

Hill and Dale is Back!

Hill and Dale is back, the much anticipated start of the 2019 series began in Castlewellan Forest Park. This race was previously known as the "McVeigh Classic" named by a former race director after himself! In those days a big entry was 75-100 runners, the popularity of this series has seen the numbers swell to a new record crowd of 325 runners this year. These events now take a lot of organising and the members and friends of Newcastle AC do a tremendous job volunteering week on week.

There was much questioning in the week prior to the race. Is the race going Clockwise or Anti-clockwise? Are there any new sections? So the recceing began which is an integral part of race preparation for some. However, the top question on the night went to a former member of the host club who asked for a map of the course on arrival. Now maybe "Dorothy" wanted to home in on his map reading skills as history would suggest he could do with the practice now he is not allowed to use his GPS watch anymore. The irony is these races are fully marked with sawdust at every junction and on the straights in between, showing the route.

The race starts with a 100 yard climb up-hill to Castlewellan Castle it is prudent to pace yourself and not get carried away by the atmosphere as there is 4.7miles and 1080ft of climbing ahead of you and is important to keep a bit in the tank for the 3 major climbs to come.

Off they galloped like a scene from Aintree, it wasn't "Tiger Roll" but more "Runners Roll" as the runners jostled for position. A number of runners hit the deck with Good Samaritan Hazel McLaughlin seen pulling girls to their feet before they got trampled on! As the runners headed up the Hill, Bronagh McInerney emerged from the bushes and gave chase. 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 at the back of the Castle was set by Johnny Scott of Mourne Runners and Mark Stephens of Newcastle AC. As the runners made their way to the top of the 2nd climb Slievenaslatt they were given encouragement by an ex Hill and Dale Champion Paul Mawhirt and his sidekick Bella. One wonders has this wet Mawhirt's appetite to roll back the years.

These two runners battled all the way with Johnny Scott eventually taking the win by 21 secs from Stephens. The top 3 in the mens race was rounded off by Top Junior Jared Martin who looked ridiculously fresh at the finish.

The ladies race was led from the start by Esther Dickson and she never looked in danger and won by 1 min 18 secs from Karen Wilton. In third place was Newcastle AC runner Aine McCann.

The race is as competitive down the field as at the front, with tiredness setting in and tempers fraying a mountain running stalwart and retired VP was heard giving words of advice on where to go to runners who tried to cut corners on the mountain bike trails. This topic formed part of the discussions back at the Pub, where the said VP was told "what did you want me to do? Mirror, Signal, Manoeuvre! It's always good to see new faces ready to take on the H&D challenge and see returning runners back for another year. One such returning was East Down Stalwart Brian Hamilton in the Male 70 category, he sprinted to the line to take the Category win in style. That is racing style and not fashion style as he ran the race with his running vest back to front.

While on the subject of style or lack of it, it would be wrong not to mention Davey Smyth who is always notable for his attire but on this occasion, he surpassed himself with his Ginger Locks unrecognisable and dyed jet black. However, it did not stop him putting in a strong display.

For the record there were category wins for; Johnny Scott Male open, Jared Martin Male junior, Colm Murtagh Vet35, C McVeigh Vet 40, Stephen Todd Vet45, Hen Kelly Vet50, Jim Brown Vet 55, Dominic McGreevy Vet60, Peter McGuckin Vet 65 and Brian Hamilton Vet70.

In the ladies race the category winners were Esther Dickson Female Open, Meadow McCauley Female junior, Niamh Kellet Vet35, Ciara Coffey Vet40, Karen Wilton Vet45, Aine McNeill Vet50, Janice Reid 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 LIFE for the use of their premises for sign on.

Post race ceremony was in Maginns in the Town. Thanks to 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 Mr and Mrs Evergreen