

North District Open Water Team at French Cup Final

Last weekend (23rd-24th September) saw the North District open Water team competing in the final of the French Open Water Cup at Lissac-sur-Couze in the south of France. The team of seven were selected on the basis of results in the Scottish Open Water season and all competed in the 5 km and 10 km events against most of France's top swimmers in the discipline.

The 5 km on Saturday was raced over four circuits of a 1.25 km course and saw Ben McLaughlin finish first among the squad in the men's race with 10th place overall within the field of 73 starters. He was followed home by Fraser Tetlow (17th), Oscar Chirnside (22nd) and Fergus Reid (39th). Ben's position gave him 4th place in the 16-17 year category with Fraser 9th. Oscar and Fergus were 2nd and 11th respectively in the 14-15 year category.



The women's race provided further successes with Kelly McIntosh finishing 13th overall just ahead of Emily Riach in 14th out of the 64 starters. For Kelly this meant 1st place in the masters (25 and over) category and Emily gaining 3rd place in the 20-24 category. Isla Reid was the third member of the team coming home in 41st place overall and 14th in the 16-17 year category.

The first day was completed by the 4 x 500 metre relay in which the team of Ben McLaughlin, Fraser Tetlow, Kelly McIntosh and Emily Riach started with high hopes. The team took an early and convincing lead over the other 10 teams which they held until the finish. Top position on the podium not only meant gold medals but distinctive straw hats and €200 in prize money.



North District team after winning the 4 x 500 relay



Clear Skies and calm waters for the start of the day racing on Lac du Couze

The second day featured the Olympic distance of 10 km with all swimmers taking part. The water temperature was just above the level where wetsuits are no longer permitted making it the first time that many of the team had attempted the distance without one. Four of the team were forced to retire at various stages but three swam well to the finish line. Ben McLaughlin had a particularly strong eighth and final circuit overtaking 5 swimmers to earn 6th place overall from 40 starters and first in the 16-17 category. This made up for missing out on being available at the Scottish Swimming awards dinner the previous evening to collect his award as the top senior open water swimmer.

Emily Riach also finished strongly to get 7th place of the 41 starters and 2nd place in the 20 years and over category. Isla Reid also had a good race finishing in 24th overall and 12th within the 16-17 year category.

Commenting on the trip, team coach Richard McLaughlin said “This was a fantastic experience for our team as it gave them the opportunity to race in a high-quality field with larger entry levels than they are used to back home. The number of swimmers in the group starts was a real challenge to our guys who are used to racing in a small pack. The scale also allowed them to practice their racing skills for example drafting and dealing with breakaway groups. We even had to cope with a bright sun dazzling the swimmers and making sighting difficult, something they have yet to experience back home! Although the water temperature cost some of our swimmers in the 10K the overall response from the team was that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience and learned lots of new skills.”

The event brought an end to the swimmers open water season for 2023. They will concentrate on pool events for the next 8 months before returning to the lochs of Scotland in June 2024 having benefited from their international experience.



North District Open Water Team
Back row: Ben McLaughlin, Fergus Reid, Oscar Chirnside ,
Fraser Tetlow and Isla Reid
Front Row: Kelly McIntosh and Emily Riach