

The Connoisseurs Mountain Marathon

As the country basked on the beaches or blissed-out at early summer festivals, around 1100 aficionados of the Mountain Marathon scene were doing battle in the glens and on the bens of Scotland. The Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon (LAMM) was the second event of the planetFear Mountain Marathon Championships and is known as the connoisseur's mountain marathon for its track record in providing excellent areas, challenging courses and seamless organisation. It also provided some thrilling head-to-head racing and a few upsets.

Venue for this year's event was Glen Lochay, just a few miles north of Crianlarich and possibly the easiest area to get to ever used by the LAMM; quite a contrast to 2006 when the wilds of Assynt provided a memorable area and some epic journeys back south for the Sassenach contingent.

As ever, the location was only revealed to competitors around 36 hours before the event and, as competitors gathered into the huge marquee on Friday evening, all the talk was of where we might be sent to on the adjacent railway. Organiser, Martin Stone, has a well developed reputation for springing surprises on the LAMM and over the years has used Ferries, buses, trains and even the Aonach Mor gondola to transport competitors to a surprise start location. Whilst the shorter courses were bussed up the road to Bridge of Orchy, the main surprise for Elite, A and B competitors was that there were really no surprises. Just walk around 2km to the start and go – it's that simple!

The Elite course for day 1 was given as 39km – as a straight line or optimum route everyone knew they would be covering well over 40km and with the 8am temperature already being oppressive it looked as though a long day was in store. The hills of the area are large but generally grassy and very runnable (for the fit!) with relatively little surface rock and scree. Course planner, Angela Mudge, lives only around 1hour away from the event area so knows it very well and had devised some great "journeys" through the hills with the emphasis being on route choice with plenty of contouring for those who were psyched by the "up and over" or "plummet and crawl back up" options.



2nd place Elite competitors – Tim Laney and Stephen Pyke relax in a midge free midway camp

Being a summer event, overnight camp at the LAMM can be a great evening out in the wilds; catching up with old friends rather than the dark/cold suffer fest that some are used to. This year, Martin had laid on a wonderfully large, flat, grassy field and the adjacent bathing facilities were used to full effect. Despite Elite course winning times on day 1 being over 7 hours, it was apparent that there was some fierce competition with the first 6 pairs all less than 16 minutes apart and overnight leaders, Jonathan Aylward and Stephen Bottomley holding onto a slender lead of under 2 minutes. Nevertheless, the evening was for relaxing and amusing ourselves at people who had packed tin foil pans and arrived at midway camp with tinfoil colanders or the man who had saved a few grams by sleeping in a blizzard pack - think "boil in the bag" but packed a 3kg tent.

With the 6am bagpipe reveille the stage was set for some head-to-head racing. Leading teams in all the classes were asked to wear identifying numbers and set-off on an overcast but still humid morning to explore the hills south into Glen Lochay and Glen Dochart. Whereas day 1 had been characterised by big rounded hills with fairly simple control sites, day 2 was a much more complex, lumpy bumpy area which, in mist, would have tested many. As it was, a combination of the pressure in the chasing start and the technicality of the area produced some serious changes of fortune. Hot on the heels of the leaders, Alec Keith and Kenny Riddle marked control 1 on a re-entrant very close to the one with the control in it but spent 40 minutes finding it despite 5 other teams coming through the control.



Overall Winners – Jon Aylward and Steve Bottomley

This blew their changes completely and they dropped from a close 2nd

at the overnight to 6th by the end of day 2. Meanwhile, Jon Morgan and Es Tressider (recent Skye Ridge record getter) were having an even bigger rush of blood to the head. In 6th place overnight they decided to storm the first hill in the hope of catching at least 2 or 3 of the teams just ahead. Unfortunately, it was the wrong hill they stormed and cost them almost an hour. A frustration compounded when they later realised that they had another control marked exactly 1km away from where it should be. They undoubtedly ran furthest on day 2, but not fastest and their mistakes cost them 3 places in the overall results.

In the final analysis, Jonathan and Stephen comfortably held onto their overnight lead with the fastest day 2 time and were deserved winners of the LAMM trophy presented in several pieces this year as it doesn't bounce well. Tim Laney and Stephen Pyke moved up from 4th overnight to clinch 2nd place and the evergreen Harding brothers moved up from 5th place overnight to 3rd overall. Karen Davison, feeling fresh after her 2nd place in the British Championship qualifier at Duddon last week was the only lady brave enough to tackle the Elite course and teamed up with Shane Ohly. Their day 1 performance saw them comfortably in the chasing start with 9th place and a slightly steadier day 2 got them home in 11th place overall with Karen vowing that 6hrs is the longest she ever wants to run for again!

In the other classes, the 2 leading teams in the A were separated by seconds and the bitterest blow must go to overnight leaders of the C course. On day 2 they convinced themselves that they were in the right place and the control was missing so pressed on to cross the line first only to realise that all the other teams were finding that control and they would be disqualified.



Shane Ohly/Karen Davison – 11th overall/Mixed class winners

Once again, Martin and his dedicated team staged a classic event – great terrain, tough but fair courses, good camaraderie and a whole trailer full of prizes from Lowe Alpine – it is indeed “the Connoisseurs Mountain Marathon”

Full results online at www.lamm.co.uk

Find out more about the planetFear mountain marathon Championships at www.runfurther.com