

Great Scott turns in a Jubilee performance

Hill & Dale Race 7 – Millstone Report by Bogusboy

The Hill & Dale action returned to Newcastle as the series moves closer to its conclusion. The appetite for Thursday evening racing remains strong as evidenced by the 185 athletes who took the line in Donard Forest for one of the newer races in the fixture list. For the uninitiated Millstone stands to the left of the quarry when looking at the mountains from Newcastle town centre. It is also synonymous with an aggressive, belligerent and uncompromising old buzzard; Pete Grant is the other Race Director for this particular event.

By 6:30pm the white van was parked up, Darragh had all systems firing and Debbie and Kerry were standing to post to get the runners processed and registered on what turned out to be a great evening for forest running. The new slick entries and results service is proving to be efficient in streamlining the process or so it seemed until John Taylor presented himself at the van sans number but armed with a plethora of good reasons for needing a replacement. These included some standard fayre such as the dog ate it, it's in 'my other bag', it was definitely in the car when I left home and finally the truth was revealed, I've lost it!!! Such is the nature of the bespoke IT solution proffered by the host club that Mr Taylor (no relation to any of the members of Duran Duran) was issued a bright shiny new number, swiftly thanked us for the interrogation and set off to get ready for the race – another satisfied customer!

On Uncle Frank's whistle the eclectic band set off towards the first bridge, some faster than others and McVeigh effusively thanked the entries team for a job extremely well done as they began preparation for the next stage of their work in scanning the finishers in preparation for the processing of the results. A somewhat impromptu finish funnel was quickly erected, and the camera turned on to catch all the action at the end. A box of rather tasty Malteser Squares was discovered and devoured in suitably quick time as the athletes took on the steep climb to Millstone. Before they knew it, one athlete was making his way back. Veteran Jim Brown cited a leg injury as his reason for his early bath, but was overheard whispering to his long-suffering friend Paddy Mallon who was not running, 'I just couldn't do it without pal. I missed you far too much, so I turned and came home.' A tear was shed and hug exchanged and they vowed never to be parted again!!!

At the business end of the race Jonathan Scott was rarely troubled and returned home first in 38:24 with Joshua McAtee 21 seconds in arrears in second place and Lorcan Vallely just over a minute further back in fourth place. Arriving with Lorcan was H&D stalwart David Smyth who announced on the way to the finish that he had taken a wrong turn and had not completed the prescribed course. His honesty was only superseded by his determination as he decided to head back up towards the quarry and pick up where he went wrong so that he could avoid a DNF or even worse a DQ. David would eventually complete the course and received much applause when he finished in 177th place some 30 minutes after entering the finish area for the first time. He would be a contender for the lost in the mountains award if it became the lost in the forest on a marked track award!

As this was unfolding the athletes returned in a steady procession, some feeling the effects of the final few hundred metres on the tarmac more than others. Some were charging home like gazelles gaining an all-important place or two while others, legs shattered from their earlier

efforts resigned themselves to their fate and trundled to the line, counting down the steps and glad to be done for the night.

In the ladies' race, Esther Dickson was first home in 43:03 (34th overall), just under a minute behind the evergreen and ever-improving Diane Wilson (46:56 and 42nd overall) with Sarah Graham just over a minute further back in 48:10 (51st overall).

There was also a junior race with the younger athletes completing the same course as their older counterparts. First home was Ethan McMullan in 15th place overall (43:19) and just over 8 minutes ahead of his dad Martin, who if my sources are to be believed, took some time to get close to nature and contemplate the great mysteries of life while exploring off-piste in the foliage! Ciara Savage was first female junior and fourth female overall in 55th place (48:54).

There were the usual battles within categories and races within races as the competitive side of most came to the fore once again. Nowhere was this more evident than in the hotly contested MV70 category. At a time when most men of this age are slowing down considerably, Peter McGuckian and Ernie Hall came charging towards the line with the former prevailing by a mere 4 seconds – Hall was heard mutter under his breath 'I'll train harder next week to make sure I get him' – boys will be boys. Elsewhere there were category wins for Colum Campbell, Sean Donnelly, Thomas Leitch, Deon McNeilly, Paul Le Blanc, Ciara Coffey, Hazel Sutherland, Karen Wilton (without Cassie!) and Pat Shields, Mary Mackin and John Sinton.

I had taken up a position close to the finish to guide the finishers home and was taken aback when a caped crusader stole past me a quare rate of knots with a rain jacket flapping around her. Rather bemused, I asked a fellow bystander if that had in fact been the legend that is Mary Mackin. 'Of course it was' came the reply 'sure she is superwoman – did you not know that she did a swim and run race last night'. Then it all made sense. Chapeau Mary Mackin

Like so many racing events, there would be no Hill & Dale without the commitment and efforts of the many volunteers who mark the course, manage the entries and results, stand out in the wind and often rain and organise the event. We are indebted to these unpaid unsung heroes who cheerfully (in most cases!!!) go about their task.

Back in O'Hare's it was time for the usual post-mortems, 'what ifs' and 'if onlys' over some much-needed salty chips, sausages, sandwiches and an ale or two to replace lost fluid.

Race 8 of the series is the eponymous Loughshannagh Horseshoe with the Prophet and his Beloved Disciple on RD duty – insults will be plentiful, but these are covered by the race fee and there will be no additional charge. Please follow the instructions of the marshals when parking and leave the passing spaces free to ensure that we keep the road open and safe. There will be portable toilet facilities available. Registration will be in the usual car park close to the start. Full body kit and other navigation equipment is mandatory as this is the longest and most exposed event of the series. Cut off times are in place to ensure the safety of both competitors and marshals and these are non-negotiable.