

Between fjords and mountains

By Thor Gotaas

Knarvik is a small village half an hour's drive north of Bergen. A running festival has been organized there, on the first weekend of September, for the last 27 years. This year the Fjord Norway Half Marathon was added to the traditional "Knarvikmila" 10km and there were more than 6000 participants in all events (including a 5km). The runners run on gravel and asphalt surrounded by the beautiful and scenic natural surroundings of western-Norway, while the locals play music and cheer.

The bus from Bergen to Knarvik is a lovely scenic ride that takes approximately 45 minutes. A German and a Dutchman are sitting at the front. It's their first time in Knarvik and they're going to run the half marathon.

There is a lively atmosphere when we arrive. The local sports hall is crowded with people and there are exhibitors including runners' magazines, fruit farmers, massage and health food. Knarvikmila's slogan is "sport without alcohol" and everything here reflects that cause. Fresh fruits are served for free and there is an uplifting atmosphere when several generations come together at Knarvikmila, either to participate or to watch and cheer. Even the sun is shining when runners from thirteen different nations line up at the start.

The Ethiopians go straight to the front to form a leading group. There are several other strong Africans registered as well. The Olympic 5000m champion Million Wolde participated last year and enjoyed it so much he asked his friend Haile Gebrselassie if Knarvikmila could work together with the Great Ethiopian Run. So this year nine Ethiopians are running Knarvikmila, and from among them Girma Assefa wins the inaugural Fjord Norway Half Marathon.

Moving backwards among the runners we find Håkon Røst. He is a 53-year old man from Oslo who started running (again) at the age of 45. He used to do cross country skiing and running in his teens, but then didn't do any exercise for a couple of decades. However, after a few seasons with moderate training he was back in good shape.

The Fjord Norway Half Marathon is very cosy. The course is fun and it starts and ends close to the stadium. First we ran a loop around the centre of Knarvik, then we headed south over two bridges before we turned to go back to Knarvik. The course is not the easiest, but it is charming because it goes through the streets of the town and its surrounding natural environment, with a lot of spectators and several bands playing. It's a race between fjords and mountains, very different from a marathon in a big city. My time this year was 1:20:02 which is well behind my personal best from a different course last year. Håkon Røst

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will certainly return to Knarvik another time.

It is always obvious that something is happening in Knarvik during the week building up to race weekend. There are seminars, debates, concerts and children's races. Most of the locals are involved in some way or another and they also participate in the race. The 10km on Sunday 6 September is the last race of the running festival. Girma Assefa wins again (29:02) and he celebrates by running a lap at the intimate Knarvik Stadium where the Kenyan Henry Rono broke the 5000m world record back in 1981.



A few minutes behind Assefa a man called Odd Nilsen arrives at the finish line in 36:50 - very impressive for a 62-year old. He has a smile on his face. After 45 active years he still loves to run and he is the prototype of a healthy older person. Asked how he manages to stay so fit at the age of 62 he replies "I run every day, often sessions of 45 minutes at a good pace. I never do intervals and I don't run very far. I participate in 8-10 races a year and enjoy it a lot. The joy of being fit and the feeling of well being is the key to success". Nilsen, 1.68m tall and weighing 53-54kg, is made for long distance running. Light bodies are also less likely to get injured.

The running festival in Knarvik is for everyone. It is framed by a West Norwegian fjord landscape, and the lovely natural setting of the stadium makes it

unique. For foreign runners getting here is easy, with flights to Bergen Airport, Flesland. From there it is only a 20-minute drive to Bergen and a 45-minute drive to Knarvik. It is ideal to stay in the charming city of Bergen and take the free bus to Knarvik. In that way you can have the best of both worlds: city life and the countryside with its fresh air and great natural appeal.

Result

MEN:

1	Girma ASSEFA	ETH	1:03:28
2	Urige BUTA	NOR	1:04:44
3	Kipkorir JAPHET	KEN	1:05:16
4	Oystein SYLTA	NOR	1:05:46
5	Terje AGGVIN	NOR	1:09:27
6	Afewerk AMELO	ETH	1:11:35
7	Laban SIRO	KEN	1:12:03
8	Alemayehu SITOTAW	NOR	1:15:09
9	Gjermund GROVEN	NOR	1:16:51
10	Bjarte EIKANGER	NOR	1:17:42

WOMEN:

1	Kjersti K DANIELSEN	NOR	1:19:44
2	Yimenesu TAYE	ETH	1:22:28
3	Anna CRITCHLOW STRONG	GBR	1:23:24
4	Helene PEMMER	NOR	1:27:30
5	Nancy SOMMER	NOR	1:29:29
6	Hege EIKEMO	NOR	1:34:37
7	Camilla GRIEG	NOR	1:37:40
8	Trude A ODEGARD	NOR	1:38:01
9	Christina LINDE	USA	1:40:53
10	Valborg NES	NOR	1:42:30

RACE CONTACT DETAILS

FJORD NORWAY HALF MARATHON SEPTEMBER
Helge Brekke, Boks 177, 5903 Isdalstø, Norway
Tel: 47 971 45 628 Fax: 47 56375053
Email: Info@knarvikmila.no Web: www.knarvikmila.no
Full race contact listings start on page 70

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