



LOWE ALPINE MOURNE MOUNTAIN MARATHON Event Report 2011



Attical

For the first time ever we used the village of Attical as the starting point for this year's event. Attical is tucked into the southern side of the Mournes and offered us good access to the hills of the South Western Mournes. We used the community centre as our event centre and are very grateful to Mairead White and her team for all their assistance, the GAC for use of their car park and to the local community who helped us out in various ways.

Cluster Zone

Once again Terry McQueen was our course planner, and he spent many days of the summer investigating features and planning routes which spread from Slieve Martin in the south to a marker on the Brandy Pad trail in the north. His day one routes included a cluster centred on the Ben Crom reservoir, used by both the Elite and B classes and, unusually, the entrance and exit from the cluster was from the same point.

Courses and campsite

Three of the courses went to the West around Shanlieve and Pigeon Rock; the B course took a more direct route, and then crossed the main B27 road which cuts through the centre of the Mournes to tackle Slieve Muck and the hills beyond. Unfortunately we ran into some trouble with local farmers who unbeknownst to us had repaired the fences along each side of this road and were justifiably angry when they came across teams climbing over them. Fortunately no serious damage was caused and, for the future, we will try harder to plan courses which make better use of styles and gates to avoid such problems. All courses finished over Butter Mountain and the campsite was situated on the grass area over shadowed by the Spelga dam; the same area we used as our event centre in 2007. Grass it may have been but the heavy rain of the preceding days had turned it into a sort of sponge from which a green goo emerged if you stamped too vigorously. Careful selection of your pitch was required. Day two courses wound their way south through the Western Mournes, encountering plenty of the heavy boggy ground which the area is famous for and low cloud on the higher ground.

The Elite contestants

The past two mountain marathons have seen the same two teams battling for the Elite title with Deon McNeilly and Eamon McCrickard winning on both occasions but pushed hard all the way by Billy Reid and Gerry Kingston. Less than ten minutes has separated them on both occasions. Jonathan McCloy and Patrick Higgins returned (after being knocked out by hyperthermia last year while leading) and the continually improving Mark Alexander and Jim McCormick, previous B class winners, were also entered. The unknown quantity was the Scandinavian team of Sebastian Ljungdahl and Fredrik Hedin.

The Course - The Cluster

The weather was not too bad as the teams set off on day one and McCloy and Higgins were the fastest over the first section of the course as far as the entrance point to the cluster, three minutes ahead of McNeilly and McCrickard. Reid and Kingston were 18 minutes of the pace, in fact in fifth place at that point, but they turned that all around by finding the best solution to the cluster and emerged as the leaders with a six minute lead over McNeilly and McCrickard. The Mc Cloy and Higgins team were struggling with fitness issues and despite choosing the same cluster solution as the leaders; they lost 30 minutes in the cluster. The biggest losers were the Scandinavian team who had been in touch with the leaders as they entered the cluster, but their route choice lost them an hour traversing it. From the cluster exit to the finish, times were similar for the top teams which meant that Reid and Kingston finished the day with a seven minute advantage.

Sabotage of course

Overnight the weather changed and it was wet and misty when the teams lined up the following morning. The tactics of Reid and Kingston soon became clear as they set off hot on the heels of McNeilly and McCrickard, determined to stick with them and preserve their overnight lead. They even managed to make the same mistakes together, losing fifteen minutes each in the mist at checkpoint four, which allowed the chasing pack to close up. However it was point five which changed the course of the day. It had been stolen

and much time was spent searching and checking cross references before deciding that it was definitely gone. McNeilly and McCrickard spent less time coming to this conclusion so by the time Reid and Kingston decided to head for point six, their rivals were out of sight and their tactics were in ruins.

Racing to the finish

Meanwhile the third placed team of McCloy and Higgins were struggling with Jonathan unable to maintain the pace. Still, accurate navigation was keeping them in the hunt so they still had a chance if the leaders slipped up. Run of the day was coming from the Scandinavians of Ljungdahl and Hedin, making up for yesterday's disappointments. Despite another control being stolen, but fortunately manned on the day, the teams pushed on for the finish with McNeilly and McCrickard building a lead which would claw back their rival's advantage of day one. The Scandinavian team continued their impressive run and were second home on the day while the mixed team of Lucy Harris and Wil Spain run very well, finishing in seventh place and within ten minutes of fourth fastest for the day.

Dead heat

Final computations, removing the two legs each side of the stolen control, produced the astonishing result of a mere five seconds separating the top teams after two days competition. Given the circumstances of the stolen markers and associated uncontrollable influences, for example the variations in time it took for marshals at the second stolen control to explain the situation to each team, it was felt that under the circumstances, five seconds was too small an interval on which to base an accurate decision of the final result. A discussion involving the teams resulted in the awarding of a joint first prize for the first time ever in the event's thirty two year history.

Cluster separates them

The B class had a much shorter run to the start of the same cluster used by the Elite teams. They headed around Pigeon Rock Mountain then across to Slieve Muck and north to the manned control on the Slieve Loughshannagh/ Carn col. Three teams entered the cluster with less than two minutes separating them. The two all male teams used the same route through the cluster as chosen by the Elites Reid and Kingston with varying degrees of success. Pete Grant and Barry Tinnelly became the fastest B team through the cluster, but Richard Campbell and Mark Hanna seem to have faded or run into navigational difficulties. The mixed team of Ciara Largey and Declan McGrellis used the same route as McNeilly and McCrickard, but as in the Elites it appears to be slightly slower for they emerged eleven minutes behind Grant and Tinnelly. Little changed on the run in to the finish meaning that Grant and Tinnelly were the overnight leaders, with Largey and McGrellis twelve minutes behind and Campbell and Hanna a further thirteen minutes back. It was interesting to note that there were four mixed teams in the top ten.

Mixed fortunes, mixed winner

The more murky conditions of Sunday morning seemed to suit Largey and McGrellis for they were soon setting a pace which no other B class team could live with. Grant and Tinnelly had a fast start but seem to have had big problems finding point number three near Pierces Castle. Livingstone and Hanna ran well and were second fastest on the day while the mixed team of Finbar McGurran and Karen Duggen, and the vets Kenneth Clarke and Jonathon Shepherd also enjoyed good runs which were to win them category prizes. These teams encountered the same stolen marker problems as the Elite class but fortunately we were able to sort out the results without the problems encountered with the Elites. So, Ciara Largey and Declan McGrellis, last year's C class winners are this year's B class winners. Pete Grant and Barry Tinnelly slipped back to second place and Richard Campbell and Mark Hanna remained in third place. The top ladies team was Taryn McCoy and Kathleen Monteverde.

Family teams lead

The C class turned into a battle between two family teams, Clive Coffey and son Liam, and David McCann and son Alex. Their course took them up over Shanlieve and Slieve Moughanmore then on to the hulking heap of Muck and north to Meelbeg before cutting back to the Spelga campsite. Both teams ran well and there split times show very little between them. At the campsite the McCanns had a slender three and a half minutes lead over the Coffeys in second place overall. Third place was held by Neil Maguire and Patrick Lavery while the experienced veterans of Ciaran Young and Paul Smyth were in fourth. Sixth place was another family team but this time of the mixed and married variety, Helen and Stephen Cassidy, and just behind them were the all ladies team of Stephanie Pruzina and Norma Rea.

Coffey with no sugar!

Day two saw the leading teams racing each other right from the start. Clive and Liam Coffey had managed to get about eight minutes ahead of the McCanns by the time they reached point three, with Neil Maguire and Patrick Laverty sandwiched between them, but then disaster struck for team Coffey. A simple misreading of their map meant they missed point four and headed directly to point five and raced on to the finish unaware of their mistake; convinced that they had won the C class, as there was no sign of the opposition. It was only at the finish line that the computer flagged up the missing marker and the realization of their error dawned on them. Desolation is perhaps the word for how they felt, all that effort, manoeuvring and tactics for nothing and the sweet taste of victory spat out in the dirt. Disconsolately they packed up and headed for home unable to bear seeing others collecting the prize they had thought of as there's. Meanwhile out on the course Maguire and Laverty set the pace and were first home, with the McCann team second. Third place on the day went to Gavin Donald and Greig Forbes.

Family team win

After the results were crunched in the computer, another close finish was revealed with less than a minute separating David and Alex McCann from Neil Maguire and Patrick Laverty in second place. Third place was more than half an hour behind and it was claimed by Mike Bignall and Clarke Finlay and fourth place went to the vets Ciaran Young and Paul Smith. Helen and Stephen Cassidy were the first mixed team and Stephanie Pruzina and Norma Rea won the ladies prize. A great run on day two saw the mixed vet's team of Tom Greg and Lorna Masterton move up to thirteen place overall.

D Course

The D course is meant to be a novice course but it attracts a great variety of people and some are quite competitive so we set aside a few small prizes. There was quite a bit of changing around at the front end of this category over the two days but at the final shake down Paul Wilson and Edward Cooke managed to win it, moving up from third position at the overnight camp. Karen Shaw and Brian Cook were the fastest team on day two and this elevated them to second place overall and the overnight leaders of Jim McGourty and Owen Kane dropped back to third.

Prize giving.

Dion Jackson of Jackson Sports and representing Lowe Alpine helped Denis Rankin to present the prizes and everybody enjoyed the sandwiches, tea, soup and craic in the spacious community centre. There was even a bit of folk music being played in one corner of the hall. Many thanks to everybody who helped, especially the marshals and those who helped bring in controls, especially on Sunday.

Mourne Lodge hostel

Finally, if you enjoyed your visit to Attical and fancy a return trip sometime then I must recommend the Cnocnafeola (Mourne Lodge) Hostel in the village. We were based there on the Friday night and found it to be a very comfortable and friendly place. Food wise I recommend the ham stew; I think it kept me energised for the whole weekend.

Jim Brown
MMM Committee
21st September 2011