



LOWE ALPINE MOURNE MOUNTAIN MARATHON Event Report 2012



The question before this year's event was - would the teams of Deon McNeilly & Eamon McCrickard and Billy Reid & Gerry Kingston be battling it out once more for the title of Elite champions, as they have done for the last three years, or would another team be able to gate crash the party? There were some strong candidates such as the young team of Jonathon McCloy & Patrick Higgins who had the lead last year before fitness issues thwarted their challenge, or would the skilled navigation of Liverpool's Brendan Bolland & partner Chris Jones win the day.... er days!

The Courses

Saturday dawned clear and bright and soon a stream of teams were heading into the hills from this year's exceptional starting location, the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre. Course planner Terry Mc Queen surprised the Elites by having not one, but two clusters to be solved on a course which swung out west as far as Slieve Meelbeg then east to the bulky masses of Slieve Binnian and Slieve Lamagan where a cluster forced teams into some serious climbing and descending. A similar cluster was inflicted on the B class after their foray out west, and then both courses crossed the Annalong valley and headed for the overnight camp site in a field at Dunnywater owned by farmer Kieran Mooney. This is the second occasion this field has hosted the overnight camp (last time 2003) and once again we had plenty of encouragement and help from Kieran. The C course went on a roughly similar route to the top courses but without the clusters and the D course wended its way through some of the best scenery in the Mournes including a stroll along the shores of the Ben Crom reservoir.

Elite leaders

The Elite class leaders at the overnight campsite were Brendan Bolland & Chris Jones but they only had a seven minute advantage over Billy Reid & Gerry Kingston, and guess what? - They were just 30 seconds ahead of their fierce rivals McNeilly & McCrickard. Jonathon Mc Cloy and Patrick Higgins were also in close attendance just seven minutes further back. All the top teams took the same routes through the clusters with the exception of McCloy & Higgins who opted for the alternative route on the second cluster and by my calculations were 18 minutes slower than the leaders for this section of the route.

B Class best

The leaders in the B class were last year's second placed team of Pete Grant & Barry Tinnelly, with a comfortable 16 minute advantage over Rinaldo Colombi & Lawrence Friell who are in fact the representatives of Lowe, our main sponsors. Behind them by five minutes was the Veteran team of Robert Hickling & Sean O'Sullivan, and in 6th position was the ladies team of Katrin Harding & Megan Wilson. The B class cluster was tackled by one of two main routes with the choice of dealing with Binnian first proving to be slightly more attractive. This was the route used for the fastest cluster time recorded by overall leaders Grant & Tinnelly.

McCanns lead the C Class

The C class leaders were last year's winning team of father and son, David & Alex McCann, still competing in this class due to their status as a family team, i.e. Alex is less than 18 years of age. They were 14 minutes ahead of Neil Maguire & Patrick Lavery who in turn were 8 – 10 minutes ahead of a group including the Mixed team of Lucy Butt & Mark Stephens. Robert Hegerty & John Scullion were the D class leaders eight minutes ahead of the Mixed team of Stephen Montgomery & Sally Vivien, then there was a half hour gap to the third team of John Williams & John Shaw.

Campsite

The day had remained dry and pleasant so the campsite was soon full of teams erecting tents, cooking, resting or just catching up on each other's news. Farmer Mooney had allowed the grass to grow to about six inches in length and this helped soften up the sleeping arrangements. Considering the wet summer we have had the ground was reasonably dry so mud was not an issue. We did have a bad moment when another farmer started spreading slurry in a nearby field and the smell wafting over the fence was on a par with some of the socks hanging on guy lines, but fortunately the slurry smell soon dissipated; more than can be claimed for the socks.

Rain for Breakfast.

The weather changed during the night with a frontal system moving through bringing a period of heavy rain and low cloud which extended into the morning, making for uncomfortable breakfast conditions. As the teams headed out onto the hills the cloud began to lift and then break and the rest of the day was relatively dry with just the odd heavy shower moving through.

Cluster torture

The Elite, B and C classes quickly found themselves dealing with another cluster this time centred on Chimney Rock Mountain. It would appear that the best solution was to climb to the manned marker in the Bog of Donard area then cut back to the sheepfold on the other side of Chimney Rock Mountain and exit via the stream junction marker on the Bloody Bridge river tributary. All the teams in the Elite and about half the teams in the B and C classes opted for this solution. The D class avoided these cluster conundrums and wound their way past Chimney Rock and Donard before crossing paths again with the other courses at the top edge of Donard wood. From here the Elite and B classes were forced up onto the high slopes of Donard and Commedagh where more cluster torture was dished out before they were allowed to descend to the comforts of rest, food and hot showers in the Mountain Centre. The C and D classes enjoyed a more direct less arduous route back to the finish line though there was a sting in the tail for all courses with a couple of tricky final controls.

Bolland and Jones win Elite.

Brendan Bolland and Chris Jones were once again fastest Elite team on the day and therefore are the winners of the Elite title for 2012. Deon McNeilly & Eamon McCrickard got the better of Billy Reid & Gerry Kingston and in the end finished a comfortable second place half an hour ahead of their perennial sparring partners. Jonathan Mc Cloy & Patrick Higgins were again fourth on the day and finished fourth overall. The mixed team of Greg McCann & Violet Linton moved up to 10th overall after a great second day effort and won the mixed title. Their main rivals Paul Mahon & Jackie Howard unfortunately missed a marker.

Hickling and O'Sullivan power to victory.

There was a shock in the B class when overnight leaders Pete Grant & Barry Tinnelly came unstuck on the slopes of Slieve Commedagh, within sight of the finish line. They had posted the fastest time for the first cluster but lost a stack of time in the second which allowed Robert Hickling & Sean O'Sullivan, fastest on day two, to move up from third place to become the winners. Rinaldo Colombi & Lawrence Friell also closed up on Pete and Barry but in the end had to settle for third place. Ladies team Katrin Harding & Megan Wilson posted another impressive time and moved up to fifth overall and first Ladies team. The Vets race was won by Dawson Stelfox & Stewart Magill who held a very respectable 8th position across the two days and further down the field in 14th position was the first Mixed team of Molly Stack & Ivan Park. Four places after them was the Mixed Vet team of Jeanette & Ian Sumler – Hutchinson.

Coffey Blinder.

The C class also produced a shock result when the overnight fifth placed team of Clive & Liam Coffey played a blinder and pipped the overnight leaders David & Alex McCann by a mere 12 seconds. This result is an interesting sequel to last year's result when the Coffeys also had a fantastic second day run and thought they had won until the computer pointed out that a marker had been missed. Total devastation on that occasion; with Clive last seen kicking things around in the car park in a frustrated rage, while David and Alex collected the prize. No such scenes this year as the two teams congratulated each other on their close battle and promised to lock horns next year in the B class. Looking at the splits it would appear that the Coffeys won on their cluster busting choices, choosing the same solution as the Elite teams while the McCanns went for the alternative. The Mixed team of Lucy Butt & Mark Stephens held onto third place, and the top Vets team was Richard Ross & Keith Dalzell sixth overall. There was a good battle for the Mixed Vet title which was ultimately won on the back of a great second day performance by Michael & Eithne Murphy. Veteran Ladies title went to Fiona Murdock & Ann McGeeney and just a few places behind them the family team of Stephanie & Helen Pruzina picked up the other Ladies prize.

Hegarty and Scullion win D class.

The popular D class saw overnight leaders Robert Hegarty & John Scullion hold onto their lead and the same applied to the overnight 2nd placed mixed team of Stephen Montgomery & Sally Vivien, comfortably second at the finish. Ruairi O'Connor & Eoin O'Connor ran the fastest second day time to move up and claim third prize. Fourth place went to the Vets, John Williams & John Shaw. First all Ladies team were Judith Malcolm & Katie Malcolm in 11th position overall.

Mountain Centre wind down.

The Mountain Centre proved to be a great venue as it allowed competitors to have a good cleanup, followed by plenty of food and hot drinks and a chance to loll around on the balcony watching those still staggering towards Nirvana. When a rain cloud did come along there was plenty of room to duck inside until it passed, then it was back out into the sun again. Rinaldo Colombi of Lowe Alpine and Dion Jackson of Jackson Sports helped Mountain Marathon front man Denis Rankin present the prizes and Rinaldo was warm in his praise and reaffirmed that Lowe Alpine intend to remain a major player in the outdoor market and committed to continuing to support the event.

Thanks

We the organizers are already thinking about next year's event, but I think we can safely say that it is unlikely that we will have such a brilliant event centre. Thanks very much to all the centre staff who helped us throughout the weekend and the chef for the food. Also a big thank you to all the people who helped with marshalling duties or planned their walks or runs to bring in markers at the end of a long weekend. There are loads of pictures to look at on the website and if you feel inspired to come to next year's event but worry that your navigation is ropey, then sign up for a Mountain Centre course. I did, many years ago and look at me now, placing markers in the name of pleasure (torture)!

Hopefully see you all next year. Jim Brown.