

The UK Ironman 70.3 race was held on the 14th June at Wimbleball lake in the Exmoor national park in Somerset and played host to 6 Andover Triathlon Club members. The race, labelled as the toughest Ironman 70.3 in the world, consisted of a 1.2mile open water lake swim, a 56 mile cycle which boasts 52 hills and almost 6000 feet of climbs, followed by a 13.1 mile hilly run. The triathlon attracts in excess of 1000 competitors every year and with a healthy prize fund and qualifying slots for the Ironman 70.3 world championships in Florida, it lures top professional triathletes from all over the world.

The start of the event was delayed for an hour due to heavy mist on the lake which was making it impossible to see the buoys positioned in the water marking out the 1900m circuit. However at 7am the mist lifted and almost 1000 competitors made their way into the water to get ready for the sound of the klaxon which finally got the race under way. First out of the water for Andover was Chris Thompson who posted a superb time of 31mins 20 secs, followed soon after by David Hall in 37.38 to get into transition one fast and out on the bike soon after to start the first of two laps. Paul Venus, Paul Wills, Jason Briley and Hannah Williams, all first timers at this race distance exited the water a matter of minutes later and well inside the hour cut off mark to also continue onto the bike route.

Thompson, a strong cyclist, grew a commanding lead over Hall but this was unfortunately cut short after only 20 miles where a problem with his bike rendered him unable to continue and he disappointedly had to pull out bringing his race to an abrupt end. With Wills, a strong hill climber, now in pursuit, Hall put in a fantastic ride over both laps and came into transition two with a healthy lead over his fellow club mates, completing the 56 mile course in 3 hours 15 mins. Wills arrived after a good ride almost 15 minutes later in 3 hours 29 mins. Hannah Williams, the only female competitor from the club, rode extremely well, battling it out with Venus and Briley who all came into transition closely together around the 4 hour mark.

Onto the run and with the sun now high in the sky conditions were heating up, but Hall, now with a comfortable lead over Wills, remained strong throughout the 3 lap hilly off road course to eventually cross the line in a total time of 6 hours and 15 seconds, knocking a massive 50 minutes off his previous best time on this course. Wills showed true grit and determination to find the endurance needed to cross the line 2nd place for Andover in 6.38.38. Paul Venus dug deep on lap two of the run to extend a small lead over the remaining club members still on the course, of which he maintained to the end and finished in a total time of 7 hours 29 mins and 53 seconds. Next home with the biggest smile of the day was Hannah Williams, who gave an inspirational effort to complete the total distance of 70.3 miles in 7 hours 44 mins and 53 seconds. A massive cheer from the crowd almost ten minutes later signified the finish of Jason Briley who cart wheeled across the line in 7.53.24 well inside the 9 hours 30 minutes race cut off time of which many did not make.

The weekend also saw club members Peter Dennett and Andrew Woodhouse participate in the Nokia Royal Windsor Triathlon. The Olympic distance race comprised of a 1500m swim in the river Thames, a 40km bike and 10km run in and around the town centre. Experienced triathlete Dennett was first back for Andover in 2 hours 35 mins and 34 secs which placed him 501st overall out of 1586 finishers. Woodhouse came home in 2.49.06 beating his best time on this course by a minute and placing 996th overall. Tony Ebdon also continued his good form this season and raced in the sprint distance race which included a 750m river swim, 20km bike and 5k run finishing in a time of 1hr 39mins 33 seconds, placing 46th out of 350.

Also representing the club was Steve Bungay at the Ineos Beaulieu sprint Triathlon in Hampshire. The 750m swim was held in the tidal influenced Beaulieu river, which provided the competitors this year with both a strong current and swarms of Jelly fish to contend with. The bike was a 20km loop around the picturesque New Forest, followed by a 10km mainly off road run. Bungay finished in 1 hour and 31 minutes, placing 17th in his age group and 71st overall out of 243 competitors.



