



# Athenry AC

## Fields 10k

### 20th Anniversary

### Souvenir Issue

Winter 2021

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Our first start venue for the Fields of Athenry 10k near St. Mary's GAA club, Carnaun. The photo shows the start of the 10k, 2005. Photo by John O'Connor.

#### ...AND ALSO

This issue also contains our standard 20 Questions (Jane Mangan) and an inspiring race report from Speedy in the Hills of Donegal.

### Three Cheers for the Fields 10k at 20 and Athenry Athletic Club!!

Congratulations to all present and past members of the Athenry AC who have contributed in any capacity to the staging of the Fields of Athenry 10k over the years.

We will reach a significant milestone on December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 by staging the 20th version of same. This includes the virtual race in 2020.

What a fantastic achievement to establish one of the pre-eminent races in Connaught at a time of year when

continued or any success seemed unlikely!

There isn't space nor time to thank everyone individually but the commemoration interviews in this booklet mention many by name, including many outside Athenry.

Let's toast the race directors though, an onerous and stressful job. They were Mick Rice, Alan Burke, Iain Shaw, Frank Burke, Jim Leahy, Kieran Guirey, and Aidan Madden. Thanks guys.



Aidan Madden, Race Director 2021.

## Services Rendered



*Committee 2021, from left: Frances Leahy, Secretary, Jim Leahy, Chairperson, Niall Lyons, Treasurer*

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unless otherwise stated.



*Iain Shaw, Juvenile Chairperson*



*Malachy Conlon and Kenneth O'Hara, Moanbaun Development*

# FIELDS 10K: "JUST DO IT"

## Mick Rice and James Lundon

**James Lundon:** The club was founded — not 100% sure of the date — at some stage in July/August '02. Now I remember the first Connemara [Marathon & Half Marathon] happening in September and after that Ray O'Connor talking about it being 70 or 100 people and we were talking about having a race and he just said in one training run — Mick was saying, ah, we'll have something in '03 — and Ray said "Just do it" and we did, that's my recollection.

**Mick Rice:** That sounds fair enough. I think we reached out to Tom Kilgariff at the time in Claregalway and Tom was a kind of advisor and came over and spoke to us, he was kind of the voice of the establishment, he'd done a bit of race organization. We settled on the date, St. Stephen's Day, might be worth giving it a go, 'cos there was a half marathon in Carraroe.

**JL:** That was gone by 98/99. One of the first outside broadcasts of TG4 was of the half marathon of '96.

**MR:** We were trying to think of a date that people would be free on, that there wasn't an already established race on, mind you around that time there was very few established races [in Connacht]...

**JL:** Loughrea, Streets, Claregalway 10k, and Connemara before us, that's it. Killimer, Tommy Porter had a race in '02,...'04, '05, '06, but there were no other races. Tuam wasn't there...

**MR:** The Connemara and Longford Marathons started within a week of each other and then went on to become fixtures. Ray O'Connor had a launch meeting for that Connemara Marathon out in the hotel in Taylor's Hill, Ardilaun, himself and his father had been on the radio that day, so I went out. That was the first time I met Seb [Locteau] and Ray O'Connor. They came into the club after that.

**JL:** I didn't realise that was the way you first hooked up.

**MR:** In the very first Connemara Marathon, Seb went off like a rocket, 12 of us, we went out to the start in a minibus, the entire field, from Peacock's Hotel. For the first few years, the idea was that you had a full breakfast, a full hotel fry-up. There was about 70 in the half, and [the marathon runners] we all went out to Lough Inagh, and Ray was the official starter and he joined in the race. Seb and I kind of passed each other at the bottom of the Hell of the West, and Seb and I got talkin' afterwards.

**JL:** I remember meetin' Peter Delmer at a camogie match, Mick and I knew each other obviously for six, seven years. Mick arrived in Athenry in 2000, and he stayed with us for six months in the old house. We found out that there was another guy running. Mick was the runner, I was the guy who was sort of talking about running, I started in March

'01, I ran my first race in Loughrea '01. We knew about this other man in Athenry who was running. I met him [Peter]. There was nobody else [running] in the town that I remember. Johnny O'Connor and Ray started to come out to the sessions — the Saturday morning sessions — Autumn '02.

**MR:** We had some sort of a meetin' out in Delmer's house to discuss, you know,

would we try and put a club together, in Delmer's kitchen, I think you might have a minutes book.

**JL:** [Membership then] was no more than 12 or 15...

**MR:** I think it was seven for a while...

**JL:** That's the way it was back in those days, running was almost dead at all the clubs except juveniles, we had the Athenry Juvenile club and Dermot McNamara, no adult section and we knew there were other guys who had run in Athenry over the years: the two Cheevers in the '70s and '80s [with the shop under the Arch], the former AIB bank porter, Willie Killeen, who lives on Chicken Hill, across between Castle Ellen and Carnaun and his brother Joe a postman for 52 years and he only retired there re-



Early days: Streets of Galway 8k, 2004.

Back: Peter Delmer, Gary Doherty, Liam Mycroft, Ray O'Connor, Johnny O'Connor, Mark Mitchell.  
Front: James Lundon, Mick Rice, James Corbett, Jeff Noone.

## FIELDS 10K: "JUST DO IT" (CONT.)

cently, another family who were known to be runners, in the town of Athenry.

**MR:** Back in the early 50s it was known as Athenry AC, before Derrydonnell, then it became moribund as the guys retired in the very late 60s and people who wanted to continue running, Tommy Madden, they joined Loughrea for a year or two and then they joined [Galway]



Alan Burke, 2005. by John O'Connor

Harriers. Athenry became dormant, it was refounded in the '80s for a year or two, named Athenry de Wetts, after a Boer War general. There had been an Athenry de Wetts in the late 1800s also, contemporaneous with the Boer War as a kind of middle finger up to the local establishment.

**JL:** The first race we did very little advertising, I think we may have advertised in The Irish Runner, this is before the Web really caught on, no websites, no social media, a lot

more people would have run the first year if they had known about the race, it's even amazing that we still have the six "stalwarts", there are now many semi-stalwarts who've run 16, 17, 18 of the races who just didn't know about it, the first one. I'm not even sure how we managed to get 69 the first year, most people just turned up on the day, they'd somehow heard about the race.

All I remember is Peter Delmer and his three kids — he ran the race — his kids surrounding him after the race. And we had a cup of tea afterwards and small prizes, Paul Mac[Namara] won the race. Fionnuala won, no sorry, Kathryn Casserly just back from the States, she got a scholarship and was running pretty well and of course the first couple of years we were substantially short on the course. Myself, Mick, and Peter went measuring with three different engineers wheels, spent five or six hours measuring. If we'd had Andrew Talbot on board, Andrew would have known how to measure a course with a bike. Engineers' wheels are not accurate, 1.5% out, 150 metres. The start for the first four years went further and further back as we realised; so we started near the clubhouse. It must have 2004/5 that we got it officially measured.

**MR:** There were national championships like that also. Like the Half Marathon Champs in Tinryland that Gerry Ryan won was about a quarter of a mile short, he ran it in 62 minutes or something, ridiculous, and Tommy Porter afterwards was challenged about it.

Alan Burke always mentions this. Every single year somebody ended up to their shoulder in the toilet, every single year, 'cos we'd only a couple of toilets in the [St. Mary's] clubhouse and every single year they got blocked. Peter used a black plastic bag to unblock with a good shove

once.

**JL:** [Afterwards] Mick and I went down to Ballycotton in '02 and we knew straightaway that this was the race we wanted to organise and every year Ballycotton did something new, we'd try and replicate it. Any time we were mentioned in the same breath as Ballycotton I always took that as the ultimate compliment. I said that to John Walsh. Every single year that I've been involved when I had a spare hat I've sent it to John, he must have 14 hats at this stage.

We outgrew Carnaun [St Marys] after four years, I think Alan Burke had come on board at that stage, as the main driver or one of them, in getting into the Presentation hall. By '05, the running boom had really started and there was a lot of races comin' on board and the Stephen's Day was brilliant marketing and everybody knew: the race is going to be on the same day, every year 11 o'clock and that alone has kept the race goin'. Other races have been bigger and more successful in the old days but they messed around with it, times, locations, venues; the railway line was the only obstruction but we had flexibility.

And the Presentation being so close, having the parking, there's a confluence of serendipitous things that kept us going. Plus we had the same organisers for the first four years, myself and Mick and Peter.

**MR:** [What comes to my mind is] the sense of adventure. We didn't really know what we were doin', that was an advantage, When we activated the club, Paul McNamara and Claire, the McNamara clan, they were very active in athletics but they didn't have a club in Athenry so Paul was actually runnin' for Harriers when we re-established Athenry and he waited about a year or so to see if we were gonna do something, you had to belong to a club to enter all the championships.

We didn't know what we were doin', we used to do things like arrange track races end of season, and there was a tradition of cross country in the Winter, in Spring road running, track in Summer and road in Autumn, that was the traditional pattern. We didn't have a background in club athletics so we just disregarded all of the rules, and we benefitted from a couple of movements around that time: the Meet and Train which had activated lots of women, the precursor of Fit4Life. Bernie Kelly was involved and Mary Mullins...we kind of rode that wave. The Predator got established as a



Philip Magnier

## FIELDS 10K: "JUST DO IT" (CONT.)

club relatively early on as well, and we were learnin' lessons from Predator so if they did something and we thought it was translatable into runnin' we would do it. So we did things like the Renville Rave, the handicap race, the Burger Run, the club championship...

**JL:** ...and then of course you cannot discount the 5k Series...

**MR:** We were makin' it up as we went along but it was workin'. It wasn't until afterwards that we realised we were doing things differently. Seb founded both Galway and Predator triathlon clubs, and then he came into the athletics club along with Tony Daley and they brought a kind of entrepreneurial feeling. There were loads of women who didn't want to be seen jogging around in public, it took us a long time to get women involved...

**JL:** ...the influence of the Web, the whole idea of the mailing list and then our website in '05...

**MR:** ...massive and it having a list of races. At the time it was the only available list of races in the country, I used to get people ringing me up from Dublin all the time, saying the port tunnel race is that on at the weekend, and I'd go I don't know...

**JL:** ...but then these website became superseded by the behemoths, the Facebooks, the Instagrams, and other social media. The stalwarts, we had nine or ten for a while, we lost a couple along the way, Brian Geraghty was and is very enthusiastic from the first year, he knew straightaway this was different and the people involved were proper, serious, we may not have been runners but we were proper organisers!

Myself, Mick and Peter for the first four years, Ray O'Connor was in the background, and Johnny the bro-



The famous wooly hats

yourself Phil and others, Paul Hehir was involved, Gary Doherty for a good few years, then the likes of Maeve, Frank. Iain Shaw came on from '07 and he was central to

the club for five years, a lot of people came on in the mid noughties period, very, very good people, I mean you see where Iain has finished up since, when you have people of that calibre, you know you're doin' things right.

The race, suddenly in year five we went to 570 [entries], the first online entries were '09, '10, I have all the paper entries in the shed...

**MR:** ...God help your wife, James London...

**JL:** ...it's all in the shed, everything, any piece of paper produced by the club I still have it. All properly archived, I should have been an archivist. I have all the AGM minutes, all the notes from every race I've run

I, I may not have the specific memories but I know exactly when it happened. Or I can find out. Alan Burke was instrumental in the transition to the Presentation and then the sky was the limit. Obviously the race can only grow so much because it's West of Ireland, it's Christmas, and in the last ten years a lot of other races now coming on top of us.

**MR:** We're gettin' people from all over the country runnin', a steady crew coming down from Dublin every year, the building of the motorway, it's an hour and thirty five minutes to get to a really great race; we get people from Limerick, Ennis, all over every single year...

**JL:** ...Meath, Athlone, we had a winner Noel Kelly from Ferbane. And we've never given out a single cent in prize money or appearance money, we are "the chrysal", the Fields of Athlery race.

The first year we had the t-shirt, the second year we had the blue hat, the third year a coffee mug, for some reason unknown to me we thought a coffee mug would be a brilliant idea, the fourth year and forever more since, the hat. John O'Connor [the photographer] has been a very important part of the success. He has documented the race for at least 10, 11 years, at least 2017.

And Roger Rushe was a Fields stalwart for a dozen years and looked forward to it as much as anyone, accompanied by his daughter Audrey a handful of times in later years before illness took its toll on him. Himself and Mickey Kelly were the last two remaining links with running in Galway from the 1950s and before.



The late Roger Rushe at the Fields 10k, 2005





FIELDS 10K: 2002

Photos: Various

# FIELDS 10K: “STALWARTS”

Here are impressions of the Fields from the six “stalwarts” who have run each of the 20 races

## Danny Carr (Galway City Harriers)

Danny works in social welfare and his favourite distances are 10k's, half marathons. His three marathons include Rotterdam, 3h42. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> in the first Fields of Athenry race.

“ I’m originally from Athenry, born and bred. I did join Athenry AC juveniles when I was a youngster. In the early 80s I moved into Galway, I joined GCH.

Back in 1984 to '88, there was the Carraroe half marathon on Dec 27<sup>th</sup>, a group of us always went to that race, a day out. Then there was that void, and next thing Athenry AC [started the Fields 10k]. I said that’s a race I’m going to run, being from Athenry and everything else. The great thing is it’s on at 11 o’clock in the mornin’, you can be home early. It ticked every box.

At the beginning, Pat O’Dwyer, Gearóid Quinn, Una Murphy, and husband Niall, and Martin Kearney, Lali Kelly, went out [to the Fields]. Afterwards, we’d go to *Dan’s Bar* just to have a chat, about the race, end of year, and anything else, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. And then afterwards the *King George VI* horse race and off home.

The Fields is a great race, great atmosphere, and I meet my cousins, my family; a sister runs the race as well, Frankie Carr, along with a cousin. You have the whole community involved, a lot of the neighbours I know from home, they’re out there as well, on the day, they’re hyped out on organising the race, having showers, and the tea, the coffee, and the biscuits. I have a brother, two sisters and cousins, they live in Caheroyan. A lot of people, that’s the only race they run or walk all year, the Fields.

Back in 2012, I was injured, ITB band, I ran it in just under the hour, I remember gettin’ to the top of the hill, one k to go and looking down and the amount of people [running] who had the hat, it was just one colour, fantastic to see it. [Walking] you’re chatting and talking to people. I also remember 2011 because you had two races on that year as 2010 was postponed because of the weather. I remember running it on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January and the following week running with the lads on Sunday and coming

down and breaking my shoulder, I had to go in for an operation about a month before the race and the first question I asked the surgeon was will I be able to run — thinking of the race on the 26<sup>th</sup> — and I ran the race with my arm in a sling. The other great thing about your race is the booklet. It’s the only night that I go to bed early, on the day of the race, I read the book from cover to cover.

My best time is 36 mins, 2004. Another great thing is the top 50 t-shirt. 2014 was the last time I got the t-shirt but every year you’re lookin’ forward to maybe makin’ the top 50 and I hope to God this year I’ll be trying to do the same thing. Another good thing, during the Xmas period, you’re maybe eating and drinking but you know that the FoA is coming up so... you want to give it your best shot, you want to be sure you don’t overindulge.

When I was young I played hurling but I was too light. The last few years, I got a bike, I enjoyed it very much at the beginning. But athletics is a sport you can do all your life, no matter what age you are.: 40s, 50s, 60s.

I run six days a week, I always take one day off. I still enjoy it, that’s what it’s all about. My best 10k was 31:30, in my 30s. And the national half marathon, 1984 in Wexford, with Seamus O’Donnell, PJ Coyle, Pat O’Connell, and myself. I ran 71:30. We got silver. You didn’t have the volume of runners then but the standard was a lot higher. The Fields is very well organised, a good course, and great atmosphere. A great undertaking. I give full credit to you for organising the Fields, we really appreciate it.



## Tomás Mac Lochlainn



A native of Moycullen, Tomás is retired in New Inn, and worked as the local secondary school principal.

“ I’ve been running for a long time, a bit of running, cycling, that kind of stuff. Athenry is the only race that I would run regularly. After Athenry, I might do a few 5k’s, 8k’s, 10k’s, and then after that once the weather gets fine the ponies take

over, going to shows, then the Summer. Come September, I say to myself you better start thinking of Athenry again. At Christmas if I can kinda run 10k, I feel okay.

I’d all the time an interest in running. In the '70s I used to read about David Bedford and people like that and it always fascinated me. I like distance running, saw them [the races] on TV, newspapers, I suppose Mick Molloy and people like that. He was in the neighbouring parish, up the road, you had people like that in the back of your mind. Martin McEilly, also Moycullen, is a phenomenal runner. His father is over a hundred!

I had run the marathon in New York, I’ve done four marathons: New York twice, Dublin, and Connemara. The hill up from Maam valley up to Maam cross is a killer. I actually went injured to NY twice, my calf, just walkin’. I did it for Croí and I gave my €5000 or whatever it was but NY is a fantastic event, guys out playing music, all sorts of bands, a fellow playin’ the accordion, Spanish people, they’re all shoutin’. Somebody said put your name on the singlet and it’s “C’mon Tom”, it’s amazing, massive support. New York is the best gig ever. I did it 2003 and 2005. I’m goin’ downhill since!

Fields 10k: I saw an ad in the Tribune one day, 2002, I said I’ll go and do that. So I arrived up at the Mart, I said it’s bound to start at the Mart...nobody at the Mart, quarter

## FIELDS 10K: "STALWARTS" (CONT.)

Tomás Mac Lochlainn [cont.] to eleven. I went downtown, I couldn't see anybody and

eventually I found somebody and he said oh that will be out at the hurlin' club. I had no entry. I missed out [on a number] and I arrived out, they were ready to start and they parted like Moses and the Red Sea. James [Lundon] was inside and I had ten euro and I went out and I caught up with them, ready to go. My first 10k, I did 48 minutes.

I just went along, to me it was just the perfect date, Saint Stephen's Day. In Moycullen one time we always had a big basketball blitz on St. Stephen's Day since the 60s so and I was playin' in that for years so this is a substitute for that. The perfect day and it kind of keeps you disciplined.

Kept goin' and after four or five years I saw this thing that only so many had been in them all, I said I should be on that list but that was because of my late arrival the first year. I've done them all since and I've done them with a broken finger, an Achilles, and all sort of injuries, two or three years I had to walk it but I just kept it goin' because you're part of something. I really enjoy it. Great atmosphere there. I love the build up to it, gettin' fit, gettin' better over two or three months. Then up Croagh Pat-

rick, 1<sup>st</sup> of January every year, myself and my son.

This time of year, early November, I do two miles [training], I could have started even earlier but my knees flared up there at the end of Summer, all of a sudden, Never had it before. I have a little bit of land where I keep the ponies, up the road there, a dead end, lovely quiet road and I don't meet anybody, I might see a buzzard, a kestrel, a squirrel, it's amazing all the wildlife you see. I did three miles this mornin', I'll do six [per day] by the end of the month. I love the Parkruns now I must say, I go into Renville, it's a hard course, two laps. It's on early on Saturday mornin', gets ya outta bed and you feel good, and at ten o'clock you're on the road again, set up for the day.

I was appointed principal in '84 and that's when I moved from Moycullen. We always had a good few ponies, for showing, breeding, Connemara ponies. We've 15 now. If you can keep them outside — Connemaras are very outdoors really — if you have grass for them, at this time of year, they're no bother.

I try to get in under the hour. My son and my daughter do it now, they'd be up ahead of me. I do a lot of walkin', the ponies are two miles away and I'd often walk up and down, this evening we have to catch a foal and a horse for the first time and bring her out and walk her. You're on the go. I wouldn't be interested in a running buddy, I'm just a real loner, never been a member of a running club.

## Bernie Kelly (Galway City Harriers)

*Bernie is from West Clare and a granny of two children. "I'm a mamó not a granny, I live in the Gaeltacht" (Inverrin). She is the acting County Librarian of Galway since 2019.*

“I do remember hearing about it...and I remember thinkin' what kinds of eejits are they out in Athenry havin' a race on Stephen's Day, that's not gonna catch on, I'm not gonna do that. I had teenagers then, but come the [St. Stephen's Day] mornin', of course Bernie Kelly gets out of her leaba, heads to Athenry, she was going to see would there be anyone else there at all.

And I can't remember the detail of it, my time, but I know I thought this is good, this was fun, it was the atmosphere and everyone that was there had eaten their Christmas dinner the day before but everyone is in the same boat, it didn't really matter and I certainly wasn't racin'. I was very much a recreational runner, still am, and love the meetin' and the craic, talkin' to people an' all that. And Athenry certainly had that on that day. Nobody on the road, no cars, and I came from Connemara, Inverrin, just brilliant. I like to be at a race early, that's the other thing, get into the zone, I'd leave the house about 9, no traffic.

And there were lights on the Christmas trees [in the houses along the route], during the race, I thought I'm definitely going to do this again and then I continued to get out of my bed and many's the mornin' I can tell you I did not feel like it. When I was gettin' back home my three teenagers would just about gettin' out of bed because I'd be the last person to leave [the race], always was, that's 90% of the reason I used to go to races: I'm a social kind of a person, I like chattin' to people.

[In running] nobody knows anything about you apart from the race, the time, and that was a great thing, you know them on a different kind of a level, and that was what I like about it. And my teenagers, "oh where were you?, what was the race?, what's for dinner?" And I kept goin'. Now there was the year I broke my arm the end of November, 2018, so I was in a sling, so I had to get somebody to drive me but Bernie Kelly is a really poor traveller, I get really, really, bad motion sickness, I could drive

forever  
...walked the race, got home again, and all with my cocktail of drugs inside me and wrist bands that help with my motion sickness.

And there was another year then I pulled a muscle in my back, I think it was Christmas Eve, I was fine but I just couldn't move very well, painful so I took a couple of painkillers and headed off, the same year it was very wet, awful puddles, but when Bernie Kelly got to the 1st kilometre marker, they were actually takin' down the marker! but I kept goin', I got in in about two hours.

I was walkin' on and on and a car arrived and who was it but Maeve Noone and she been despatched out to find out who was this person, everyone else was finished, Frank was at the finish line, someone said there was a woman out on the course, who was the lunatic, further up from the new bypass road. I said you wouldn't have any painkillers?, she found somethin', gave it to me and went back to tell Frank to wait for me.

I've yet not finished a race that I've started, never had a DNF, I've had loads of personal worsts! If it's an ultra or a 5k or whatever I keep goin', no matter what.

I did my first ultra in Connemara, 2004, I said if I have to crawl it, I'll finish it.

I used to have three races in the year, Ballycotton 10, I always do the Warriors Run Knocknarea mountain [Sligo], and the Fields.

I'm really runnin' about 31 years but a lot of that was Micky Mouse kinda, I hadn't a clue what I was doin', it





## FIELDS 10K: "STALWARTS" (CONT.)

Bernie Kelly [cont.]

wasn't in any way structured, I started to lose a bit of weight after havin' two kids close together, workin' full time and being on that merry go round. But I enjoyed it, the runnin' and being a club member, GCH, Secretary for seven or eight years (felt like 50), then Fit4Life.

I started Fit4Life November 2007 and I kept goin' for 13 years, full time, every Monday and Thursday night without fail. One year after Christmas, the Beginner's group alone — we had five groups I had leaders with each of the groups — I had 161. I would start them in September, January, and after Easter.

### Kevin O'Dea (Clare River Harriers)

*Kevin works for the Department of Social Welfare in Galway and comes from Corofin originally.*

“At the time [of the first Fields 10k], I used to do an awful lot of marathon running, you'd be talking about maybe 100 miles a week and I was comin' off sub four hours previously in Dublin and whatever happened in 2002, didn't I get injured before the Dublin Marathon. I was injured maybe August, September, and Gerard Murphy told me there's a race out in Athenry, why don't we go out for the craic? An' we met Willie Morris out there: he was still runnin' at that stage. I met Gerard in Claregalway and we drove out together, I was up there maybe an



hour before the race, I remember there was a small crowd there. I remember talkin' to Mick Rice before the start of the race and he said this race is gonna be big, it didn't look like it was gonna be with 70 runners turnin' up. I felt that the race could go places but my only worry was this is a small clubhouse, if they get anythin' above 500, you're in trouble there.

2002 was sunny and about ten degrees, perfect weather, it went off smoothly, slowly then by 2003/4/5 crowds started to get bigger. The farmers used to lend them their fields and I remember the cars being wedged and James Landon sayin' to me, we're going to have to get a bigger place next year. And for the 2006 race they moved into the town itself.

At first I said to myself I'll come back and see how it goes.

Absolute beginners, people who had never run before, they don't want to be there, maybe they're overweight, got dragged along by somebody else, whatever, very few of them were all excited about being there, these faces lookin' at me, and invariably at the end of a month or six weeks, I had people who absolutely wanted to be there, who were enjoying it. GCH had the largest membership in the country, and that down to Fit4Life and stayin' with it. It's still goin' strong, you need one person who is completely committed.

I also started Fit4Track. And LSD on a Friday evening: long slow distance, I'm a great believer in that. And stand in the river afterwards, up to your waist ;-)

From 2005 onwards I really, really like this race, I've somethin' to get up for and it was kinda like some people would call it an end-season race, I would call it a pre-season race. What I liked was you had the t-shirt the first year but the little hat which you could wear and I remember 'this is gonna come in handy some time'. 2015 was very cold and wet, I had the hat on, the gloves on: "All I wanna do is get round here."

Maybe 2008 I remember my dad drivin' me up that year and he says: "You have to keep goin' until the day you die!" There is another race, the Corofin 8k, that started in 2010, I would have started out with Corofin AC before I joined GCH in the mid '90s, it's just the nostalgia. I go out specifically to do the county cross country each year just to start gettin' fit for Athenry, yeah, I'd be last in the field, the boys would probably lap me, maybe once, maybe twice as I get older. One day PJ Coyne says "What'd'ya do it for?" and I say for Corofin in November and Athenry in December. Instead of once or twice in the Summer, you'd be trainin' maybe three to four nights a week.

In 2017, I'd not one but two hamstring injuries and my dad was worryin' on the finish line, James Landon was worryin', and when I crossed that line, the elites were clappin' me, there was a risk if them hamstrings were gone and they were ready to go, they would have been waitin' three hours for me to finish, instead of just over the hour. That is the only time I've ever seen elites, the ordinary runners, the volunteers, people who knew me, out clapping!

I've done five marathons, four Dublin and one Connemara. I did them all around that time. I was in college, you'd be off for three months in the Summer, and trainin' for Dublin. I remember John McSweeney, he used to do some of the marathons, I used to go out runnin' with him, he'd start me off with a five miles, a ten miles, a fifteen miles and then we'd run against each other in August.

Christmas Day my wife and my family are drinkin', eatin' the big food, I would just maybe have a cuppa tea, a turkey sandwich and that's been goin' on since the race in 2002. I'm in bed at 9 o'clock every Christmas night and I'd be up at five o'clock in the mornin', eat the porridge, take a supplement that give you a boost during the race, then maybe an hour stretchin', then sit down for an hour, prepare your gear, and then around eight or nine o'clock, meet my teammate John Sheehan in Claregalway and we aim to be there for a quarter to ten. We religiously meet in Claregalway and [after missing one 10k race] he told me he hopes the rest of us die so he can catch up on us!

My golden days were 2008–2015, running wise. In 2012 I ran sub 20 minutes in the 5k series. In Corofin 8k, I ran 32 mins so it was game on. I ran the Jingle Bells 5k in December in 19:20 on a Saturday and another 5k on the Sunday in 19:30 so I thought I'm gonna break 40 mins [in the Fields]. But about 2k into the race didn't it come rain-

## FIELDS 10K: "STALWARTS" (CONT.)

Kevin O'Dea [cont.]

in' and didn't I miss 40 by about 38 seconds. I've done sub 40 twice in my career, Hollymount in 1997 and Claregalway in '98. In the car on my way home [after the Fields], my dad will tell you this: I put a blanket over my head and I didn't lift it, I was that upset.

Sinéad Brody, she was my training buddy. We used to go out to Galway, Athenry, Tuam. She used to push me at the time and she'd be doin' 37/38 min 10k, then when she died, for a year or two I kinda lost interest in athletics. I trained maybe two times a week with her, best friends for life, she was my running coach practically. It took me maybe two years to get over it. If we did meet away from training it would be a meal, cinema, but it was strictly about athletics, we were best runnin' buddies. She'd train me, she gave me a regime to do everything: "We'll do this tomorrow night, we'll do this Wednesday night", whatever.

er. One year, she says you're doing the 10k for me, I'll be just hangin' in behind, when I get to 8k I'll give you the signal and if you're gone by that stage, let me take over, and I remember gettin' to 7k and I said to her the race is yours, and she ran the legs off them the last few k's.

I'm 25 years at Clare River Harriers, 11th June 1996. I was in Leaving Cert, Corofin had folded, I knew if I went into Clare River Harriers I'd win county medals, cross country senior medals, and we won Intermediate Cross Country in 1999, the team event, that's the one I value.

The boy I miss the most is Roger Rushe. When I was startin' out runnin' back in '89, this guy [Roger] ran Hollymount around the low to mid 30's for 10k in his 50s! I was lookin' at the timesheets, and I said I'll never do that in my lifetime!

My dad is my number one supporter. He was the young guys head coach at Corofin AC. I'm 32 years runnin'. I would have got the old traditional runnin' style, it's all gone scientific now, that's what's changed since the late naughties, there's none of the old school style anymore.

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## Martin Keane (Athenry AC) and Tommy Joe Whyte (Tuam AC)

*Tommy Joe (on right below) lives in Moylough townland and works as a farmer. He has run for decades. Martin, though older by what Tommy Joe believes is a considerable amount, took up running in mid-life and lives along Derrydonnell.*

**Tommy Joe:** The day after Christmas was no bother for me [for the Fields]. We always had Carraroe roughly at that time of year as well, a half marathon. That finished but we used to be doin' that. We got a bus out, just a small one so that they'd be no one drivin' back, we could have a few drinks.

**Martin Keane:** I had the advantage that time, by brother-in-law would drive out, he was a non-drinker, that was great. When Carraroe finished up, Athenry took up the mantle.

**TJ:** It [the Fields] used to start down at the pitch, the GAA pitch...

**MK:**...Carnaun it's called, and it finished up there as well, but they used the GAA clubhouse for...

**TJ:** ...tea and things afterwards

**MK:** but they only had 70 runners for the first one, then they hadn't room [for the participants], and they went into the school.

**TJ:** [Last year 2020] I came up on the last day of the year, the day was comin' up and up, I had to come and do it [the virtual 10k on the actual Athenry course]. Ran in my tracksuit bottoms, I didn't warm up. At half way I stopped

and took them off. Time was 45 minutes.

At the first race, we parked in the field, I came up with Roger Rushe and Mickey Kelly. Roger wanted to be there on time, I was late goin', as usual.

**MK:** It was very badly advertised I got a phone call early on St. Stephen's mornin' — after havin' a good Christmas the day before — from Dermot McNamara: "Could you come in, we're havin' a bit or a race here and if there's



anyone else there who could do a bit of stewarding as well". We were all in bed, my brother-in-law was with us, Siobhán me daughter walked it and she kept doin' that for years. Also Vin, my late brother-in-law came but Dermot put him at Castle Ellen, stewarding. But he came back to run it, several years. He used to do the Dublin Marathon for years and years as well. I think the man that won the race was Dermot's son, Paul.

**TJ:** [T] was 4th in 2002 in 36:35]. Myself and Danny: for a good few years Danny was kinda slippin' off, I was beating him but he came back again, he had some injuries. There

## FIELDS 10K: "STALWARTS" (CONT.)

Tommy Joe and Martin [cont.]

was another man he came down from Meath, Newman, Mullingar AC. He beat me there one year, I knew he was around my category. Next year I was keepin' an eye out for him. I was with a girl runnin' and he came up beside me, jeez I said that's Newman and he went off. This is half way. I was on his heels the whole way right down to the hill, I went beside him and past him. I got him that day. Next year there was only a kilometre to go and didn't he end up beside me again. I nearly killed myself and...he wasn't in my category at all! I turned 60 there a few weeks ago.

**MK:** Welcome to the old men's club. They used to put a candle in my cake for every year, they don't do it now!

**TJ:** They'd burn the house down!! And thanks for sayin' it out loud. Well I was workin' in Scotland on the wind turbines and there was one thing about the Fields of Athenry: we were home for Christmas. Usually we'd be gone again by the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> of January but one year the postponed race was on one of those days. I told my employers that I had a sore back, which was true, but I stayed back and done it [the race]. I flew out from Galway airport that mornin' to Scotland.

I have a thing for flying, a paraglider, you strap it into you back, with a parachute then, like the William Shattner [Star Trek]. You start on the ground, the parachute brings you up there. I can be up there an hour. I might go round the village, or Moylough. When I go hard enough I can give myself a blackout, with G force.

[Note: See the [back page photo](#).]

**MK:** When you go runnin', you're flying as well! I have your headline: "Tuam's Answer to Alcock and Brown".

**TJ:** I started running in '91, I was 30 or so. Do ya know what was in me head? When I used to go to national school I used to win everything. The teacher, near Moylough, used to say you can't have all the prizes, you can only have three [out of] the egg and spoon race, the wheelbarrow race, the three-legged race, and runnin'.

From school I used to go to Moylough to the sports there, then I used to go a few times to Galway to the games, community games, could be a mile race.

My father use to take the clock out of the kitchen, all the brothers and sisters. I'd do a lap and after one lap, he'd get the others to run round with me, to get a bit of speed into me. I'd have been 13, 14. I was always jumpin' over gates and things.

**MK:** I remember goin' to a race in Kinvara in the 70s, how they timed the race was: someone brought out an alarm clock. I was runnin', could have been a 10k.

I started when I was nearly 40 years of age. I never ran until that, it was a fund raiser for Galway Mentally Handicapped. Guess who was runnin' alongside me when we came to the finish, Michael D. Higgins. He became more well known than I did. First race out. For a laugh.

**TJ:** Well there was always runnin', down through the years. Derrydonnell, Roger Rushe, Mick Kelly. Mick is 87 now. Roger was 82 when he passed away. We were down in Ballina at a race, 8k, a few years ago, Roger was a good age at the time, in his 70s. We were makin' up a team for Tuam and we couldn't get any team and Brendan Monaghan rang me and said couldn't we get Roger. I said I'll ask him. We went down anyway, cross country, as soon as we went in, Roger says sure I know this place here, I was runnin' back here in the late 50s, this could be 40/50 years after, back to the same field again!

Roger was in with Tommy Madden and Willie Morris [in those times]. Roger was [once] runnin' with Willie Morris and they were runnin' down the field an' (I don't know who he was), Willie kept shovin' a man over, he was in the ditch after one round.

Roger would get excited goin' to a race, he'd come out of the house [when I arrived], back door, and he'd kinda do a hop and a skip around the yard in a circle, lookin' at me laughing.

**MK:** I was in County Clare, it was the Inter-Counties Cross Country: Madden, Morris, Mickey Kelly, Mick Molloy.

**TJ:** Didn't Mick lose a shoe at a race one time, and he kept runnin', didn't he?

My best run? I had a PB down in Balla: 35:28 [10k]. I doubt I was 40.

The 10k was my favourite event, even though I've done the Dublin Marathon every year since '92 to '19, one missed: '94. I was never great at the marathon, I never liked the really long distances, I struggled, best was 3:01. Never trained [properly].

One year I talked to Eamon Coughlin, he was runnin' as well, a bit of a fun run. I told him to come on, spent a little bit of time talking to him.

**MK:** Peadar

Results of the 2002 Fields of Athenry 10KM Road			
Position	Number	Name	Time
1	123	Paul McNamara	0:31:15
2	129	Danny Carr	0:36:15
3	158	Martin McEvilly	0:36:25
4	168	Tommy Joe Whyte	0:36:35
5	170	Vincent McGuinness	0:36:40
6	103	Peter Delmer	0:36:44
7	119	Kathryn Casserly	0:36:57
8	125	Darragh O'Brien	0:38:16
9	133	Brian Kenny	0:38:35
10	144	Gearoid Quinn	0:38:43
11	124	Fergus McGirr	0:39:03
12	120	Fionnuala Keane	0:39:12
13	132	Sean Lally	0:39:39
14	145	Brian Geraghty	0:40:02
15	113	Gerry Fahy	0:40:27
16	126	Gary Doherty	0:40:40
17	142	John Hunt	0:40:51
18	134	Colman Greene	0:41:44
19	167	John MacSweeney	0:41:54
20	154	Mary McHugh	0:42:30
21	114	Liam Mulloy	0:42:34
22	135	Patrick Connolly	0:43:34
23	143	Albert Lane	0:44:09
24	104	John O'Connor	0:44:15
25	163	Frank Flannery	0:44:20
26	101	Ray O'Connor	0:44:20
27	169	Roger Rushe	0:45:07
28	102	James Corbett	0:45:20
29	112	Bernie Kelly	0:45:48
30	107	John Ludden	0:45:52
31	146	Patrick Moran	0:46:17
32	166	Peter Corrigan	0:46:23
33	162	John Reilly	0:46:28
34	109	Paddy Bugler	0:46:49
35	106	Terry Redmond	0:48:14
36	127	Finbar Flaherty	0:48:14
37	155	Tom O'Connor	0:48:24
38	110	Kevin O'Dea	0:48:27
39	156	Michael Landon	0:48:52
40	160	Kevin Monahan	0:48:55
41	152	Peter O'Halloran	0:49:12
42	108	Patrick Kelly	0:49:16
43	147	Matt Donnellan	0:49:40
44	171	Tomás MacLochlainn	0:49:57
45	111	Brian Niland	0:50:03
46	164	Michael Doherty	0:50:23
47	161	Gerard Morrissey	0:50:23
48	151	Gerry Rohan	0:50:23
49	131	Mary Corless	0:50:37
50	149	Martin Keane	0:51:20
51	136	Mary Concannon	0:51:58
52	137	Dermot O'Connor	0:52:15
53	121	Siobhan Keane	0:52:48
54	159	Gerry Monahan	0:53:49
55	118	Tony Daley	0:53:50
56	117	Padraig Farragher	0:54:27
57	115	Gabriel Collins	0:58:54
58	172	Gerry Jordan	0:58:56
59	130	Pat Murphy	0:59:40
60	150	Mary Mullins	1:05:50
61	153	Richard Edmonds	1:05:51
62	122	Martin Hansberry	1:25:03
63	141	Deirdre Keary	1:26:53
64	140	Aine Caulfield	1:27:00
65	138	Stephanie Duane	1:28:31
66	139	Nicola Burke	1:28:31
67	148	Siobhán Keane	1:37:10
68	165	Helen Landon	1:37:10
69	157	Brenda Landon	1:37:10
70	128	Willie Morris	SPECIAL

## FIELDS 10K: "STALWARTS" (CONT.)

Tommy Joe and Martin [cont.]

Nugent? We used to run together, racing/training. He was miles ahead. He recently did the marathon [at Esker] in 5 and a half hours, at 79, walking.

What I recall about the Fields race is that it started up about the beginning of the century and the committee were thrilled when they got 70 runners to take part. That time the race started beside the GAA pitch in Carnaun and using the clubhouse for registration, dressing rooms, prize giving etc. not forgetting the very welcome cuppa.

There's a old saying "there's no success without a struggle first" and the said committee did trojan work to get it where it is today with way over a thousand taking part. With increasing numbers and limited space, the race was moved into the town starting near the railway station close to the old goods store and finishing under the Arch. I'm looking at the Arch all my life and I've yet to hear any compliant about it though its a major traffic hazard in North Gate St.

I like to keep it goin' as long as I'm able. Great to meet all of the people, like Tommy Joe and more. I like that last couple of hunded yards when you're nearly there. It's tough goin' out the road when you're on your own, people passing you out. Once you get to the railway line, crossing the railway line, nice.

**TJ:** That's if you're not spent at that stage!

**MK:** More often, I am!

**TJ:** I know the feelin'.

**MK:** You nearly get all the few same supporters along there, livin' along there. They give you a shout.

I'll look forward to seeing a good few familiar faces at this years race here in Athenry but I'll never forget that phone call I got very early on the morning of St. Stephen's Day many years ago from Dermot McNamara. A man who wouldn't take no for an answer.

**TJ:** [With the Fields race] the song is in your head, the

place is well known, it stands out somehow, Athenry. First time we seen that race, we said we're goin' up. We know everyone, a big crowd, great atmosphere, in the hall. Roger did them all up before gettin' sick.

**MK:** A man called Seán Hehir won that race one year, and someone took a photograph of him finishing the race underneath the arch. A good photograph and your man [the photographer], Frank Kennedy, gave it to me and said you might meet him at Tuam, on a couple of weeks after. So I asked Seán at the race, do you want it? He was absolutely thrilled with it, thrilled.

Races lately? Like everyone else I haven't competed in many races for nearly 2 years now due to Covid and the last competitive race I recall was the National Masters in Rathdrum Co. Wicklow where the course circled around the old homestead of Charles Stewart Parnell.

Other races of interest I remember were the British & Irish CC which is held in the month of November annually and I qualified in the "going to seed category". We once had it in the grounds of Swansea U. in Wales and another year in Fairyhouse near Liverpool. Nice to renew a old acquaintances and maybe make a few new friends.

**TJ:** [I wouldn't miss] Athenry no matter what, Streets of Galway 8k, done that lately. Nearly always the cross country, it's hard, I like the challenge.

Recently I ran Ballybrit 8k in my bare feet and did a better time than Galway Streets and there's a big boggy spot down in Ballybrit in the cross country. They were laughing at me: Runnin' in bare feet. You might get cut. When you're runnin', there's nothin' like that comes into your head; there's someone shoutin' at me, I wouldn't know who is shoutin'. The Streets 8k this year I did in 34 mins.

Ways of Training? Once I saw someone in a 5k with a big bag of sand on his back. I might tell you what I do, I go out to the field with me boots, wellingtons and boots with steel toecaps; I do miles with that on my feet. The weight is down on the bottom of your foot, no strain on the joints. I could often go out with a pair of jeans and boots and everything I can think of on me.



2019	Hugh Armstrong	29:32	2019	Breege Connolly	34:42
2018	Mick Clohisey	29:46	2018	Laura Shaughnessy	34:56
2017	Mick Clohisey	30:21	2017	Jane Ann Meehan	37:39
2016	Mick Clohisey	30:35	2016	Laura Shaughnessy	35:03
2015	Mick Clohisey	30:03	2015	Marie Hyland	36:36
2014	Mick Clohisey	30:18	2014	Norah Pieterse	37:02
2013	Mick Clohisey	30:48	2013	Eilish Kelly	35:45
2012	Mick Clohisey	30:57	2012	Eilish Kelly	35:45
2011	Sean Hehir	31:07	2011	Lizzie Lee	36:27
2010	Gerry Ryan	31:12	2010	Catherine Conway	35:53
2009	Gary Thornton	29:57	2009	Teresa McGloin	35:18
2008	Gary Thornton	30:40	2008	Catherine Conway	36:53
2007	Gary Thornton	30:02	2007	Orla Ni Mhuirheartaigh	38:52
2006	Gary Thornton	30:12	2006	Lucy Brennan	37:03
2005	Gary Thornton	30:34	2005	Lucy Brennan	37:30
2004	Paul McNamara	31:11	2004	Lucy Brennan	36:36
2003	Noel Kelly	32:46	2003	Fionnuala Keane	38:18
2002	Paul McNamara	31:15	2002	Kathryn Casserly	36:57

**Winners: Fields of Athenry 10k**

## 20 Questions: Jane Mangan

Jane comes from Coleraine in the North and is married to Tomás, with children Fabian, Jordan, and Nessa. She lives near Newcastle, is a partner at Connacht Accountancy and also a member of Predator Triathlon.



### 1. What shoes do you train in?

*I am an Asics girl for sure, GT-2000. Been in them for 12 years now and love the stability and support. I got lured away from them recently with a pretty pair of pink Nike — big mistake, ended up hitting the tarmac — not the shoes fault but back to my trusty GT-2000s!*

### 2. How many miles did you run last week?

*Not as many as I would like.*

### 3. What's your favourite racing distance?

*I have had to reduce my distance in recent years to preserve my knees. 10 miles used to be my favourite but now its probably 8km.*

### 4. Where is your favourite place to train?

*Anywhere that is scenic. When I was doing long distance, I used to run a route up home that went Coleraine, Portursh, Portstewart, Coleraine, wide open roads, fresh sea air and fabulous coastline. Now I like the forest: Kilcornan, Monivea.*

### 5. What's your favourite race or event each year?

*My number 1 would always be the Connemara Half (on a good day!!) but now I settle for the Streets of Galway.*

### 6. What annoys you most about races?

*People positioning themselves too near the front at the start and running in groups. I like to get into my rythm early and they are just in the way!!*

### 7. What race that you haven't run would you most like to?

*I always wanted to do the*

*London Marathon.*

### 8. Best running performance?

*My best performance was an 8km in Loughrea many moons ago! It was flat and fast and one of the few races where I really pushed for the finish line.*

### 9. Worst?

*OMG I suffered in the Kinvara Half one year. Went out far too fast and died from 9km.*

### 10. What's the strangest thing you've seen on a training run?

*One of our more seasoned runners running bare chested up towards the church on a Saturday morning. The look on the pedestrians faces was priceless!*

### 11. What is your favourite piece of running gear?

*Gotta be my iPod - I can take a lot more pain with music.*

### 12. Who would you most enjoy beating in a sprint finish to the line?

*There are very few people who deserve to get beaten by a "social runner" like myself but what I would give to be able to beat Aidan Madden to the finish line. Trust me he would never hear the end of it (from all of us!!) Don't worry Aidan it can only ever be my dream... and your nightmare.*

### 13. What was the best bit of training advice given?

*Reduce my miles... given by Ms Meehan. I have a very different perspective on running now compared to 5 years ago. Long miles are great if you are not suffering, but when things start to hurt its time to reassess.*

### 14. In 10 years, will you be running? I will, I hope!

### 15. If for some reason you were told you could never run again, how would you react?

*I knew when I ran Berlin that was definitely it for me and distance. Hard enough to take but there are other ways. I have been dabbling in triathlons for a few years. I have so many hangups when it comes to cycling and swimming but the gang at Predator are very supportive and now I'm doing things I would never have thought possible!! Having said that, I am trying to do everything possible to preserve the knees and keep on running.*

### 16. Bitten by a dog? No.

### 17. Any "Paula"? No.

### 18. Favourite post-race food?

*Pancakes, fruit and coffee!*

### 19. Embarrassing moment?

*As part of a hen party I ran the Newtownards Half dressed in pink tutu, wings and fluffy pink headpiece. Thankfully no-one knew me.*

### 20. Greatest Irish athlete?

*Northern Irish athlete Mary Peters. She won gold in the Olympic pentathlon in 1972 and has done a huge amount to support talented young sports stars across all communities in Northern Ireland.*

# Juvenile Club 2021

by Iain Shaw

As 2021 comes to a close, it is encouraging to report that the juvenile section is in great health, with over 100 members and many coaches and regular helpers. A juvenile club can only survive with a solid base of support from parents and helpers, and this really has been the success of the year. I want to thank everyone who has helped out this year, whether coaching, acting as team manager at events, operating the gate at training, or helping out on toilet runs.



In particular, I would like to thank Yvonne Knight, who has been in the club for many years now and still comes out week in, week out to coach and encourage our young athletes.

The year started still in the grip of COVID restrictions, and it was unfortunate that it was not possible to hold an indoor season. This meant that it would have been well over a year since they had the opportunity to compete for some athletes, not a great situation for athletic development and keeping children interested in athletics, particularly when some sports were finding ways to continue. As the clocks took their annual move forward, there were encouraging signs that there may be an outdoor season. To help

prepare athletes for impending competition, a cunning plan was hatched between several clubs to hold what got to be known as the Galway Coaching Series, a COVID compliant, coaching focussed, non-competitive series of events. Athenry AC athletes grasped the opportunity to be back on track, from well-established athletes to those who had just joined the club. For some, this was their first track and field experience, and everyone gave a great account of themselves.

When the Outdoor T&F season did happen, in a slightly new format, there was again a small club contingent that made their way to Dangan. Full reports of the Galway Championships can be found on the club [website](#).



Special mentions must be given to several athletes, Evan Phillips, who was tripped in his 60m but got up and still completed the race. For a seven-year-old in their first-ever race, this is a testament to his dedication. Also, Kaitlyn Fitzpatrick and Kayla Poniard, who on any



normal year would have progressed to the next round of the Children's Games, except for them being cancelled this year. There were medals for Bronagh Deeley, Liam Shaw, and Sean Doggett in the older age groups.

Sean and Liam also represented the club at the Connacht Championships, with both qualifying for the National Championships in their respective events. Nessa Mangan made a return to the club for the Connacht Championships in the 1500m. At the national championships, Liam walked away with both the Discus and Shot National titles, continuing his 100% record in his age

group for the year. Sean gave a great account of himself in a tough field. These are the days when you learn a lot as an athlete, and we know that Sean will come back stronger next year.

While Sean may not have had a great finish to the T&F season, he did not let it deter him as he went into his preferred cross-country events. The track experience,



coupled with the opportunity to train with the Craughwell AC Wolfpack under the guidance of Mark Davis, certainly showed. Sean took bronze in the County U16 championships and then 11th place in the Connacht championships. These performances were good enough to get him



into the National XC Championships. Unfortunately, a combination of illness and having to



travel from the UK on the day before the competition left Sean down the field, which was in no way a measure of his ability. Sean's development through the year has been impressive, and 2022 looks like it



could be a significant breakthrough year for him. The 2021 XC season also saw good involvement from other club juveniles, most new to the club. This is probably the toughest discipline to compete in, so we all take our collective hats off to all those who competed.

The first full school's competition of the year was the Indoor Combined Events in November, with both Sean and Liam again qualifying for the National Finals. Liam ultimately finished 9th against some tough competition but managed to set 3 PBs in the individual disciplines.

So this draws to a close the competition season for 2021. However, it would be remiss of me not to write some words about a truly stand out athlete

who is very proud to compete in the maroon and white of Athenry AC, Liam Shaw. This was a great year for Liam; he took 15 gold medals, two silver and two bronze medals, mostly in the throwing events, and remained unbeaten in his age group. In taking these medals, he also set six Championship Best Records. He became the youngest ever winner of the National Junior Shot Put title in the summer at just 15 years and 267 days.

Liam's hard work was ultimately rewarded this year with his selection for the Irish Schools T&F team to compete at the 2021 SIAB Championships in Derby, UK, where Liam came away with his first-ever international medal, bronze in the Shot. This will certainly not be the last time we see Liam in an Ireland singlet; it just now remains to see how far this very talented athlete can progress.

Liam is not just a competitive athlete but now coaches our young athletes; in doing so, he hopes he can act as a role model and encourage the next generation.

We hope 2022 gives us more opportunities to grow as a club, and we also look forward to the next phase of our track development to finally give us a home.



# Seven Sisters Skyline 2021

From *SkyrunningUK.com*: The 2021 edition will see 200 participants take to the start line on Ireland's most demanding mountain running route. The out and back course takes in all seven peaks of the Derryveagh Mountains with all but the highest peak, Mount Errigal, being covered twice, covering over 4,000m ascent in the now 55k route. A new start will see competitors take in a loop around Dunlewey lough before the first ascent at 5k.

BY RONAN "SPEEDY" MCCARTHY

As I walked back to the car about 20 minutes after finishing the race, glancing at my finishers medal and watch, which read 11hrs 52mins, I just burst into tears, I didn't know why or how, it just came out of nowhere, a few people approached asking was I okay? Was I injured? "No, I'm fine, I don't even know why I'm crying" was all I could muster up to say. Another 10 minutes later while sitting in the car I realised that this hadn't just been a race, it had been a journey of discovery, of self-doubt, of physical and mental endurance and a journey of redemption that had taken the guts of two years to complete.

A quick rewind of the clock to September 2019 where I saw a video on Facebook of a guy running down a mountain (turned out to be the miner's path on Muckish mountain) and I just thought wow, that looks scary but pretty impressive, I would love to have a go at that. It was a promo for the Seven Sisters Skyline race over 55km in Dunlewey, County Donegal, a race that takes in 13 mountains with a total elevation of almost 4000 metres. There was also a 25km race, but I figured if I'm travelling all the way up to Donegal I may as well do the big one.

## AUGUST 2020

I landed in Donegal full of hope and excitement, it was going to be a very hot day, I tend to suffer a lot in the heat, but other than that I thought I had the training done and could somehow tough it out to get to the finish line before the cut-off point of 14 hours. Alas, 27kms, 7 mountains and 7.5 hours later I stood at Checkpoint 2 at the bottom of Muckish mountain with my tail between my very sore legs, dropped out, wondering how it had gone so wrong. It had been my first DNF since the All Ireland Under 17 Cross Country Championships almost 30 years earlier. That DNF had brought about the end to my early running career so this was going to be an important crossroad that I needed to tackle



Ronan McCarthy photo by John O'Connor

accordingly. my final big training week before taper so I

I took a full month off, no running whatsoever, pigged out on bad food and gained about a stone weight in rapid time. Then the email came through: "Registration for Seven Sisters Skyline 2021". A quick word to the wife to say I was thinking of having another crack at it, "Well you better finish it this time because I'm not putting up with you in this mood again".

Permission received, lets go!!! I booked a one-on-one session with Jane Ann and started the whole process again. On reflection I knew I had made massive mistakes leading up to the 2020 race and Jane Ann confirmed a lot of these with me. We made a few adjustments and added some strength/HIIT sessions to my training and a few changes in diet too. I also discovered Shane Finn's podcast, *Pushing Limits*, and took a huge amount of guidance from this. The main change in training though was to get more mountains in. I had done plenty of mileage in 2020 but not a lot of mountains.

To cut a long training story short, I upped my strength sessions from zero to two a week, went from two mountain days in 2020 to 13 days in 2021, ranging from 4 to 8

hours each day. These were solo training days as they were all midweek. Some of these proved lonely but they were huge in building physical and more importantly mental endurance. A week's holidays in Kerry coincided with

managed to squeeze in three days on the MacGillycuddy's Reeks giving me a total of 16 days in the mountains along with all the regular road runs.

Two weeks out I was nervous and still not 100% sure I had done enough but I was mentally ready to give it another go. One week prior to start day another email comes through notifying us of a "slight" course change, 3kms extra distance and 200 metres extra climbing. Well, isn't that great, as if it wasn't already tough enough!!!

## RACE TIME

So to the race itself. After a de-



A runner on Muckish mountain, Donegal

cent night's sleep (which is rare before a big race) I trotted up to the start line 15 minutes before the off. I had set out a race plan for myself the night before and wrote it down, so I pulled it out



for a quick recap.

1. If you think you are going too fast YOU ARE, slow down.
2. If you think you are going too slowly, YOU'RE NOT.
3. Stay positive. No negative thoughts. If negative thoughts creep in squash them quickly and move on.
4. Your first goal is to get to Checkpoint 1 at the base of Muckish in good shape, well hydrated, and well fed. Don't wait too long at the checkpoint, refill your water and get moving again.
5. Your next goal is to ascend and descend Muckish at your own pace, do not get sucked in to following other racers.
6. Refill again at Checkpoint 2, stay hydrated and fed. There are only 6 mountains to go now, take one mountain at a time, stay at your own pace.
7. Once you get to the bottom of Errigal you are at Checkpoint 3, you are almost there. Make sure you have enough food and water to finish out.

I read these to myself 3 or 4 times before the off to cement them in my head, I made a lot of mistakes the previous year so wanted to get a solid plan this year and stick to it.

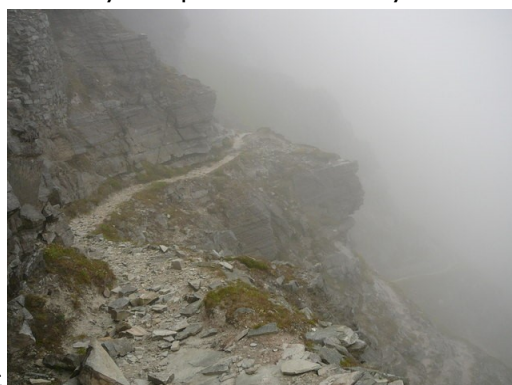
At 6am race organiser Eunan Quinn did the countdown and sent us on our way. I started pretty close to the back of the pack so as not to get sucked along at a break-neck pace up the front. I got chatting to a guy called Shane during the first few kilometres, this helped the mind relax and keep the pace low.

After around 5kms of trail and mud the real climbing starts: mountain no. 1, Errigal base. Only 200 metres up my calves started burning, heartbeat elevating, head in a spin... "Oh no, what's happening, I can't feel this bad this early". Panic was really setting in, then I started to talk myself around. "You're fine, relax, you've done the training, this has happened on training runs too, relax, it will pass". I started thinking positive thoughts and just kept putting one foot in front of the other. It worked and before I knew it I was

cutting across to mountain no.2, Mackoght, this was a really steep climb but a relatively short one so the pain never really kicked in and I felt good. This galvanised me a bit, I'd been through the first panic attack early but had heeded my own advice so now it was time to push on and get into a rhythm.

Between mountains 2 and 3 (Aghla More) is the only real bit of respite the course gives you, it's about 3kms of descent on soft marshy ground but it is easy running and a good time to get settled into the race. I was with a group of about 7 or 8 other runners here and felt my pace was good, so I just stayed at the back of the pack and stayed steady.

Climb 3 is a real toughie and exceptionally steep as you go from 120m to 570m in less than 2kms. It was at this climb last year that I had already started to think I was in trouble, but I got through it relatively unscathed this time. I had lost touch with the group I was with, One runner behind me, five in front but I wanted to keep to my own pace so didn't worry



*Muckish mountain*

about the gap.

The next 2 climbs follow very quickly, Agha Beg (4) and Agha Beg North (5). This is the first point where you can meet other runners descending while you are ascending and seeing a lot of other faces and how they were moving gave me confidence that I was still moving pretty well.

On to climb 6, Na Leargacha, a short but really steep one coming at the 20k point. I seemed to struggle on this one for some reason and it knocked the stuffing out of me but I kept moving, the descent was a really steep slippery one that really tested the quads, I

watched as most the guys ahead of me were using poles.... "hmmm, they seem to be helping, I wonder...forget about it, you don't have poles, concentrate on what you are doing and keep going". The worst thing about these tricky descents is you immediately remember that you have to go back up them again on the way back, this was another thing that had killed me psychologically the previous year so I started looking for positives this year... "maybe if I moved 10 metres to the left there on the way back up this might not be as bad".

### **MUCKISH**

After mountain 6 you come to the first checkpoint of the day situated on the first bit of road you have seen since the opening 500 metres of the course. I had made the cut-off time with plenty of time to spare, I felt really good and was chuffed to have accomplished goal number 1. However, in the background, looming large, was mountain no.7, Muckish, a gruelling ridge climb to the summit at 720m then down the Miners Path on the far side and back up to the summit again before descending back to the checkpoint, which by then is Checkpoint 2. This is where everything had gone completely pear-shaped last year and had ended my race: what should have been an approximately 2.5 hour round trip had turned in to an almost 4 hour nightmare. But I had prepared just as much mentally as I had physically this year and broken the climb down in to different parts in my head, so I was ready for the challenge.

I met up with Shane again when he came in to Checkpoint 1 just behind me and we chatted about how things were going so far, a banana, Mars bar, and some water later the two of us decided to head out together to tackle the Muckish beast, two more guys tagged along as I shared my story from last year on the run down to the base, none of the others had been up Muckish before so I felt obliged to tell them how horrible it was. This, in hindsight, was probably a bit unfair and uncalled for but sometimes while making conversation you lose yourself in your own stories.

We got to the base and started heading up the ridge, I took the lead, put my head down and kept telling myself not to stop for any breaks, "keep pushing, keep pushing" was all that went through my head. There are parts of the climb where you are down on your hands and knees and funnily enough, I find this easier climbing, your back gets a bit of a rest along with your quads so I didn't mind it at all.



*The Ridge of Errigan mountain*

I reached the first point where the climb flattens out a small bit and looked behind, Shane was close by but our two compatriots were 200 metres down the ridge, Muckish had shown its toughness once again.

As I stood up and started trudging for the summit I was actually delighted, the climb had gone really well and still felt really strong. Shane and I stuck together and picked up another comrade on the way back up the far side: Ciara. The sole of her shoe had almost completely ripped off and was being held together by duct tape, so she had a tough few hours ahead of her with one dodgy shoe but she was really friendly and full of chat. The three of us kept each other company until we reached Checkpoint 2. We had made the round trip in 2 hours which was a really good time and still hours inside the cut-off.

We decided not to delay at Checkpoint 2. A quick feed, bottle refill and off we went having picked up another companion, John. There were six mountains and 25kms ahead, this is really where you start getting tested. There were going to be plenty of low moments over the next few hours but I felt I was still in good shape and was just going to tackle it one mountain at a time.

Halfway up the very next climb our little group had splintered. John had suffered early and had dropped off and gaps had opened between the rest of us. I was beginning to feel pinches in my quads and calves but in general I still felt good and got into a good climbing rhythm. By mountain 9 (the return up Agla Beg) I had found myself alone, I had stayed pushing on and without realising it had distanced Ciara and Shane. For a moment I thought about waiting but as much

er three runners and had joined up with another runner, Eoin. We got chatting when both of us seemed to lose the route and go completely off course. Wandering around looking for little red flags after 8 hours of torture is not the easiest thing to do but we eventually found the route again and headed on towards mountain 11 (Agla More).

Eoin was starting to suffer so advised me to push on by myself, I did, I was getting closer to the finish and could see more runners ahead so the competitive edge started kicking in and I was now starting to chase wilting runners down as I seemed to be getting stronger. Between mountains 11 and 12 there is a small beach front on the edge of Lough Altan, it looked very inviting and although declining the a full swim I walked in to it up to my waist to give the legs a quick ice bath, unfortunately my trail runners felt like they weighed a ton when I got out but it was a small price to pay.

**ERRIGAL**

I picked off a few more runners just before the base of Mackoght (12) and it was at this point that I first really felt I was going to finish the race. I knew Errigal was a massive climb to finish the day, but I felt I had enough in the tank and more than enough time to get the job done. I started the climb of Mackoght but about halfway up I started getting massive cramps in my quads, this was new, and really painful, I had cramps in my calves plenty of times in the past but never here, this was worrying. I looked around and saw nobody to seek advice from..."Do I stretch them? Do I rest? Do I keep going?" I took three electrolyte tablets and dumped them in to one of my water bottles and downed half of it and started moving again. The cramps subsided after a few minutes so I thought I was in the clear.

From the summit of Mackoght I looked over at Errigal: it looked daunting, the steep North Ridge that we had to ascend looking wind-battered and rocky. I descended to Checkpoint



*Lough Altan with beach*

as the companionship was great I felt I needed to keep going at my own pace. As it turned out my own pace was proving better than I thought and by the time I reached mountain

10 I had passed another

3, the last point at which you can exit the course early, knowing I was over two hours inside the cut-off time. Another banana and water refill and I started making my way to Errigal's north ridge.

As you circle the base of the mountain to get to the north ridge the whole mountain seems to loom over you, daring you to take it on, after almost ten hours out on the course it's the last thing you want to see. The cloud had moved in so I could not see the summit which made it all the more daunting.

By the time I had reached the start point of the climb I was almost hoarse from shouting at myself to stop thinking about it and just get on with the job at hand. I had heard plenty of horror stories so knew it would be tough but I had still underestimated how tough it was going to be: it was a real struggle, half the climb almost on hands and knees on rocks. I stopped multiple times gulping water and electrolytes, my quads began to cramp again about three quarters of the way up and it was agony.

This time I rested for a couple of minutes, it seemed to ease them again momentarily so on I went. I finally reached the 740m summit after what seemed like an eternity and almost cried with relief, there was still 8kms of racing left to do but the mountains were now out of the way, I think I was even more elated at this point than I



Finishing time: 11:52:35

was at the finish line because now, barring an injury or fall, I knew I was going to make it.

I took my time on the descent so as not to make any silly mistakes and tried to enjoy the last few kilometres as best I could.

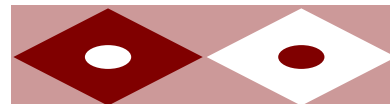
The quads started acting up again about 3kms from home and I started to walk rather than run. I got passed by another runner for the first time since the halfway point but at this stage I didn't care, the competitive edge was now gone and it was all about getting to the finish without risking an injury.

About 1 km from the end you cross the bridge over Lough Nacung and can see and hear the finish line in the distance, the pain never goes away but it subsides enough that you can enjoy the run in and savour the crowd cheering you home over those last few strides. These kind's of moments are rare and need to be enjoyed so I grinned from ear to ear and gave plenty of fist pumps over the last 100 metres.

A few minutes later it was great to see Eoin and Shane

running through the line, handshakes turned in to hugs, they were well earned.

We spoke while eating the freshly made burgers and of course posed the obligatory question.....Would you do it again? "No" was my answer, for now anyway. It had been a hell of a journey and it would be a full 20 minutes later in my car before I would fully understand and appreciate what it had all meant to me.



**World's Marathons website**

An EPIC Mountain running event in the Derryveagh Mountains in Donegal. The Seven Sisters Skyline Ireland - 55km with 4,000m ascent!

Regarded by participants as the toughest mountain running event in Ireland. The event is being held in Donegal, the most northerly county on the island of Ireland....but still only three hours from Dublin, and two hours from Belfast. Donegal is a mystical, magical place, which boasts wild, rugged, unspoilt landscapes, and an incredible coastline with some of the most spectacular views in Europe. Donegal was voted 'Coolest place on the planet' by National Geographic in 2017, and for good reason...

Review from "Mark", same website: "Most beautiful scenery in Ireland, as this mountain range in Donegal is so spread out. It has an untouched hidden beach between mountains, endless ups and downs, "the Miners Path" on Muckish mountain has to be experienced at least once in your life, the most challenging course ever, the 2018 event was 42k and only comparison is that it was twice as challenging and rewarding at the Mourne Skyline gtr, but even more sections and challenges added again in 2019 and friendliest encouraging aid stations in my opinion and experience having run extreme one day events across the world."



Still standing, just.



Tommy Joe Whyte in his back field with his flying machine.