



# LOWE ALPINE MOURNE MOUNTAIN MARATHON 19/20 SEPTEMBER 2009



## **Day One – Hunt the Car Park**

The first obstacle encountered by early arrivals at this year's event was a the locked entrance gate to Tollymore Forest park which caused us some difficulties as we tried to redirect traffic to the rear gate. Everybody seemed to find their way to the official car park in the end but I suspect there was some scratching of heads in various car parks before the correct one was found. The gate was eventually unlocked and registration process soon settled down and teams made their way to the start line. Some encountered our new kit checker; the precious young Jamie with his list of must-have items and firm insistence that they had to be shown, even if it meant the most tightly packed rucksacks were emptied. We are thinking of training him to take over from Denis Rankin when he decides to retire (hopefully not for a while yet).

## **The Contenders**

The weather was fine during registration but a band of rain passed through later in the morning dropping the clouds down onto the hills for a few hours. The afternoon improved and by the evening we had lovely conditions. This year's elite entry was down, with very few cross channel teams represented which was a disappointment, but it presented the opportunity for the local teams to shine. Deon McNeilly last won this title in 1999 when the event was held in Tollymore and this year his partner was well known Newcastle runner Eamon McCrickard. Billy Reid and Gerry Kingston are past winners of the B class and high placers in the Elite class, so they must have fancied their chances as no doubt did Jonathan McCloy and Paul Weir, the young guns who have performed well in the C and B classes in recent years.

## **Missing Marker Problem.**

The Elite course picked up a few marks in the forest then had a long leg to a crag close to the Blue Lough before turning back on its self and heading for the top of Slieve Bernagh. Here problems were encountered as the lead teams found that the marker was missing, stolen by some idiot. The potential existed for the whole of the Elite times to be messed up but fortunately we had a secret marshal in the area and he did a terrific job of recording the teams and advising them to head on to the next control at the Hares gap. The McNeilly & McCrickard team were in the lead at this point with McCloy & Weir team also going well but they were both to lose out badly on the next couple of markers allowing the expert navigators of Reid & Kingston to take the lead. This remained the situation to the finish line at the Bloody Bridge; Reid and Kingston twenty minutes ahead of McNeilly & McCrickard with McCloy & Weir a further half hour adrift. Paul Mahon and Ivan Park were in fourth place, then the vets Fred Hamond and Ricky Cowan just ahead of the mixed team of Norma Rea and Dave Ewart. Later after discussions with the affected teams it was agreed to credit Jonathan Mc Cloy & Paul Weir with ten minutes as they were the first team loose time looking for the stolen marker and Billy Reid and Gerry Kingston received a credit of two minutes. I think this was the best solution for a difficult problem and I thank the teams for their input and flexibility. Special thanks as well to the marshal Jim Duffy for using his head and making the best of a bad situation.

## **Food For Thought**

The B course was the same as the Elite course as far as the first manned checkpoint beside the Annalong River. The course planner does this on purpose so that B class teams can compare themselves to Elites. Looking at the times of the leading teams in the B class I see that nine teams produced a time which would have placed them fourth in the elite at this stage - food for thought and maybe an incentive to move up and test themselves in the Elite next year.

## **Alexander and McCormick lead B Class**

On the B course Alan Gilkison and Richard Lang got off to a flier but then lost out on the long leg to the crag near the Blue Lough, allowing last year's C course winners Mark Alexander and Jim McCormick to take the overall lead. Roy Donaldson and David Newell were also going well and were to hold third position at the overnight camp. Fortunately the B class did not have to go over Bernagh and so avoided the missing marker problems and after the Hares Gap came on line with the Elite course again for a few markers on the northern slopes of the Mourne. Two good vets' teams were also in the mix; Clive Coffey and Desmond O'Hagan, fought a close battle time-wise with Dave Wilson and Dan Mitchell and were to end the day just a minute

apart. Like the Elite, the B class entry was disappointingly down and we only had two all female teams. Niamh O'Ceallaigh & Caroline Reid took the honours on Day 1 ahead of Stephanie Pruzina and Kathleen Monteverde who lost quite a lot of time on the penultimate marker on Laganabruchan. After their error free run Alexander & McCormick were the campsite leaders with a half hour advantage.

### **Wetherill and Chatterton Dominate C Class**

The C course was interesting with a number of stiff climbs the first of which was to a summit wall corner of Slieve Bernagh. Sadly the control box was missing but the orienteering cane and punch were still there so teams were able to proceed unimpeded. Thanks to those who phoned to tell us of the problem and we were able to move a marshal to supervise the marker. The veteran team of Dil Wetherill and Andy Chatterton dominated and by the end of day one were over half an hour ahead of their nearest challengers, Jimmy Murray and Peter Coyle. Top mixed team was Loz and Sarah Colyer and the ladies leaders were Fiona Mullen and Claire Samways.

### **Competitive Juices Flow in the Novice class**

Although the D class is designed as a novice course the competitive juices still flow and teams deserve some recognition for a good run. It may involve a lot less climbing than the other courses but this year there was a bit of a slog dipping down to the top end of the Ben Crom reservoir then climbing up to the Blue Lough. Our course planner lives in fear of an early starting D course team charging around before the marshals get in place or the finish is set up and it was a bit close for comfort this year as Darren and Mark Asquith blasted around in less than four and a half hours. Only one other team went under five hours, the mixed vet team of Michael and Eithne Murphy and the best ladies team of Amy Teasdale and Chloe Boden were in close contention in fifth place overall.

### **Bloody Bridge Campsite**

Our overnight campsite this year was at the Bloody Bridge, close to the coast and a recently opened official campsite sporting good ground and fantastic views. The owner Frank is a very enthusiastic supporter of the event and keen to spread the word that campers are welcome so if you need a base for quick access to the high Mourne, this could be it. If you require more info look at his web site [www.bloodybridge.com](http://www.bloodybridge.com). The evening was very pleasant and there was much chatting going on as old friends met up again and new acquaintances were made. The only drawback was the noisy neighbours; Mr and Mrs Donny donkey and family who would periodically launch into loud tirades in their two syllable language.

### **Day Two - Battle in the Sun**

Sunday morning dawned clear and bright and the elite teams lined up for a battle in the sun. Reid & Kingston knew that despite their lead, the team of McNeilly & McCrickard would be faster over the ground so they would be hanging on and trying to out navigate them where possible. McNeilly & McCrickards' mission was clear; they had to avoid making any mistakes if they were to stand a chance of winning. They also knew that the cluster would happen today, and how you deal with it can make a big difference to the overall results. McCloy & Weir also fancied their chances. Right from the start you could see the differences in approach. McNeilly & McCrickard marked down the first two points then were up and running, completing their plotting of the course at a later stage. Reid & Kingston plotted the entire course before getting underway as did most of the other teams. The course took them up Chimney Rock mountain initially then across to a stream source on the north side of Slieve Donard. They passed a manned check point on the Donard col then looped up and down on both sides of the Brandy Pad before arriving at the manned check point at the Hares Gap. The split times looked very good for Reid & Kingston at this point; they were only six and a half minutes down on McNeilly & McCrickard and well ahead of the chasing pack.

### **Cluster Buster - McNeilly & McCrickard win Elite**

The Hares Gap marked the start of the cluster and unusually the exit was the finish line in Tollymore. McNeilly & McCrickard opted to climb for the high marker on Slieve Corragh first then backtracked to pick up the marker beside the Trassey track before sweeping around the northern slopes of the range picking up controls as they made their way back to Tollymore. All of the other Elite teams opted for the same route as did the majority of the B class who were doing the same cluster. The one elite exception was Reid & Kingston who went for the Trassey marker first then swept up some of the northern markers before climbing back up to Slieve Corragh for the high marker. From there it was downhill most of the way back into Tollymore and the finish line. The cluster proved decisive in determining this year's Elite winners for the McNeilly & McCrickard choice proved to be the faster. They were first across the line and then had an

anxious wait as the minutes ticked by, whittling away Reid & Kingston's overnight lead. Reid & Kingston charged out of the forest and rushed to the finish box, then fell gasping to the ground. The computer did its silent work, spat out its little results slip and the answer. McNeilly & McCrickard were the winners by the narrowest of margins, a mere three minutes (once the two minute's credit for the previous day were taken into account). Jonathan Mc Cloy and Paul Weir were third in splendid isolation, well ahead of Ivan Park and Paul Mahon. The only lady in the Elite category, Norma Rea came fifth with her husband Dave Ewart and they pushed the vets team of Ricky Cowan and Fred Hamond into fifth position.

### **Best Cluster Busters?**

The B class leaders, Alexander & McCormick, didn't hang about and were up and running quickly. They found themselves accompanied for most of the day by the overnight fourth placed team of Tim and Stephen Martin. Unlike the majority of teams these two teams went through the cluster by a more unusual route, down to pick up the Trassey marker then up again for the Slieve Corragh before working their way down to Slievenabrock. With the awkward markers now bagged they swept up the others and raced to the finish line with Alexander & McCormick finishing just ahead on the day and claiming the B class title. Tim and Stephen Martin's efforts moved them into second place overall. Their cluster routes may have been unusual but they produced the two fastest B course cluster times of the day and were only bettered by the top two Elite teams. Roy Donaldson and David Newell claimed another third place on the day and were third overall while Richard Lang and Alan Gilkison second place at the overnight camp, lost time in the cluster and dropped back to fourth place. Another team to lose time in the cluster were the leading ladies, Niamh O'Ceallaigh and Caroline Reid. Their route through was exactly the same as their nearest challengers Stephanie Pruzina and Kathleen Monteverde but they lost over an hour on the day which allowed Pruzina & Monteverde to win the ladies title. The top vets fought all the way to the finish line and Dave Wilson and Dan Mitchell won it with only seconds to spare on Coffey & O'Hagan.

### **Mountain Rescue as Wetherill and Chatterton win C Class**

Dil Wetherill and Andy Chatterton the C course leaders were well ahead of the pack for most of the day and it was only during the later stages that they were overhauled by the overnight fourth placed team and had to settle for second place on the day – though still winning overall by 39min. Mike Bignall and Clark Finlay's efforts moved them into second place overall and third place went to Alek Zholobenko and Owen Largey. While all this was happening there was high drama on the col between Donard and Commedagh where second placed overnight competitor Jimmy Murray was in agony with a suspected broken hip. Marshal Peter McClenaghan took control of the situation and called the mountain rescue team who in turn called in a helicopter. Our Doctor, Peter Howie packed a sack and ran up to the col and administered pain killers and had Jimmy ready for pick up when the helicopter arrived. Thanks to all the other people who helped - especially Mark Hannah who was out for a walk and was able to offer considerable professional assistance. I understand that Jimmy did not have a broken hip although his injury will take some time to heal. Marshal McClenaghan is becoming an expert at dealing with these situations as he had to deal with a broken wrist the previous day. (In future events, competitors may wish to stay clear of Peter as he seems to attract injuries) We wish both competitors a speedy recovery. The top mixed team in the C-class was Loz and Sarah Colyer and the top mixed vet's team was Scotland's Tom Greig and Lorna Masterton. The ladies title went to Claire Samways and Fiona Mullan.

### **Asquith Brothers win D Class**

The D class route roughly followed the famous old smugglers path, the Brandy pad through to the Trassey track and then into the back of Tollymore and home. Mark and Darren Asquith the speed merchants from day one had company in the form of the mixed team of Brian Cook and Kristina Greig who moved into second place and finishing behind them in third place overall was the mixed vets, Michael Murphy and Eithne Murphy. The top ladies team of Amy Teasdale and Chloe Boden were forth and to neatly complete the category winners we have the vet's team of Peter Young and Dean Gartley in fifth position overall. We awarded a few small token prizes to the first three teams home in recognition that it is thirty years since the Mourne Mountain Marathon started business.

**The winning courses can be viewed on the maps in the Results section of the website and all split-times analysed in [www.splitsbrowser.org.uk](http://www.splitsbrowser.org.uk)**

### **Prize Giving.**

The sun shone as the teams finished and many tired runners lay around and soaked it up. Denis Rankin conducted the prize giving assisted by our local sponsor, Dion Jackson. Denis talked about the situation of the B class and Elite entries being down and wondered how we can encourage more people to test themselves at these levels. On the other hand the C class is tremendously popular and the D class continues

to grow in popularity each year. After the main prize giving was concluded Denis made two special awards. One was to Brian Layton for his long term support of the event. He has racked up fifteen consecutive MMM's. With an eye to the future he also gave a special award to the youngest team, Craig Palmer and Allan Mc Keown.

## **Thanks**

Finally, a big thank you to all those people who helped out with marshalling, registration and running the campsite. Also to our sponsors, Lowe Alpine and Jackson Sports, for their generous support for the fifth year running and to Frank Harper for the use of his camping field and to the Forestry Service for use of the facilities at Tollymore. Everything went so well that we had the whole event packed up by eight o'clock, a record, and I was home by ten with my feet up in front of the telly. I don't think I was the only one. See you all again next year.

Jim Brown. Sept 2009