



# Mourne Mountain Marathon 2025

## Report

### **Silent Valley Mountain Park**

The build up to this year's Mourne Mountain Marathon was against a backdrop of complicated weather forecasts which oscillated between Yellow weather warnings for rain and wind to the sun splitting the skies. A week out and the met office were saying it was very hard to predict due to a "kink in the jet stream". We had no idea what to expect and it was only on Friday that things began to look hopeful and the bad weather veered to the east to pummel Wales, the Lake District and Northern England.

### **Exhibition Building**

A dry morning with a cool northern breeze saw competitors heading off into the hills from the Silent Valley Mountain Park, a venue we have used as an overnight campsite in the recent past but not as the main event centre since 2010. We used the exhibition building for Registration and were able to funnel people through it and out the rear exit door directly to the start line. Some of you must have wondered what was going on as you made your way past memorabilia from the dam building years and miners tunneling through Slieve Binnian.

### **Elite Course**

The Elites' course took them up onto Slieve Binnian to track down some awkward markers then after reaching the marshalled col between Lamagan and Binnian they had to decide which order was the best way to deal with two markers on the far side of the Ben Crom reservoir before climbing Slieve Bearnagh. From there they swept around the Northern Mournes to the Castles of Commedagh before heading south to Rocky Mountain and the lower slopes of Binnian then down to the overnight campsite on the Carrick Little Track.

### **High Flyers**

As a competitive race, day 1 was a bit of a flop... as last year's winners Paul Pruzina & Philip Vokes are on the form of their lives and absolutely slaughtered the opposition. Philip has had some great results this year including 2<sup>nd</sup> place at the Ben Nevis race, and Paul is based in Grenoble these days with the Alps as his training ground. Looking at the splits, they were first in absolutely every leg except the last one when the team of Simon Hodge & Jonathan Gibson equaled them with a mighty 2min 15 second sprint! Simon and Jonathan had to settle for third place on the day for Laurie Luscombe & Gareth Turner finished six minutes ahead of them, but they in turn were nearly two and a half hours behind the high-flying leaders.

Not far behind, the ladies team of Helen Ockenden & Heather Corden were just twenty minutes off second place and behind them the mixed teams of Ruth Barker & Robert Barnes, and Dom Dakin and Sarah Pedley were having their own private duel. The top veteran's team was the ladies team of Moire O'Sullivan & Teresa Parr.

## **Tricky Start**

The B course started with a right stinker; having to decide how to get to a control on crags near the Miners Hole river above the Silent Valley reservoir with choices ranging from climbing over Slievenaglogh, following the reservoir's western shore line or running the road on the east side around the top end and approaching from the north. From there, another long leg followed leading to a small cluster on the slopes of Slieve Bearnagh followed by a series of markers on Slieve Corragh, Commedagh, Beg, Lamagan and Binnian and down to the finish line.

## **Joshua and Joe set the pace**

The leading team was Joshua Flanagan and Joe Hilton who set the early pace but a few problems with some markers allowed David Gamble & Matt Crawford who were running a steady race to stay in touch. Not far behind them were last year's winners, the veteran team of Alasdair McCallum and Tommy Begley & in eighth place the top mixed team were Rebecca Magee & Thomas Prentice. Helen Pruzina & Zuzka Windsor led the ladies challenge.

## **Neck and Neck**

A steep climb confronted the C class via a couple of markers close to Binnian's summit; then it was essentially a clockwise circuit of the Annalong Valley taking in the likes of Upper Cove and the tricky quarries of Rocky Mountain along the way. Two teams fought it out for the lead with the Under 23 team of Ethan McMullan & Aaron McCauley initially having the upper hand before the father and son team of John & Liam Casey gained the lead in the middle section only for Ethan and Aaron to finish quickly and whittle the overnight advantage down to a mere fifteen seconds. Regular visitors from Cork - Diarmuid Kiely & Brendan O'Leary - were firmly established in third position, the top mixed team of Sam Bagshaw and Emily Bushby were fourth and another mixed (and veteran) combination of David and Karen Somerville were fifth. Stephanie & Sophie Pruzina were the leading female team in seventh place.

## **Hodges lead the D Class**

The D class route made its way up past Slievenaglogh to Lough Shannagh then worked its way down to the Ben Crom dam, followed by an ascent of Slieve Binnian before descending via the Mourne Wall to the campsite. Looking at the stats I see that two teams swapped the lead position all day long with the father and daughter team of Phil & Rachel Hodge just getting the upper hand on Cameron Brush & Josh Morrison.

## **Score Class**

The One Day Score event continues to grow in popularity with over forty teams starting this year. The objective is to accumulate as many points as possible within a six hour time period and this year one team dominated. Mark Stephens is a former Elite class winner of the Mourne Mountain Marathon and he teamed up with James Miller, another top class orienteer and mountain runner to form a team which nobody else came close to. They had a seventy point advantage on the second placed team of Mike Jordan & Eoin Syron who in turn had a twelve point advantage over Owen Boden & Sam Herron. Sam McNeilly & Grace White were the top ladies team, but only just for the top veteran team were also the ladies paring of Hazel McLaughlin & Denise Mathers who had exactly the same score of 340 points. Sam and Grace however had the slightly faster time and took first place though it has to be said that Hazel and Denise couldn't have cut it any finer before penalties kicked in with a running time of six hours exactly to the last second!! The mixed prize went to Vicky Ward & Kyle Stewart.

## **Carrick Little Campsite**

The campsite was a field at the top end of the Carrick little track, one we last used during the Covid year of 2020. On that occasion the weather had been fabulous meaning firm ground, and the grass had been mowed short for silage but when we turned up on this occasion we found long damp grass and soggy soil which made the campsite setup much more difficult. We could only risk a few vehicles with essential loads into the field and on more than one occasion quite a lot of shoving was required to get back onto firm tracks. And there were cow pats, many of them, hidden by the grass and waiting like squidgy mines for unwary foot fall.

## **North Wind**

We had set up our gazebos and tents tight against a section of high wall on the north side of the field in anticipation of a cold north wind, and this proved to be a wise decision for the wind blew from the north all weekend. The score teams gathered here for tea and biscuits following their exertions, then we had a quick prize giving before sending them down the Carrick Little track to catch the buses back to their cars in the Silent Valley. The overnighing teams also sought the shelter of the stone walls and so were spread out in long lines so we didn't enjoy the same social interaction familiar to more compact campsites. Additionally, the arrival of persistent rain around dusk drove most competitors to an early night's sleep.

## **Day Two - Elite course**

After a cold night the dawn was rain free and teams were soon getting ready for part two of the weekend. The Elites' course headed back up Slieve Binnian then across to Slieve Lamagan for a look at (or through) the Sheppard's Window. From there it headed roughly west via a few markers to the start of a cluster problem on Slieve Meelmore which provided four markers to link together by whatever route teams deemed best, exiting on Slievenaglogh for the final run into the finish.

### **Paul and Philip win the Elite**

Amazingly after the scintillating display of running from the previous day the lead team messed up their start and had to backtrack to pick up the first marker of the day but from that point onwards it was business as usual as they clocked the fastest times for every control, bar the last two when they obviously decided to slow down and start preparing for the prize giving. Behind them changes in the lineup were occurring as Simon Hodge & Jonathan Gibson enjoyed a good day which quickly moved them into second place overall at the expense of Laurie Luscombe & Gareth Turner. Helen Ockenden & Heather Corden were just a few minutes slower than the mixed team of Ruth Barker & Robert Barnes but they easily retained their fourth position overall and Barker & Barnes' great day two run saw them claim the mixed title. Moire O'Sullivan & Teresa Parr were the top veterans ahead of Clive Coffey & Helen Cassidy.

### **Gamble & Crawford win B**

In the B class Joshua Flanagan and Joe Hilton pushed on from where they left off yesterday - running hard - but the stats show that two other teams were matching them for pace... the second placed overnight team of David Gamble & Matt Crawford and the fifth placed team of Robbie Usher & Gareth Buhl. The course led them up to the southern quarries of Binnian then on a circuit of that mountain to the Buzzards Roost. From there they descended to the Ben Crom dam and climbed to a stream source on Slieve Loughshannagh which was the entrance point to a small cluster. The final section took them round Slievenaglogh and down to the finish in Silent Valley. Something went wrong for Joshua and Joe as they approached the cluster entrance point on Slieve Loughshannagh and they lost a load of time which allowed the two other teams to open up a sizable gap. This was to prove crucial in the outcome of this year's B category for it allowed Gamble & Crawford to eliminate the twelve minute overnight deficit and their strong running right to the finish line ensured they could not be wound in. So they were first and Joshua and Joe had to settle for second place with Robbie Usher & Gareth Buhl's great day two run moving them up to third place. The veterans title went to Tommy Begley & Alasdair McCallum in fourth place overall and Helen Pruzina & Zuzka Windsor were the top ladies team. A great run by Rob Truswell and Louise Waters moved them right up the field and on the strength of that surge they claimed the mixed team prize.

## Father and Son win the C Class

The C class was launched into a small cluster right from the start which was based around Binnian Lough. Then they had to get to a marker at the top end of the Ben Crom reservoir before turning south into another cluster zone around Lough Shannagh and running into the finish around the bulk of Slievenaglogh. Only seconds separated the leading teams at the overnight campsite and for the early part of the day it was Ethan McMullan & Aaron McCauley who were setting the pace but as they went by different routes through the Lough Shannagh cluster the father and son team of John and Liam Casey reclaimed the lead and held onto it as Ethan and Aaron's challenge faded. The veteran team of Diarmuid Kiely and Brendan O'Leary, longtime supporters of this event, produced another solid run to claim third place just ahead of the mixed team of Sam Bagshaw & Emily Bushby. Stephanie & Sophie Pruzina were the first ladies team back in a very creditable eighth place overall and the Under 23 team winners were Billy Trafford & Evan Koe. In the veteran category the winners outside of the top three places were David & Karen Somerville and the remarkable eighty-year-old John Adgey and his son Chris were second. I noticed that after the first marker on day one they were actually leading the whole C class! As an adult-junior team won the C class outright that prize was transferred to the next team and that was Martin McMullan and his daughter Emily who were in 11th place overall. The other adult-junior prizes were picked up by Patrick & Philip Denis in 16<sup>th</sup> place and Anne-Marie & Conor Masterson in 21st position overall.

## Wine and cheese....class!!

A yomp up the Annalong Valley to the Brandy Pad was the route for the D class followed by a visit to the Hares gap then a long trek back down the Silent Valley past both reservoirs to the finish line and cups of tea and sandwiches. Cameron Brush & Josh Morrison, who had sustained themselves at the overnight campsite with a bottle of wine and a cheese board didn't seem impaired by the lack of freeze-dried food, setting a steady pace to overhaul Phil & Rachel Hodge to be first home and winners of the D class.

## Mac in a Sac and Lilas Outdoors

The North wind still blew, and strongly at times but we were sheltered and with the sun shining it was possible to set up the prize giving outside. Gareth from [Mac in a Sac](#) and Stephen from [Lilas Outdoors](#) joined us in front of the presentation board and the competitors gathered around in an appreciative ring as I thanked [Mac in a Sac](#) for their generous support and help with the event and [Lilas](#) for their contributions with prizes and equipment sales for competitors who needed last minute supplies. I also took the opportunity to thank **NI Water** for the use of the [Silent Valley Mountain Park](#) as our start venue this year and to farmer Robert Agnew for the use of his field for camping.

## Volunteers

This event could not happen without the support of many volunteers, at the start, campsite and finish line and out on the courses marshalling and indeed bringing in markers. It's quite a task running this event but I have a good team which has been forged from many years of experience and the reward is the pleasure and satisfaction to be had contributing something to the outdoor sport we all enjoy. However, we have a problem looming for, believe it or not, the organizing committee is getting quite old! We need new, younger enthusiasts to join us now to ensure the Mourne Mountain Marathon continues after we old duffers run out of steam. So, if you are interested please get in touch.

I would like to personally thank everybody who helped out this year and I have put together a list of all those involved in recognition of their efforts and also as an indicator of the number of people involved in making the event function effectively.

*We are always looking for new helpers so if you feel like getting involved next year please get in touch.*

- **Putting out markers;** Terry McQueen, Gareth McKeown, Deon McNeilly, Eugene McCrickard.
- **Mini Bus Driver;** Brian O'Neill.
- **Car Parking ;** Nigel Foley-Fisher, Richard Wilson, Brian O'Neill.
- **Registration;** Mark Pruzina, Simon Pruzina, James Carr, Alison McQueen, Helen Shields, Angela Collins, Irene Bankhead, Ciara Murphy.
- **Kit Checks;** Peter Howie, Jon Morrison, Fiona Sands, John McBride.
- **Start Line;** Frank Morgan, Paddy Mallon, Terry McQueen, Gareth McKeown, Eugene McCann.
- **Campsite;** Gareth McKeown, Paddy Mallon, Frank Morgan, John McBride, Nigel Foley Fisher, Brian O'Neill, Eugene McCann.
- **Timing;** Mark Pruzina, Simon Pruzina, Scarlett Anderton.
- **Campsite catering;** Alison McQueen, Sheena Bradley, Ciara Murphy, Helen Brown, Fiona Sands
- **First Aid;** Jon Morrison, Peter Howie.
- **Finish Area;** Mark Pruzina, Simon Pruzina, Scarlett Anderton, Paddy Mallon, Sheena Bradley, Alison McQueen, Helen Brown, Peter Howie, Jon Morrison, Brian O'Neill, Nigel Foley-Fisher, Barbara Foley-Fisher, Terry McQueen, Gareth McKeown, Frank Morgan
- **Marshals on the hills;** Peter McClenaghan, Kerry Hall, Nigel Proctor, Pauline O'Hara, Denise O'Hagan, Brenda Nugent, Alan Elwood, Brian Crothers.
- **Collecting control boxes;** Ian Stuart, Vicky Wade, Christine Kelly, Richard Wilson, Mark Stephens, Roisin Mallon, Brendan O'Hare, Barbara Foley Fisher, Nigel Foley Fisher, Brian Crothers, Peter McClenaghan, Gareth McKeown.

Apologies to anyone I may have missed.

## **Frank Morgan says farewell**

Frank Morgan first took part in the Mourne Mountain Marathon in the Eighties when he was a sprightly young thing. Injury in 1989 saw him volunteer to help with the event and he has been involved every year since. He is a practical builder so his skill has been in solving logistical problems over the years; building bridges over streams, stiles over awkward fences or walls and who can forget the wonderful foot pedalled hand washers he devised during the social distancing Covid years. Frank has been the man who organizes the day one starts for as long as I can remember so I was sad when he approached me this year to say that it would be his last as a committee member. I asked him to help present the prizes this year and he got a long heartfelt round of applause from the audience for all his dedicated years of work. Knowing Frank he will still be working somewhere quietly on the sidelines next year so please come back to find out and support and enjoy the Mourne Mountain Marathon 2026.

Jim Brown, September 2025.