



MOURNE MOUNTAIN MARATHON 2016



We had two lovely days putting out controls and setting up the campsite before the main event, and these benign conditions extended right through to the Sunday morning breaking of camp. Mist and rain moved in to spice up the navigation on Sunday but with the temperatures remaining high, the run for the finish line was not too uncomfortable.

Nordic Marauders

Tomas Albinsson, our now regular Swedish competitor, had posted a warning message about a top Nordic team, on their way to raid our prize funds but one of the warriors was lost overboard, resulting in some frantic searching for a replacement. The locals had lined up some impressive defenders ranging from 2014 Elite winner Shane Lynch with Jonny Kendall, and last year's B class

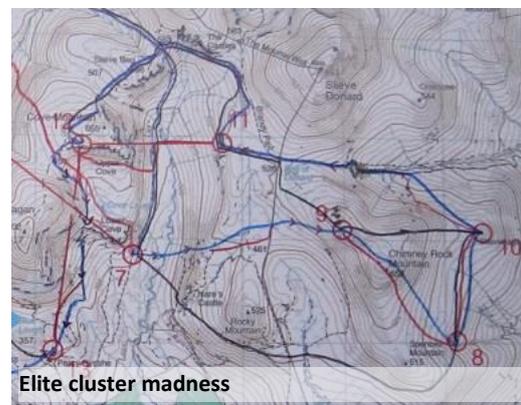


winner Laurence Quinn with Ben Mangan, through to the youthful mixed team of Paul Pruzina and Megan Wilson who have had some great hill running results this year. Tollymore National Outdoor Centre was once again the base for the event and, following registration, busses were soon ferrying teams to the Foffany Dam start line. We have to thank Northern Ireland Water service for allowing us to use this venue and also for the Silent Valley campsite where the teams would ultimately end

up. The starters were soon lined up along the dam wall marking up their maps.

Close Fought Elite Battle

The Elite quickly developed into a three way power struggle between Shane Lynch & Jonny Kendall - regular Mourne Marathon men - Jonathan McCloy & Paul Weir and the Laurence Quinn & Ben Mangan team. By the time they entered the first cluster on Chimney Rock, Quinn & Mangan had a two minute lead but this changed to a five minute deficit by the exit, even though both teams used the same route through it. McCloy & Weir used an alternative route and were still within ten minutes of the leaders. The mixed team of Paul Pruzina & Megan Wilson used the same route as McCloy & Weir, and posted the second best time for the cluster, but they were well down the field following an earlier blunder.



Lynch & Kendall still had a slender lead as they entered the second cluster on Slieve Binnian and even though Quinn & Mangan used the same route and closed in on them, the slender lead was

maintained as both teams rushed down to the Silent Valley Campsite. McCloy & Weir's challenge faded on Binnian, but Pruzina & Wilson were flying and by the finish were in fourth place overall just minutes behind. Ominously, the Swedish team of Sabastian Ljungdahl & Janne Stromborn were just a few minutes further back following a baptism of fire for replacement team member Janne, taking part in his first ever mountain marathon.

There were four mixed teams in the Elite this year with the young guns Pruzina & Wilson in fourth place. Just twenty minutes behind was last year's Elite runner-up Paul Mahon with partner Rachel Nolan, well ahead of Tomas Albinsson & Pernilla Berg who had had a disappointing day. In eleventh place were the ladies team of Taryn McCoy & Sarah Galligan just one position behind veterans Andy Creber & Bryan Stadden.

Stephens and Moran Dominate B class

The B course contained many of the elements of the Elite course but the cluster on Chimney rock was omitted. Mark Stephens & Colm Moran were in a class apart and by the overnight campsite would be over an hour ahead of the team in second place. Their time through the cluster on Binnian was the fastest of the day, better than all of the Elite teams. Mark Burley & Tom Watkins held second spot but with just over a minute's advantage over regular and very experienced veterans Alasdair McCallum & Tommy Begley. McCallum & Begley had been up to twenty minutes ahead during the middle of the day but appear to have lost time in the cluster despite following the same route as Burley & Watkins. Not far behind was another very experienced vet team of Trevor Wilson & Declan McGrellis and in eighteenth place were the ladies team of Michelle Hetherington & Madeline Robinson. The leading mixed team included everybody's favourite blogger Mark Robson & Victoria Canavan.



Vets Leaders Wilson & McGrellis

Route Choices

There were no clusters in the day one C course but the navigational leg between Slieve Meelmore and the Lower Cove track junction, common to the Elite and B courses, was part of the challenge. This is a classic Mourne's test, using the deep gash of the Silent Valley as a barrier. Many teams opted to head for the north end of the reservoir and climb steeply up over the col beside Cove mountain, while others went south to cross the dam and swing around Lamagan to the marker. Probably the best route was the longer detour north to the Brandy Pad (track) for the faster running ground but also to benefit from the less energy sapping terrain, especially as the going was hot and sticky in some of the breezeless valleys.

There was also a testing finish to the day up over the bulk of Slieve Binnian. At the campsite William Winter & Andrew Dames had a nice lead of about fifteen minutes over the mixed vet team of Judith Austerberry & Allan McCall and they in turn enjoyed a similar buffer over the veterans Alan Elwood & Johnny Parks. Not far behind was the mixed team of Sam Dixon & Jo Hickman Dunne. The leading

ladies were the mother and daughter team of Stephanie & Sophie Pruzina and in thirty first place was the ladies vet team of Heather Wood & Eileen Young.

Classic D Course

The D course as befits a novice course did not have the same navigational challenges of the other courses but it did wind its way through some of the Mourne's most spectacular areas and climbed up over Binnian before the drop to the Silent Valley campsite. Veterans Barry Spence & Clifford Jones set a rattling good sub four hour pace which give them a half hour advantage over another vets team Paul O'Hare & Alan McMaster. Less than ten minutes further back were Thomas Pollak & Christopher Burke and the leading ladies in sixth place were Mary Tweedale & Ali Tute.

Five Star Campsite

The Silent Valley must rank as our five star campsite. We used it for the first time in 2013 and its fantastic location combined with a thick level lawn for setting up camp, make it a dream to sleep on. From our point of view we had fine buildings to use for running the event with power supplied... so no need for a noisy generator. As the site filled up and competitors rehydrated on strange drinks or consumed even stranger food stuffs out of a variety of makeshift containers, the hum of conversation increased and the stories of the day's successes and disasters were shared around. The day was rounded off with a warm sunset and later a full moon cast its colourless light on the sleeping masses.

Danny Boy

The following morning dawned with a blanket of cloud over the hill tops and Paddy Mallon's rendition of "Danny Boy" easing the sleepy heads and sore limbed back to life and there was a red tinge to the sky, tying in with a forecast predicting rain to arrive by noon. It arrived sooner than that on the southern side of the Mourne's but by then all teams were well into their various courses on the way back to the Tollymore Mountain Centre.



Epic Battle to Win Elite Class

The Elite saw some epic battles, none more so than the titanic struggle between the top two teams. Laurance Quinn & Ben Mangan knew they had to overturn a six minute overnight deficit and rushed off from the start to open up a lead on Lynch & Kendall. After the first control there was a two point cluster which both teams tackled in the same way and by the end of it the six minutes had nearly been eliminated. Now both teams were neck and neck as far as the overall competition was concerned. They charged on to the tight bunch of cluster controls on Bernagh which were shrouded in thick cloud and again both teams chose the same route through and at the exit Quinn & Mangan were still ahead on the day. They tore on towards the final controls on the slopes of Slieve Commedagh and it was only during this stage that the overnight leaders Lynch & Kendall began to draw them in and as they entered Tollymore forest together Quinn & Mangan realized that their

gallant attempt had failed. So Shane Lynch & Jonny Kendall crossed the line a minute ahead on the day and became mountain Marathon champions with Laurance Quinn & Ben Mangan in runners up spot just seven minutes behind.

Swedes Divide the Spoils

Another epic battle was going on behind them as the Swedish teams set about some prize plundering! Fifth placed Sebastian Ljungdhal & Janne Strombom took on the third placed team of Jonathan McCloy & Paul Weir, and for good measure the mixed Swedish team of Tomas Albinsson & Pernilla Berg joined in. They all went through the first cluster reasonably close together and entered the Bernagh cluster with the two Swedish teams locked together and McCloy & Weir just a few minutes behind. This changed as McCloy &



Weir, using the same cluster route as Albinsson & Berg, caught up with them by the exit point. Meanwhile, Ljungdhal & Strombom on a different route lost out and emerged a few minutes behind. For company they had the local team of Willy Marks & Richard Hanna who by using another obviously good route choice had caught up with the male Swedish team. By the next marker they had also caught the mixed team of Albinsson & Berg. However this was to be the high point of their day for the two Swedish teams now raced away with the lead alternating between them. McCloy & Weir also faded out of the race. The other mixed teams were not doing well with Pruzina & Wilson



missing a point on Bernagh and being eliminated and Paul Mahon & Rachel Nolan failing to find the speed they had the previous day. This cost them dearly, for the rampaging Swedes were now forging well clear of all challengers and so Tomas Albinsson & Pernilla Berg moved from third placed overnight mixed team to win the category by four minutes. This effort moved them up from eighth to fifth place overall. Also on the move was the other Swedish team of Sebastian Ljungdhal &

Janne Strombom who moved up to third place overall on the strength of their third placed run on the day. Andy Creber & Bryan Stadden won the vet prize in eighth place overall one position ahead of the ladies team of Taryn McCoy & Sarah Galligan and the Scottish mixed team of Helen Wise & Willie Gibson.

Stroll in the Hills for B Class Winners

There was not so much excitement in the B class as the top teams all retained their positions. Mark Stephens & Colm Moran took it easy and were first home by about ten minutes on the day giving them an overall margin of victory of nearly an hour and a half. Mark Burley & Tom Watkins had no problems holding onto second position overall and although Alasdair McCallum & Tommy Begley were pipped by a minute for third place on the day, their overall third



place was assured. Trevor Wilson & Declan McGrellis, in fifth place secured the vet title and Michelle Hetherington & Madeline Robinson with a great eighth place run on the day moved up to fourteenth place overall and first ladies team. Mark Robson & Victoria Canavan had another good day in the hills and claimed the mixed vets title.

Winters and Dames win C Class

The best performance on day two in the C class was the run of mixed team Sam Dixon & Jo Hickman Dunne, over twenty minutes faster than anybody else. This effort moved them into third place overall and nearly overhauled the mixed vets of Judith Austerbury & Allan McCall who had to produce the day's second best run to hold onto second place by less than a minute. The overnight leaders William Winters & Andrew Dames were not as fast as the top mixed teams but their buffer of fifteen minutes from day one meant they were able to win the title with a few minutes to spare.



Team Pruzina sprints to the line

The addition of two small groups of cluster controls seems to have spiced up route choice and competitors seem to have enjoyed them. Outside of the top three, the mixed title went to John Yells & Bethan Nadin with the third fastest run on day two, and a fine effort by Gwenda & Joe Kenneally claimed the mixed vet title for them. For the second year running the mother and daughter team of Stephanie & Sophie Pruzina won the female title and Heather Wood & Eileen Young were the vet female champions. There were many good performances

in the male veteran category but in the end those masters of multiple mountain marathons, Brian Layton & Mike Stewart took the title. The family team was won by Trevor & Cameron Martin in seventh place overall.

Spence and Jones win D Class

Barry Spence & Clifford Jones ran away with the D class title after another dominant performance and second place was retained by Paul O Hare & Alan Mc Master despite the efforts of Neil Robinson & Ian Elliot running the second fastest time of the day, enough to move them up from fourth to third place overall.

Denis Rankin Round Presentations

The rain was fairly persistent by this stage so the prize giving was held inside the Mountain Centre. Dawson Stelfox, the originator of the idea for the **Denis Rankin Round** in memory of the man who ran and developed this mountain marathon for over thirty years, presented certificates along with Madeline Rankin, to some of the fourteen people who completed a circuit this year. They all received a warm round of applause from an audience who well understand the commitment needed to achieve such an accolade.

Prize Giving

Denis's daughter Kerry presented the prizes which were once again provided by **Jacksons Sports of Belfast**. They have been very loyal supporters of this event for many years – a partnership we hope to continue - but we are looking for a new big-brand sponsor, if anyone knows any big names looking to share the kudos of Ireland's only Mountain Marathon. Tollymore has once again done us proud with their magnificent centre which is a fantastic base to operate a mountain marathon from, and the Water Service with their mowed lawns will be hard to better next year as an overnight campsite.



Thanks, and see you Next Year

I am just one of a large team of people who make sure this event happens every year, so a big thank you to everybody who give their time and expertise (sometimes performing very mundane tasks, but they all need done). Elsewhere on this website there is a credit list so have a look at it to get an idea of how many people become involved and if next year you are unable to compete we would be glad to hear from you if you want to help out. Otherwise...make a note in your 2017 diary to get fit for the 39th Mourne Mountain Marathon in mid September. We look forward to seeing you there.

Jim Brown September 2016.