

Fast Times on Slieve Martin

Race report by the terminator

Slieve Martin, the third Hill & Dale of the series which also counted as a “short” in the NIMRA Championship this year was held on Thursday 28 April. After a prolonged dry spell, the ground was firm underfoot, and with the sun shining and a light breeze, conditions were perfect on the evening of the race.

The race directors were determined to mark the course as thoroughly as possible so that even the most easily disorientated of runners (Rory McMullan) would not get lost. Hours were spent preparing the course in advance of the event. Thirty kilos of sawdust, flags, metres of tape and even a strimmer was carried from the very bottom of the Kilbroney to the summit of Slieve Martin marking every junction, turn off and clearing the way. Confident an excellent job had been done, with even passers-by commenting on the quality of the arrows, the directors were all set for the evening with the assistance of the volunteers offering to marshal, help with registration and the finish.

That evening with the sun shining and the volunteers gathered to set off to their checkpoints on the hill, a call was received to notify the directors that the Chief Tech Officer was running a bit late. However, all was not lost when Debbie kept everyone right and thought of a radical solution – pen and paper! As a result, everyone was registered with time to spare in advance of the start whistle. A surprise to see at registration, with plenty of time to spare was Pearse Brogan, who didn’t factor in time to travel to Rostrevor when entering the race and doubted he would make it. Either Laura must have the patience of a saint or Pearse somehow managed to sneak out – we will never know! The majority of runners were prepared and dressed appropriately for the short mountain race however with a few notable exceptions dressed like they were about to run an ultra with their race number pinned to their shorts! Runners gathered at the start line, with a race brief given and a blow of the whistle they were off like the wind, with sweeper Jap keeping everyone on track.

Zak Hanna was first to the summit of Slieve Martin, with Jonny Steede following in second place. In similar fashion the women’s race was led out by Esther Dickson who ran a speedy race with a fast descent. Deon McNeilly had a strong run to the summit and arrived ahead of club mate Connaire McVeigh, however on the descent leg cramp set in and a wise decision was made to take it handy on the descent. A similar story for Rory McMullan who had a strong climb, however, a niggle on the downhill resulted in an even handier descent to the finish (successfully, with no detours)!

Zak Hanna (30:39) and Esther Dickson (40:05) won first male and female respectively on the night, both with similar margins, with Hanna taking the course record previously held by Seamus Lynch. Jonny Steede (35:03) and Andrew Tees (35:31) had fantastic runs to make the podium in the open race and Naomi McCurry (45:04) and Ciara Coffey (45:24) finishing confidently to make up the women’s podium. Strong finishes were had for Joshua McAtee, local man Barry McConville, and one to watch for the future and first junior on the night Ethan McMullan (38:07). Ciara Savage (45:56) who has been going from strength to strength finished first female junior. A close race was had between Catherine McIntosh and Aine McNeill, with McIntosh finishing ahead of McNeill in Tollymore, and McNeill piping McIntosh to the line at Slieve Martin, who will win next week?!

Prizegiving was held at the Cloughmór Inn, who organised a fine spread for the hungry runners. The craic was ninety as the runners shared post-race analysis of their runs with each other, comments on how jovial and enthusiastic the marshals were heard along with discussion on the speed of the runners who clocked some amazing times. Feedback was received on the stellar job done on

marking the course, including the flags to the summit however there were some sceptical comments made by none other than the master of tall tales himself, the Prophet, who asked the directors if they had even organised the helicopter and the construction of the new path!

Thanks to all the volunteers for marshalling, tail running, tech, registration, the finish, results, photography, first aid, and all the admin and organising that goes on behind the scenes.

Slieve Binnian is the next race of the series on Thursday 5 May at 7:30pm, meeting at Carrick Little Car Park. The race route has changed this year and goes up the Carrick Little Track. Binnian is the only “to-the-top” race of the series, and there will be nowhere to hide if you’ve yet to find your “mountain legs”! This is an open-mountain race so please bring full body cover as outlined in the race instructions.

As always, make sure to register online before 9pm on Tuesday 3 May and remember to bring your race number to scan at registration before the race. Registration will open at 6:30pm on the night.



Ciara Savage (Newcastle and District AC) first junior female in a time of 46:56



Esther Dickson (Newry AC) first female in a time of 40:05



Ethan McMullan (Newcastle and District AC) first junior male in a time of 38:07



Zak Hanna (Newcastle and District AC) first male in a time of 30:39



Sinead Flynn, Donna Daly, and Linda Rogan marshalling the course