

Laserquest, midden wins and chicken curry. It's all in an evening's work!

Loughshannagh Horseshoe - Hill & Dale Race 8

Race Report by Bogusboy

Over the years, there has been many a bad night on Loughshannagh which caused mayhem in ensuring that everyone returned safely after attempting to summit Carn, Loughshannagh, Doan and Ott (or the opposite if the race goes clockwise). There have been occasions where athletes have been gathered up as far as Fofany in one direction and Attical in the other. Even seasoned orienteers found the going tough when the mist descended and the visibility was non-existent. In the midst of the recent heatwave, there were no such issues on Thursday 8 June as 223 set off towards Carn. Despite the excellent conditions, there was a considerable breeze at the registration point and the Race Directors were taking no chances and the carrying of full body cover was declared mandatory. Aware of how conditions can change, there was no grumbling (partly perhaps due to the fact that Mary Mackin was a noticeable absentee on the night).



With Dick, Kez and Debs unavailable, there was a new unholy alliance formed in the registration van as Dan the Physics Man, Miss World and Big Ron the Trucker were tasked with the role of getting everyone registered dealing with the myriad of complications that participants bring each and every week. Among this week's culprits were Neville Watson who had treated his number to an 80 degrees hot wash! Needless to say it would not scan, but the crew in the van were quick to proffer a bespoke

solution and Neville left happy adorning his pristine new number. As always, there are those who fail to register on time and a few ashen faced individuals made their way to the entries team, heads bowed seeking absolution for their sin and permission to run. After a few minutes of taking the moral high ground, Miss World zapped the numbers and all was good in the world.

In between registering the runners there was time for conversation and Miss World was firstly excited and then greatly disappointed when Dan initiated a conversation about lasers. While the QUB undergraduate spoke expertly on a variety of topics including the all silicon laser, a holmium doped laser on a silicon photonics platform and a flying microlaser, Ron listened eyes agog. Meanwhile Miss World was apoplectic with incandescent rage and eventually snapped, 'what relevance does any of this have to hair removal in the beauty industry.' Poor Dan did not know where to look and casually sipped his water until the moment passed! He longs for the return of the more erudite element of the entries team to retake their seats.

Following the 'biscuitgate' debacle last week, there were strict instructions issued to ensure that those turning up to volunteer were fed and watered. The back of the Prophet's van became an impromptu pop-up coffee kiosk and all sorts of goodies were doled out to all and sundry. Ron's penchant for buns was tested and he duly obliged by trying everything on offer and declaring them all to be good.

At 7:30, Uncle Frank blew his whistle and they were off with Carn firmly in their sights. Frank took this as an opportunity to have a wee lie down and rest his aging bones. The tea was carried to him as he reclined in the ditch.



At the head of the race, Ashley Crutchley, in his first year of competing in the series, was locked in battle with last week's winner Joshua McAtee. At just after 8:05pm, they appeared back into view and Crutchley had a slight advantage as both hurtled towards the finish line at breakneck speed. Both were as committed as the pig in bacon and eggs and the battle raged on right to the end. The final hidden dip where it is still soggy

underfoot caught neither man out and Crutchley held off his more experienced adversary to record a maiden Hill & Dale victory very early in his fledgling mountain running career. There was only six seconds between them at the finish line and both were spent from their efforts. Andrew Tees had a stellar run and was just over a minute further back in third place.

Esther Dickson tightened her grip on the ladies' series with another blistering run in the warm summer sun. Diane Wilson continued her fine form to take second and Martsje Hell recorded another podium finish in third place. As we approach the last two races of the season, things are hotting up in many of the tightly contested age categories with end of season honours up for grabs in the two remaining races.

As the field made their way home there were some really spectacular drives for the line, a few stumbles and one or two epic falls. Leading the charge was H&D veteran Seamus Whyte who did a forward roll with such poise that Team NI are considering calling him up for the next Commonwealth Games Gymnastics. His combined score of 14.773 from judges King, Vallely and McCann confirmed the quality of the performance.

The night ended in the traditional manner with a trip to Mary Margaret's where Rita had pulled out all the stops and produced a veritable feast for the grateful gathering. It was also a poignant moment as it was the first visit since the passing of the landlady and a toast was raised to absent friends. Mugs were distributed and everyone left for home at the end of a very successful evening and in his reflective insightful reflection the Prophet was overheard saying, 'aye, that went well'.

Next week is the penultimate race of the series, the 'Meels' starting at Meelmore Lodge under the watchful eyes of Sam McNeilly and Stevie Rice. Please remember to register in advance and pay by 9pm on Tuesday night to avoid disappointment.

