

Hill & Dale Race 9 – Meels

Race Report by The Troll

As a resident of the Mourne Mountains and surrounding area, I take an active interest in all the to-ings and fro-ings within the hills. No matter how many years I witness the ritual, I still cannot fathom what possesses humans to engage in a procession around the open hillside in such large groups. This year was no exception when 205 individuals toed the line at, as I have always known it, the ‘Scoop-out-of-the-earth-which-causes-pain’. Though for some reason it has become known to folks entering the hills as ‘Happy Valley’. A misnomer if ever there was one, but more on that later.

This year’s race began with the humans ascending – as I know them – by the wee-er one first followed by the slightly bigger one second. In the common tongue this was Slieve Meelmore followed by Slieve Meelbeg. In interests of language parity, ascending the mountain of large animals first, followed by the mountain of the ants. But sure, what’s in a name?

As the humans ran off the observation was made that while the runners were flocking together, they were not making good the entirely usable sheep track which climbs the mountain. Sheep get a hard rap as not having the most sense, but they do indeed put down their tracks as they do for a reason; namely that it is the best line. Anyhow the humans ran/walked up, then down a wee bit, up a touch more, before finally down a fair auld trek, until they got to the end.

The men’s race saw a result which emulated the Tory leadership contest earlier in the day. That is to say: Mark Stephens (Newcastle AC) ran out as convincing a winner as Boris Johnson, though thankfully without any of the other such speculation about stimulating substances (though Mark King, who was the only one to take a pre-run coffee, did mention something about the urge to return the mountain summit and listen to Jimi Hendrix with only his buff on) associated with competitors in the race. The only white powder knocking about after the race was going into water bottles and any talk of a pharmaceutical nature was which was gave a better recovery; High 5 or Science in Sport (other brands are available). Stephens led the field by just under two minutes in a time of 28mins 47secs. It has been remarked that this may be a record. While at the aforementioned Greenan’s smart phones were out and files were being searched online for confirmation of a record time. When our esteemed timekeeper Frank Morgan was asked if he could check his files via the cloud he merely remarked that you can’t see the cloud when there is a ceiling above you and returned to his post-match pint. (Ps Happy Birthday Frank) Crowd favourite Colm Murtagh (Newcastle AC) came in second, with Mourne Runners man Jonathon Scott making up the top three. An honourable mention must go to Lagan Valley athlete Colin McGrath who came home in fifth position. Still in the junior ranks it bodes well for the future of mountain running.

In the ladies’ race Esther Dickson (Newry AC) continued to be the standout female athlete of this term with another convincing win. The NAC athletes of Aine McCann and Mari Hig...(sorry, too soon) Troeng came home in second and third respectively. Congratulations ladies.

Traditionally at this stage the report would be embellished by some trivial filler about semi non-events which tickled the whim of said report writer. Such as Declan Morgan living up to his Twitter bio and coming to race without any fell shoes. Or perhaps the ad hoc decision by the race committee regarding the, currently tied, Vet 45 category by d’Hondt method and thus looking back at what surplus transferable value could be ascertained from previous race results with which to decide the title.

However, this evening's proceedings had two noticeable incidents. Living up to the traditional name associated with the race venue (see opening paragraph) two unfortunate souls came a cropper and connected by an uncanny fact that they both shared the same Christian name. But again, what's in a name?

After completing the previous 4367 metres, one assumes, relatively incident free Paul McCullagh unfortunately came down heavily within spitting distance of the finishing tape. Thankfully, though not unsurprisingly due to the camaraderie and wide spectrum of competitors the series draws, there were people on hand (bad pun, apologies) to help with the situation. Paul, we hope you heal up well and we'll see you soon again no doubt. I'm not sure if the Doctors present were of the open-heart surgery variety, but they certainly performed some open mountain surgery with aplomb.

At times much is made of the requirement to carry the most minimal of kit (waterproof jacket, whistle, compass) on the mountain. However, it was the humble whistle which prevented a prolonged evening on the hillside for one competitor. Again, with thanks to other competitors and marshals, camaraderie came into play and a cadre of Hill and Dalers came to the call and assisted Paul O'Connor from the hill. While the knowledge and experience contained within this group of individuals was as extensive as the previously mentioned incident team, unfortunately none of it was medical nature. We hope the ankle heals up well Paul.

From all within Newcastle AC and the Hill and Dale Series to those who helped with these incidents, thank you. They would have undoubtedly been much more severe had the required equipment not been carried.

Thank you also to; all those who helped with runner registration, marshalling the summits, those manning the finish tunnel, the sweepers/wolf pack, the farmer who allows us to park in his field, the tech genius behind the tabulation of the results, the good people of Greenan's pub and all the competitors who make charging round the hills on a Thursday evening such entertainment.

The next and final race is Drinahilly this **FRIDAY** at 19:30. Race registration is in O'Hare's. Coincidentally O'Hare's is where the final evenings prize giving is also taking place. So, post-race, why don't you swap the fell shoes for dancing shoes and the club singlet for something more glamorous and have a bit of craic that evening, in O'Hare's.

Yours sincerely

The Troll.