

Third win for William on Slieve Martin

By Wingman

The third race in the 2017 Hill and Dale series took place in Rostrevor Forest Park on Thursday 27 April, although still cool for the time year the wind had dropped, the sun appeared through the clouds and the course was dry making excellent running conditions.

A road accident had occurred in Rostrevor on the Warrenpoint Road resulting in delays for some of the 249 runners who took part on the evening, Mary Knight was in control of the entries and confident that all would be entered on time. Despite the accident, the Blaney Rockets arrived early for them shortly after 7 pm and Peter McGuckin, always late arriving was spotted at the end of the que at 7.15, all 249 runners entered by 7.23, ready for 7.30 sharp start.

Cut off times have been introduced in recent years for safety reasons, so that Marshalls don't have to spend too much time on the mountain. At last year's Rostrevor race the cut-off was set at 20 minutes to reach the tree line and open mountain. That was how long it had taken the course marker, with 20 kilos of saw dust, to reach the same point earlier in the day. Sharon Dickenson who finished last in 2016, only just making the cut-off enquired if it would apply again and seemed shocked to hear that it would.

Following the usual briefing, which included the cut off time, 249 runners started, with Willy McKee heading the field towards Foxes Green, tracked by Zac Hanna and David McKee. Willy extended his lead as the runners left the shelter of the forest for the open mountain. At the edge of the Forest, all runners were allowed to continue by the cut-off enforcement team. Willy extended his lead over the summit and pushed hard in the hope of beating Seamus Lynch's record of 32.28 set in 2015, although he was 25 seconds quicker than last year, he missed the record by 2 seconds. Zac held onto second followed by David McKee to make the top three in the men's. Jack O'Hare had a great climb summiting in 7th position, descent didn't go as well dropping to 43rd at the finish. Notable high performing Vets, showing those behind them that age isn't an excuse for poor performance, were John Hen Kelly in an excellent 9th overall and first vet50. In 22nd position and first vet60 was Dominic McGreevy making a return after injury.

In the ladies' race Newry AC's Ester Dickson, finished just over one minute ahead of Mourne Runners quickly improving Charlene Haugh, followed by Shileen O'Kane and Gillian Wasson. Further down the field Sharon Dickenson arrived, over 10minutes ahead of the last finisher and commented that the cut-off time was a great idea as it had been the motivation to run over 6 minutes quicker than the year before.

Once sweeper John "Butcher" Kelly had arrived, chasing the last runners with what appeared to be sticks, it was off to the Cloughmoor Inn, for refreshments, food and presentations, including the much sought after H&D Mug spot prizes.

The race organisers would like to thank everyone that gave up their time to help make another successful race, in particular the marshal's out on the hill who had endure cold conditions. Next week's race returns to Slieve Binnian, the only summit finish in the series, all runners are reminded not to forget their numbers and also to bring full body cover as long range forecast is predicting cold conditions.