

Tom, Tom, the Crudgington's son, climbed four hills and a race he won.

Hill and Dale Race 8 - the Loughshannagh Horseshoe by Bogusboy

Arguably the most demanding race of the series, the Loughshannagh Horseshoe presents a real test of hill running for those brave enough to take on the challenge. There have been occasions in previous years where the conditions were incredibly difficult with low cloud, driving wind and rain and poor visibility making it even more challenging. Thankfully, on this occasion, the gods of fell running were in benevolent mood and the skies were clear, the sun was shining and although very wet and spongy underfoot, conditions were favourable and made the task of summiting Carn, Doan, Loughshannagh and Ott reasonably straightforward for the record entry of 185 who were determined to complete the challenge. For some it was to complete the five races needed to finish the series, while for others it was the pursuit of a victory in their age category to cement their position in their particular group.

It is all in the detail

This race requires precise organisation, a team of experienced marshals to stand atop the peaks and Race Directors who know their onions. Who better than the eclectic pairing of McCrickard and McCann with the former responsible for the mountain and the latter managing change and transforming lives with the ground crew. Negotiations had been taking place for weeks, visits were made to Mary Margarets, portable lavatories were sourced and delivered and meticulous marking of the road had taken place. Clear evidence of commitment was demonstrated by the Prophet turning off the mixer at dinner time and heading up early to festoon the road with tape to ensure that cars could pass in each direction. There were even rumours that he was tarmacking the path to Carn!

No evidence of Pythagoras

It is important in this race to track the felled as they move between peaks. The Prophet produced a rather fancy squared A4 notebook with numbers 1-200 laid out and a space adjacent to write the athlete number as they passed through the peak. When questioned about the provenance of the book, he declared that it was his maths book from first year - closer inspection revealed that no other pages in the book had ever been used!!!

Alf Tupperware goes hungry

In an unexpected twist of fate, there were no fish suppers on the menu at the briefing at 6pm as both Race Directors are following a very strict nutrition regimen in preparation for the summer beach season and an as yet unconfirmed trip to take part in a popular show on an amorous piece of land surrounded by water!!! Unfortunately by 6:10 this had been forgotten as the tea was poured and the snowballs, caramel squares and fifteen were attacked with all the panache of a sow at a bucket. The regimen will recommence on Monday!

Clipped

The protagonists arrived in a steady stream and were processed with great speed and precision - no challenge is insurmountable for the heroes in the van who were joined this week for the first time by Miss World 1978. A few returned trophies and were reminded that they will probably be picking them up again at the end of the month. Dominic 'Mad Dog Blackfoot' McGreevey returned his and unsurprisingly it was not filled with a combination of engine oil and his toenail clippings! the organisers breathed a huge sigh of relief!

The future dawns

At 7:30 sharp the main field set off in the direction of Carn. Young Tom Crudgington, already a race winner in the series was away quickly, determined to stamp his authority on the race and secure the

win. By the top of Loughshannagh, with the hard climbing over, he had built up a commanding lead and was able to hold off the fast finishing Johnny Scott to cross the line in 44 minutes flat, 17 seconds ahead of the Mourne Runner who had made considerable inroads when Crudgington took a very safe and less direct route from Ott to the finish. Crudgington improved on his second position from last year and the sentiments in the report from that race that on a better night he could have gone one better came to pass. It was noted that he was one for the future and that future has very much arrived. The ever-improving Joshua McAtee was third once again a further 10 seconds adrift.

Slip sliding away!

One by one they came home and there was great entertainment for the knowledgeable crowd at the finish in seeing the line taken from the top of the last peak, the battles to the line, the muck and gutters each was carrying and most of all how they negotiated the final treacherous ramp that Frank had sadiistically taped off to guide the field home.

Last week we reported on the exploits of David Smyth. This week we are delighted to report that this athlete made no mistakes and came home in an impressive 11th place overall and did not have to go back up the mountain again.

Wilson asserts her authority

Diane Wilson improved on her second place last week in recording a win in the ladies race. Wilson ran a very steady and well paced race to move through strongly and impose her authority on the other female racers. Her winning time of 54:41 was good enough for 37th overall. Sarah Graham of Mourne Runners continued to show good form to finish second lady in 54th place overall, while Ciara Savage was both first female Junior and third lady overall in 58th place.

They were all winners

In the round up of the categories there were wins for Gary McEvoy (MV40), Sean Donnelly (MV35), Colum Campbell (MV45), Deon McNeilly (MV55), Pete Grant (MV50), Paul Le Blanc (MV60), Dominic McGreevey (MV85!!), Patrick McDaid (MJ), Bernadette O'Kane (FV35), Karen Wilton (FV45), Alne McNeill (FV55), Ciara Coffey (FV40), Peter McGuickin (MV70) and last but by no means least the irrepressible Mary Mackin (FV65).

The craic was 90

After the racing came the real highlight of the evening - the annual fell runners pilgrimage to the Horseshoe Bar to break bread with the lady of the house, Mary Margaret herself (one poor volunteer was unable to make the short trip as he was 'exhausted' and had to be taken home and tucked into bed with his teddy bear). This has been the scene of many of the most memorable moments in H&D history including the infamous occasion in 2008 when Dave Goddard unwittingly emptied the contents of the coal scuttle into the fire not knowing that said scuttle was laced with alcohol - he almost reduced the building to ashes!!! This year it was a little more sedate with the real highlight the delicious food served alfresco to the ravenous masses by Rita Devlin. There was a varied bill of fayre on offer, enough even to satisfy the Blayney lads who described it as a 'quare feed'. Another tradition observed again is the visit to the kitchen for tea and whatever cake the landlady has procured. This year it was a cheeky little ginger number that was well received by those present - Pete Grant had 3 slices and then went to the van to get his lunchbox for a 'takeaway'. When the food was consumed, mugs were distributed to those who wanted them and those who did not and a diatribe of bitter invective was directed towards a few unsuspecting victims - all part of the race fee!!!

Gratitude

As always we are grateful to the summit marshals who manned their posts for almost two hours and looked after the safety of all participants on the mountain - this had led to Donal Ward developing quite a drouth; thankfully Mary Margaret had the requisite cure for this and his liquid equilibrium was restored in reasonably quick time.

The Meels

Next week is Race 9, the Meels as the series reaches the penultimate race. In a change to previous years the rendezvous point is Meelmore Lodge and the race itself takes a different route which will result in finish times being around 10 minutes longer than previous editions. The H&D Committee would like to remind trophy winners from last year to return these to help up prepare for the final night presentations on Friday 24 July.