

Ask the family: Q and A with the Macdonalds



The Macdonald family hold a special place in Morpeth Harriers as one of only two families of whom every member competes for the club #. Devoted Partick Thistle fan Alistair is a long-time member as well as being registered in Scotland with Dundee Hawkhill. A keen cyclist, he was instrumental in setting up Sporting Club Gothic cycling outfit a few years ago and is perhaps at his happiest as a runner off-road in the mountains. A veteran of numerous full and half marathons, Margaret still regularly turns out in the Harrier League and is known as one of the most determined runners in the club. Amongst other achievements, oldest daughter Lorna holds the club marathon record with a sub 3 hour time and in 2017 won the Inter-Services title at London; also a fine swimmer, since joining the Army she has shown an even greater aptitude for training and competition. Middle daughter Lindsey rejoined the club recently, but has made rapid progress since doing so, gaining elevation to the fast pack in the Harrier League and dipping under 20 minutes for 5k. Youngest daughter Catriona (who is also a member of Bellahouston Road Runners in Scotland) had a super Winter season last year, medalling in the NECAA Cross Country Championships at Alnwick and leading the club's Senior Women to a team victory in the Davison Shield at South Shields in January, while also picking up a team medal for West of Scotland in the Scottish Cross Country Championships. Below are their responses to our latest Q and A session.

(The other is of course the Bennetts)

1. Tell us how you all got into running in the first place. Were there other sports competing for your attentions, and how naturally and easily did you all take to it?

In the early 80s Marg took part in the first few Great North Runs. Al spent his time between rugby and cycling. There was an early flurry with the Northern Rock 10 and Sunderland 5k sometime in the 90s. We both joined Morpeth around 2004. Margaret ran the 2005 London Marathon after warming up at the Alloa half, her first sub 2 hour half. Catriona joined because her friend lived next door to the late Tony Ward.

All the girls swam and they took part in the Tristar Series of triathlons when they were young, and this led them to the eventual membership of Morpeth Harriers early in the 2000s. Previously, the girls were quite successful in school running events; Lindsey's claim to fame was lapping the whole field one year in the school sports day 1500m at Newminster. All ran for East Northumberland in the schools cross country events and Cat went on to represent Northumberland Schools XC at Heaton Park, Manchester.

Lorna and Lindsay were (and still are) accomplished swimmers; Lorna indeed still holds one of the club records for Morpeth ASA. She competed in the Scottish and British Nationals over a number of years and holds medals for the British Masters. She is also a member of the Army Swimming Squad and holds several event records for her Division (Medical).

2. What would you consider to be your best individual (and best family) performances over the years?

Catriona's recent xc performances have been really encouraging, representing West of Scotland (when running for Bellahouston Road Runners) and the NE of England. She had a lively 2017 with a 3rd place in the Great Edinburgh Run and a win at the Birnam Hill Race. Her early season Forfar Half win was made more memorable when Marg came in 20 minutes after the presentation with a small group of dishevelled runners who had somehow got lost on the course! Their arrival was a surprise to the marshalls clearing away the signs – Al and Catriona had had their free massage and cake by then.

Lorna's win at the Kielder Marathon was probably only eclipsed by her run at London in 2017 when she won the Inter-Services Title running for the Army and breaking the Morpeth Harriers marathon time for a woman into the bargain, going sub 3 hours. They've run as a family on occasion at the Sherman Cup/Davison Shield at South Shields and helped the club in winning titles. All three girls formed the winning team at last year's Druridge Bay 10k (*see pic*). They also won this year's Elswick Harriers Virtual Relays as a team, winning a coveted china cat figurine!

Al is frequently to be found in the hills and his best early results have been 3rd places at the Yetholm and Rothbury Fell Races. His most memorable result was a sub 36 minute 10k pb at the tender age of 48, giving hope to all who think they are over the hill by then!

Marg and Al also organised the much missed Whalton Classic 5 mile race for two or three years where Marg also won a NEMAA title.



3. Who do you each admire in the world of running, either locally or further afield?

As a family, Paula Radcliffe is probably the one to be admired. The girls also appreciate the people who take the time and effort to improve other runners: Tony Ward, Vina Desai, Gordon Dixon, Mike Bateman and Chris Waugh have all had a hand in providing valued advice over the years. Kevin Bray's recent virtual race series has provided a challenge within the household and Marg managed to improve over a couple of distances.

When running the Croft 10k one year, Al saw Martin Scaife, then a Morpeth athlete (*and sadly no relation to the considerably slower Morpeth Harrier still running*) across on the other side of the track on his own, running like a gazelle. It was effortless poetry in motion; Martin did a sub 30 minute time that evening on a nothing special course.



- 4. A question for Catriona, Lindsey, Lorna: how competitive were you with each other when younger, and how competitive with each other are you now?**

Obviously all three girls are competitive, but not to the detriment of each other, and quick to text congratulations following good (and indifferent) performances. There's the usual banter following races.

- 5. And a question for Al and Margaret: how much encouragement and/or cajoling did you have to put in with your daughters to get them to run?**

No cajoling required. Catriona has represented Ashington and Northumberland at football (playing incidentally in the same team/same year as Lucy Bronze) and spent time when at uni in Portsmouth playing lacrosse, so she's never been short of fresh air. Lindsey's recent return to running is really heartening and she's posting some proper quick times. Lorna has always been a monster for exercise; Al and Marg admit that they don't know anyone else outside of the professional arena who puts so much time and effort into her cross-training. They admire her for that, despite trying to get her to take the occasional rest day – advice given in vain!



Catriona at Womens
6 Stage relays 2019

6. I notice Al has been quite literally left holding the baby (Lindsey's son Tristan) at a couple of cross countries: so what challenges and difficulties do you have when you are all turning out as a family?

Being a bit long in the tooth and frequently out of action with niggles and strains, Al is happy on the sidelines with two year old Mr. T. The youngster really enjoyed the shouting and bawling at the Newburn Relays last year and has a fair turn of speed when dashing to beat Margaret to the biscuit tin. The main challenge, however, is deciding who is going to clean the spikes after each Harrier League meeting. There's a huge pile of mud caked gear afterwards. The family claim they've had three washing machines walk out on them in the last few years!



Alistair at
Newtonmore Highland Games

7. Individually, what are some of your favourite sessions, favourite places to run and favourite surfaces to run on?

Catriona enjoys loops of High House Woods and most of the off road trails around the town. Running around the hills beside Pitlochry and Aberfoyle are also favourites when on holiday. Competition wise, we all enjoy the Black Rock 5, a beach run in Fife with a huge hill finish, a bottle of beer and a banana at the end of it. There's even a piper on the beach. A fish supper is essential after the race. Lorna's at home in Ultra events, having completed 'The Wall' Ultra twice and the St. Oswald's Holy Island to Craster Ultra with Marg.

Marg admits to liking the xc as 'no one knows where she is in the field' and there's invariably cake at the end. Lorna (or 'the dark destroyer' as she's referred to in the Macdonald household) is happy to mix it up, however, running the impossibly steep vertical kilometre in 2019 at the Chamonix Mountain Running Festival. She keeps talking about the Berkley Marathon. This year has been Lindsey's second season on the comeback trail, but the lack of races has restricted her progress. As a chef and a baker, it can be a struggle not to scoff what comes out of the oven...but there's plenty of new races ahead of her. The advent of strava has made some training runs a little more interesting and kept her going this year. Al's favourite session is two hours in the Joiners or the Tap n' Spile.



8. What do you consider you have got over the years – and will hopefully continue to get – from running?

Al tipped the scales at 13 stone when he played for Morpeth Rugby Club, so when he started running and lost a couple of stone, he qualified for a new wardrobe! Margaret says even though no one admits to being obsessed by running, the family are getting a set of new matching anoraks this year. The number of trainers delivered to the house over the years would keep a small nation in shoes for a good while. The family adopted a culture of fitness and they hope to engender this into the next generation.

9. And what are your hopes and ambitions for the future, running wise?

Both Lorna and Lindsey have an eye on competing in some triathlons, while Catriona would like to have another crack at the Alpine scene having ran in the Eiger Trail Race (2nd) and the Chamonix Half Marathon last year in melting conditions. So many races, so little time if and when this pandemic clears! Marg's ambition is to improve at xc and maybe give Cat a run for her money. Cat hopes that her form allows her to run for West Scotland via Bellahouston performances. Marg and Al add that it would be great to see the girls finish in a Morpeth women's team at the Nationals.



Lindsey at Durham XC 2019

10. What other interests and obsessions do you have outside the world of running?

Marg is a dab hand at the quilting and knitting thing. The family is apparently getting knitted socks for Christmas (sssh...mum's the word). Catriona's new passion during lockdown is indoor gardening. Al has spent August laying new paths around the house. 'It's nearly flat,' says Margaret, but there has been some unwanted attention in the evening from skateboarders checking out the new venue! Cat does a great Thai curry and likes her yoga.



Margaret Macdonald at 2009
Alwinton Fell Race

11. What other little stories or anecdotes do you have?

Catriona took part as a Junior in the 3k Fun Run at Kelso one year. However, she inadvertently became entangled in the main event, finishing still as 3rd Junior across the line having run an extra 2k! Al received stick for getting lost with Will Horsley of Durham the first time he did the long Alwinton Fell Race. Bizarrely, Will was carrying a map on a clipboard, which should have been a clue...He also got lost on Grizedale in the Lakes with five others before Colin Valentine of Keswick came out of the most impenetrable, gloopiest mist and led the group back onto the straight and narrow. Marg ran the Lock Katrine Marathon in 2018 on the day the mini *'Beast from*

the East’ was in town and after six hours in the snow, had to be thawed slowly over a fire. ‘*What she lacks in speed, she certainly makes up for in endurance*’, comments Al.