

Mission: To represent and promote trail and mountain running.

Madness in the Wild Irish Hills

by Jonathan Beverly

I suspected I had crossed a line somewhere when, after I lost my shoe a second time, I simply pulled it out of the bog and continued plummeting down the ridge—one shoe in hand, arms akimbo, wind tearing my eyes, snot flowing unheeded across my face and a huge grin on my lips. I was running down the side of Carrauntoohil (Car-un-TOOL), Ireland’s highest mountain, and I was having the time of my life. I found myself here on a Sunday morning in early June after falling in with the Irish Mountain Runners Association. This group of sturdy runners spends nearly every weekend following a centuries-old tradition of charging to the summits of Ireland’s green hills, there jettisoning common sense to race back down.

Douglas Barry, IMRA chairman, tells me the first reference to hill running comes from Irish legend. Aging hero Finn McCool decided to choose a wife by staging a women’s race up and down a mountain in County Tipperary (some versions say it was a nude women’s race, a tradition that has, alas, lapsed). Unfortunately for Finn, the winner had a mind of her own as well as great legs, and ran off with his handsome cousin, Diarmuid. This set the sport back a bit, but the mountain still bears the name Slievenamon, Mountain of the Women.

Hills races formed a part of community games and

special contests throughout the intervening centuries, emerging as an organized, amateur sport in the mid-1800s, primarily in central England where it is known as fell running. Mountain running grew in popularity throughout the world in the 1900s, with the first annual IAAF world mountain running championship, called the World Trophy, contested in Italy in 1985.

IMRA was founded in 1980, and Ireland sent its first team to the worlds in 1986. Irish runners perfect their skills during IMRA’s 50 races a year, with events on each of the country’s major mountains and many shorter races on Wednesday evenings. I decided to cut my teeth on one of these shorter excursions, showing up on a rainy evening to run the 900-foot, 5K round-trip ascent of Bray Head on the coast south of Dublin.

“This is mad,” said the runner beside me, hiding from the rain under the awning of a shop-front with 80 other fools. We all agreed, but soon emerged to line up at the base of the hill disappearing into the low clouds. Unlike flashily attired road racers, the accepted “kit” here seemed to be baggy shorts and T-shirts, low-soled, studded shoes (preferably mud-caked and showing serious decay) and a few curious hats with short brims and ear flaps.

“On a good day you can easily see Wales,” Barry had told me, “But today you’ll be lucky to see Bray.” Indeed, Bray disappeared quickly as we climbed onto the hill and spread out across the steep, muddy, root-strewn face of the hillside. Although the marked trail circled to the right, mountain-running rules don’t prohibit short-cuts if you’re willing to trade distance for incline.

Up in the mist, I stayed close behind the others as we ran over the first summit with the gorse slashing our ankles, along a narrow road above the sound of surf far below, and onto the rocky scree of the true summit. The two leaders flashed by on their way down. I later found out one was Noel Berkeley, the Irish national 10,000-meter champion, but the other, mountain champion Paul Nolan, proved stronger this evening in his milieu with a reckless descent down the muddy trail. Sometime later I made it down—wet, dirty and strangely, deliriously happy. At the pub where we gathered after the race, I found my companions came from all sorts of backgrounds—there were track elites, road racers, rock climbers, even a championship boxer. But here they were all mountain runners, and they welcomed me into their camaraderie of mutual madness.

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Anxious Moments in Switzerland

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Imagine being on the management staff at one of the biggest races of the year and told one of your team members may not be able to compete. *Just* because he lost his runner number on race morning.

Rewind to Crans-Montana, Switzerland, for the 2008 World Mountain Running Trophy Race and consider my anxiety when I visited the Data Sport timing van at the race finish line and alerted officials that one of our runners was numberless down at the start line in Sierre. I figured it was, "No big deal," I think, "Give him another number and send him on his way." Alas, this was not to be. Positively no numbers were available at the start line. I was told to carry a number down to the start or said runner **would not** compete. I had 45 minutes until race start and I was about 30 minutes away! I was no longer anxious, I was bordering on frantic. I yelled to a race official while already on the run, "Let them know at the start that I have the number and timing chip and I'm on my way."

To top it off, I'd just finished running the 11.9 kilometer senior men's course, ran another four kilometers to include collecting my gear, heading back to the hotel for a quick shower, and back to the finish line to watch our mountain team members compete. Now I was charging another 600 meters down to the funicular (the fastest way down to the start line) in hopes of catching a quick ride—the express train which took 12 minutes—down the mountain. Luck was on my side as the next car was an express and would depart at 10:45 a.m. With the start slated for a prompt 11:15 a.m. I could make it down by 10:57 a.m., hustle to the start line, locate the numberless athlete and send him on his way.

The doors closed on the funicular and thankfully we were on "Swiss time." This meant prompt. But...imagine my surprise when the train already starting down the tracks, stops, and returns to the station to let a Mother and child onto the train. Exasperated, I am now glaring at the seconds ticking very quickly away on my watch. The train starts again and we're heading down the mountain. I'm trying to relax thinking I have a few minutes to spare if all goes well.

As soon as we reach the station in Sierre I'm on my feet ready to run again. I get to the street and head to the start line just 100 meters away. I see our team leader and he takes me to our numberless runner. But, he's not where Rich thinks he is...Another moment of panic. "Where is he?!" Off I go again...still running. With less than 10 minutes to spare I spot Simon and I can't help but smile. I manage a brief, "Hello," and say, "Take a deep breath and relax, everything is fine." I guess I'm talking more to myself as he responds, "I wasn't worried at all."

We get the chip on his shoelace, the number pinned to his singlet, and one final good-luck hug for a fast and speedy ascent. It's not until the gun goes off and the runners are on their way that I finally relax.

Happy Trails! Nancy

GOALS OF ATRA

- ◆ Compile & publish a comprehensive listing of nationwide trail running events
- ◆ Educate and provide information about our sport to the rest of the outdoor community, to the media and to non-running entities that have similar goals and objectives
- ◆ Organize ATRA sponsored & supported events
- ◆ Be sensitive to the environment.
- ◆ Provide a forum whereby the business of the sport can be discussed and organized
- ◆ Create & nurture alliances with other associations
- ◆ Develop recreational participation and provide opportunities for families to enjoy our sport through events and clinics

PINE MOUNTAIN ULTRAMARATHON RETURNS TO FDR STATE PARK IN GEORGIA

The Georgia Ultrarunning & Trailrunning Society (GUTS) has announced the rebirth of the Pine Mountain Ultra on the rocky trails of the FDR State Park just outside of Pine Mountain, Georgia. The race will be held on Sunday, December 7, 2008. For many years the Pine Mountain Ultra was held as a 46 mile out-and-back race along the 23 mile Pine Mountain Trail. Later the race was run as a 50 miler. The 2008 event will be a 40 mile race, utilizing some of the spur trails in the park, as well as the blue-blazed Pine Mountain Trail. "We're very excited about the distance," says race director Sarah Tynes. "Forty miles is a great stepping stone in between 50ks and 50 milers."

The race had been without a race director for two years. Tynes says she stepped up as RD because of her love for the trails at FDR. "I've always loved running down there," says Tynes, who admits that she's probably now too slow to make the race cutoffs that she has set for this year's event. Runners will have 10-1/2 hours to finish the 40 mile course. All finishers will receive a fleece pullover with the race logo embroidered on it. While this may seem like a generous cutoff, Tynes cautions that the trail is not an easy one. "It wouldn't be any fun if it were," she quips.

A portion of the proceeds from the 2008 Pine Mountain Ultra will go to the Pine Mountain Trail Association, a non-profit which maintains the trails system within FDR. For more information on the race, visit the GUTS website at www.getguts.com.

LA SPORTIVA MOUNTAIN CUP LOOKS TOWARD YEAR TWO

After a hugely successful first year, the La Sportiva Mountain Cup will be back in 2009 with eight to 10 events held nationwide. "We plan to have fewer races in 2009 which should prove to be more competitive. The events will offer a variety of terrain with races all under the ultra distance," said organizer Buzz Burrell.

This year the Mountain Cup awarded \$25,000 in prize money to series winners who included Shiloh Mielke and sister Meadow Tarves in the open category and Simon Gutierrez and Lisa Goldsmith in the masters category.

Complete results are available at www.mountainrunning.com. The dates for the 2009 series will be announced in November.

PIKES PEAK ASCENT NAMED 2010 WMRA WORLD LONG DISTANCE CHALLENGE

At the WMRA Congress meeting in Sierre, Switzerland on Saturday, September 13, the Pikes Peak Ascent was awarded the designation of World Long Distance Challenge 2010.

After hearing the news race director Ron Illgen said, "This is fantastic news! It will be great having some of the world's best again challenging the Peak. We are honored to be awarded this prestigious event."

2010 marks the seventh World Long Distance Challenge. Hosts of the previous six included: Switzerland (hosted two of the challenge events), Great Britain, Austria, France, and the USA.

CROATIA TO HOST 2009 WORLD MASTERS MOUNTAIN RUNNING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Also at the WMRA Congress meeting, it was announced that Zagreb, Croatia would host the 9th World Masters Mountain Running Championships during the second weekend of September.

The race will start in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, which boasts more than one million residents making it one of the biggest cities in SE Europe. The course includes asphalt road for the first 200 meters and the last 350 meters with the remainder on footpath between one to two meters wide. There are no extremely steep sections over the 8.3 kilometer course, but moderate steepness. The start elevation is 360 meters while the finish is 1030 meters. Details at www.wmra.info.

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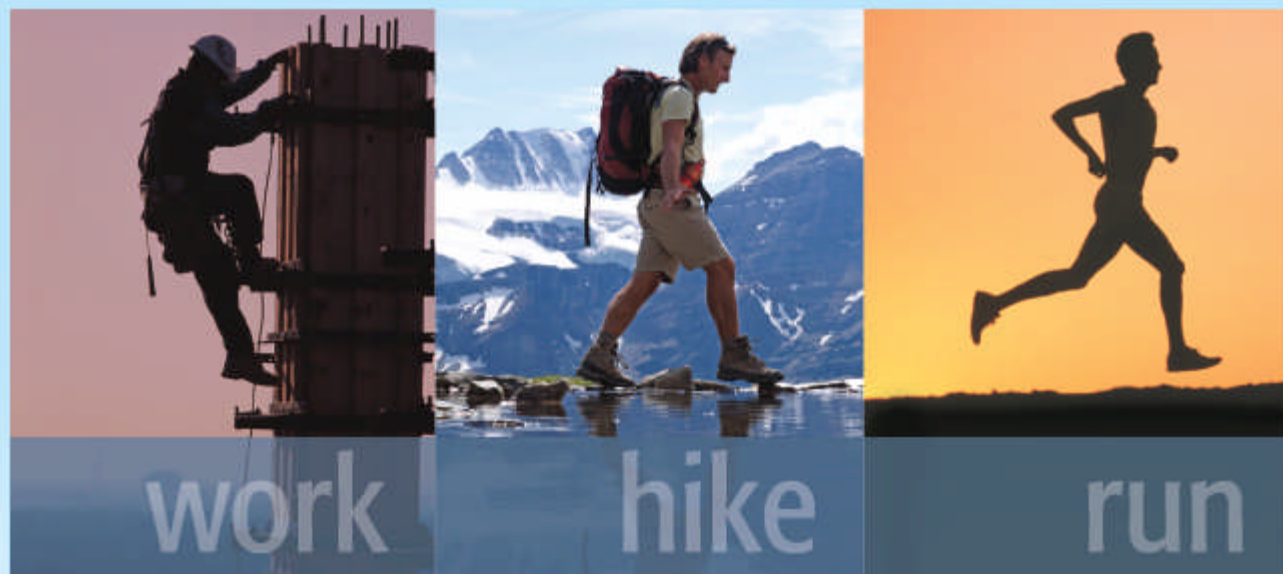
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USATF Mountain and Trail Championships 2008

ATRA congratulates the open champions listed below and all of the finishers!



- Trail Marathon — June 8, Deadwood, SD—Champs: *James McGown & Emily Brzozowski*
- Mountain — June 21, Gorham, NH—Champs: *Eric Blake & Brandy Erholtz*
- Trail (8 km/12 km) — June 29, Steamboat Springs, CO—Champs: *Jon Severy & Laura Haefeli*
- 100 Mile Trail — July 16, Lake Tahoe, CA—Champs: *Eric Skaden/Mike Wolfe & Nikki Kimball*
- 50 Mile Trail — July 28, Crystal Mountain, WA—Champs: *Michael Wardian & Susannah Beck*
- 100km Trail — August 18, Willamette Pass, OR—Champs: *Neil Olsen & Prudence L'Heureux*



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By the way, despite women's crucial role in the sport's legendary origins, females make up a minority of mountain runners. Douglas tells me there are 131 women members of IMRA, out of approximately 1,000. In the Bray Head results, I counted 12 out of 80 women finishers.

I was happy to meet several runners who, like me, were heading west that weekend for the "Big C"—Carrauntoohil. You see the 3,400-foot peak of Carrauntoohil in the distance as you enter County Kerry in the far southwest of Ireland. Historian J.H. Andrews says this area has "remained the most secluded, and in some ways the most Irish part of Ireland." I quickly fell in love with its beauty—wild mountains looming over pastoral lowlands surrounded by a rocky coast—and enjoyed exploring Killarney National Park and the Dingle Peninsula in the days before the race.

Barry first proposed the race up Carrauntoohil in 1986, but conventional wisdom considered it too dangerous. Subsequent years, however, have proved that the mountain's mystique was stronger than its reality. Not that it can't be dangerous, especially when the "the mist is down," as it was during the inaugural race in 1987. The runners decided to ascend together to ensure everyone knew the course, then race back. Barry himself won, beating a much faster Englishman by 13 minutes through his knowledge of the route and his fearless descent.

The second year a local farmer named John Lenihan showed up. Lenihan beat Barry's time by 47 minutes, running the 13.7K round-trip in what is still the course record of 71:43. Lenihan tells me his only regret from that race is that he "didn't have a more ferocious go at it"—he's convinced he could have run faster given the shape he was in. Although he has never matched his time, Lenihan came back and won the next year, and the next, and the next To date, he has an incredible 11 consecutive wins on what could well be called his mountain. Lenihan's exploits extend well beyond those of Kerry. An experienced road racer with PRs of 13:55 for 5K and 1:03:50 for the half marathon, he first discovered his mountain skills during a three-day stage race on the Isle of Man. After placing third in the road race the first day, he ran away from the same guys on a hill race the second day. Lenihan remembers thinking, "Where are they? What's keeping them?"

Not long after, he defeated the then world champion on the uphill Warrior's Race in County Sligo, winning £1,000 and national attention. He went on to set course records on nearly every summit in the land and to win races throughout Europe, at one point calling northern Italy his second home. In 1991 his 120- to 150-mile training weeks paid off with gold at the World Trophy in Switzerland, the high point of his career.

Now, about to turn 40, Lenihan says, "I'm a farmer, not an athlete." He keeps a dairy farm on the land he grew up on, six miles outside the small town of Castleisland. I visited him there, arriving via increasingly smaller roads, ending with a half-mile climb up his driveway in first gear, which hinted at the origins of his hill running skills. Milking keeps Lenihan busy morning and night, but he still manages 40 to 50 miles a week, enough to best most on any mountain, and all on Carrauntoohil, which he can point out across the valley from the field above his farm.

To keep his running streak alive he would again have to beat Francis Cosgrave, a Dubliner who also boasts international credentials. Cosgrave had finished second four years running, twice within two minutes of the champion, and once a mere 30 seconds back. Lenihan reported his training had been the best in several years, but modestly credited his streak to "lots of luck." On race morning Cosgrave confessed to having just come back from an injury incurred during the Three Peaks race in Tasmania last March. But he looked confident and said he was feeling strong.

Not all the runners at the start were international elites: I met several, such as Eddie, who had started running the shorter Wednesday night runs and now were looking to tackle some real mountains. "I'm a bit concerned about this," Eddie admitted, "but figure I can walk it if I have to. I just want to make it up and back down." I also met two Scotsmen who found out they had the mutual goal of running the highest peaks in the five nations of the British Isles, and two others with North American accents—a Canadian covered in Eco-Challenge logos, and an Iowan who was bicycling around Kerry that morning, happened across the IMRA Race registration sign and decided to give it a go.

The weather was near perfect: the first summits fully visible and the cloud cover that remained benevolently staying far above the peaks. Thirty-seven of us jumped the gate and walked up to the first corner. Then someone said go. Lenihan and Cosgrave pulled away quickly, running side by side up the roughly paved road. Yet by the time they reached the top of the first climb, half a mile from and 520 feet above the start, Lenihan already had a 10-meter lead and Cosgrave was slipping to third. Soon they pulled out of sight, leaving me to enjoy the scenery.

We ran between herds of sheep along the front of the hill to the mouth of an open-ended, cup-shaped valley, filled with lakes and surrounded by peaks. Carrauntoohil was in the center, straight ahead. To get there, however, we would have to circle the lip of the cup to the right, over the three summits of Caher—a mountain nearly as high as Carrauntoohil itself—and along the narrow ridge outlined against the sky. After plodding across a bog, we started up the ridge, the going harder than I had anticipated. Not only were we ascending rapidly, but the terrain required either lifting high over the tops of the heather hummocks or weaving and squishing through the boggy ground between them. Looking up I spotted Lenihan far ahead, already climbing well up onto Caher. The face of the mountain looked steep and huge behind his tiny figure.

By the time I reached that face, my calves were screaming that they were never going to make it to the top. Switching to the "mountain walk" I had observed—leaning forward from the waist with hands on knees—relieved my calves, and I even passed a runner. After a few minutes, however, my hamstrings and lower back told me they were now taking the strain so I rested them with some upright toe running. And so it went for what seemed like hours, walking more than running, leaving the boggy ground for a grassy slope that gave way to rocks as we climbed higher into the wind. I

(continued on page six)

was very glad when I caught sight of the shepherd's beehive hut and the volunteer waiting with water on the top of Caher. The summit of Carrauntoohil beckoned across the serrated ridge. Lenihan had called the ridge between the summits a "nasty bit of race." Indeed, with the exception of a few wide sections where I looked up to find myself running through the sky, I rarely appreciated the scenery as I picked my way down tallus slopes and along narrow crevices. The ridge fell away vertically to the left and was steeper on the right than I'd want to tumble down.

Halfway along the ridge Lenihan came flying toward me on the way back, his long hair streaming around his head and a look of relaxed concentration on his face. Considerably later, Cosgrave blew past down the slope of Carrauntoohil, living up to his fearless reputation on the rocky descent. A group of hikers offered quiet but much appreciated encouragement as I worked up the summit of Carrauntoohil beside another runner. Then suddenly we were on top—the world open on all sides and a surge of adrenaline coursing through my veins. We circled the metal cross at the summit, briefly admired the view, then started down.

I knew there was still work to be done, but also knew I would make it, and flew faster than I thought possible down the loose scree and through the tricky footplants of the ridge. Soon I was back on top of Caher. It was all downhill from here—decidedly downhill. I tried to emulate the relaxed fall of the runner in front of me—strides bouncing back and forth only to redirect and slightly brake the work of gravity. As the rocks gave way to the grassy slope, I became airborne. Nothing can beat this feeling: the wind screaming against your face, unsurpassed views spread before you, your feet instinctively finding the best route, and the satisfaction of knowing you're on the way home from the summit.

But I had one more adventure left. My pace continued unabated as I entered the heathery bog on the lower ridge, and I was two strides down the hill before I knew my shoe was gone. I turned to see it buried to the heel counter, released it with a

sucking sound, and sat down to hurriedly get it back on. But my fingers were cold, the laces were wet and double tied, and I succeeded only in tightening the knot. A woman hiking on the ridge below yelled up, "They're gaining on you! Just pull it on and go!" So I did. And promptly lost it again 100 yards down the hill. Pulling the shoe out again, I kept it in my hand and resumed my flight down the slope, actually increasing speed and thinking that I'd just carry my left one too if it came off. After a few more minutes of pure joy, I realized I would have to stop sometime as I couldn't run over the rocks and concrete of the road ahead in my stocking feet. And that is when I had the bright idea for the shortcut—straight over the steep inner side of the ridge toward the mouth of the valley ahead on the right

Somewhat to my surprise, I survived the plunge and made it across the bog, where I stopped to put the shoe back on. Even more surprising, my strategy worked, as I was in the same position when we hit the road. But I was too tired to go fast down the final descent and conceded a spot to the Eco-Challenge guy, who remarkably had gained a half mile and four or five positions since the summit. Being passed didn't dampen my thrill any, and I'm afraid I was somewhat too exuberant afterwards, as my wife told me, "Everyone here has been really low-key and you're pretty keyed up."

Lenihan sealed his 12th consecutive victory easily in 75:51, surprised only that the time wasn't faster given his effort. Cosgrave finished eight minutes back, settling for another second—no disgrace on Lenihan's mountain. Martin McDonald, who had been in second at the summit, got lost on the lower ridge and ended up sixth. Eddie finished in 2:20, well off his two-hour goal.

And I, with a plane to catch, had to say good-bye to my new friends and point my red rental car toward Dublin. But I knew I would never be quite the same, and I suspected I would be back.

Jonathan Beverly is the editor of Running Times Magazine. This article was featured in the May 2000 issue of Running Times and has been reprinted with permission from the author.

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Ultimate XC Moab Edition

This year marked the 24th installment of the World Mountain Running Trophy. Held in Sierre, Crans-Montana, Switzerland on September 14, the event offered three distances for the four categories of competitors. The junior women (at least 16 in the year of competition and not yet 20) would run a 4.6 kilometer uphill course over terrain to include pavement, gravel and dirt paths, single track trail, and alpine meadows. The junior men and senior women would start further down the mountain for a 9 kilometer course while the senior men would start at the base of the mountain in Sierre adding another 2.9 kilometers of uphill terrain through steep vineyards which flanked the entire facade of the lower portions of the course.



For the USA hopes were high for podium spots in all categories. The Teva U.S. Mountain Running Team had both first-time members and seasoned veterans representing nine states and ranging in age from 17 to 42.

Two of our runner categories had their best-ever finishes with the senior men taking a bronze medal and being the first team to have all six runners finish (Italy was the second team to have all runners finish). Rickey Gates led the way in 12th, followed by Joe Gray in 16th, Eric Blake in 23rd, Simon Gutierrez in 25th, Matt Byrne in 34th, and Zac Freudenberg in 36th.

The junior men scored a fourth-place finish led by University of Richmond Teammates Tim Smith and Levi Grandt in fifth and 13th respectively. Coloradans Jonny Stevens and Paul Petersen were 31st and 50th respectively.

Another first was an individual bronze medal for a U.S. junior woman. Alex Dunne, 17, San Clemente, CA, finished within one minute of the winner Laura Park from England. Yasmine White was the second and final U.S. finisher for the juniors in 38th position. The junior women finished 11th overall among the 18 teams.

Brandy Erholtz, a first-time competitor, led the senior women to an eighth place finish. Erholtz finished in 11th place, followed by Megan Kimmel in 33rd, Rachael Cuellar in 38th, and Laura Haefeli in 44th. For the senior women, five teams finished within six points of one another. Twenty one full teams competed in the senior women's category.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

In 2009, the silver anniversary of this renowned international event will be celebrated. And to top off this celebration, the event name will be the **WORLD MOUNTAIN RUNNING CHAMPIONSHIPS**.

The World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) has worked tirelessly over the past 24 years to achieve this designation from the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) which is the governing body of the sport of mountain running worldwide. The IAAF approved this name change at their council meeting this summer in Beijing. "We were delighted to hear this news from the IAAF," said WMRA President Danny Hughes, "It shows the commitment to our sport and solidifies mountain running on the world stage."

For countries who compete in the championships, additional sponsorships and much-needed support from their federations is anticipated. In Sierre, Crans-Montana a record 39 countries participated.

Next year's host has yet to be named, but the venue will be in Europe during the first weekend in September. An announcement is expected before November. For more information visit www.wmra.info.

Learn more about the
Teva U.S. Mountain Running
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