

Records smashed at Binnian

By Marathon Man

Going back to the old course, the Hill & Dale series returned to Carrick Little on Thursday night for a route last run in 2002. From 2003 until 2019 the uphill only race moved to a new home with the start at Marks' field before returning to the original route in 2022.

With some runners still not walking in 2002 considerable research had been undertaken during the week to establish the old route, the record and when it was set. With the previous record time set in 1999 of 23:21 held by Robbie Bryson all eyes were on Zak Hanna to see how the new generation of mountain runners compare to a race not run in twenty years.

All eyes at the registration were on Connaire McVeigh to see what age category he would enter this week. Consistently inconsistent McVeigh has so far this series managed to enter different age categories on three out of three occasions. Causing as much controversy as President Obama's birth certificate no one is now sure what age category McVeigh should be in. In future years the Hill & Dale series committee is considering introducing Birth Certificate checks to prevent a birther movement going forward.

As the clock neared 19:30 there were some questions at the start as to where the race started in 2002. Deon McNeilly seemed keen to start the race as low as possible and below the Head Road if possible to prevent any attempts on the course record.

Just like in 2002 the race start was communicated to the finish team by mobile phone and this even made it into the 2002 race report. Unfortunately it appears the mobile phone reception on Binnian is still quite poor. In 2022 the finish team had brought a drone to the finish line, however the mobile phone with the app to control the drone was forgotten so all the effort carrying it up was in vain.

The finish team saw Zak Hanna appear on the skyline on the first hill and the record certainly looked in jeopardy. Taking an incredible 1 minute and 12 seconds off the record Zak Hanna was the first finisher in an extremely impressive 22minutes and 9 seconds. Second man home was 17 year old Tom Cruddington in a time of 24

minutes 34 seconds. Cruddington wasn't even born when this route was last run. Cruddington is in fantastic shape and has recently been selected for the Irish Under 20 team at the European Championships in July in La Palma. Hanna has also been selected for the Men's senior team for the uphill only race.

The first lady home was BARF's Alice Flint in 9th place overall. Running a time of 29:01 it is suspected that this is now the female record time. The fastest time that can be found for the race between 1998 and 2002 was Shileen O'Kane in a time of 30:55 also in 1999. Unfortunately the results pre-1998 are not in the fell runner magazine.

Making his first appearance at the series this year was host of the runner beans podcast Mark Malone. When not discussing cheatboots Malone has noted that the M35 category is not as strong as previous years and went out hard for the first mile until the real hills started. Initially appearing in the male open results in 12th overall Malone has now changed to the M35 results and has taken the age category win from BARF's Jonathan McCloy who is back after isolation with Covid19.

Hopefully Malone will bring a birth certificate to the next race to prevent a further birther movement. Discussing age category wins on the podcast and Malones sparing with Deon McNeilly the race got a mention on the podcast. Perhaps the hosts will consider a live broadcast from Loughshannagh later in the series?

A former series winner Paul Mawhirt, now running in the M55 category made a welcome return to series running his first race in over 10 years. Having cycled to the start Mawhirt finished in 39th position before descending and then cycling back home.

Attempting to emulate Damien Brannigan for making the Hill and Dale podium days after racing a marathon Jimmy King was fast out of the starting blocks. He described his impressive 2:42 for the Belfast marathon only 4 days earlier as "only a warm up for Binnian ". On the first Sunday in January 2022 King decided to run from Donard park, out to Annalong, along the Head Road, up the Moyad Road, down into Tollymore and back to Donard Park. Running only 26.3 miles that morning King was delighted that he managed to see every side of Binnian that morning, albeit only with a headtorch. Finishing in 89th place King described it as not the smartest thing he had done that day. Meanwhile at the top of the mountain Sam McNeilly was absolutely delighted to have beaten the Segment King telling all who would listen that she had beaten a 2:42 marathoner in a race.

With everyone descending down the mountain it appeared that Colm Murtagh felt he hadn't done enough and wanted to run the race again and improve his time. Having ran up in a time of 34:07 Murtagh had returned to his car to discover that he had dropped his car key somewhere during the race. Meanwhile a good Samaritan on a walk up Binnian had discovered a key for a Volkswagen as they climbed up Binnian and provided it to Barney Cunningham at the finish. Retracing his steps up Binnian a second time Murtagh was delighted to hear the key had been found and he wasn't going to have to walk home to Drumaroad that evening.

Further down the mountain Deon McNeilly was telling all that would listen that back in his day, they didn't run to set records. This was interspersed with comments such as the lane wasn't as good back then and the path up the mountain is better now. McNeilly quickly followed this up by admitting that he has recently spent all hours of the day searching for old watches and uploading his times onto strava where his times provide him with numerous strava segments. He also declared that he is the owner of the fastest known descent off Binnian.

After the race it was back to the Avoca for much welcomed refreshments and the prize giving. The biggest competition of the night was who had travelled furthest for the race. Luke Sutherland from County Donegal looked like a strong contender until Brian Brannigan declared that he has been living in Australia for the last 30 years and had travelled home taking part in both Slieve Martin last week and Binnian this week with a run round the seven sevens inbetween.

In a Cinderella style Francie McAlinden was enjoying himself too much and had to leave the ball in a hurry after realising he had forgotten to lift his daughter from work. Sincere thanks to Danny and Carrick Little café for use of their field for car parking and toilets. There is no Hill & Dale this Thursday due to the annual Slieve Donard Race at 2pm this Saturday from Donard Car Park.