

# Barry Murray's Race Reports

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2018

## MUNSTER CONVERT

15 January, 2018

Race: Corrin Hill

Now that I'm a Munster resident, might as well give my first race report of the year. Having moved recently from Wicklow to Kerry, I was keen to kick off the season with the first MMRA race on the calendar.

I have a bit more driving to go now to get to races so it means early morning departures. After finally reaching the Fermoy Golf Club, it still took me a while to actually find the race start !

Corrin Hill it was. A cool enough soft morning and wet conditions underfoot. No fancy timing chips or online race registration with the Munster folk, but they still have things under control. "old skool" pay on the day and manual time recording.

Great to see a big turnout for the youths race, some good runners there. I was getting a warm up done in time for the 11am start. Nothing seemed to be happening at 11, so went off for another jog. Came back at 11.10, and then Robbie announced race start would be in another 10mins. The leinster IMRA folk would have been screaming ! But no big deal, most people just trotted off to keep warm for another few mins.

Race then kicked off at 11.20, and it was like a 100m sprint at the front. Downhill start and the waiting around had people fired up. I tried to keep up with the front pack but didn't want to overcook the first km. Easy for me to blow a fuse early on especially in the first race of the year. Didn't have the usual Leinster heads around me to gauge myself, but had about 6-7 fast folk ahead of me. Knew we had one main climb, and we were soon flying up it. Nice single track threw the wood. Tried to keep running but some steep sections and hopping over fallen tree's had me with the hands on the knees .

Up over the first climb by the cross and we had our first downhill. Pace was fast and only seconds between the first few of us. I knew we had one more hill to go so tried to keep my pace steady. Not easy in a race like this where the trails are fast and you are close to the guy in front and behind.

Up the last climb and I passed 3 guys but got overtaken by 2 at the very top ! Final fast descent and I was feeling okay and tried to catch the lads just ahead of me but ran out of road.

Came in 7th and just happy to get a good first blast in. Nice course with mix of single track, fire trails and 2 little climbs. One of these races that is hard to pace and has no real let up.

Tea and sambo's after in the golf club was well attended. A great start to the MMRA race season and a good crew of organisers. I'll be looking for helpers at Brandon ;-)

## THE KINGDOM

12 February, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Tralee Tonevane

With the commute distances to races around Munster taking a lot longer compared to my days racing around Wicklow, it was nice to have a local one on the calendar.

Waking up to a blanket of snow in Annascaul surrounded by white mountains, I wasn't sure if the race would actually go ahead. Left the house in a blizzard and drove on snow covered roads but the Dingle Peninsula seems to have several micro climates. After about 2km from Annascaul, heading towards Tralee Bay, the snow disappeared and the roads just became wet. The temperature didn't drop much and it certainly wasn't a day for the fair weather runner.

If you stayed in bed and just thought it was too cold, then seeing the numbers of kids and juniors running on the hills on a baltic wintery morning would make you feel a bit soft. It was great to see the youngsters that turned up and were off running in the hills before the adults race. Really gives a family and community feel to the races and with all the other indoor distractions these days, its so good to see kids outdoors.

The course itself was a part of the peninsula I didn't know. Up the side of a hill outside Blennerville overlooking Tralee Bay. After 2 races in the woods, I was happy to be back out in the open mountains.

Lots of runners shivering before the start so it was nice to get going. I decided to go off fast and see what could be ventured. Up onto the first bit of single track and I was in 2nd just behind Mark Nolan. We had a nice little rocky climb up onto the side of the mountain and Mark started to pull away. I stayed in 2nd with a Sean Quirke right behind me. On the first little downhill descent, I caught back up with Mark. Its what I like about IMRA races in that you can make up ground on guys that are faster runners then you on the road if there are technical downhill sections. You have to watch your feet and pick the right line over the rock and through the mud. As I did this, I passed Mark and moved in the lead. First time leading a MMRA race and it was the early stages, maybe just 1km done. I knew we had a turnaround point at 4km so I planned to just hold on. Probably a bit fast for me to start out with as I normally do better by building in to the race. But no harm in a change.

The track flattened out a bit but was still uneven underfoot and you had to tip toe over rocks and mud. I just tried to keep a steady pace but could hear the 2 lads breathing behind me. At the turnaround, Sean passed me and upped the pace a notch. I tried to stay close but he gradually got away. I still had Mark behind me but he also stepped on the gas. Maybe I went out too fast as I couldn't keep up.

With the last couple of k's to go I knew we had the last technical section to do and a bit of a descent to the finish. I could see the two lads ahead, and saw Mark overtaking Sean. I was sort of stranded in 3rd place at this stage and wasn't able to make much ground up on them. Nice bit of hail came down just to remind you of the weather and there was a nice open mountain section on a rocky trail to bring you down the the

finishing straight. Had to settle for 3rd but a good ol ding dong battle.

Another very well run event especially with the conditions. Plenty of marshals out on the course which was probably the most difficult job of the day so fair play ! Hot drinks and food after in the pub in Blennerville warmed everyone up. Another great day out in the Kingdom

## THE REBEL COUNTY

**19 March, 2018 - Barry Murray**

**RACE: Sli Muscraí ½**

I was looking forward to this 1/2 marathon trail series and had never run this Sli Mhuscraí before. A couple of years ago I would have been happy to set off on the long haul at 8am but not I'm just happy to go a bit faster over the 1-2hr mark !

The re-scheduled date meant that the numbers were lower but there seemed to be a good turnout loading on to the buses. A more logistically challenging race to organize with having to transfer us to the star and then shuttle bus transfer everyone to the back country fields where we started !

I could see it was hassle for RD Matthew but he seemed to have everything planned out so well that nothing could really go wrong. After finally getting everyone shipped to the start, we all then were led across a muddy sheeps field to the bottom of a hill. Lots of people shivering before the start as Matthew gave us a detailed layout of the route. I actually listened more than usual as I knew that there could be important turns and directions to take !

So off we went up a grassy hill. With 21km or so ahead, I didn't want to shoot off and just wanted to see what the lie of the land was. We had Becky Quinn who led us up the hill out front with a spring in her step. Once we got up on to the trail then , things settled down and it was myself , Henry, Peter and 1-2 others more or less running in a pack. I was happy to just cruise and keep with the gang.

After a couple of km, we were onto fire road and the "running" commenced. This is something I am noticing more and more about IMRA races. Some are not much running, more hiking and trudging. Others are more full on running but very mixed in terms of fast downhill stuff and slow uphill stuff. then others are full on running and steady with more slopes and hills. This route was the latter and its this sort of running that seems to suit me more. I went out front and just got into a steady pace. I could hear less feet and breathing behind me.

After 5-6km, it was just Henry who was close to me. 30 or so minutes into a race like this is when you have to just settle into your own race pace. Myself and Henry were more or less going at the same speed so I was happy to keep the company. I don't get out in the lead often and you forget how lonely it can be ! Usually I have people ahead of me to scope out, plenty close behind me and even a few shoulder to shoulder. But leading a race means you have nothing to focus on in front of you.. and if you are too far

ahead of the next guys, then you have no company at all ! tough for these race leaders I tell you... anyway, after 40mins or so, We were approach the big wind turbines and I was able to chat with Henry. He had reced the course 2 weeks before so he knew the route.

Luckily he called me back as I missed one of the right hand turns so I have to thank him for that. Easy to just put your head down and miss an arrow.

It was strange running so close to the wind turbines, sort of eery. Heavy underfoot too and every foot step sinking into the ground starts to tire you out. Still myself and Henry were tipping along, no walking. We couldn't see anyone behind us at this stage so I knew it was just a race between myself and himself. I also noticed that any of the boggy uphill he was able to move ahead of me and I was just hanging on. But on any of the fire trails or downhills, then I was passing him out.

As we got towards Claragh mountain, we kept the pace going and took turns in the lead. There was a steady long drag up around the mountain we were both pushing it. I knew we maybe had only 5k to go and I was still feeling like I had plenty left in the tank. Some more downhill and we were both picking up the pace.

I knew if there was any flat bits or road section that I might be able to pull away. And that's what happened in the last kilometer. We hit the road, and I opened up the legs a bit more to come in just 100m or so ahead of Henry.

Eric Wolfe came in a few minutes after us in 3rd and Becky Quinn had a great race to finish first lady and in 6th overall.

Cold air for the day and the showers were even colder ! But the hot cuppa and proper ham sambo's warmed everyone up I think. I was hoping to see the Ultra folk coming in but they were slightly longer than expected and it wasn't a day for hanging around. A pint of Murphy's in the local pub warmed things up again. But 8-9hrs for those lads is a long day out so fair play. As I said at the beginning, lots of organization went in to this one so hats off to both RD's, Matthew and Rob.

Nice to run through the rebel county.

## THE KINGDOM SUN

26 March, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Glenageenty

I was really looking forward to this race given it was a course practically hand built by the living legend of Irish mountain running, John Lenihan. If anyone has read his book, you will be familiar with his tales of running near his farm through thick wooded hills that are immersed in folklore of the rebellion and civil war.

I actually only read his book recently and last week decided to recce the course to see what it was like. No sooner than 200m from my car and I bump into John who was out for a hike on a sunny afternoon. I almost felt like a little kid who loves football and was meeting Ronaldo for the first time. John knows the Glenageenty trail like the back of his hand and was happy to explain it to me in detail. So off I went on a high to run the course on a sunny day and back at the car, I bump into John again. He was interested to see what I thought of the course and I pointed out it was a "long" 9km. The course meanders through forest and hills, with steep climbs, twisty trails, steps and gates. A course with a bit of everything but very little flat out running as you are stopping and going so much. I realised that it wasn't a course that suited my own strengths but a great tester all the same.

So onto the day itself and thankfully the sun gods were out again. After a few months of doing MMRA races in snow, rain, grey skies and bitter cold, it was so nice to have sun on the face. The Glenageenty crew are a great bunch of people too and their passion and enthusiasm for the upkeep and enjoyment of these trails is warming. They make such a big effort for the day and you really get a community feel. Registration was in the local pub of Ballymacegglit. A pub that John told me he spent more time meeting at it for a group run than drinking in it !

The forest entrance to the trails was 2.5miles from the registration so we all car pooled up to the car park. First time this year for me with no hats or gloves and just a singlet top. It was still cool enough air but the sun had plenty of warmth. The organisers had everything set up at the start and there was a kiddies and junior race put on beforehand. Great to see this and I think we might have some good future mountain runners thanks to these races.

I wanted to get a decent warm-up done so I went off to get some strides in and some drills. Very easy to just not bother too much with a warm-up but for these sorts of races it is worth it. My last race league race was Tonevane and it looked like I had similar competition again with Mark Nolan and Sean Quirke limbering up too.

A short race briefing from the RD and we were off. The first part was a wide fire trail and we went off fairly fast. It was myself, Mark, Sean and Paul Deane more or less in a bunch at the front with a couple of guys right behind us. I knew the course quickly goes into a single track and by the time we hit the first little bridge , we were all single file.

As I mentioned, this course never really goes straight or steady so you are changing direction and pacing very quickly. The first climb up through the forest is when the heart starts really pumping. Mark was already pulling away, with Sean and Paul Deane just

ahead of me. I had Ed Casey and John Lynch just behind me as we hit the steepest part of the course, Cardiac Hill ! This is a short but what must be a 20% gradient .... Hard to run up it, so its hands on the knee's climbing up to the top. The course then goes up into the open hills with soft boggy terrain that saps the energy. Somewhere here I got passed by Ed Casey and then John Lynch but we were all close to each other.

The course then meanders back through woods and along a stream. There are gateways at the fences that you have to shuffle through which all adds to the stopping and going. I've said this before, but IMRA races really teach you many skills and makes you find out about your strengths and weaknesses. 10yrs and I'm still learning. This course doesn't favour the constant fast paced steady runner. You have to be good at changing your speeds and effort with varied intensity. I'm the former, so I was finding it hard to make ground on the guys ahead of me. I did manage to pass out John Lynch again and just had Ed in sight not far ahead of me. Mark, Sean and Paul were out of sight so I knew my best hope was a 4th if I could overtake Ed.

The course has plenty of little surprises like steep steps and steep stoney/rocky climbs. On the last big climb, we passed John Lenihan himself who was out taking pictures of all the runners. We also could hear a drone hovering over us so hopefully the Glenageenty folk got good footage to promote their trail.

If you had the time, there are some beautiful views to take in as well. On the clear day we had, you could see the Dingle Peninsula . Tralee bay and even the McGillicuddy Reeks.

The last 1.5km of the course is more or less downhill and I tried to open out the legs a bit. I moved ahead of John but couldn't catch Ed. Had to settle for 5th.

The afters were back in the local pub. Plenty of tea's, coffee's and sambo's. John Lenihan came in to say hello and a few of the youngsters got their photo taken with him. I got chatting to him outside in the sunshine and we were talking about training. I mentioned to him that to become a really fast mountain runner, some say you need to do 80-90% training on the road. He agreed and told me this . "when I was training to race my fastest Carrantuohill, I did most of my training on the mountains, but I had the slowest year of my life" . Note to file !

Thanks again to all the Glenageenty crew for a great day out. If anyone is down in these parts, do make sure to check out the trails. Apart from the nice run or walk you can do, there are plenty of information boards about the woodland, wildlife, history and even local athlete success stories.

And if you are interested in hearing the story of how a Kerryman that always finished last in his teenage years but became World Mountain Running Champion, read Tough as Leather.

## **GORRILLA'S IN THE MIST**

**09 April, 2018 - Barry Murray**

**RACE: Slievenamon**

A proper Irish mountain race. Best way to describe it. Damp, grey and misty up the back roads somewhere. Car park in a farmers yard. Registration in a boggy farmers field. Everyone getting changed in the back of the car.

It happened to be a qualification race too so plenty of fast legs around and plenty of young whipper snappers. With the conditions, the lads had to change the course and opt for plan B. This shortened the course a bit and took out a second climb. But it was warranted as the visibility was really poor.

It was a debut RD for Jay and he had his hands full but everything worked out perfectly and it was very well organised. Plenty of marshals at the start and around the course.

A long cross country drive for me from west Kerry for this one but I arrived in plenty of time. Got a warm up in with 2 lads from the north and was ready for the race start. Like I said, a proper Irish mountain race, with the start at the bottom of a boggy field and the race direction going up.

With these qualification races for all age groups, the juniors all fly off at the start. I had familiar faces from MMRA of Sean, Paul, Henry and Ed to pace myself off and others like Bernard Fortune. It was the first proper up/down mountain race of the year for me so I just wanted to sort of ease into it. Up the boggy field had people panting... and then we were onto the mountain path climb. Sean and Paul went off a bit ahead of me, and I had Bernard and Ed close to me. Sarah McCormack was just ahead too who beats most of us men in these races !

It has a long slog up , visibility worsened, and it was a combination of short slow trotting and hands on the knee's plodding. We hit the first sort of false summit and Barry Harnett was there to guide us towards the main summit. I went slightly off track and Ed called me back. I had Bernard just ahead of me so I was trying to just catch up with him. We came to the big cairn, and I was watching who was coming past me. A few of the flyers were well ahead... I saw Sean and Paul come by me, then Sarah..... then was just about to round the cairn... but didn't see anyone else come around . Bernard and Henry seemed to have disappeared.

Onto the descent then, and it was rocky, slippy and wet. I couldn't see anyone ahead of me and wasn't able to go full gas downhill. Its the sort of running you just need to practice at race pace. I hadn't done much of it recently. So kind of felt out of the race. I was looking forward to the planB route which meant there was an extra section of 2-3km where it was an out and back on level trail. But half way down the descent, Ed came past me and I just let him go. Thought I would be able to catch a few on the out and back section but it was a rough rocky track that was hard to run properly on. plenty of splashing and splashing and jumping over rocks.... still didn't catch back Ed and had no-one behind me. Got to the last turn off where Robbie and a few of the other marshalls were and it was back down the field to the finish. Not sure where I came, maybe 10 or so ahead of me. No Bernard or Henry... as it turned out the took another route off the



summit and ended up on the planA course !

Back to the farmers car park, and the farmer himself was there with a rubber pipe to hose us down. Almost a father Ted moment. Plenty of tea's and sambo's at the local after. 2 of the northern lads I was warming up with happened to be 1st and 2nd. Sarah dominated the ladies race and most of us men too ! Plenty of fast youths and juniors so it will be great to see them progress.

Another great IMRA event , well run by the SE and MMRA lads, and a proper Irish mountain run. I'll look forward to coming back to see it on a clear day.

## THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

19 April, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Devils Glen

Now that I am a Munster renegade , it was nice to be back in familiar surroundings of Wicklow. Always have loved the mid week races for a blast up the hills in the evening. The 2nd race in the trail league, Devils Glen, isn't a mountain race but its still testing and still hard. All these races are as hard as you want to make them !

Old boy Mikey has been running this one for a few years now and makes it seem easy to put everything together. He had so many volunteers that he didn't know what to do with them. I had my self down as a "running volunteer" so I was on race number duty. Plenty of newbies and first timers of this season so it was 7.15 by the time I got my kit on. Usually like to get a bit of a decent warm up in especially for a race like this that goes off fast and hard and stays like that !

A great set of Glendalough AC juniors went of 5 mins before the seniors. Nice to see more and more junior races happening. Mikey gave us a quick debrief and we were off up the Seamus Heaney hill. I had plenty of familiar faces to gauge myself off this time and it was Greg Byrne and Brian Flannelly that went off ahead of me. While Mikey is an old adversary but since he wasn't racing this time, I had another good one, John Bell just ahead of me too. Man of many talents, Graham Bushe was on my shoulder aswell. The one fast young lad, Rory, had shot off the front and was pulling away up the first hill. At least we have some fast youngsters to beat all us M40 and M50 men.

Having raced the course last year I knew that the 2nd section had a hard slog up the river so I didn't want to go off too fast. Greg and Brian crept away from me, and another friend, Luke Lennon was just ahead of me too. By the time we were running down to pass the start/finish area, I was just ahead of a pack with John and Graham, and still within eyesight of Luke and Greg.

The 2nd section has some nice tracks and zig zags. A bit wetter underfoot than last years race in August so a tad bit slippier. I knew that the river path was where I could maybe put the foot down and catch up with the lads. Everyone hates this path as it looks flat but isn't ! it also goes on for maybe 2km.... and it feels like there are several false summits... where you think you are about to turn left back up the hill. I had Luke or Greg just ahead of me but couldn't pull them in. I didn't hear anyone behind me so knew I must have pulled away from John and the others.

Finally back up the hill to follow the route back to the finish area and I wanted to step up a gear but couldn't. Just no spring in the legs. It happens.... for whatever reason, where the legs just feel a bit dead compared to normal. I started to hear feet behind me and was surprised as I thought I was 30secs or so ahead of the next guys. On the last bend I could hear breathing behind me but I was just focusing on putting in the last effort to the finish. On that last little steep climb up, Mr John Bell goes sprinting past me ! I think I was too shocked to react quickly ;- ) ... So once he went ahead, we had reached the top, and then it was just a sprint downhill to the finish. I think he is going to hang up his boots now after that one ;- ) I had to settle for 6th.... But with only 40secs or so between

me and 2nd.... It was a close race.

A good old blast and always great to have a little battle with friends. That's what the IMRA races are great for if you do them regularly, no matter what end of the field you are in. It might be a while though before I can come back up to Leinster for revenge ;)

Big crowd for the prize giving and raffle back in Ashford. Great to be able to catch up with everyone. I didn't even manage to win the M40 with Greg just ahead of me but managed a raffle prize of a bottle of vino so how bad :-)

## SUMMER TIME

01 May, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Clonakilty

First of the summer league munster races and it got the weather it deserved. A beautiful part of the country too. A few km's west of Clonakilty, drive then towards the coast and the registration was in small woods apparently where there used to be a lot of Freke's.

After Silvermines the previous week, I had my mountain running legs ready. But this trail race didn't need them in the slightest. This trail race needs the fast legs. Lovely wooded trails, and a unique section on the beach with just a couple of slight uphill. Great for people new to mountain running or for those fast road runners who want something a little different.

Not as big a crowd as I expected but I saw Tom Blackburn in his singlet so I knew I'd have a race. The legs weren't feeling too fresh from a 3hr bike ride the day before. Then to add insult to injury, I tore my calf muscle while doing a few short sprints while warming up. Excuses aside, RD Paul Deane set us off and I went off first in an attempt to ignore my strained calf. I didn't last too long as some chap with a bag on his back ;) (Paul Minogue) ran ahead of me and looked to have a spring in his step. Another lad I didn't recognise overtook me next and sped off to catch Paul. It was myself and Tom then fairly evenly paced. I wasn't feeling too fresh and by 2km I was just holding on. After some nice wooded trails, we were out on the beach. A great idea and with the sun blazing and a blue sea it was a pretty picturesque setting.

I had Tom and Paul just ahead of me as we plodded up the beach. The young lad was flying a good bit ahead of us. I knew he must have been some local fast road runner !

The only little hill was a path up to a cross. Tom was just ahead of Paul and I was starting to catch Paul on the climb. We touched the cross and then it was downhill dash to the finish. I had no pep in my step . Paul did and I saw him sprinting by Tom in the last 100m to finish ahead of Tom. Just a few seconds between the 3 of us. Young lad , Andrew, was over a minute ahead of us. A look at his recent 5km race which he won in 15.48, explained that !

With the sun shining and blue skies, we had our first "after party" outdoors back in the car park. Its been a long winter for everyone so it was nice to not be rushing to a pub with a warm fire, for a change.

A unique race in a beautiful part of the country. Thanks to RD Paul and crew.

## AH, ITS TOO HOT !

08 May, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Ballyhoura ½

We do seem to love complaining about the weather. With my last 1/2 marathon being Sli Muscraí in the baltic air, here I was in 20C weather getting my running cap on to block the sun !

As much as I like looking for excuses, I'll never say no to the sun. A beautiful day makes everything run smoother and this event needed it. 4 x races, bus transfers, timing chips..... the Munster crew know how to put on a good show.

Having won the first 1/2 marathon on that cold day in Millstreet, I was hoping to repeat the same with what looked like a similar trail course in Ballyhoura. Winning can make you greedy. I have to get back to why I race in the first place, and that's for the fun and enjoyment.

A big crowd for the 1/2 gathered and while we waited for the start, a few of the ultra folk trotted through. I used to be one of these and with other shorter races on at the same time, it can be tough to watch the fresher legs fly by you after you have already been running for several hours !

The race got off to a flying start and Ed Casey set a fast pace. He knew the course and knew that it was good to be at the front with a series of stiles to hop over. I wanted to try and take it easy at the start as I was still nursing a calf strain from the previous week . However, at the same time, I knew that if I wanted to do well in the race I needed to stay with the leaders. Luckily, plenty of foam rolling and trigger point self therapy, seemed to fix the calf and it didn't give me too much bother. I stayed just behind Ed as we hopped over the first few stiles. I didn't see Henry Browne but knew he must have been close. I had fellow club mate Torben Dahl right in front of me and on a good day he would be close if not ahead of me. So first few k's... Ed kept the pace at the front, Torben and myself a few metres behind. We hit the first little climb and Henry shot past us ! I knew he was good on the hills and he was definitely showing some early form.

I wasn't able to keep with him and he drifted off ahead with Ed. Having run side by side with Henry in the Sli Muscraí race, and with also being close to Ed in previous races, I thought I should be able to keep up. The 1/2's are where I can use my endurance experience a bit more. But not on this day, always a multitude of reasons, but just felt like I was working harder than I should be.

Thats how the race more or less went. I managed to pull away from Torben but knew he wasn't too far behind with 1-2 others. There were some flat sections and road sections where I thought I would gain some ground, but I could only ever see Ed and Henry in the distance. There were some steep climbs that sucked the energy out. Hard to pace yourself when you are on your own too. You can drift off and instead of a constant fast march, you can end up plodding along up the hills. Its what makes trail/mountain running so interesting though. Lots of variables. On one of the steep climbs, I did see Henry make his move and pass Ed. After that I lost them but knew that any more hills

would suit Henry. Some people are just very good at going up, and Henry is one of them !

As we got to the last few miles, I tried to step up a gear but couldn't. I had John Hannon close behind me and I managed to stay ahead as we entered on to the last road section.

Back to the school and it was nice to see the finish. Sort of a game of 2 halves for me. Didn't have the pace to keep with the lads in the first half, then ended up solo for the second.

Sitting in the shade after the race was a nice luxury. Some others like Tom Blackburn took to collapsing on the grass, which is another nice luxury given the year we have had so far !

An even tastier luxury was the beer sponsor, 8 degrees, beer for recovery works ;)

Lots of runners crossed the line with either 10k or 70k in the legs. But plenty of beers and food and sunshine made it all worthwhile.

A great day out for all and great event organisation by all the crew.

## **I GOT 99 PROBLEMS BUT A...**

**04 June, 2018 - Barry Murray**

### **RACE: Carrauntoohil**

With almost 100 finishers , this was the biggest field ever for Carrauntoohil since its beginning on the IMRA calendar. What an event it is and great to see so many come from all over the country for this iconic race.

With the big numbers and tight parking, RD Vivian was looking a bit disheveled at first. But I think he is one of these guys that might appear flustered yet with everything under control given his years of experience. A quick look around at the faces registering and you could see that this was going to be a pretty "stacked" field. With 4 previous winners, Tom Blackburn, Bernard Fortune, Diarmuid Collins and Brian Furey..... then a fairly big contingent of "northy" boys..... that meant the race to the top was going to be fairly competitive.

I was arriving with a bit more "specificity" compared to my first Carrauntoohil race 2yrs ago. I picked up John Bell at the Climbers Inn and he couldn't even pronounce the word ;-). But basically, I had run up and down Mt Brandon a few times over recent months, and at least knew what to expect at Carrauntoohil, so I was a lot more "specified" than I was previously for my first ever Carrauntoohil.

The conditions were warm and muggy. Plenty of midgies in the carpark to keep you company. Myself and John arrived early so we had plenty of time for a fresh coffee brew at the back of the car before we got the kit on. Knowing that the Carrauntoohil start is basically heart rate max from the get go, I was eager to get a decent warm up in. Reckon this is key for anyone who generally needs time to build into a race. There is no "building in" time in this race as like I said, you are basically panting after the first 50 meters. Anyway, managed to get a 15-20min jog in before. Then off up the the Kerry Way trail and the start on the side of the climb. A classic Irish Championships race start it is... in a big valley, on the side of a hill, narrow rocky trail... with the Carrauntoohil peak not even visible.. somewhere up there in the sky.

With the big numbers , the start was a tight squeeze. I normally go off at the front, or at least try to, but not for this one. Apart from having about 10 race winners... I wanted to remember how I need to learn from my mistakes... my mistake being last time that I went off too fast and was hurting far too early. So Vivian set us off and I was about 3-4 rows back... we all had to shuffle at the beginning. The first zig zags up to the fence are steep and if you run hard, it's easy to blow a fuse early. I saw maybe Brian and Diarmuid going off fast with some Newcastle vests also and from the video clip, a young lad (who is a fast guy) went off course on one of the bends. I was happy to shuffle up the first few zig zags with John Bell and Bernard Fortune not far ahead of me.

Up over the first fence and I was a lot happier than before. No fuses blown and a much steadier start. Now I knew we had to trudge hard up to Caher. Here the field quickly lined out.... I could see a few of the MMRA vests ahead of me.. Tom, Ed Casey and Paul Deane.... then I was in a pack with 3-4 others... masters vet Gerard Maloney and Dingle

Adventure Race organizer Noel O Leary. This is a steep hike and marshy underfoot. You just try to get into a rhythm... not much running to be done. As we climbed, the mist got closer and by the time we were approaching the ridge... the visibility was poor. My own pacing was working as I was starting to feel stronger as we went on and was starting to pick off a few. I caught Ed Casey and Paul Deane, guys I've been finishing just behind in the MMRA races as we approached the ridge. I had Tom Blackburn just ahead of me and could see my old adversary John Bell not too far ahead either. I also had to check twice and blink as I saw Paul Mahon just ahead of Tom ;-). He was having a stormer of a race well ahead of guys he is normally behind. I could only imagine how even faster he could have went topless but thankfully for all concerned on Carrauntohill on this day he remained fully clothed ;-)

Crossing the ridge was tricky with the poor visibility as its very technical, very easy to go over on an ankle or two. I remember my advice from Jason Kehoe, which was to stay high here. I sort of did but ended up just following Tom who I thought would now know the best route.

As you come off the ridge you face the last big climb up to the peak. Its a rocky steep climb and the top looks miles away even though its actually quite short in distance. It's here , depending on what part of the field you are in, where I started seeing where I'm placed and how far the next guys are ahead of me. 2Yrs ago I was further back with leaders passing me while I was still coming off the ridge I think. Then guys like Alan Ayling where flying by me just as I began the climb up. It's what makes this sort of race so interesting. The terrain, the climbing, the navigation, the technical descents.... all can suit some guys very well. They might be guys that don't do as good on a flatter more trail type course. Alan is one of these and I do like seeing guys beat me in these sorts of races that they are very specifically suited to . I didn't see Alan this time as he was further behind and having on "off" day. He probably had 3 races already done that week before and a few big mountain bike rides, late nights and partying too hard (which on speaking to him afterwards, wasn't too far off)

So first off the top I saw was Seamus Lynch with Brian Furey going well not far behind and another Newcastle man in chase. Then it was a few of the heads I know... Diarmuid, Brian Mullins , then Bernard and Henry Browne who I knew would be going well on this course after his ½ marathon win at Ballyhoura. John Bell and Pat Foley (another race winner of many league races) came towards me as I got closer to the top. So as I hit the cross, I turned and started the descent to see if I could catch up with a few. The top was misty and foggy.... with big groups of hikers around staring at us. The descent is rocky and steep and you start off just trying to stay upright. I could hear plenty of shouts of encouragement from others but I couldn't look up to acknowledge them !

Down onto the technical ridge and I was following Tom Blackburn with Paul Mahon just ahead of us. There was another newcastle man with us and MMRA man JP O Connell too. We seemed to be all moving at more or less the same pace. The climb back up Caher is a heart breaker but again this time I was feeling much better. We stayed high up on the narrow single track where you feel like to are running on a tight rope. With the mist you couldn't see the drop off which was probably a blessing. So there was a pack of 5 of us...and I knew we had to hit the flattish section down Curraghmore. With adventure racer navigation expert Paul Mahon and former race winner Tom Blackburn... I was happy to just follow them. It seemed like we were drifting too far left but I was none the wiser. After a few minutes of gradual descending I could see Paul in the corner of my



eye veering back off right. Tom soon did the same. We met Pat Foley who just had a fall, I asked him if he was okay and he seemed fine. He joined us soon after too. The pack of us then all traversed back over to find the route. We must have been running for at least 5mins. As we eventually met the route again, Ed Casey went flying down past us so we knew we had gone off course by a bit.

I wasn't too annoyed as it is the sort of thing to expect on a race like this. The rest of the descent was more boggy and involved picking a low or a high line. Tom, JP and Newcastle man moved away from me and I was just ahead of Paul. Pat Foley had another fall which allowed me to just stay ahead of him too ! I myself had about 3 near misses... where I was practically horizontal but managed to stay upright. Again, thinking back about how my quads felt 2yrs ago, like someone had hammered them with a sledge hammer, I was just delighted with how I wasn't going through that same experience again. Long hard descending is a tricky business and you need to sort of switch on to it and go hell for leather if you really want to gain time. I was more letting gravity do the trick and race mode was sort of switched off. I guess it was a case of finishing 15th or 19th .... which consciously I wasn't too fussed about.

As I finally approached the last fence, back onto the Kerry Way, I had a race to keep ahead of Paul and Pat down the zig zags. A spritely fella, who I didn't know, but was with me on the climb, pipped past me and I didn't end up making it a sprint finish.

Happy to finish in one piece this time and actually felt like I didn't empty the tank . A quick check with Nora who was diligently recording the results old school with her watch, saw I finished in 1.41. Almost 10mins quicker than my previous time. With our diversion, we must have lost a few more minutes so it could have been a time in the 1.30's . But on this occasion, times or placing didn't matter too much. IMRA has lots of different types of races which test various skills and technique. Carrauntoohill is a pure mountain race, a race that deserves respect and it is one those races that just finishing it is reward enough. Competing at the pointy end and racing for position definitely places a lot more demand. So fair play to winner Seamus Lynch and Brian in 2nd and Colm Murtagh in 3rd. Actually hats off to all the Newcastle lads as its a long haul for them plus I doubt they get to become that familiar with the course.

Recovery involved washing down in the river with more midgies, then brown bread liquer ice cream in the local inn ! A great crowd gathered back in the Climbers Inn for the prize giving and raffle draw. A quick pint and a chat, then this time a 1hr drive back to the new home on the Dingle Peninsula. Another thing that was a lot easier than the previous time. I'm looking forward already to Carrauntoohill next year !

## **EASTSIDER REUNION**

**07 June, 2018 - Barry Murray**

### **RACE: Prince Williams Seat**

Well I'm now heading back west after a flying visit to the eastside. A work trip in the big smoke coincided nicely with one of my favorite times of the week... The Wednesday night mini running festival.

And what an evening it was.... sun splitting the rocks, a dry grassy field for registration and a big crowd for what was a newbie to the Leinster League circuit. Sort of new. I had been missing the Wed night bashes with living out far west and being even too far away from MMRA summer league races. So it was great to be back in the game and great to catch up again with all the gang.

Dreading a M50 crawl southbound, I got picked up early by Torben and we hit the road. But thankfully, we didn't get held up and cruised out to arrive over an hour early ! We weren't the only eager beavers as already there was about 50 cars.. and some setting it was, overlooking the sugar load and the sea. Great thing about the IMRA is how close a community it is. Torben sorted me out with a lift, Gav-Scott Byrne sorted me with a punch on his race voucher and Andrew Hanney sorted me with a bandana.. nice one lads ;- ) Had time to relive the Carrauntoohil experience with Alan Ayling and I think we both knew that the legs wouldn't be feeling too fresh this evening. A good few other Carrauntoohil heads around too... with Brian, Diarmuid and Bernard .... I was hoping they weren't feeling too fresh either !

After a bit of a warm up and some strides, I realised this was going to be a sweat fest. But still, I'll never get sick of the sun ! Shuffled my way to the front line and it was good (sort of) to see plenty of friendly competition. I was hoping John Bell would get stuck in traffic, but no joy, there he was ready to go... no stress as always. Warren Swords was looking eager and finding his form again. Mikey was fully loaded with beetroot juice and still trying to get the taste out of his mouth ! Even had our national ultra legend Eoin Keith was lining up with his race number 50 on. It had been a long time since we both raced together and with his new age group, he was back for more glory ;- ) Then there was the slight fast looking guys... Killian and Christian.... who the rest of us knew would be floating around the course.

Anyway, after about 2hrs, Jason finally got the race underway ;- ) He's definitely a man of details, fair play, as it shows your meticulous with the planning.

One of the weirdest things happened as we shot off. After about 20metres, we see a car driving down towards us on the narrow trail. It immediately starts reversing ! Diarmuid Collins is out front, with the rest of us just behind.... the car manages to reverse back up the hill.... and we all then manage to veer off right around him. Definitely a first for an IMRA race I think.

Off on the first fire trail and I wanted to go out hard. I knew there was a single track up through the forest and I also just wanted to be close to the front. I think where you place yourself early in a race can sometimes dictate how the rest of the race goes for you. Diarmuid was still out front, with Neilus just behind, who was only doing his 2nd IMRA race of the season. The fast young lads were just waiting to jet off. Myself and Brian Furey exchanged places .. and he just got ahead of me before the forest climb. So I knew I had the lads, John , Warren and Mikey hot on my tails. Legs were feeling a bit tender on the first climb but I kept up with Brian and we passed Neilus at the first fire road junction. Thought Brian might have tired legs from Carrauntoohil but he moved off fast and I never saw him again until the finish. Gavin Scott Byrne slipped by me and

somehow had good speed in his legs with 127km to cover on Saturday !

Biggest climb of the day was up to Prince Willies seat... a long steady climb that was runnable but fatiguing. The foreign name bloke went by me here, Marcin I think. It was a hot steady climb and I was just digging in to keep the pace. Could still see Diarmuid, with Gav also just ahead. Next minute, the Bell trots by me and we all want to know what he's smokin ;- ) I tucked in behind him and tried to not let him get away. At the summit, he was just a few metres ahead, with Diarmuid, Gav and Marcin just a few metres ahead also.

On the descent, the legs where feeling a bit sore. Fast enough descent with lots of jumping over rocks. I was trying to pull back the lads but we seemed to be all running the same speed. Back on a bit of fireroad section and I started closing in on Gav. Back down then through the tree's again and I could hear breathing behind me. Was thinking it must have been Warren as I know he is particularly good at fast descending. The forest trail was fun, lots of ducking under tree's and fast twists and turns.

Back out onto the last fire trail road and I know these sections can suit me more than some others. Just seem to have that extra gear on very runnable sections. Had Diarmuid, John and Marcin just ahead of me and closing in on them ever so slightly. No breathing behind me so knew I had gotten ahead of Gav and Warren. Back down the hill to the finish behind the 3 lads, Diarmuid, John and Marcin. Fairly flat out and hot... what a great race. Mikey was a bit further back with Bernard , blaming the beetroot ;- )

Flap jacks from the scouts and a couple of pints after with a big crowd back in Enniskerry. Like I said, these Wed nights are like mini running festivals. And IMRA knows how to host them without much fuss and with little cost to the runners.

Well done RD Jason and helpers. Might see some of you out west for the Connaught Champs. And don't forget there is a little mountain called Mt Brandon to run up and down in September ;- )

## DING DONG

14 June, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Mt Hillary

If a picture paints a thousand words, just have a look at the finishing photo's for this race !

With my first Wednesday night summer league race done back on home turf at Prince Williams Seat, I was back in my new home of Munster for my first summer league race out west this week. Banteer is just about reachable on a Wednesday evening from Dingle, so I decided to get in the car and head to the rebel county.

After the weeks of scorching weather, we had our first drizzly grey day but fortunately it had cleared up around Banteer. Race was up Mt Hillary and marked the launch of a new athletics club based down there so lots of local interest.

There were a few "firsts" for this race and one was registration at a theatre, not an operating one, an acting one ! Hard to know who will show up for these races as you can have anyone from Cork, Limerick, Tipp or Kerry. I met Brian Mullins in the carpark, freshly shaven, who has been putting in some great runs recently. Didn't see Sean Quirke who has been winning most of these summer league races so I knew at least I had one place made up !

Love it how they do things in Munster. After a lengthy race briefing at the leinster league the week before, this RD gave us 2 sentences and then blew the whistle !

Off we went on a slight uphill on fire trail . I knew we had about 3km of this so I didn't want to fly off and blow a gasket. James McIntyre led out, with myself, Paul Minogue and Brian Collins just behind. After about 2k... it was just Paul leading, with myself and James behind. I knew Paul has good speed on the flats but on the big climbs or descent, he slows down, and as we hit the first single track downhill through the tree's, he stepped aside to let myself and James through... very polite !

That put myself and James out front. Think we only had about 3k gone. I knew there was one big climb. My plan was to wait for that and then shoot off. As we hit the climb, James stayed ahead of me and was trotting up. I was doing a mix of trotting and hiking. It was fairly steep, and windy and wet as we climbed up. About half way up, Brian Mullins trotted by me and told me to stick with him ! James had gotten about 10 yards ahead of me. I was feeling good at the start of the race but the climb was starting to knock me. Maybe went out a little too fast on the flats... as its hard not to.

Anyway, just up the top and there were a few tree's to jump over. Brian was just ahead, with James not about 20 yards ahead.

After the summit, I knew we had a race downhill all the way back to the finish. It wasn't a technical or steep descent... just a bit stoney and narrow single tracks. I got my second wind and opened up a bit more... started to catch back up with Brian... caught him and sped by him on a flatter section. Always reminds me of how IMRA runners can

be slower/faster based simply on the terrain/gradient. Brian is a great climber and steep descender. Any flat or more fast runnable sections... and he's not as fast. Sort of the opposite for me. So I pass Brian and now have James about 15 yards ahead of me.

We join back on to the fire trail... not exciting for more mountain runners, but good for me as I can run faster here. I put the head down and gradually pulled James back in. Was pretty full gas at this stage so had to just run behind him for a few seconds to recover.

I had no idea exactly where the finish was. I looked up and saw some hi-vis vests.... so started to put a sprint on... just clawed ahead of James.. but as we got to the people, we had to keep going as they were just photographers !

So we make another turn and hurtle down the fire trail... another person ahead of us at the next corner. So James puts the sprint in.. I try to follow... we get to the person... and keep going... so one last time I put in another sprint.. empty myself.... look back and I have about 10 meters on James... we are both struggling.... I keep looking back while trying to sprint... and it seemed he couldn't catch back up... we make one final turn.... and I see him in the corner of my eye with a full on sprint... he's 5 meters behind me all of a sudden... I do one last sprint.... the finish is just in front of us... just a few people and kids.. no cones to aim for... so I just stick my neck and arms out like Usain Bolt ! James comes up right beside me and we finish literally neck to neck !

Think I let a few expletives out so apologies to any of the younger audience !

We both practically fell over the line... after having to sprint to the line several times !

Anyways, it was a proper ding dong battle and what racing is all about I guess. You would think M40's would get a bit less competitive, but that doesn't seem to be the case !

We all went back to the theatre after for the traditional Munster spread.... well this one was one of the biggest yet... Mt Hillary will be a club that will be well fueled on sweet stuff ! Thanks to all organisers and crew. A great evening.

## **MIGHTY MANGERTON**

**18 June, 2018 - Barry Murray**

### **RACE: Mangerton**

This one goes out to the Loopers, the Glenageenty ones ! as well as the rest of us that raced this course !

As I usually end with thanking the volunteers but I'm going to start with it this time. The Glenageenty Loopers are a trail running club based just outside Tralee and the area is home to the living legend John Lenihan. Given Mangerton is not too far from them, they helped put this race together. Even though these championship races are technically unmarked, they had marshalls high up the mountain at the main turning points. With the mist and poor visibility they even had the section to the summit marked out. Then they had enough post race grub to feed an army. And even though it was a 1pm start, some of them were there setting up since 8.30am. So fair play lads, well done !

As for the rest of us loopers, Mangerton ain't no walk in the park. I had never done it before but I did remember John Lenihan actually mentioning to me that it was very "runnable". So oblivious to what he considers "runnable" I was thinking this might suit me.

I arrived early given it is one of the closest MMRA championship races to me, bar Mt Brandon. I left the Dingle peninsula in wet misty conditions, but arrived at Mangerton to warm dry air and clouds clearing.

Managed to get a couple of km's of the first part of the route in as a warm up and could immediately see that it wasn't that runnable on the downhill... big rocky twisty and turny single track.

A decent enough crowd gathered with a good munster contingent that I knew would be going well... with former multiple winner Tom Blackburn and the likes Sean Quirke, Henry Browne and a couple of young fast lads... then there was other good MMRA runners like Ed Casey , Paul Deane and JP o Donnell. My body double, James McIntyre, after our joint win, was lining out too and we joked about how maybe we wouldn't be sprinting to the line in this one.

If you've read my reports before, you will have heard me say many times, how IMRA races keep teaching you and challenging you. Mangerton is one of those. If you are good at the mid week league races, you may not that good at these championship type races. The skillset required is very different... wooded trails, gradual climbs, smooth descents..... are very different from rocky steep climbs, hiking, picking your line, technical not very runnable descents.

Some guys have strengths in some of these area's and weaknesses in others. I myself have strengths maybe in the trail, steep climbing, runnable descents.... but non runnable trails and steep technical descending, I am not as good. But this is good as it puts manners on you !

Others are strong in all area's... that's rare and probably takes a long time to develop. Tom and Sean would be two in this race that have most of those skills... either could win a flattish 10k or a Mangerton type race.

So anyways, we're off up the first rocky track and young lads Naoise and Conor sprint off... it was a faster start than I expected. I was with Henry and Sean .. and Tom and others close behind. The other difference with this type of route is that there is not just one single track... there are a few tracks, all leading in the same direction, but when you are racing, it's hard to always pick the best one. As the climb steepened... Sean followed after the young lads, I was back a few yards with Henry just ahead of me. As we approached the mist , I was just trying to keep with Henry who I know is a good climber.. I had Tom right beside me . He manages to keep trotting up the climb whereas I do a combination of trotting and fast hiking. We had another runner just pass us... didn't know him, but he had road shoes on so I was thinking we might see him on the descent anyway !

Up on to the summit section and it got very misty. As I said, there was a marshall there wrapped up and then we had a sort of out and back to the summit cairn. Myself and Tom weren't too far behind Naoise, Henry and Sean... with young Conor still out ahead. The summit section was like a sponge... so it was hard to run without sinking a few inches every foot step. As we turned around the summit cross, I went just ahead of Tom and was looking forward to a "runnable" descent.

Another thing about these championship races is that you need to have your bearings or be familiar with the route, especially if its low cloud and poor visibility. So Tom passed me as we cut around the top of the bowl but I was happy to follow his line. As soon as we started to descend steep, I was just trying to stay with Tom, we both then passed the "road shoe" guy who called us "mountain goats" ! Tom then pulled away from me and played to his strengths. He seemed to be able to pick direct lines and fly over the rocks and keep his pace. I could see Noaise and I think Conor ahead.... and Tom was catching up with them. The descent got steeper and rockier.. big boulders... jumps off small crevices... twisty and turny..... runnable only for the select few I think !

Its pretty dangerous and you need to keep your focus. I get a bit annoyed as I am not really out of breath.. but I'm not going as fast as I should or could. Also I guess I am more the cautious type..... . just as I was thinking these things, I slipped on wet rock and went down on my side.... nothing cracked, so I just got straight back up and let the adrenaline do its job. Just a few grazes and cuts so no major drama.

The descent was particularly long.... felt like it went on for an age... and also there were different little tracks to take and some were better than others. On the very last bit... There was a V in the track.... I stupidly took the track through big bushes of heather.. had to wack my way through.. as I got out the other side... .JP o Donnell, who took the grassy track around the bushes, flew by ahead... with just about 100m to go ! I tried to sprint to catch back up but we were too close to the finish. Had to settle for 7th.

Great win by Sean and Henry having a good season taking 2nd. Tom who I was with most of the way, showed how strong his descending skills are by taking 3rd.

A proper mountain race. It was like a field hospital at the end though with all the

casualties... I only had a few scratches... James McIntyre came in with his knee cap showing... so we patched him up and sent him off for stitches ! A few other fallers had head wounds..... so there was plenty of blood to mop up thanks to first aider Micheal !

Definitely a mighty one.



## ITS NOT ABOUT THE RUN

02 July, 2018 - Barry Murray

### Race: Mweelra

#### Part 1

The Connaught Champs weekend is a weekend like no other. I don't want to big it up too much in fear of it "selling out" but since I like writing stories, here goes !

Driving up from Kerry in 31C heat was a bit of a camel trek. You tend to think living out west means you are close to other places in the west, but you can be traveling longer than those departing from the other side of the country. As we approached Westport around 8pm, the temperature was still 28C, so with the stunning views of Clew Bay and Croagh Patrick it was like another world. Remembering a nice bistro place past the marina that I went to with the Bell brothers the previous year, I stopped off here again, this time with the lady. A nice way to start the weekend, good food, sitting outside looking across the bay. A few km's out past Croagh Patrick and we landed in the picturesque spot of Old Head. The campsite is situated just a few mins walk from the beach/harbour of Old Head which in the heat was like a tropical paradise.

We pitched the tent and a good few of the IMRA folk were already settling in sitting out on the grass tucking into a few beers. It was 10pm, everyone in shorts and t-shirt, cooler boxes to the fore. Amazing the contrast to various other IMRA events and just your own camping experiences in Ireland so its such a pleasure. A few of the gang then headed off to the local for the traditional Friday night pints before the big race. The rest of us stayed around the campsite and other late arrivals set up camp, close to midnight. A long day for most people so there wasn't too much partying to be done and sleep was preferred option.

A balmy sunrise had most of us up in the early hours. Myself and Mary grabbed our towels and the kettle and hit the beach for an early morning swim. It was 7.30am and must have already been 20C. Lots of pinch yourself moments with this heatwave. With the race start at 1.30pm, there was a long morning to kill. We got a few swims in and then later in the morning cooked out on the beach. Eggs, black pudding and some homemade porridge bread made a nice brunch. Back on the campsite, Justin in his old VW camper, had the stove out making pancakes topped with Nutella for a more continental twist. People then started to pack up around midday and the race atmosphere started to develop. I had never done Mweelra before or even visited it before so was looking forward to the new adventure. A beautiful drive out west through the quaint village of Louisburgh brings you to an edge of the earth location. Blue Atlantic, white sanded beaches, and green grassy imposing peaks. With the previous day of 31C, it still felt hot, but thankfully the temperature was 23-24C. It has to be one of the most picturesque registration locations, a carpark right beside the white sanded beach, looking up towards the summit of Mweelra.

There was a big IMRA turnout with the carpark already full with 45mins still before the race start. With these championship races, especially if you don't know the route, its very hard to know what to expect of yourself and how to predict the race. With the

league races, you know the course is marked, you may have done the route before and there are the usual heads that you race against regularly. The championship races are not marked, are up higher mountains and more "off piste", with a broader selection of runners from around the country. So lots more of unknowns.

Got the stove out and kettle boiling out the back of the car for a fresh coffee brew. A nice pre race kicker. Managed to get a little warm up in and some strides to open up the legs. As we then gathered for the race briefing, a quick look around showed a good number of experienced and fast legs. As RD Eoin gave the briefing, some very late arrivals added to the mix with Sean Quirke and Peter O Farrell literally running from the cars 30 seconds before the start!

Off we went as it was a fairly calm start as we jogged up the road section. I guess this was the calm before the storm as we all knew the going was going to get tough. I stayed at the front with Brian Furey, young Naoise, and Newcastle Ac man Colm Murtagh. The pace was fine for me so I just said to myself I would try to stick to the front guys for as long as the climb as I can. After the road, we veered off to a gravel path. I was right on the heels still of Brian and the others, with Sean Quirke and Brian Mullins beside me. I didn't see my old adversary John Bell so I knew I must have been going a bit better than normal. Even though it was hot, I was feeling good..... it was over a week of heatwave weather so I think the body had adapted somewhat by this stage. Something to do with Heat Shock Proteins, but I won't bother getting technical here.

Anyway, after the gravel path we are sent through a gate into the open mountain. Myself and John had spoken to Joe Lawlor just before the start, and one thing he recommended was to look back on the gate when you go through it so that you can eyeball a marker for when you are descending. I did this and I lined up the gate with a big white walled bungalow house directly behind it.

So off up the open mountain. The first bit is not too steep.... grassy knolls but we were able to run most of it. The first sort of marker is a ravine that you can kind of hand rail up. I remember there was talk of either going up the saddle or going directly up. This is where there was some divide in the front runners. I just stayed with Brian Furey who I thought had done it before or won it before, with Naoise and Colm just ahead. To my right, Brian Mullins and 1-2 others seemed to drift off. This is where Championship races get confusing or exciting, whichever was you want to look at them.

So the climb gradually gets steeper as you go up the ravine. I was still just back from Brian Furey, and was climbing with Sean Quirke. I know Sean from the Munster races and he has finished ahead of me in every race we've done together so I knew if I could just stay with him I'd be doing alright. He was one of the late arrivals and it turned out he had spent a couple of hours extra in the car trying to find the place! So not ideal preparation for him, but everyone has their curveballs to deal with.

As we approached the saddle, the climbing got tough, rocky shale and steep. Hands on the knees stuff. Also, it was a sort of sheltered spot and there was a dead heat. Henry Brown caught up with myself and Sean and the 3 of us ploughed up. Brian and moved a bit further away from us and was closing in on Naoise and Colm. More climbing and we eventually got to the col where there was some rocky sections to jump through. One last climb then up to the summit and suddenly we see some others converging. They had

taken the direct route and it seemed they got a little ahead as it was a shorter route but steeper. So it was Naoise, Colm and Brian Furey ahead, with myself and Henry not far back. Brian Mullins was one who took the direct route and was just ahead of us. I said I would start counting when I saw Brian Furey coming back down to see how far he actually was. Turned out it was 30-40secs. I turned around the summit where summit marhsall Karen was bravely manning her post. From here I wasn't too sure what to do. I had Henry and Brian Mullins just ahead of me. Sean Quirke had dropped off a bit behind me. I couldn't see where Naoise, Colm and Brian Furey had gone.

So I just got my running legs going again on the descent, would loved to have stopped and taken in the views as they are specatular, thanks to those who did stop and take pics ! I followed Brian and Henry, thinking that they probably know where they are going. They are both good steep descenders so they got a bit ahead of me. I could still see them so followed there tracks. We ended up taking the direct route down, which involved this almost vertical descent down a rocky gully, I slid down some of it on my arse. At the bottom, it brought us out onto the open mountain and I just aimed for Henry who was wearing a blue top. I couldn't see Brian Mullins at this stage and his downhill skills helped him. I couldn't see Naoise, Colm or Brian Furey anywhere so was wondering what happened to them. The descent down the mountain and by the ravine is runnable enough although lots of jumps to do over grassy mounds. I was trying to keep my pace up but was catching back up with the lads. I had one or two quick glances behind and didn't see anyone. I then hit low cloud and started cursing it. The view went and I couldn't see where I was going. I sort of just went with my own sense of direction and thankfully as I came out of it, I could see the bungalow house that I marked at the start of the run. I lined my run up with this and made good ground without veering of course. Got to the gate and remembered the 1km or so of road running left to do ! Normally I like this fast sort of finish but the legs were hurting at this stage and the thirst was growing too. I managed to keep going and didn't want to get by Sean Quirke who I knew wasn't that far behind me.

Crossed the line and didn't see too many runners around. It's the first sign that you did well, when its quiet at the finish ! Just saw Brian Mullins and Henry. A couple of minutes later, Brian Furey arrived in followed by Naoise and Colm. Turned out they didn't take the direct route down and went more or less back down along the saddle. A quick check with RD Eoin and I was 3rd place. I guess if Brian, Naoise and Colm had of taken the same route as us, it would have placed me 6th. But thats all part of championship races and I have gone wrong myself more times than I have gone right.

A few hours later ;-), John Bell crossed the line and didn't look his normal together self. He was immediately looking to collapse in the shade so I brought him back to the refreshments table where he got a hit of coke and an umbrella ! Old man Paul Mahon, celebrating his ½ centuary , had a good finish as seems to be getting faster with age. Tom Blackburn was also one of those who didn't take take the more direct line and seemed to veer of course. Becky was first lady home with another good win. Another few hours later ;-), the other Bell brothers came in , with the younger Kev almost catching the speedier Peter.

Plenty of cold drinks and a mountain of sandwiches were kindly provided by Daniella and crew. Myself and Mary headed down to the sea for a cool down and a beer on the beach with the Bells. Not a bad way to recovery. I heard there was prize giving so ran back up

to the car park... my first championship medal so had to collect ! Was actually feeling okay and still able to run... so happy that I was set up nicely for the bbq.

That sets me up for Part 2 of this story. But Mweelra was a blast and an amazing part of the country to be in with the heat. Hats off again to RD Eoin and crew, summit marhall Karen and everyone who makes this CC happen. But its not just about the run ;-)

## ITS NOT ABOUT THE RUN

03 July, 2018 - Barry Murray

### Part II

After the prize giving and raffle at Mweelra, it was back to the campsite at Old Head to prepare for arguably what is the biggest event of the whole weekend, the beach BBQ !

As much as I like racing, the Connaught Champs is more than just running. Its a festival vibe and its summer time. After the effort up and down Mweelra in the heat, we needed some downtime back at the campsite. A few of us congregated in the Bells tent and cracked open some beers. It was almost 7pm by the time we started the move down to the beach for the bbq. The setting for this is sort of like Leonardo Di Caprio's movie "The Beach". When we arrived, Alan Ayling was chopping wood like a madman. We had an upgraded bbq, Stuart's one was laid to rest. Rachel, thanks to the generous IMRA committee, had orderd a tonne of burgers and jumbo sausages. We then had a big fold out table with plenty of salads and dressing, even a happy pear hummus for gods sake ;-). Some homemade sourdough by Maikke, and plenty of buckets of sea water and ice for the beers.

We had 4 x cooks, myself, John Bell, Becky and Donal..... it was a hot pit, my eyes are still red from it. A bigger crowd than last year, so thankfully we had plenty to go round. As the sun set, the wind picked up and the temperature dropped, but we had a big fire going to keep us all warm. We even built a 2nd fire for the outsiders, those MMRA people ;-). As per usual, there was more than just beer going round. In fact, wood chopper Alan, kicked off the evening with some of his finest Buckfast, not quite the connoisseurs choice but thats how Alan rolls. Peter Bell had some of the finer stuff, a 10yr old scottish single malt, which was being passed around. As the darkness set in, the entertainment kicked off with Feno and his six string. He belted out some great tunes and we had some good sing alongs. Feno too was enjoying the single malt in between songs but he still remembered his chords and words. The fires got bigger, and buckfast Alan seemed to enjoy adding bigger pieces to an already blazing fire. Tom Blackburns daughter was making these "Smores" which I never heard of before, melted marshmallow in between two chocolate biscuits. Feno lasted a good while, but the single malts took their toll and he had to retire.

The numbers dwindled but there was still a good crew around the two fires late into the night..... I had managed not to take too many single malts myself this time but was still well over the limit. My other half had enjoyed the strong stuff a bit more so I had to escort her home ! It was well into the early hours of sunday morning but it marked the end of another brilliant bbq and beach party.

The next morning, reminded me of the previous year. Grey clouds, a bit misty, and about 10C cooler than the previous day. There was a lot of slow moving bodies and sore heads. I had more or less decided before the bbq that I was going to give Nephin a miss. Myself and Mary wanted to climb Croagh Patrick instead. Plus, I knew Nephin was going to be a slog and I didn;t want to tarnish my 3rd place result from the day before ! Maybe I wussed out and I know I'll get abuse no doubt.... but I guess thats why I wrote the title of these reports.

It's a slow grind packing up and taking down the tents with a sore head and in the grey misty weather. It's even a slower grind for those that managed to clear the beach up and all the bbq stuff after the party. I don't know how they did it. I know Gavin arrived back with his Range Rover full to the brim with all the stuff so all I can say is fair play and fair dues. I normally would like to help out with these sorts of things but I find packing up our own stuff was a struggle !

The head and the weather didn't make Nephin any more appealing to me. But it is an adventure and fair play to everyone that did do it. Eoin and Daniella deserve a special mention as they are not only part of the festival thing and camping out themselves, but they organizing everything for the races and heading off a few hours earlier than everyone else. Another special mention is to Brian Mullins, who did the double. Now maybe he was staying in some luxurious B&B and was early to bed both nights with his herbal tea ;-). So we'll have to get him out camping next year and out to the bbq to see if it is possible to do well in both races ! I had stats man Rene Borg look up results and apparently Peter O Farrell and Brian Furey have done the double before. Were they camping and at the bbq too ??

Maybe we should have a separate category next year. MBBQ and FBBQ. ;-)

So I started these reports with the intention of not getting the CC to "sell out" !! Maybe I have failed.. but remember, its not about the run.

## **BROCKAGH BELLS**

**13 July, 2018 - Barry Murray**

**RACE: Brockagh**

A 5hr drive cross country in a camper is probably not the best preparation for a mountain race, but enough excuses. Managed to arrive just after 6pm, jumped out of the camper, grabbed a bag off Rachel, and started taking cash at the entrance for the "poor" farmer.

Had to get changed for the race in a bit of a hurry. Usually prefer to have a relaxed build up but still had time to get a jog in with the lads and start getting the craic going. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, was sort of my intention. I have written before about starting off controlled and building in to the race. However, over time, I've managed to get some speed back in to the legs and I have been able to go off at the front of most races. So that was the plan here. A nice brief race briefing from RD Rachel, and we were off.

I went off and led the race for about 5 seconds. Barry Minnock then sped off but I thought I'd catch up with him again on the technical sections ;-). Up the first few fireroads that Mikey loves and the pace was fairly tempo. I was happy to get the legs turning over, and Neilus went a few steps ahead of me. Up the first slight drag and old man Peter O Farrel shuffled by me and aimed for Barry. So I'm in 4th at this stage but its very early doors. Before we hit the open mountain, I had deep breathing on my shoulder, caught a glimpse of a blue singlet and saw it was Bernard. I led us into the ferns, which with the sun made them tough to navigate. I could still see Peter, Barry and Neilus ahead of us through the glare. As we approached the side of the mountain, Bernard skipped by me and I just then tried to stay on his shoulder. He got a few yards ahead and just before we turned right up the mountain, I heard a shout from Damian MacParland telling us to go right. I then thought Bernard had missed the right turn and I sort of stopped and headed up right, shouting at Bernard at the same time. He kept going though so I immediately knew he was still on the right track. It meant I just lost maybe 5 seconds on him and Damian and a couple of others closed in on me. When the racing is that tight, seconds do count !

Anyway, OAP Paul Mahon was at the official turn up the hill and this led us up the summit. No trail here, just marching through the gorse/heather. Good for the longer legged people. I had Karl Maguire on my shoulder here and another lad I didn't know. Bernard had managed to get a bit ahead of us. I was thinking once we hit the summit, I could get the running legs going again and make up some ground.

Karl and the other lad were just ahead of me. The descent is lovely grassy not too steep flat out running. Just didn't have the pep in my step I thought I would have. I was just behind Karl who was moving well with the other lad just ahead. Thought for some reason we might catch up on non technical Barry M but as Peter pointed out, that was a con.

I knew we had the fireroad to the finish so I was holding back some gas for this. Karl didn't lose any pace though and I couldn't make much ground. 1-2mins in a race can be won or lost in a variety of ways. And in these IMRA races, no matter what part of the race you are in, you can beat someone you know one week by 1-2mins, and the next week they can do the same to you. So many factors dictate this - the route, the conditions, your day, the side of the bed you got out of, etc. So anyway, I started off in 1st, finished 7th, so probably not my best paced race. But numbers are just numbers. I always prioritize just enjoying the occassion and having fun. And it was. Lovely warm evening, fast running, in the garden of Ireland. The fun didn't stop though, and as I was just getting my breath back at the finish line, there was a big cheer. Peter Bell crossed the line with his hands in the air, as if he just won the Irish Championship ! He might as

well of, as you can read in his report, his first time ever beating his bro John in something like 120 races ! He even beat Mikey too but Mikey is still getting the holiday out of his system !

Probably the most important part of my race was getting a few of the lads back to the new camper for some cold beers. I was actually thinking about this all through the race ! No better way to rehydrate. Might have to get Mikey on the beers soon too ;- ) Packed crowd back in Lynhams for the big match. Good to be able to catch up with everybody. Recovery is tricky at these evening races. Not much chance of a proper "recovery" meal. So beers it was, and then back in the camper, pistachio nuts and parmesan cheese was the odd selection of choice. But c'est la vie. Camped out in Trooperstown dusty carpark and got a rinse down in the river in the morning.





young lad. Great to see young blood out front to be honest... we can't have old boys like Bernard and Tom still winning !

I turned the summit... and thought I could get going on the descent ... but I had no gas . The descent was steep and rocky off the summit.. and I was sort of tip toeing down as I had no umff.

It got worse from here.... Back up the climb to the ridge and I had Tom just ahead of me. A Mourne runner passed me and I couldn't keep up. On the ridge I was okay and then the big descent down the zig zags.... it was like I was getting squeezed of all energy with each step.... it was getting hotter as we descended too... and the legs were just feeling more and more like jelly.

Tom had gotten away from me at this stage. I was surprised no one else was passing me.... maybe everyone was suffering too. Off the zig zags without a fall miraculously .... and the 3-4km of nice trail... more or less downhill, was left.

Here I am normally thinking - great... pick up the pace and finish strong. But it was the opposite. I was just dead. Actually felt like lying down. Managed somehow to keep this one slow pace... like a pace that I have used during a 100mile ultra.

John Kinsella managed to pass me and I could tell he was suffering too. I was like bambie on ice at this stage. I couldn't control my legs... and any little jump of hit off a stone and I was almost face planting. Eventually it did happen... I just tripped over my legs and fortunately fell straight down onto the heather , no damage done. Shuffled all the way back to the finish and basically collapsed. Thanks to Bernard and Barry Harnett and a few others who could see I was in need.... I had to just lie down flat on my back and get bottles of water poured over me. It was the closest I think I have ever got to heat stroke.

It seemed most people were in the same boat. A few managed to get through it and race okay. 3 of the youngsters finished as top 3... Sarah was up there in the top 10 overall..... It is a great course and I am looking forward to racing it again hopefully in cooler conditions ! Thanks to Robbie for organizing it and it was great to have the marshals on the course at all the important points. As per most MMRA races, there was more sambo's to feed an army.

In the meantime, I am going to get in the sea today to cool down !

## **FOLLOW THE MARKERS...**

**12 August, 2018 - Barry Murray**

### **RACE: Galtee ½**

Gloves as part of the mandatory kit, waterproofs, phones, and cut off times. Here I was sitting in the sun on the evening before at Inch beach, looking at the clear skies and the McGillyCuddy reeks in the distance.

But safety for all concerned I guess and this new Galtee half was more off the beaten track than normal. I woke up Saturday morning to calm mild air and dry roads. By the time I got to Banteer the mist had started to sprinkle. Picked up Conor Murphy along the way and with all the chat we were at the race HQ in no time.

Plenty of new faces for this one and the visibility for the morning wasn't looking great. Thankfully, the lads, Barry Harnett and Alan Sheahy marked out the course the Friday night and they did so perfectly. It was a twisty turny course with open mountain and lots of just proper off the beaten track sections. Barry or whoever came up with the course must have been smoking some good stuff when they planned it.

Anyway, it was my first trip to the Galtee's and half marathon trail race no.3 for me. I was more relaxed than normal for this race, not sure why. Didn't even manage to get a warm up in, was too busy grinding my coffee in the camper. Got changed and was the last one down to the race briefing. Figured I would use the first couple of km's as my warm up. Not as many familiar faces as normal, but I had Brian Mullins for company and I knew English lad Andy Fleet would be at the front too.

Off we went, after all the hot dry weather and muggy air, with my Carauntoohill Classic experience, it was nice to be running in the wet. For some reason, I just wasn't feeling as good as normal from the start. It was myself, Brian, Andy and Torben running at a nice steady pace, but I just wasn't feeling it. Maybe it was the lack of a warm up. I knew I just had to shake it off so ploughed on ahead. After a couple of km's, we hit our first ascent and Andy led off with Brian in tow.

I was 3rd, trying to keep Brian in my sights. Torben was just behind me. The running also felt a bit different as the visibility got worse. You could only go as far as the next flag or tape. It was hard to openly run as you had to keep on the course and the only way was to follow each marking. I wasn't able to keep with Brian and Andy and I knew this would make getting in the lead harder. Sometimes, just staying with the lead, even if they are going that bit harder than you would like, is worth it, as you can just find that extra gear. Harder to find that extra gear when you are on your own.

Anyway, the course involve 3 peaks..... before I knew it,, we were up the first one, Galtee beag I think... then Galtee Mor... would have loved to have been able to take in the view.. but you could only see about 20yds ahead of you. For some reason, the climbs didn't seem hard or long. A good bit of hiling up steep slopes, but nothing crazy. Maybe not being able to see up, and not being able to see the summit, makes it less taxing.

I ended up running most of the course with Torben... good to have company on the route like this and poor weather conditions. About mid way through the race I started to feel normal again and wanted to push on to try catch the lads. Torben was running well so the two of us just paced off each other. We were on our final sort of climb.... zig zag sort of grassy mossy trail... and we see Andy running back down towards us. He said he couldn't see any more markers. We told him we thought we were on course and the 3 of us kept going... a few seconds later and Brian is running towards us saying the same

thing, no markers. So we immediately all turn around and start running back to the last marker we had seen. Within a minute or so, we saw that we had missed a turn. We also met Conor Murphy, Peter Power and Karl McGuire.... who were behind us and just at the turn. So Brian and Andy had lost time to myself and Torben, and we had lost time to the next group. Anyways, these things happen on a course and weather like this. I looked around, there was now 7 of us together, and said, "race starts again here lads". We had about 3-4km left I think. another big open mountain section... Brian charged off. We were all still looking for markers... a few shouts were needed to keep us all on track. I sort of switched off race mode. It was just a case of us all getting back. Brian in fairness kept in the lead. Peter Power managed to follow Brian.... I was with the other lads. We had a few ravines to climb down and jump over. We then met Barry Harnett waving to keep us on track. I asked him how far away from the finish we were, and he said about 10mins of running. I was sort of surprised... I didn;t feel like we were out that long.... the previous 1/2's were around 1.40hr and felt much longer... maybe it was the fact that we couldn't see where we were going and we couldn't run flat out, made the journey seem shorter !

We then came off the mountain and back onto more runnable trail. I switched back on again to race mode and actually was enjoying being able to run properly again. I had Brian and Peter about 100yards ahead of me. Thought I would catch them, got to within about 5-10yards, then we arrived at the finish.

A funny ending. Glad Brian kept his lead. Andy unfortunately went over on his ankle and came in a few minutes later. Peter was lucky and raced the last 3-4k to take 2nd. Torben wasn't too far behind with the other lads.

Looking forward to doing this race again in clearer weather. Fair play to the lads for the organisation and course marking, and the volunteers who were out on the course.

## **ITS LONELY OUT THERE...**

**16 August, 2018 - Barry Murray**

### **RACE: Warrenscourt**

I actually did a longer warm up for this race than the actual race itself. I did a 30min warm up and ran the race in just over 26mins. Something I sort of learnt from the pro cyclists.... they often do 1.5hr warm ups for a 20min or 30min time trial.

My second only race of the Wednesday evening Munster league races.... It is nice to get out during the week for a good blast but with them not having a MSL race in the county of Kerry (note for the next AGM ;-), the travel is just too far. I was en route to Kinsale so stopping off just outside Macroom helped my logistics.

Off to the woods it was, with Warrenscourt forest tucked away in some undefined part of Cork. I knew it was going to be a fast one and after the open mountain slog of the Galtee ½, was looking forward to turning over the legs quicker.

Where you position in a race is very much decided by how many of your rivals turn up. You can be 20th, 30th just based on how many better runners than you show up. I can be 3rd, 5th, 7th or more depending on the lads I know who are faster than me lining up. So a quick look around at the start line and I didn't see Sean Quirke or Tom Blackburn or the likes. Conor Murphy did introduce me to his friend he brought along who he quickly told me runs a 17.30 5km.... so thanks Conor, I knew I had competition !

RD Brian set us off and I just ran out front and no one passed me. I never do this. I usually prefer to build into a race and let whatever "fast guys" are around set the pace. I normally then like the battle behind and to be always aiming for the guys ahead. This time I had no one ahead of me right from the start. So I kept going and within 1-2km, I couldn't hear any feet or breaths so I knew I was already pulling away. Sort of weird... if you have never experienced it before, lone ranger type feeling... all quiet as opposed to having someone breathing down your neck.

Anyway, I knew I must have been running well as I clocked a 40second time gap to second place at an out and back section. The route had one drag, a few small slopes and a bit of off road. Then the rest was fire trail, probably enough for most IMRA runners. I was happy enough and like just being able to run at a fairly hard constant effort. The last 1-2km was mainly downhill and fast running, I looked behind me once or twice and could see no one. So all alone and no last minute sprints or gasps... started to slow down with 200m to go and arrived back to a quite finish line too ! 2nd place was about a minute behind me, Conrad, and Conor's fast 5k friend John came in 3rd.

Strange one for me but any IMRA race is never easy to win. Rain held off and it was a nice mild evening. With the camper as my own B&B, I was able to kick back and celebrate with a few beers ;-). Got up the next morning and ran the course again to shake out the legs !

Thanks to Brian for RD, the Mullins bro's, Kas and co for a nice evening in the woods.

## THE JEIDI RETURNS

04 September, 2018 - Barry Murray

### RACE: Mt Brandon

My first time as an RD for an IMRA race so I had more race nerves than actually taking part. The head mills through a hundred different things in the weeks leading up to it and I just think too much anyway.

I moved to Kerry last year and Mt Brandon was one of the first mountains I used as training. Looking at the race calendar I just knew it had to be part of the championships. I had spoken to John Lenihan earlier on in the year and he told me about the previous race routes that were used many years ago. I spoke to a few others and then decided that the best and most pure route was to start at the pilgrim path base and just go up to the summit and back.

I contacted John back in June and asked him if he could do summit marshal. I just thought it would be fitting to have such a legend be part of this race and I knew that it would be a role that he might enjoy. Being so competitive and racing to win, it is often hard to turn up for races and sit on the sidelines. I know this myself and its something John had mentioned to me. So summit marshal, where he is in the middle of the race, gets a good hike in, and with the race instructions being that runners had to "tag" John... meant more to him and something he seemed happy to do. I hope that he can be involved in future IMRA races in a similar fashion and fingers crossed, I will have him next for Mt Brandon.

So a few weeks leading up to the race, and its just myself and John on the volunteer list. I knew the MMRA crew would lend a hand and I had mr co-ordinator Robbie Williams to help me in the background. I think the main part of being an RD is all about getting the logistics sorted and organized before the big day. The course, parking, pub, food , race details..... then the day itself is easy as you have good helpers.

And thats what happened. The only logistics that didn't work out was the weather ! A heatwave on the Saturday , clear skies..... to wake up to mist and fog on the Sunday morning. What can you do. I had guests to entertain as well... great to have some of my Wicklow mates down for the never ending craic... The Bells and Mikey. Arriving on the Saturday evening at least allowed them to enjoy good weather on the peninsula and dining out at Inch beach was like being on holidays.

A few too many craft beers and an anxious sleep had me up early on the Sunday . Got the lads packed up and we made our way out west towards Dingle. Mist and fog got heavier, a real pain. We arrived at the race HQ, An Bothar Pub , and it was already nice to see I had immediate help. Rob and Tricia had arrived the Friday evening and stayed over. Rob was already putting the MMRA sign up. They had the race box too so we could set up registration immediately. Michael McSweeney and Henry had made an early trip up too. With John Bell being another experienced head, it was nice to have people around that knew what they were doing ! Thats the great thing about IMRA/MMRA , there are plenty of good heads to sort things out and things are never left adrift. With Peter and Mikey out on the roads, no one got lost and people were car pooling. Hard to

guess what sort of numbers we were going to have but we were prepared for a big crowd if they came. The numbers were small enough in the end but the names on the registration sheet looked good... with Sean, Tom, Henry, Paul Deane, young Naoise, veteran Ger Maloney ... John and Mikey, then an old adversary of John Lenihans, Rob Bryson to add to the mix too.

Off up the set up the race start and I had more great help from David Twoomey and his wife Mary, along with Czech lady Yvonne who has a cork accent ;) John Lenihan had already made his way up to the summit and I had him on the walkie talkie. The mist looked like it was about to lift but as it approach 1pm, race start, it got even heavier. Fortunately it was mild, even warm, and not really raining. The runners gathered, 30 strong, and I had planned on keeping the race briefing short... the main thing to point out was they had to tip John Lenihan at the top and also to reassure them that the course route is marked out with posts and crosses. With the poor visibility I think everyone was happy with this.

Off they went up into the mist and up one of the steepest constant climbs there is. I was thinking sub 40min to the top would be a good time. My walkie talkie crackles and its John , telling me the first runner has tagged him, in around 37mins..... turns out it was Robbie Bryson, one of the oldest competitors in the race , who showed me his own split time after for the summit of 34.44 ! That will be one that is hard to beat I'm sure. John kept me updated with the next few and I knew Sean Quirke was close. With just under 50mins gone, we could see our first runner coming down the mountain. He had no one near him and was just gliding down. In just over 50mins, Sean Quirke crossed the line with a convincing win. Henry Browne finished strong and came in second with Rob who is not as strong a descender as he is climber, arriving in 3rd.

Not long after the leaders, the rest of the field came charging in. Some great runs and good times by many, anything around 60mins for this course is good. Joan Flanagan was first lady home and looked strong at the finish , another veteran that defies age. Siobhan and Mairead were not far behind her either. My quick facebook post was to just report "top 3".... if the top 3 were all female, I would have just reported their names too ! RD's are told not to report all the results on facebook before they are processed . Thats me done your honor ;)

It wasn't long before our last finisher was in, an M60, so then it was just the living legend Lenhian on the course. Everyone headed back the pub for tea and sangwidges..... I said I would go up the mountain a bit to meet John. I just got to the first cross and I could see him coming down in the mist. As he got closer, he had a big smile on his face and said " I almost felt like running down"..... we had a good chat on the way back and given I was just reading his book a few months ago and had never met him before , it was all a bit surreal.

Back to the pub and a good crowd had stayed on to have some grub and pints. Trica helped me with the results and John Lenihan did the prize giving with me.

A full day and before I knew it, I was back in Dingle with the lads before they headed off back east.

Mt Brandon is back. Hopefully next year it will have even more company too for the weekend. Stay tuned.