

I'm going and I may be gone some time, but Scott was back in 33 minutes.

Race Report by Hawaiian Tropic

Thursday 21st April saw the second race of the Hill and Dale series in the most glorious setting of Tollymore Forest Park on a fantastic spring evening. A course which measured just over 5 miles with a sweeping start past the monument, a zig zag of the river before the infamous forest climb up through the trees and over the first stile. Conditions were perfect and the ground was firm, much to the delight of Connell Nugent who was festooned in a new pair of dapper brogues.

Earlier that day a second check was completed of the whole course by the Prophet and the Run Director before the arrival of the now mandatory fish and chips supplied by co-Race Director Francie - 2 fish and 2 chips - feeding of the 5000, with Mrs McNiff getting a fair share of the feast.

240 runners put their toe on the line and faced the monument ready for the starter whistle. GBird, Linda and McCann took up their new roles as tail runners/walkers, with the latter ready to hurl abuse at those who wanted it and those who did not! Things were touch and go before the tail runners had even got to the monument when McQuaid was already overtaking them and this time I don't mean Brendan but his 2 year old son Oliver. Rumour has it that a top Irish coach has identified McNiff and McCann as the "new Irish running power couple" - high praise indeed.

A fast start to the race before the climb up through the forest with Jonathan Scott leading the pack with Coulter-Smith and McAtee hotly in hot pursuit. A blistering finish from Scott of Mourne Runners ensured the winning of the race in 32 minutes flat. Newcastle AC had 5 runners in the top 10 with McMullan, Hicks and McEvoy all eager to get top 10 positions. Barry McConville had a super run leading the club in an impressive 34.00 (it's a pity he didn't listen as well in school).

Alice Flint (BARF) had an unbelievable run for the second week in a row, finishing top female and 2 mins 54 from the overall leader coming home in a really impressive 8th overall. Bernadette O'Kane was second female overall and first FV35 and third female overall was Amanda Perry and first FV50 in 40.16. Newcastle AC ladies, Sam McNeilly, Catherine McIntosh and Rachel Wallace were best placed for the host club.

Note to other Race Directors - get McCann booked for tail runner as he had all runners in and over the line in just over the hour - when asked what was the secret it was quite simply the runners trying to get away from him as quick as they could as they couldn't bear listening to his stories about the Armagh 10 and other selected races any more.

The Juniors had their second race of this 4 race series for them. No alterations were made and all completed the full course. "McMullan in good shape" was the headline in the paper this race 25 years ago and this can quite simply be the same headline again with young Ethan McMullan coming first in the new Junior series and 2nd Newcastle AC runner over the

line. Dad Marty just wants to confirm he was 8 years old when this headline was written!! First Female junior was Rebecca Magee.

Evergreen Deon McNeilly was delighted with his top 20 finish and title as MV55 and wanted to advise us of the reason for his fantastic running - socks! Yes his new socks from Next (other fashion outlets also sell socks).

A special mention also has to go to wee Ernie - 2 weeks in a row this man has warmed up with a 4 mile tempo at 7.20 mm at 12 noon before his second run of the day at Hill and Dale and winning his age category again.

So then it was back to the recently renovated Avoca for the food, pints, post-mortem and spot prizes and of course what the runners treasure the most - the mugs!! Question from Rathiland boys - do we get these mugs filled with Guinness? Eh no!

The bar was buzzing - Hazel from Ballycastle on her first Hill and Dale winning FV55 commented, "you are all so lucky to live in this beautiful area".

The young lady from Colorado who also enjoyed her first Hill and Dale and in her own words described the run as a scene from the "zombie apocalypse" as she looked back down through the trees.

A huge thank you to Jack and his staff in Avoca for the light refreshments and pints. To all the marshals who kindly volunteered throughout the course and a special mention to our youngest volunteer Meath Flynn. Of course, the night does not run without the assistance and expertise of Rita, Debbie and of course Darragh at the helm. Stalwart Frank Morgan as always for his start and finish set up. And of course prophet and crew helping to mark out the course.

Next race is Slieve Martin on 28th April. Make sure to register online before 9pm on Tuesday and take your number with you for every race. Full body kit is essential as we move onto open mountain for the first time in the series.