

Isle of Jura Fell Race 25th May 2019

There are two types of runners who compete at the Isle of Jura Fell Race. Those few who run their first race and say 'never again, not ever!' And then there are the many for whom the race simply gets under their skin. Most of the Jura fell running community who make the annual pilgrimage to the island, having just completed one of the hardest races in fell running, are already thinking about next year. Once isn't good enough; many need to run it again, and again and again, like Albert Sunter who completed his 30th race this year, and Ian Holmes completing his 23rd race - every single one of which has been well under 4hrs.

Jura is way more than just a race; it's a full-on weekend adventure; travelling to the island, by bike, boat or campervan, the ferry across the sound of Jura and those first views of the Paps, foreboding. Meeting old friends, making new. Having a blether whilst enjoying a beer (or six..?..) the night before the race looking out over the idyllic natural harbour at Craighouse. Then the race itself, brutally hard, unrelenting, scree the likes of which you have likely never seen, hoping to find that perfect racing line. The bog, the 7 ascents and descents. What is it about a race as hard as this, that makes you feel so good when you have finished, and leaves you wanting more?

I am not sure who obsesses over the weather forecast more, me as the race organiser or the competitors? As the week before the race progressed, the forecast of rain for the afternoon was now looking like starting earlier and earlier. The 8-year run of good weather was about to change. At last, a race for the navigators.

As registration progressed Beinn Shiantaidh (check point 6) and Corra Bheinn (check point 7), the only two summits visible from Craighouse, disappeared from view. The drizzle had started early and was turning to rain. The midges had been on a feeding frenzy since the first tents were unzipped.

As runners congregated on the start line, maps and bearings were given one final check. Five years old Oscar, from Jura Primary School, did a superb job of counting down to start the race. Finally, the wait was over. 255 runners headed off into the mist.

This year we had SportIdent chip timing, broadcasting live splits from each checkpoint back to race control. For us organisers and the spectators in the cooperage, watching the race unfold, albeit on a screen, was really exciting. The male front runners changed between each checkpoint. A battle was unfolding. The first two females, Jill Stephen and Helen Fallas were neck and neck through each check point, another battle taking place.

Tim Morgan, another young runner competing in his first Jura, like Ted Ferguson last year, eventually pulled away from the field winning in an impressive time of 3:20:27. Jill Stephen, doing the same was first female, in an equally impressive time of 4:06:22.

As runners crossed the finish line, the stories started to come in. Navigational errors, runners in groups following the perceived confident runner in front, successful lines, less successful ones, runners joining forces, runners parting ways. One runner described themselves as feeling like the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

The conditions favoured some; others just wanted the ordeal to end. The ability to navigate a racing line in poor visibility is a unique skill, in a different league to the ability to simply navigate safely off a hill. On the cols runners were teased by gentler winds and temperatures that were described as "almost balmy", only to have to climb back up into the cloud and biting wind to the summits.

Being able to track runners through each checkpoint added a vital safety element to the race and was worth its weight in gold. Almost unbelievably in the conditions, every runner made it safely back to Craighouse. The mountain rescue teams did not have to search for a single lost runner, a testament to the quality of the field,

Last runner Mick Robinson received the biggest cheers of the day, crossing the finish line during prize giving after a gruelling 8 hrs 15mins on the hill, in worsening conditions. His 17th completion.

A record 35 males achieved under 4hrs, an incredible achievement given the conditions.

November sadly saw the passing away of Jim Smith. Together with George Broderick he devised and organised the first ever Jura Fell race. Jim is the only person to ever both win the race and come last. In his 30's and 40's he was an awesome runner, clocking up amazing times in all the classic races. As he got older and unable to race, he was still there at races on the tops of hills handing out tangerines and more recently taking numerous photos. He loved the Isle of Jura and continued coming for many years to support the race. He will be greatly missed.

A huge thanks to everyone who helped make the race a success. Glasgow and Clyde Raynet for the communications. Arrochar and Oban Mountain Rescue Teams. The Jura Distillery for sponsoring the race. The numerous volunteers who helped with setting up, registration, the finish line, first aid and anything else that needed to be done. To Martin Stone for bringing his SportIdent timing, and taking away the stress both of tracking runners and producing the results. Fiona Walton and her team for feeding all the hungry runners. Jura Juniors & Small Isles Primary School parent council for the kids races. Ardfin, Inver, Forest and Tarbert Estates for allowing the race to take place on their land. Jura village hall committee for the excellent post-race ceilidh. The final and most important thanks is to all the marshals, the heroes of the hour, who stood on those summits in very challenging conditions to make sure all the runners were safe. They really had the hardest job of the day.

2020 will be the 40th ever race. See you there (if you are lucky enough to get a place!).

Results

1st Male - Tim Morgan, Edinburgh University Hare and Hounds - 3:20:27

2nd Male - Kim Collison, Borrowdale Fell Runners - 3:22:45

3rd Male - John Yells, Lochaber Athletic Club - 3:26:21

1st Female - Jill Stephen, Hunters Bog Trotters - 4:06:22

2nd Female - Helen Fallas, Carnethy Hill Running Club - 4:07:37

3rd Female - Eleanor Johnstone, Pennine Fell Runners - 4:21:27

1st Local Male – Rob Fletcher, Jura AC – 4:08:04

1st Local Female – Gini Dickinson, Jura AC – 6:17:15

1st MV40 – Alasdair Anthony, Ochil Hill Runners – 3:45:16

2nd MV40 – Andrew Jebb, Bingley Harriers & AC – 3:53:24

3rd MV40 – David Kerr, Highland Hill Runners – 4:00:26

1st FV40 – Sue Richmond, Pennine fell Runners – 4:59:12

2nd FV40 – Kirsty Bryan-Jones, Dark Peak Fell Runners – 5:19:50

3rd FV40 – Jenny Caddick, Dark Peak Fell Runners – 5:19:52

1st MV50 – Ian Holmes, Bingley Harriers & AC – 3:35:45
2nd MV50 – Mark Harris, Fife Athletic Club – 3:51:41
3rd MV50 – Stephen Pyke, Dark peak Fell Runners – 4:05:19
1st FV50 – Judith Jepson, Dark peak Fell Runners – 4:29:13
2nd FV50 – Michelle Hetherington, Carnethy Hill Running Club – 5:00:20
3rd FV50 – Alison Wainwright, Dark Peak Fell Runners – 5:24:40
1st MV60 – Gordon Pryde, Lomond Hill Runners & AAC – 4:52:06
2nd MV60 – Stephen Jones, Eryri Harriers – 5:00:58
3rd MV60 – Glen Davies, Mercia Fell Runners – 5:28:09
1st FV60 – Wendy Dodds, Clayton-le-Moors Harriers – 5:58:56
1st MV70 – Graham Arthur, Highland Hill Runners – 6:25:15
1st Male Team –Edinburgh University Hare and Hounds (Tim Morgan, Alexander Chepelin, Alistair Masson) – 10:48:44
1st Female Team – Dark peak Fell Runners (Judith Jepson, Majka Kunicka, Kirsty Bryan-Jones) – 14:35:38
John Dare Shield – Es Tresidder and Jill Stephen