

Esther and Seamus Win the 2019 Hill and Dale Series

The final race in the 2019 Hill and Dale Series took place on the summer Solstice Friday 21 June, in evening sun 194 runners started at 19.30 sharp with the first runner arrive 23 minutes and 6 seconds after starting, being Jared Martin from Ballydrain Harriers to win the race followed closely by Mourne Runners Jonathan Scott and in 3rd place Newcastle ACs Rory McMullan.

In the women's race Newcastle ACs Áine McCann was first home in 26minutes and 9 seconds, followed closely by Newcastle ACs Mari Troeng, with 3rd spot going to Karen Wilton from Jog Lisburn.

The overall series woman's title went again this year to Newry AC's Esther Dickson who continues with brilliant form, improving every year. The overall series men's title was won again by Newcastle AC's Seamus Lynch, who has won virtually every mountain race there is to win across the whole of Ireland this year including classics such as Carrauntoohil and Slieve Donard, and is well on the way to securing Northern Irish and All Ireland titles.

This year also saw a U16 Juniors Series of three races, runners must be over 16 to take part in the main series, with three runners finishing all three races to complete the series, Tom Crudgington and Ciara Savage both Newcastle AC along with Rebecca Magee, Dromore AC.

A trophy is also awarded for the "Runners Runner", this is for a runner who doesn't necessarily lead the field but is an inspiration to others, this year the trophy went to John "Butcher" Kelly, who throughout the series donned high vis and ran at the back of the field making sure all runners were accounted for, he received numerous messages of thanks via the clubs social media pages for his words of encouragement.

Prize for completing the series

Each year every runner that finishes the series by completing 6 races receives a prize, this year the prize was a vital piece of safety equipment that every serious mountain runner needs, a bum-bag to carry their safety equipment which includes a built in whistle. During the 9th race of the series an injured runner summoned assistance using his whistle and during the 5th race another injured runner had to be loaned a jacket by a passing runner to keep warm while waiting for help as he had chosen to ignore safety advise, both examples showing how important the safety equipment is.

More to it than just Running

The whole series wouldn't be possible without the dozens of helpers that make the series happen, from Newcastle AC, Shimna Wheelers, along with family and friends. The marshals out on the course are particularly important, often standing for hours in poor weather, on the last night, 15 marshals directed the runners, Judith Robison, Patricia McKibbin, Declan McElroy, Danny O'Boyle, David Hicks, Daniel Molloy, Lawrence Hamilton, Jim Patterson, Claire Trianor, John Trainor, Mark Hanna, Ian McCracken, Jeromme McCrickard, Phillip Murdock, Gwenda Kenneally.

With regulars Mary Knight, Frank Morgan and Rita Devlin at the start and finish. Darragh McCrickard again in charge of the laptop and producing results within minutes of the last runner crossing the line.

Leading the way on reducing single use plastics

As each participant registered for their first race of this year's series they were presented with a free Hill and Dale branded reusable water bottle made from recyclable materials which they can then fill and then bring along to each race. In the UK, 7.7 billion plastic water bottles are used each year, with the average person now using 150 plastic water bottles every year – that's more than 3 a week.

In previous years the Newcastle Athletics Club would have provided single use plastic water bottles at the end of each Hill and Dale Race to each participant. For example, in 2018 there were approximately 2,500 single use plastic water bottles provided and used during the course of the series. The 2019 Hill and Dale Series had 700 registered participants therefore 700 reusable water bottles. This year 0 single use plastic water bottles were issued. Not only did this new initiative reduce the use of single use plastics it has also helped reduce any potential littering at each of the ten series races and it has also helped reduced the amount of waste produced.

The last race of the 2019 series was timely as it coincided very closely with the National UK Refill day which was on 19 June 2019. We would like to encourage as many runners as possible to 'think before they drink' and continue using their reusable bottles in any further races throughout the year.

Charity

The entry fee for the last race in the series is donated to charities with a local connection, this year £2000 will be split between two , one being the Mourne Mountain Rescue Team who are a vital safety service manned by volunteers that anyone enjoying the Mournes hopes they will never need but will be glad they are there if they do.

Finally

All of the organising committee would like to thank the competitors that take part in the series, who travel from all over Ireland on Thursday nights. This year we received numerous messages of thanks on social media, which mean a lot everyone giving up their spare time to make the series enjoyable. Looking forward to meeting you in 2020.

By Newcastle AC Members

