



Mourne Mountain Marathon 2018

For many this year's event will be remembered for the storm force winds which ripped through the campsite in the middle of the night, flattening tents and breaking poles. Even before we went to bed we had been struggling to secure the side walls of the main marquee and tie down anything which might take flight. One ladies team had to be given a hand repitching their tent in the shelter of a van after it had been nearly blown away.

Night Storm.

When I did get to bed it felt like I had just drifted off when a tapping on the window of my van awoke me. There in the roaring darkness stood a dishevelled figure who told a tale of his tent being smashed beyond repair and of seeking refuge in the main marquee only to find that it too was in danger of destruction as one of the wooden poles had snapped and the side walls were billowing in the wind. I pulled on my togs and found he was right, pegs and poles were popping out and not only that, there was already another team in there seeking shelter. Gareth the course controller joined us and we all worked for an hour hammering in extra pegs, tying ropes, jamming struts and anything else that would shore up the tent before the refugee campers felt safe enough to spend the rest of the night in survival bags under dining tables.

Outside I found the portaloos rocking backwards, only being prevented from toppling right over by the stone wall behind them. Enough to loosen even the most constipated bowels I would have thought. A tour of the campsite revealed various flattened structures containing bodies determined to stick it out, and others with side zips ripped open and fabric thrashing around. I zipped up some and pushed a few pegs back into the ground and hoped that the occupants didn't think a tent robber was on the loose. Most of all I hoped that the weather app was right and that the winds would ease off as the night progressed.

Back in bed I lay awake for a long time fully expecting to hear more tapping on my window but gradually the winds eased and by dawn normality had returned. Somebody said it was like spending a night in a tumble dryer, a fairly good analogy I thought.

Day One Competition.

Before all this excitement we had had a great day's competition on the hills in fine conditions bar some cloud around the peaks which spiced up the navigation. Our event centre was the Gaelic Athletic Club (GAC) in the village of Atticall and from here we bussed teams to the start at Round Seefin on the Eastern edge of the Mournes. As is now the norm, Terry Mc Queen had planned courses with some challenging cluster problems to be solved and the Elites and B class discovered that their problems were spread right across the main peaks of the central Mournes. The C class had a small cluster and the D class had the luxury of a fixed route. The one day score teams were free to range over all the day one controls in their six hour hunt for as many points as possible.

Last year's winner Paul Pruzina was favourite to win, this year teamed up with Philip Vokes, the brother of his partner from last year. These two soon justified their status as they bounded off like greyhounds across all manner of rough ground, hitting the markers with precision and accumulating a forty minute lead over another very good young team, and former B class winners, Mark Stephens and Colm Moran. In third place were Colm Hill and Seamus O Boyle with last year's overall third placed mixed team of Paul Mahon and Moiré O Sullivan in fourth place.

The B class were led by a team put together at the last minute from healthy members of teams hit by injury, Simon Hodge and Gary Warnock and in the C class the father/ son team of Alan and Andrew Elwood were nearly an hour ahead of the opposition.

Score class.

The score class had enjoyed their day whether they were going for a big score or just a nice day out in the hills. Interestingly all the top three positions were taken by Mixed teams and it was with great pleasure that I was able to present the top prize to a great supporter of the MMM, Sam Mc Neilly and her team mate Stephen Rice. Another MMM regular, Ricky Hanna and partner Sarah Graham took second place and just behind them points wise in third place were Jennifer Bratney and Robert Mc Bride.

The afternoon was pleasant as teams accumulated in the two fields at the bottom of the Happy Valley which local farmer Bob Parker had been good enough to allow us to use. Tents were pitched and meals cooked and there was plenty of amusement as teams were observed on the slopes above searching for a final marker below a crag. If you were a team that messed it up and thought that nobody noticed, sorry you were well observed by multiple eyes and the organizers binoculars. As evening approached the weather deteriorated and people disappeared into their tents and I slowly began to realize that there was trouble ahead as described at the beginning of this article.

Day Two competition.

The morning duties involved fixing up a few things, making sure everything was safe and all the teams got away on time for what turned out to be a very nice day in the hills. In a way we were lucky that the storm moved through in the night for if it had struck with that violence during the day we would probably have had to abandon the event. The day's courses went West as far as Hen Mountain where the Elites and B Classes had a tight wee cluster around the tors of this diminutive mountain, then it was South through the windy gap and ultimately back to the finish line at Atticall GAC.

Paul Pruzina and Philip Volks were again the fastest on the day but this time they were just a few minutes ahead of Mark Stephens and Colm Moran. Mixed team, Moiré O Sullivan and Paul Mahon had the third fastest time on the day, a great effort, but not enough to unseat Colm Hill and Seamus O Boyle from third position overall. Cathal Mc Greevy and Kevin Murdock bagged the Veteran prize and the Ladies title went to Andrea Priestly and Heather Dawe. Clive Coffey and Helen Cassidy claimed the Mixed Veteran title.

Gary Warnock and Simon Hodge continued where they left off yesterday to comfortably win the B class. Rob Mc Evoy and Conrad Daly had a good battle with Mark Alexander and Tim Lowry and in the end triumphed by four minutes. Trevor Wilson and Declan Mc Grellis won the Veteran title and

the Ladies title went to Michelle Hetherington and Madeline Robinson. Finbar and Karen Mc Gurren won the Mixed class and Sarah Francis and Martin Skinner took the Mixed Veteran prize.

The C class runaway leaders were hampered by a leg injury to young Andrew but this did not prevent them winning day 2 as well, meaning that Alan and Andrew Elwood were the C Class champions for this year. A super effort by the Ladies team of Gillian Wasson and Ruth Aiken claimed them second place overall, just ahead of Veterans winners and third place overall, Neil Grant and Stuart Duncan. Richard and Sarah Gamble won the Mixed team prize and top Ladies Veterans were Hilary Jenkinson and Ruth Lynam. The leading Mixed Veteran team was Keith Fitzsimmons and Roisin Mc Donnell. In the D class Helen Pruzina and Fiona Peterson were the first team home.

The Prize giving and Supporters.

Before we had our main prize giving a number of people were presented with their Denis Rankin Round completion certificates by Madeline Rankin. Have a look at the [Denis Rankin Round website](#) to learn more of this unique event and to catch up with some of the stories behind these individuals' attempts. It was sunny and bright as we presented our prizes this year under Frank Morgan's mighty arch with the hills in the background. I have mentioned the winners of categories but a few others deserve a mention. Tommy Begley and Alasdair Mc Callum were here on their tenth consecutive trip and had hopes of winning the B class. However a missed marker on day one blew their dreams away and even a second place finish on day two and a good slugging by regular Mountain Marathoner Mike Nangle did little to redeem the situation. On the other hand I had to advise Pdraig and Claire Matthews last year that they were inadequately kitted out for the score course and despite rounding up some more gear they pulled out frozen after a short time. This year they returned much the wiser and successfully completed the D course. Let's hope that both these teams will be back next year on what will be our 40th anniversary.

All the competitors enjoyed superb hospitality and good food in the GAC function room so a big thank you to Cyril Trainor and all his team for treating us so well and providing such a fine venue for running the event from. We also have to say a big thank you to Jackson Sports for once again sponsoring the prizes. [Jackson Sports](#) are a long established family firm, these days fronted up by Dion and his friendly team. Their Belfast shop and website can provide almost everything an outdoor enthusiast requires so please support our main supporter. We are fortunate to have two other sponsors this year, [McAuley Financial](#) who are independent financial advisers and [Investec](#) who are a wealth and investment company. We are very pleased to have them on board with us backing up all the volunteer effort which goes into running this event.

Talking of volunteer effort a special mention has to be made of the team who help me organise the show and to all the helpers, marshals, control setters, control collectors, car parkers, doctors and many more who give their time, expertise and effort each year to ensure this event continues. Next year will be our 40th anniversary and it would be nice to have a big turnout to celebrate that so please spread the word. Recover well and see you all again next year somewhere in the Mournes.

Jim Brown
September 2018