

McKee is almost home and hosed

Hill & Dale Race 8 - Millstone by the Angry Buzzards

Pre-race events

Recent sightings of a Toyota Hilux, its four occupants and two fertiliser bags of who knows what gave rise to speculation that Taliban insurgents had invaded Donard Forest on Wednesday night. In fact the situation was of graver significance as Messrs Wallace, Kelly, McVeigh & King were on a mission to mark out the race route for Hill & Dale race 8 – “Millstone”.

Although the traditional “Hill & Dale” mantra of “spend nothing” is still alive and kicking, race directors McVeigh & King were to have none of it and went on an unprecedented spending spree at Kirkwood’s sawmills where they purchased not one, but two bags of sawdust from its “finest” range. Surely (you ask) this couldn’t be allowed to continue. However, gay financial abandon was the order of the day and the course was duly marked to within an inch of its life. Stephen Wallace & John (Hen) Kelly could only watch in awe as directional arrows and no-go lines were laid with artisan detail about every fifty yards.

Up to this point the actual race route had remained a tight-lipped secret but with the markings now laid, runners were seen sneaking into the forest to get a preview. Two such runners (Barry McConville & Colly Murtagh) were so immediately overcome by the magnificence of the spectacle of Kirkwood’s “finest” all over the place that upon meeting McVeigh they let themselves down by opining the course was reminiscent of a “Park Run”. On hearing this blasphemy the ever presidential Deon McNeilly quickly put paid to any further negative comments and stated there was to be “no more covfefe” – wise words indeed!

In summary the course covers 4.8 miles including 460m of ascent from Donard Park to the top of Millstone and back to Donard Park. Whilst this course is not the longest in the series it does have a fair degree of technical challenge as Millstone is neither an easy climb nor easy descent.

The Race

Thursday marked the start of summer; this along with a mild temperature, soft rain, reasonable visibility and firm ground, led to near perfect racing

conditions. The only downside was the omnipresent midges at the start and finish line. Notwithstanding this minor annoyance, 188 hardy runners gathered for the event.

Recent race results meant namesakes Willie & David McKee (Mourne Runners) and Zak Hanna (Newcastle AC) were the firm favourites in the men's race. However, given recent performances it was not a foregone conclusion as to their finishing order. In the end, however, the outcome was decisive with Willie McKee stealing a clear and convincing victory in 37:44, with Zak Hanna following in 38:26 and David McKee completing the podium in 39:04.

The ladies' race was a less certain affair with long odds being given due to the lack of an obvious winner. As the race unfolded it was Megan Wilson (East Down AC), now based in England for her university studies, who stole the day in a most impressive time of 43:35. This victory was even more impressive as she completed the race in 15th position overall. Esther Dickson (Newry AC) was second in 45:07 with the enduring Shileen O'Kane (Lagan Valley AC) finishing in third place in a time of 46:31.

As is the case in all Hill & Dale races there are too many equally important battles taking place throughout the field to mention, although the following results are definitely worthy of mention: Oisin Brennan (Springwell) 43:47, Dominic McGreevy (Newcastle AC) 45:34, Trisha McKibbin (Newcastle AC) 49:19, Fred Strickland (Ballydrain Harriers) 1:01:34 and Ricky Cowan (Mourne Runners) 1:05:00.

The final competitor crossed the line safely in 1:23:16 and with only one DNF race directors King & McVeigh breathed an obvious sigh of relief and took the well-deserved pats on the back for a job well done.

Fact or Fiction

With so many familiar faces regularly competing, marshalling or helping at the races it is no wonder that relationships develop and stories unfold. Noting this, it would be remiss of the writer not to recount some of these trivialities and whilst I can't personally vouch for their veracity "they'll do me".

As previously mentioned McVeigh & King were on a spending spree, which extended further as a box of assorted chocolate biscuits were presented to Mary Knight and her colleagues at the registration table. This was

immediately declared a first and no doubt the Hill & Dale annals will recount this magnanimous gesture for years to come.

Indeed word of the irresponsible and spendthrift nature of the directors had quickly spread to the runners and when Kevin Murdock (Team Purple) was handed the keys of a new Volvo car as he crossed the finish line mutterings were overheard that the organisers had lost the run of themselves. This no doubt swelled the numbers of competitors who attended the prize giving in O'Hare's pub in anxious anticipation of some splendid, nay glittering, spot prizes being decanted. Alas only Hill & Dale mugs were on offer.

Whilst it is usual for Shileen O'Kane to be mentioned in dispatches for all of the right reasons it is the opposite for husband Donal who crossed the line wearing his BARF running vest back the front. Although this sight may have surprised some, for Donal's many friends this fact would seem completely normal and indeed fellow BARF member, Gareth McKeown, signed an affidavit stating he had never seen Donal wear his vest any other way.

Special mention is also worthy of Willie McKee's aunty Lorna who made the long journey from Kilkeel to witness her favourite nephew running and although she missed the start of the race thankfully she witnessed the important stuff. Perhaps Willie you can teach Lorna the merits of speed!

Race 9 - Loughshannagh

Next week the H&D roadshow moves back to open mountain running with directorship moving to Joe McCann and Jerome, the Prophet, McCrickard. The Race directors like to leave the field wondering what lies ahead, but these two great men have already cleared up the confusion they cultivated with sublime craft. Firstly the race will be anti-clockwise as declared at the outset, but will of course summit Carn first, thus contradicting their playful rouse! More importantly competitors are reminded of the need for full body cover and other mandatory equipment in the likely event of bad weather.

True to form, the Prophet has already foretold that Mary Knight will not be available due to an event that now appears to have more frequency than a DFS sofa sale – another election. The timing of this is perfect brain food for McCann who is already fully occupied conjuring carefully crafted quips for use on the night.

And finally

Race directors Audey McVeigh & Mark King wish to thank all of those people who took the time and made the effort to ensure this week's race passed safely and without incident. No names will be mentioned, as the list is too long. However both directors retired smugly upon overhearing resident legal eagle, Dominic McInerney's comment that this week's race was "the best run ever".