

## **Hanna in a different parish & Flint a brilliant 3rd overall**

*Photographs courtesy of Paul Fegan*

*Race Report by BOGBOY*

The annual Slieve Donard Race took place, like last year, in gorgeous weather – a clear sunny day, no visibility problems but that wasn't gonna stop some over-eager competitors going walkabout.

Every year since 1945 the pilgrimage to the highest point of the Mourne Mountains for the right to call yourself the fastest or just to complete what is an arduous race – 2,796 feet of climbing (or 850 metres for the kids) via the Glen and the Saddle, a rough descent to the Quarry and then a scuttle through the steep forest to reach the finish line. This is what was ahead of the 155 runners, up from 102 last year, who turned up to take the challenge.



*A man alone in his own playground – Dromara's finest Zak Hanna emerges onto the glen climb*

Zak Hanna won the race in 2017 and then again in 2021 – this year he dominated from the start to the finish to make it 3 victories in this the most prestigious of mountain races in Ireland to add his name to the trophy joining the greats of the past in this the 78th consecutive running of the race. Hanna is now 26 and in the prime of his life and hopefully with still so much more to come.

This is only 'pre-season' for him and a great one it has been. First it was a victory and new record in the Slieve Martin Race in Kilbroney on the 28th April taking 1 minute and 47 seconds of Seamus Lynch's 2015 record (30:41). Second it was a victory and smashing the

legend that is Robbie Bryson's 1999 record on 23:21 on Binnian to the Top on 5th May by 72 seconds recoding 22:09. An now today his 3rd victory in this classic up and down challenge.

With the Donard Race start and finish currently located at the entrance to Donard Forest at the edge of Donard Demesne local stawarts will debate how much extra the run from the Newcastle Centre to the forest would add to the climb time – some say 2 and a half minutes and others 3 minutes – the most prolific local Donard winner Deon McNeilly always reckoned that 36 minutes from the Centre to the summit via the Glen was a benchmark time.

Whatever the answer, today Hanna was in a different parish. 31 minutes and 17 seconds after the starting whistle Hanna was on the summit of Slieve Donard with literally not another runner in sight – a phenomonal climb underlying his potential to be one of the best climbers in the world and certainly the best mountain racer of his generation in Ireland.

Care and attention was then needed to navigate his way to the quarry first over the boulder field near the summit and then over the treachorous open mountain. Despite his foot disappering at one point deep underground, he escaped with only an ankle gash and no lasting damage. His descent time of 17:27 was only the 3rd fastest but that was not an issue as he crossed the finish line in a record time of 48 minutes and 44 seconds to take 31 seconds off his own record from last year.



*A face of determined concentration Hanna close to the Quarry on the Donard descent*

Behind Hanna there had been interesting developments. Suffering from a head cold, 17-year old Tom Crudgington still made it to the summit in 2nd place in 38:05 just ahead of North Belfast's Philip Goss (38:08). Around the summit cairn Crudgington plunged for sea

level certain in his own mind that he was on the right track. However, the mountain plays tricks on the mind, especially on a tired mind and Slieve Donard is unforgiving. Less than 10 minutes later Crudgington, followed by others, came to a sliding halt at the top of a cliff – a cliff at the top of the Black Stairs, which meant he was hundreds of metres to the left of where he should have been – him and all his disciples. Looking over the cliff he took the sensible decision to climb back up in order to circumnavigate back towards the Quarry.

Meanwhile, Luke Russell, who had been couple of minutes behind Crudgington at the summit in 4th place hadn't taken the bait and emerged at the quarry in 2nd place. Delighted, he sped through the forest to make it home in 58:09. He was also the fastest descender with a 16:43 time, with Gary McEvoy 2nd in 16:49. Also worth noting that Timmy Johnstone's descent time last year on his chase of Zak Hanna was 14:56.



*Pain etched on his face Luke Russell on his way to 2nd place in the Classic Donard Race*

### **Flint dominates the Women's Race and takes 3rd place overall**

BARF's Alice Flint has burst onto the local hill racing scene this year and is leading the women's Hill & Dale Series after the first 4 races. She climbs and descends equally well. She was an excellent 8th overall at the Tollymore race, the 2nd in the series and 9th overall in the Binnian to the Top race only 9 days before Donard.

She turned at the summit in under 42 minutes in 6th place and was on the tail of local man Russell and they quickly found themselves into 2nd and 3rd as the young Crudgington led a couple ahead astray. A superb effort from the young BARF athlete to make the overall podium in 3rd place and also dominate the women's race.



*BARF's Alice Flint powering her way to 3rd place overall and 1st women and new record holder for the Donard Race*



*Diane Wilson (2nd & 1st F50), one of the best descenders around, on her way to second place in the women's race with a flying descent of 18:37 to pip Martsje Hell (3rd & 1st F35) – the 4th fastest descent on the day – perfect style points too.*

Outside of the 1st 3 men and women mentioned above the other category winners were:

M Junior – 7th overall – Tom Crudgington (Newcastle & District AC) 63:18

M35 – 16th overall - Phil Goss (North Belfast Harriers) 66:09

M40 – 4th overall – Paul Rooney 62:04

M45 – 10th overall – Gareth Kelly (Armagh AC) 63:59

M50 – 19th overall – Thomas Leitch (Victoria Pk & Connswater AC) 66:59

M55 – 8th overall – Deon McNeilly (Newcastle & District AC) 63:26

M60 – 29th overall – Paul Le Blanc (Newry AC) 69:46

M65 – 68th overall – Merwyn Donaldson (Mourne Runners) 79:13

M70 – 70th overall – Peter McGuckin 79:43

F Junior Ciara Savage (Newcastle & District AC) 83:26

F45 Karen Wilton (Jog Lisburn Running Club) 78:55

F60 Pat Shields (Murlough AC) 84:38

It was another victory for host club Newcastle & District AC in the team race. They retained the Team Trophy with 16 points (same as last year) with BARF 2nd with 25 points.

So that was the story of the 78th edition of the classic annual Slieve Donard Race. A massive thank you to everyone who made it possible, especially to all the volunteers out on the mountain who helped to ensure a safe race, also to the administrators at registration and at the start and finish line. Thanks also to O'Hare's who hosted the prizegiving in the brilliant weather in their beer garden.