

3 Peaks Race Report for 2011

By Race Director Paul Dennison and Brian Dooks.

The Scots led the way in the 2011 Three Peaks Race with Thomas Owens claiming victory after his Shettleston Harriers team mate Jethro Lennox – winner of the 2008 World Long Distance Mountain Running Challenge in the Yorkshire Dales – fell on the descent from Ingleborough.

Owens finished in 2hrs 53mins 34secs, which was 2mins 41secs ahead of Robbie Simpson, of Deeside Runners, with Ben Abdelnoor, of Ambleside Athletic Club, third in 2:59:37. Lennox, who beat Owens by 37 seconds in the 2008 Three Peaks, was fourth in 3:00:29. The winning time was the fastest for four years.

After three weeks of sunny weather, the chairman of the Three Peaks Race Association Committee, Paul Dennison, thought the chances of a good race day were slim. But sunny it was, with a cool wind down in the valley at Horton-in-Ribblesdale and gale force on the tops. The organisers could not have asked for more.

A record number of 765 starters set off from a full entry list of 999, which included five former men's race winners and five in the ladies' category. It was an impressive start with the top seven in the men's race reaching the summit of Pen-y-ghent in 30 minutes.

Then the race for Ribblehead was on. Owens and Lennox were the first through the checkpoint separated by only two seconds. As they started the climb up Whernside they were just over a minute ahead of the chasing pair of Simpson and Abdelnoor. The leaders were working together to combat the gale force winds.

Only two seconds separated them at the Whernside checkpoint and they were still together as they came into the Hill Inn, having opened up a two minutes lead on Simpson and Abdelnoor.

The climb up Ingleborough saw Owens take over a minute lead on Lennox, who was starting to feel the pressure. On Ingleborough summit Simpson was only 22 seconds behind Lennox and everything was gearing up for a great race to the finish in Horton.

It proved to be very close with nine runners home within 15 minutes of the winner. The first three all finished in under three hours, but were well outside the race record of 2:46:03 set by Andy Peace, of Bingley Harriers, in 1996.

In the ladies' race New Zealander Anna Frost took an early lead on Pen-y-ghent and slowly increased it as she went along, but as she was coming off Whernside Helen Fines, of Calder Valley Fell Runners, started to catch her.

The climb up Ingleborough found Frost increasing her lead to three minutes ahead of Fines at the summit and she finished in a time of 3:30:00. Fines was second four minutes later. The women's record of 3:14:43 was set by Anna Pichtrova, of the Czech Republic, when the Three Peaks hosted the World Long Distance Mountain Running Challenge in 2008.

Two more records fell during the 2011 race. In the Ladies' Over-50s Race, another Shettleston Harrier, Fiona Maxwell, knocked 26 minutes off the previous record to finish in 3:39:53, and in the Ladies Over-60s category, Wendy Dodds, of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, recorded 4:34:01.

This was a 29-minute improvement on the time set by Jenny Vesey, the only other Over-60 lady to have finished the race. She died within months of completing the 2009 race. This year her husband and family presented a new trophy in her memory to be awarded to the fastest Over-60s female competitor.

It was presented for the first time to Wendy Dodds. Another new award – the Alf Case Trophy - for the first ladies' team was won by Calder Valley Fell Runners.

Alf, who died in 2009, was one of the three competitors who completed the first Three Peaks Race. For many years he was secretary of the Three Peaks Race Association and was also the first chairman of the Fell Runners Association, which was founded in 1970.

A total of 677 runners finished the race, which is 23.3 miles long with 5,279ft of ascent.

At the prize giving the team prizes were sponsored and awarded by Salomon. They were awarded to: Men's race – 1, Shettleston Harriers; 2, Dark Peak Fell Runners Club; 3, Pudsey and Bramley AC. Women's race – 1, Calder Valley Fell Runners; 2, Wharfedale Harriers; 3, Settle Harriers.

Other prizes were presented by the Three Peaks Race main sponsor Welcome to Yorkshire, the tourism agency for Yorkshire. The winners of the men's race and the ladies' race received their trophies from Fred Bagley, the winner of the first race in 1954.

Although Mr Bagley won the first Three Peaks Race, he never took home a trophy because it was not presented until four years later after the event grew in popularity.

But now the 80-year-old, who lives on the Wirral, is looking after the carved oak trophy for 12 months after Thomas Owens, of Shettleston Harriers in Glasgow, who is spending the summer in the Alps, presented it to him.

Mr Bagley, a retired aeronautical engineer and teacher, won the first race in which there were only six competitors in a time of 3hrs 48mins.

Mr Owens, 29, said: "It was a privilege to meet Fred Bagley, who is such an important figure in the history of fell running. It is right that he should have the trophy to look after for me. I am proud and very happy to ask him to hold it on my behalf."

Mr Bagley, who was one of the founders of the Three Peaks Race, which originally started at the Hill Inn at Chapel-le-Dale, said: "I will cherish the trophy and show it to my children, grandchildren and great grand children. It feels so good to be able to hold it after so many years."

The oak wall plaque includes two of the Three Peaks – Penyghent and an outline of Ingleborough – as well as the Ribbleshead Viaduct on the Settle-Carlisle railway and Horton-in-Ribblesdale church.

Race Director Paul Dennison said: "The fell runners and their supporters gave Mr Bagley a tremendous reception at the prize presentation and we were delighted that Tom Owens made such a wonderful gesture. It was a perfect end to a perfect day."

Gary Verity, chief executive of Welcome to Yorkshire, said: "We are proud to support events such as the Three Peaks Race which put Yorkshire on the map. As one of the oldest and most famous fell races in Britain, this incredible challenge is close to Yorkshire's heart."

“This major event draws in runners and supporters from across the UK and really gives us a chance to showcase our stunning countryside and hopefully entice visitors to extend their stay and enjoy all we have to offer.”

For each person who enters the race, the Three Peaks Race Association gives £1 to the Friends of the Three Peaks, a charitable trust launched in 2009 to protect and enhance the special qualities of the landscape around Penyghent, Whernside and Ingleborough. This year the Association will give £999.

Details of the Friends are at:

<http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/looking-after/howyoucanhelp/friends-of-the-three-peaks>