

Record Turnout for start of Hill and Dale Season

Thursday 13th April marked the return of the Hill and Dale Season with the first race of the series 'The McVeigh Classic' taking place in Castlewellan Forest Park. A total of 351 runners put their toes to the line for the undulating trail course that measures approximately 5.1 miles in length with just under 1200 foot of climbing.

Competitors were relieved that due to heavy rain the previous evening, the Prophet having had to mark the course twice didn't have sufficient sawdust for a bonus mile unlike last years Christmas Cracker. The course instead was run in the opposite direction to the previous number of years in order to keep things fresh. Despite rain and freezing conditions in the lead up to the race, the sun broke through for what was a pleasant evening for both racers and the many spectators gathered around the slopes of Slievenaslat.

With a strong squad of race marshals moving into position, some may have mistaken the site for Joe Biden's security entourage however it was club president Frank Morgan who was the only man with his finger on the button in these parts and it clocked an impressive 33:52 for Jonathon Scott of Mourne Runners who came first in the mens race whilst Newcastle AC's Aine Gosling had her first Hill and Dale victory finishing comfortably in a time of 38:01 in the ladies race. Aine is a former county footballer and has excelled in recent years on both the road and Cross Country and is now showing her versatility in the hills. Noting her brother boxer Sean Og Keary put in an impressive performance the same week in Manchester Marathon with a sub 3:00 run, some might put the victory down to Keary sporting prowess however Eamon McCrickard was quick to take credit for his downhill coaching.

Post race celebrations including and the handing out of the much-coveted Hill and Dale mug spot prizes were held in Maginns Bar. A special mention must be made to all who contributed to the smooth running of this event and in particular to Darragh McCrickard and Paul Fegan who have contributed so much to the making of this series in recent years. Next weeks race is at 7:30 in Tollymore Forest Park, with after race refreshments in the Avoca Bar.

