route, pacing and race awareness were crucial.

The race quickly split apart, with a small group of front runners moving clear. Ewan settled into the chasing pack before gradually increasing the pace and reeling in runners over the middle miles.

A small stitch threatened to disrupt his progress around mile eight, but after easing off briefly he was able to recover and make the most of the downhill sections towards the finish.

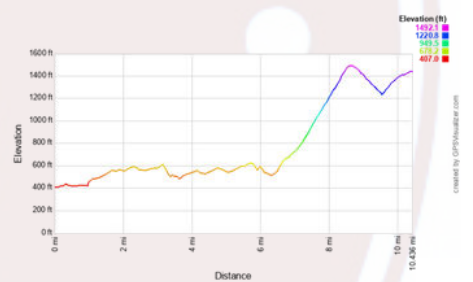
The final mile was run at full speed as Ewan chased down the runner ahead, closing the gap with every incline before ultimately running out of road.

His reward was an excellent 10th place from a strong field of 44 runners. The atmosphere along the route was one of the highlights of the day, with supporters lining the roads, car horns sounding and cowbells ringing, creating what Ewan described as a real Tour de France-style carnival atmosphere.



STAGE 14, BUILTH WELLS TO DROVERS

10.8M JOSEPH PICKARD IITH 1:06:43



Stage 14 was one of the tougher legs of the weekend, featuring plenty of climbing and terrain that suited strong hill runners.

As a dedicated fell runner, Joseph Pickard looked right at home on the challenging course, producing an excellent run to finish 11th against a strong field.

His Strava activity afterwards described the route as “my kind of road race”, which perhaps tells you everything you need to know about the profile of the stage.

The performance continued a strong spell of form for Joseph, who went on to finish second at the Boars Head Fell Race just a few days later.

For a runner who enjoys tough, hilly racing, Stage 14 proved to be an ideal fit.



STAGE 15, EPYNT VISITOR CENTRE TO BRECON 12.8M

NATHANAEL BOOKER 12TH 1:14:12

The stage began perfectly, with Nathanael making the most of the downhill sections and the fantastic roadside support.

'Flying downhill, my fastest mile pace in years, ringing cowbells and shouts of encouragement from car windows.'

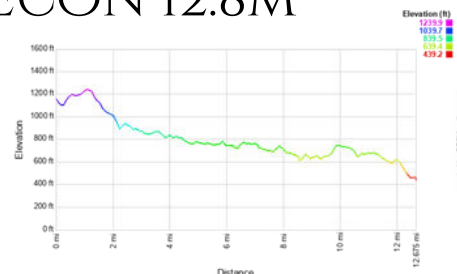
However, the race took an unexpected turn around six miles in "disaster, hamstring cramp at 6 miles!" Despite the setback,

Nathanael dug in and continued pushing towards Brecon as the discomfort gradually eased. 'I hobbled on and the pain and tightness gradually reduced, but it felt like a very long undulating second half.'

By the closing stages he was able to increase the pace again, finishing strongly on the descent into Brecon and 'Almost back to full pace by the final descent into Brecon.'

A battling performance saw Nathanael finish 12th on the stage, although he was left wondering what might have been without the midrace cramp.

"Happy with 12th place, but it could have been better!"



STAGE 16, BRECON CANAL BASIN TO TORPANTAU 12.5M

WILLIAM STEWART 15TH 1:20:38



Stage 16 was one of the toughest legs of the entire Welsh Castles Relay and carried the coveted King of the Mountains designation. Featuring a significant climb into the Brecon Beacons and attracting many of the strongest runners in the field, it was always going to be a demanding assignment.

William Stewart took on the challenge on Sunday morning, tackling a varied route of canal paths, roads and trails before the long climb towards Torpantau.

"My leg was a mix of canal, road and trail. It was very scenic when I could distract myself from how much my legs were hurting."

Like many of the mountain stages, the route was as beautiful as it was brutal, rewarding runners with stunning scenery while testing tired legs late in the relay weekend. William was supported on the day by both his parents. His mum headed out on her own long run to meet him near the end of the stage with some much-needed water, while his dad Craig was part of the support crew and experienced first-hand the unique atmosphere of the Welsh Castles Relay.

"It was fantastic to experience the atmosphere of such a unique event and to join all the supporters on the finish line."



STAGE 17, TORPANTAU TO CYFARTHFA CASTLE 8.7M



ALICIA ROBERTS 15TH (1ST LADY) 54:27

Alicia Roberts produced one of Macclesfield Harriers' standout performances of the weekend on Stage 17 from Torpantau to Cyfarthfa Castle.

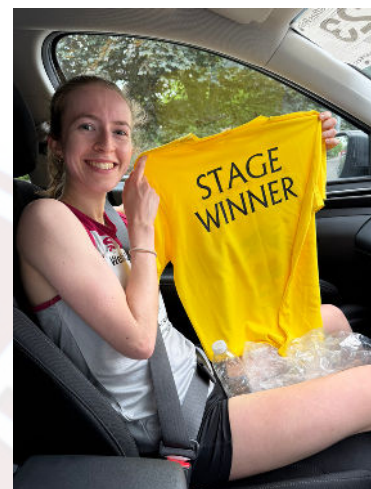
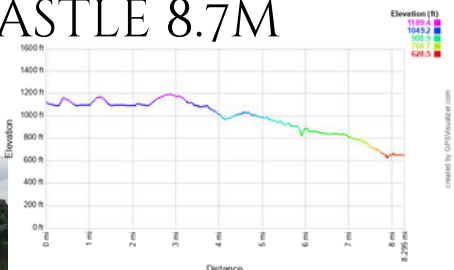
Running on a fast, predominantly downhill course, Alicia stormed to first female on the stage, earning the coveted Yellow Jersey as 1st Lady on stage 17.

The performance was all the more impressive given how close she came to the long-standing course record.

"1 min off the course record!! Pretty happy with that. 5k and 10km PBs count even when they are downhill, right? How cool I get to come home with a yellow jersey."

Her winning run capped a fantastic weekend for the club and highlighted the strength of the Macclesfield women's team.

As if that wasn't enough, Alicia followed up her Welsh Castles success by winning the Boars Head Fell Race just a few days later, continuing an excellent run of form.



STAGE 18, RHYD -Y-CAR TO NAVIGATION PARK JW 9.1M

MATTHEW LYNAS 15TH 54:25

When I volunteered to be Harriers' team manager for "The Castles" I'd sort of assumed I'd be running 1st leg and be able to spend most of the weekend not worrying about how I was going to race. However, for all the right reasons I ended up running stage 18 as it had been nominated as the leg on which the Jeff Wood

memorial award would be contested. It's awarded annually to the first v50 on this stage, in memory of Jeff Wood who sadly collapsed and died on stage 1 in 1989. As the only member of our team that old, I found myself running at 1:30pm on Sunday having been up since 5am on Saturday and having attended a briefing at 6:30am on Sunday! Hey Ho! Being honest it didn't really affect my performance, well not after a caffeine voom bar and a good warm up round Greggs & the cinema in Merthyr Tydfil.

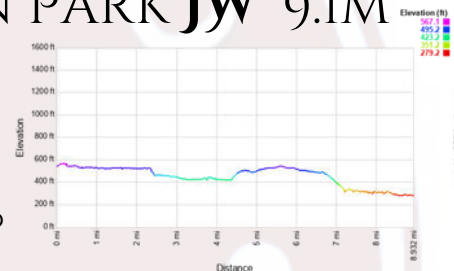
The stage got off on time with the usual culprits Swansea, Les Croupiers and Highgate leading, closely followed by Leeds City who look liked easy winners of the Jeff Wood award. I went off a little too fast on a very smooth cycle path but after the obligatory few kms recovering settled in running alone about 10 metres behind a group of 3 runners. The leg was more undulating than I expected but I bided my time, and as we dropped back down to the river, my trail legs helped me catch and pass the group ahead and then time trail it to the finish. Sadly 1 runner caught me in the last few hundred metres, but I wasn't too disappointed as time is more important than places in relays and I felt I'd run the 9 miles just about as quick as I could have hoped for.

I was welcomed by several harriers into the finish, but after a quick chat I was shepherded into Rob's car and off to pick mine up from the start of stage 20. All was good there before a last dash to see the race finish in Cardiff.

After months of planning and a weekend spent ensuring everything ran smoothly, Matt's efforts as team manager played a huge part in making Macclesfield Harriers' first Welsh Castles Relay such a success. Alongside Owain Morris, he helped coordinate everything from entries and logistics to transport and accommodation, ensuring the team could focus on racing and enjoying the experience.

As Matt summed it up:

"550 miles of driving over two days – worth every elite inch."

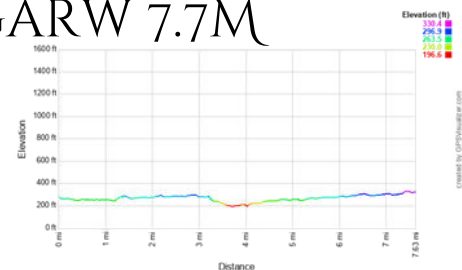


STAGE 19, NAVIGATION PARK TO NANTGARW 7.7M

FRANCESCA BRINT 19TH (2ND LADY) 50:10

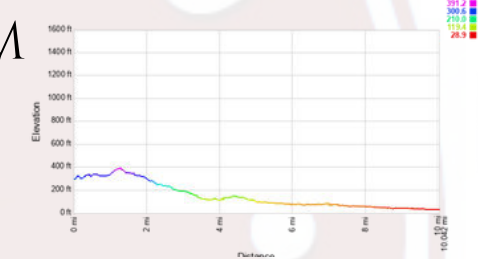


Francesca Brint took on Stage 19 after a hectic afternoon of Welsh Castles logistics, with plans constantly changing as runners, supporters and vehicles made their way between stages across South Wales. Despite the rush to reach the start and the usual relay juggling act of getting people and cars to the right places at the right times, Francesca produced an excellent run to finish as 2nd Lady on the stage. Her performance capped another strong result for the Macclesfield women, following Alicia Roberts' Yellow Jersey-winning run on the previous stage. As for the race itself?
"Actually possibly, maybe, kinda, a little bit fun."



STAGE 20, CAERPHILLY TO CARDIFF 9.1M

MARK WALKER 14TH (2ND VET) 54:25



I was excited to get my turn to run, and having studied the handbook felt quite confident with 9.1 miles downhill and flat. One of the joys of Welsh Castles is that it is pure racing, not chasing times. By the time I started I was out of date with where we stood for the overall competition, so decided to just race hard and ensure I left nothing out there. My leg was mostly on cycle paths and pavements as we tried to avoid the main roads between Caerphilly and Cardiff. That meant a bit less support on course and a surprising amount of twists, turns, rises, and obstacles that broke up any rhythm and made it a much harder day than expected. I found the first mile tough but I was in a good position, miles 2 and 3 were really great and I was moving well. Miles 4 to 9 I was hanging on for dear life, but taking some places and only passed by one runner, who ended up taking the vet prize for that leg. I knew I had some steps at 8.5 miles and then a couple turns before 800m flat out in the park, so I started to pick it up and fight to catch somebody ahead and pull away from those behind. It was going perfectly until some stabbing hamstring pain and the realisation that we were going to be 9.5 miles rather than 9.1! I finished delighted that I hadn't dropped the baton after 209 miles and 19 strong legs and with nothing left as planned. I was a little disappointed with my lack of sprint finish, but soon perked up once Rob mentioned Gloucester services and I had time to reflect on competing well against CDF and Clevedon as our nearest competitors, and being 28 seconds away from a yellow t-shirt - hopefully next year :)