

Hill and Dale, record entry for the race series!

The Hill and Dale race series is a unique series of trail /mountain runs that have been traditionally put together by the Hill and Dale committee, which is made up of the race directors of each race. It attracts athletes of all abilities and encourages them to take part. The fact that it's not elitist means you're just as likely to share a post-race pint with the winner as you are with the person who finishes last. They have been traditionally modest individuals and see no need for the world to know what they have done.

However, the winds of change are a foot, Newcastle Mountain lovers grumbled to one another before the race started about the lack of consultation regarding this year's series, and in particular the Donard race. However, Wingman and his merry band of asphalt warriors have been at their work and ignored the mountain running side of the club. The holy grail of The Donard race has been tampered with, but alas the blame game has started and no one will admit who made the decision. A search has begun, will Wingman's black box turn up to shed some light on the truth?

The race preparation took place with course arrows put in place with sawdust, branches cut, finishing funnels erected, but a new problem had emerged. Other obstructions had to be removed from the route thanks to the local horse fraternity or was it elephants! (this wasn't in the job description.)

The first race of the series was in Castlewellan Forest Park a record number of pre-entries had registered for the series with 550. On the night 296 entries took to the line this is a new record for the series.

The runners started to arrive from 5.45pm full of anticipation and nerves. The debate started was the race Clockwise or Anti-Clockwise? Should it not change every two years? How far is the race? This was music to the organisers ears, if you want predictability this may not be the series for you! Plans are already coming together for next year's new and improved course.

The race brief was carried out which included an introduction of a cut off time for safety reasons, the official starter Frank Morgan set the runners on their way.

It's about 100 yards up-hill to the right turn and important to pace yourself and not get carried away by the atmosphere as there is still 5.2miles and 1080ft of climbing ahead of you and is important to keep a bit in the tank for the 3 major climbs still to come.

Off they sprinted, luckily for many there is a bit of respite as they descend down into the Spring Gardens. Unfortunately, what goes down must go up, and runners began the start of the first of three climbs in the race. The field settled down and the race was on.

The early pace was set by Mourne's McKee brothers with the Newcastle duo of Davey Hicks and David McNeilly in close pursuit. Once the race hit the climbs the McKee men showed their superiority and pulled away with Willie dragging the last efforts out of Brother Davey. However, in true brotherly rivalry as the finish line approached Willie ran off to claim a comfortable victory. Davey McKee was second and Davey Hicks third.

In the ladies race Shaleen McMurray had to battle hard for a win in the ladies race from Newry's Esther Dickson with Shileen O'Kane in 3rd.

McCann one of the many helpers on the night a person who gives of his time relentlessly, he helped with sign on and also said he would do sweeper at the back of the field. Now anyone that knows McCann would agree he is ideally suited to this role as he loves to talk and encourage people and above all he is comfortable with the speed required. As McCann came into the field towards the castle the timekeepers prepared to stand down as Joe and the last runner approached. McCann came into the funnel and announced proud as punch "that's the last runner now." A further seven appeared after him, Uncle Frank broke into fluent French as McCann sloped off to see Sally.

A word of thanks to Stevie" the enforcer" Rice he was the man who was going to remove the runners from the race if they didn't make the cutoff. However, the last runner home was a huge 12 minutes quicker than the previous year. I am not sure if the standard has improved or it is the threat of Stevie that proved effective.

For the record there were category wins for; Willie McKee Male open, John McKee Male junior, David Hicks Vet35, Alex Brennan Vet 40, Mark Alexander Vet45, Hen Kelly Vet50, Paul McCullough Vet 55, Brendan O'Hagan Vet60, Stewart Cunningham Vet 65 and Fred Strickland Vet70.

In the ladies race the category winners were Esther Dickson Female open, Molly Brennan Female junior, Shalene McMurray Vet35, Gillian Wasson Vet40, Shileen O'Kane Vet45, Aine McNeill Vet50, Suzi Carson Vet55, Mary Mackin Vet60.

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with sign on, timekeeping and tidy up. Without these volunteers, we would not have a series.

Thanks to Forest Service for the use of their premises.

Post-race ceremony was in Maginns in the Town. Thanks to Marty and Brendan and staff. A great spread was laid on.

Next week is the Tollymore forest race, 5.5 miles with 900ft of climb.

Remember to bring your Series Race Number!

Report by Evergreen



Mourne Runners McKee brothers leading the race. Picture Mal McCann