Mourne Mountain Marathon 2026

Things were looking spicy in the build up to this year's event as there were a number of good teams entered in the Elite class. Last year's winners Paul Pruzina and Philip Vokes were back to defend their title but former Elite class winners, Shane Lynch and Mountain Running Champion Adam Cunningham had other ideas. The up-and-coming young team of Tom Crudgington & Ashley Crutchley also fancied their chances with both running well and with Tom having claimed both the Seven Sevens and Ben Nevis race titles in recent months. Regular Female winners Helen Ockenden and Heather Cordon were also back to defend their title and Helen's brother John Ockenden, another former Elite champion and Fred Allingham had the potential to upset the apple cart.

Shimna College

The start venue was the newly rebuilt Shimna Integrated College, a fantastic facility for operating a mountain marathon from and we owe a massive debt of gratitude to the staff who helped us plan and use these facilities to best effect. After registration in the gymnasium teams made their way to Donard Park where they were allocated their route cards and the fun began.

Elite Route

The Elites' route took them southeast to the rough ground on the slopes Millstone, Crossone and Chimney Rock Mountain, then west to a marker on Slieve Lamagan, overlooking the Ben Crom Reservoir. Course planner, Terry McQueen, had positioned the next marker on the opposite shoreline causing a few teams to contemplate swimming across but fortunately nobody did as we don't want sweaty runners contaminating the public water supply! A nice cluster problem had to be dealt with next, then it was down to a culvert under the road and a circuit of the Spelga Reservoir via Cock mountain's summit to the campsite at the base of the Spelga Dam. The first Elite team to appear on the skyline above the campsite were Paul Pruzina & Philip Vokes having safely traversed all the rough ground thrown at them and soon after both Tom Crudgington & Ashley Crutchley and Shane Lynch & Adam Cunningham also came running into the finish line. When the times were sorted out it showed that Paul & Philip had a 10 minute lead over Shane & Adam with Tom & Ashley a further 38 minutes behind. John Ockenden & Fred Allingham had a good steady run to claim fourth place and Helen Ockenden & Heather Cordon were in eighth place overall and leading ladies.

Through the Culvert

The B class also headed to Millstone Mountain then across to the manned checkpoint at the Donard-Commedagh col. From there they had a cluster problem to solve before heading to the second manned checkpoint on the col between Slieve Beg and Slieve Loughshannagh. They followed the same markers as the Elite down to the culvert under the road but from there only had a short boggy trek to the campsite. It was a Mixed team who dominated proceedings, Edward Corden & Abbie Walker with a comfortable lead of nearly 25 minutes over the veteran team of Donal Burke & Richard O'Donnell with

David Hicks & Neill Andrews a further five minutes adrift. Stalwarts of the Mourne Mountain Marathon, Hazel McLaughlin & Denise Mathers were the leading Female team.

Eleven seconds lead

The C course also swept around Millstone and Crossone - actually it did most of a circuit around Slieve Donard before arriving at the manned Donard-Commedagh col checkpoint. From there it went to a marker close to the Hares Gap and then to the manned control between Slieve Loughshannagh and Meelbeg. The final section was via the Ott track road crossing and then around Slievenamuck to another river culvert which the planning team had discovered and this led to the campsite. Competition turned out to be very tight in this category as two Mixed teams fought it out. In the end it was the English team of Charlotte Williamson & Thomas Edwards who held a slender eleven second advantage over the Swedish father and daughter team of Emil & Greta Ljungdahl. Fifteen minutes further back was the team of John Wilson & Paul Elliot. Leading Female team was Lauren Hampson & Sheelagh Hennessy and there was a total of five Mixed teams in the top ten positions. Three of those top ten teams were also Adult/Junior teams which is an encouraging sign for the future.

D Course.

The D course had a climb to the col between Slieve Donard and Commedagh then wound its way through the mountains to get to the manned control on the Meelbeg-Slieve Loughshannagh col. From there it followed the same route as the C class to the campsite. Tom Sweeney & Cara Shields set the fastest time for the day and not far behind them were the Larkin brothers, Jim and Noel, long-time supporters of this event.

Ronan and Zachary and 440 points

We also run a one day score event and it always attracts a good spread of teams and this year was no exception. With a total of 500 points available it was a very impressive performance by last year's winner Ronan Davison-Kernan and teammate Zachary Askham to amass a total of 440 points, forty better than the runners up Niall Gibney & James Cuffey. Tim Wilson & Russell Crookes took third place just ahead of the Mixed team of Sam McNeilly & Joshua Mcatee who had the same point's total but lost on time. Top Female team was Jennifer Frazer & Karen Coulter and the Vets title went to Rick McKee & Dale Mathers.

Spelga Dam Campsite

It had been a breezy day out on the hills with a few scattered showers, so pretty good by MMM standards but after a long slog over the hills most teams were happy to reach the campsite tucked away beneath the towering walls of the Spelga dam. Soon there was a hum of activity as teams rested, cooked up meals or just wandered around catching up with the news and studying the route choices of the top teams marked up on the notice boards. At this point I would like to express our thanks to Northern Ireland Water for allowing us to use this location and also to the owners of the Luxury Spelga House for

renting it out to us for the weekend. For once I didn't seem to have any shortage of volunteers helping out at the campsite and sleeping overnight in comfy beds. Although somehow, I ended up sleeping in my van as usual!

Culverts for Starters.

After a cool night, day two dawned with the promise of improving conditions as the day progressed. Soon teams were flowing away from the start line through the culvert under the road to get onto the slopes of the Spelga Mountain range. The Elite and B courses followed different routes around five markers with the C and D collecting just a few before all teams went through a manned checkpoint just short of the road crossing at the Ott track. From there the Elites headed to Slieve Bearnagh and Spellack for a cluster problem and then onwards to another one on the slopes of Slieve Commedagh. The last leg took them down to the Shepards Lodge and then a final fast run-in to Shimna College.

Pruzina and Vokes win.

The lead three teams shared the fastest leg times as they raced around the Spelga tops but after the road crossing at Ott, Paul Pruzina & Philip Vokes were consistently the fastest team for nearly every leg to the finish. They were particularly fast through the second cluster centered around Slieve Commedagh while in contrast Tom & Ashley lost out by opting for the alternative route which cost them the guts of fifteen minutes. Shane & Adam were consistent throughout the day and extended their overnight lead on Tom & Ashley but they just could not find enough to close on the lead team which meant Paul & Philip arrived back at Shimna College as winners of this year's Mourne Mountain Marathon. Tom & Ashley were comfortably third while a great day 2 run saw Jonathan McCloy & Andrew Tees come home as the fourth fastest day two team. Agonizingly for them they were a minute shy of dislodging John Ockenden & Fred Allingham from fourth place overall. Helen Ockenden & Heather Corden were relentless as they navigated accurately and steadily to move up to seventh position overall and first Female team home. Another Female team Stephanie Pruzina & Moire O'Sullivan were the top Vets team but, as they pointed out at the prize giving, they were the only Vet team in the Elite this year. Nevertheless, top Vets, second Female and tenth place overall, not too bad for a weekend's mountain running. Alister Masson & Grace Pow came home in ninth place overall to be the top Mixed team whilst Oscar Rowe & Gerry Browne in eighth place got the Under 23 prize.

A Walker wins B class with Edward Corden!

The overnight leaders in the B class, Edward Corden & Abbie Walker had to settle for second fastest day two time as David Hicks & Neil Andrews came home exactly ten minutes ahead of them but the big lead from day one ensured that they retained the overall first position to be this year's B Class champions. David & Neil moved up into second place overall and Joe Hilton & Joshua Flanagan who also enjoyed a fine second day moved up into third position overall. All three teams were the day two leaders at various stages as the course made its way from Spelga and around the bulk of Slieve Meelmore, Bearnagh and Commedagh before the fast finish through the Donard woods. Hazel McLaughlin & Denise Mathers produced another very steady performance to be the top Female team and the Mixed title

went to Paikea Doesburg and Olivia McKevitt who just snatched it from overnight leaders Janette Macleod & Tony Broadley by less than three minutes. Anita Miotto & Orla Byrne were the top Under 23 team.

Vet regulars dominate

Once the veteran calculations had been completed, that veteran of now 30 Mourne Mountain Marathons, Clive Coffey was declared the champion along with his partner Jonny Hobson. Second place went to Donal Burke & Richard O'Donnell and third to Paul Daniels & Richard Hetherington. All these runners have been loyal supporters of this event over many years.

Charlotte and Thomas win close battle

Yesterday's fierce battle for the C class carried on for another day as the two top Mixed teams once again slogged it out for the outright win. Initially Emil & Greta Ljungdahl had a slight lead on the Spelga section but on the long leg to the Spellack marker Charlotte Williamson & Thomas Edwards managed to open a four minute advantage and this they maintained as they collected the remaining markers on the slopes of Slieve Commedagh and on the run-in to the finish line. John Wilson & Paul Elliot were third place finishers on both days and indeed ended up third overall. There was a battle for the top Female position as well but in the end Lauren Hampson & Sheelagh Hennessy managed to extend their slender overnight lead to a ten minute winning margin. As I mentioned earlier there were quite a number of high performing Mixed teams in the C class and outside the top three category positions, which actually contained two of those teams, the next best Mixed team in fourth position overall was Phoebe Dibben-Dean & James Buckley. The top Under 23 team were Michelle Kearney & Kseniia Terokhina.

C class Vets and Adult/Junior teams

Once all the Veteran positions had been processed (using the traditional handicap system) Claire Withers & Stephen Stewart were declared the champs with Ray Johnstone & Richard Worledge in second place and third place going to Barry Spence & Greg McComb. The C class also hosts the Adult/Junior competition and Emil & Greta Ljungdahl in second place overall were the top team but we like to spread the prizes so next in line in fifth place were Phil & Ronan Hodge followed by Martin & Emily McMullan in seventh place overall. The final generous prize in this category was presented to Paddy & Philip Dennis.

D Class Achievements

We present just one prize in the D class and it was all change from the overnight campsite situation. The third placed team of Maol Larkin & Fergal Magee had ran a blinder on day two and pushed the overnight leaders, Tom Sweeney & Cara Shields back into second place. The D course had roughly followed the Ulster way round to the Trassey river then had a massive sting in its tail with a climb to the summit of Slieve Commedagh before the descent to the finish line. Well done to all novice teams for getting round it and especially Jason & Jack Le Masurier for being the last team home as darkness descended. And why

should we celebrate this you may well ask? Well, Jason had a serious kite surfing accident twenty years ago and ended up in a coma for a year and was told that he would never walk again. He was determined to prove the doctors wrong and has undertaken various challenges such as triathlons and running events. He might be slow but with his son Jack he has now added a mountain marathon to his list of remarkable achievements. Jack was also there with a cause in mind as he is raising money to fund a 12 month volunteer teaching placement in South Africa Click here to find out more.

Thank You to our Volunteers

The day had turned into a lovely afternoon so teams were able to lounge in the sun as they enjoyed their refreshments and the hum of conversation filled the air. At three o'clock we got the prize giving underway and, as I always do, I asked for and received a tremendous round of applause for all the helpers who give their time freely every year to make this event happen. Every year I worry that not enough people will volunteer but there always seems to be just enough people with reasons for not competing who can fill the gaps. If you are available next year please get in touch.

The Prize Giving

Gareth Stewart of Mac in a Sac joined our course planner Terry McQueen in presenting the prizes this year. Mac in a Sac and Lilas Outdoors of Armagh City generously provide gift vouchers for a fantastic range of products and we are very grateful for their continuing support. Even if you didn't win a prize you should check out their gear for it is top notch stuff.

Thinking ahead

So that just about rounds up this year's event but there is one important statement I need to make. In three years, time we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mourne Mountain Marathon. If all goes well I will be there but I have decided that it will be a good time to step down as the chief organizer. If the event is to continue it needs new blood and ideas and people to carry on the project which started way back in 1979. So if you feel you have something to offer please get in touch so that we can transition to the next generation.