

Mill Hill Mile 2021

Report by Deon McNeilly

The 2021 Mill Hill Mile took place in Castlewellan on a warm wind free evening, excellent for fast times, with the defending men's champion, Zac Hanna was missing this year, returning to Italy following his recent win in the Slieve Donard race, while defending ladies champion Joan Mills was unable to start due to injury leaving the race open to new talent.

The field of 66 runners started in Annsborough, Newcastle AC's Patrick McNiff taking an early lead. It wasn't long since Patrick needed leg surgery requiring a bone graft, it was thought his running career could be over, so it was brilliant to see him coming home in first place in a time of 5 minutes 24 seconds to join select group of runners to break 5 minutes 30 seconds. The surprise of the night was Newcastle AC Junior Niall Goodman also breaking the 5.30 barrier, he only took up running during lockdown because he couldn't play football. Another Newcastle Junior Tom Crudington wasn't far behind in 3rd place following on from his 3rd place in the Slieve Donard Race. With the first seven runners all under 6 minutes, the quality of the Fields was the best for many years, it is great to see so many new names and young runners leading the Field with excellent performances.

In the ladies race it was Newry AC's Eve Welsh that took the win in an excellent time of 7 minutes and 3 seconds, with Claire O'Rourke from Newry AC runner up and Sam McNeilly from Newcastle AC taking third spot.

The Junior Shield's for the first 18 and under finishers, went to Junior Eve Welsh (also Open Winner) and in male Junior Niall Goodman.

The Mill Hill mile is free to enter with voluntary donations to charity, this year Kevin O'Neill is fund raising for Shine who help his daughter who suffers from hydrocephalus. £371 was raised, Kevin would like to thank everyone that made a donation. Kevin is taking part in this years London Marathon for Shine, donations can be made via his JustGiving page.

Joe Quinn from East Down AC took part in this year's race, having put so much of his life into the sport over the years, as well as competing, he was instrumental in helping many non-running clubs in County Down organise running races, to his work with East Down, Jimmy's 10k, regular reports in the local press, he was awarded an MBE in 2012 for his services to the sport. In 2014 Joe was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, around that time I bumped into Joe on his own, in Tollymore Forest while out on a training run. He came to watch the Tollymore Trail Marathon which I didn't even know was on and I stopped for a chat with Joe, he told be about his illness and that he wasn't going to let it him stop enjoying the sport loved. After this year's Mill Hill Race Alison Carroll of East Down AC sent the following message, "Will you pass on to the rest of the team how much we appreciate you waiting for Joe. We did tell him to start earlier but he was having such a good time before saying hello to people that he forgot! He is really struggling now physically and with speech but his mind is no less vital than ever and he was determined to do this. It was lovely for him to get recognition although this was not his aim. Please let them know how delighted he was to be given the chance to complete!"

Thanks to everyone that helped with this year's race, it couldn't take place without all the volunteers, Frank and Lorna time keeping, last years winner Joanne barcode recording with help from Joe, Jerome and Eamon starting the race, Darragh producing the results and web, Paul for photos and all the marshals.

All being well the next planned Newcastle AC competition will be the Christmas Cracker.