

# 3 Peaks Race Report for 2012

By Race Director Paul Dennison and Brian Dooks.

A Scottish runner with a growing international reputation beat world class opposition to win the Three Peaks Race at the weekend but set himself another tough challenge in the process.

Joe Symonds, 28, of Hunters Bog Trotters in Edinburgh, finished the 23-mile race over the summits of Penyghent, Whernside and Ingleborough in the Yorkshire Dales in 2hrs 55mins 58secs.

Now he must win the race, which has Salomon as its principle sponsor, twice more to equal the achievement of his father, Hugh Symonds, of Kendal Athletic Club, who won in 1984, 1985 and 1987.

They are the second father and son to win the Three Peaks Race. Harry Walker, of Blackburn Harriers, won in 1977, 1978 and 1981. His son, David, of Clayton-le-Moors, won in 2003.

Joe Symonds' father was not there to see him beat some of the race favourites, including last year's winner Tom Owens, of Shettlestone Harriers in Glasgow.

After finishing the race at Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle, Symonds was not able to get a mobile phone signal to tell his father of his success. Joe said: "When I contact him he will be quite happy. In fact I think it will make his day."

But it later emerged that Hugh Symonds, who was in New Zealand, was monitoring his son's progress via the SPORTIdent website on the Internet and knew he had won. Joe said: "It's nice that they were taking such an interest on the other side of the world."

After several days of heavy rain, Saturday dawned dry, but there was a bitter cold easterly wind and the temperature barely lifted above three degrees on the summits. The 745 starters from an entry of 1,000 found themselves battling against showers of sleet.

Symonds, who finished ninth in the Three Peaks in 2008 when it incorporated the World Long Distance Mountain Running Challenge and retired at the Hill Inn checkpoint last year suffering from blisters and what he described as "a lack of fitness", was modest about his success.

He said: "The Three Peaks has a reputation for toughness, but in some ways you have to be fortunate to win it. If you have anything wrong with you on the day, you will get found out on this course."

The Three Peaks is billed as "the Marathon with Mountains" because of its 5,270ft of ascent. Symonds, whose wife's parents were on the summit of Ingleborough to support him, added: "I was lucky. I felt I was running really well and I won it. Whether I can come back and do it again, we will have to see."

In the 2011 Gore-Tex Trans-Alpine Run, Symonds and his teammate Jethro Lennox, who won the Three Peaks in 2008, finished only 17 minutes behind the winners, the Spaniards David Lopez and Miguel Caballero. In eight days of trail running, the winners covered 273.73 kilometres and 15,436 metres of ascent in 26hrs 37mins 51secs. Symonds and Lennox were second and won the final stage.

In the 2012 Three Peaks Race, second and third places went to two runners making their first attempts. Carl Bell, 29, of Howgill Harriers, was second in 2hrs 57mins 29secs and Rob Baker, 34, of Dark Peak Fell Runners, finished third in 2hrs 58mins 01secs.

Fourth was Ricky Lightfoot, of Ellenborough Athletics Club in West Cumbria, in 3hrs 00mins 21secs. Karl Gray, 42, of Calder Valley Fell Runners, had a notable race taking the male veteran over-40 title and fifth place in 3hrs 01min 19secs. His time was a new V40 record over the current course.

Andrew Davies, of Mercia Fell Runners Club, was sixth in 3hrs 02mins 05secs. Rob Jebb, of Bingley Harriers, who won the Three Peaks in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009, finished in seventh place in 3hrs 02mins 55secs ahead of last year's winner Tom Owens, of Shettlestone Harriers in Glasgow, in 3hrs 04mins 56secs.

As well as winning the race, Hunters Bog Trotters also supplied the fastest woman competitor. Sarah O'Neil, 25, finished in 3hrs 28mins 43secs. O'Neil's time on Penyghent summit was 20 seconds ahead of the second placed female Emelie Forsberg, of Salomon International, who finished in 3hrs 43mins 52sec.

Forsberg, a biology student from Tromso in Sweden, who sat an exam the day before the Three Peaks, fell further behind at Ribblehead and O'Neil was 4mins 38secs ahead on Whernside and reached Ingleborough 12 minutes ahead of the newcomer. Third was Welsh international fell runner Sarah Ridgway, 38, in 3hrs 45mins 51secs.

In the men's race, the pace was slow to the summit of Penyghent with Symonds, Baker, Lightfoot, Gray, Davies, Jebb and Owens all taking 30 minutes. Bell took nearly a minute longer but was back in contention at Ribblehead where the first three to finish were all within 22 seconds of each other.

Symonds, who said he enjoyed the steep climb up the face of Whernside, reached the summit 1min 49secs ahead of Bell, with Baker only two seconds behind. Symonds lost a few seconds on the rough descent to the Hill Inn where he was 1min 44secs ahead of Lightfoot, with Bell only three seconds slower.

Despite the weather, there was a good crowd of supporters on Ingleborough to see Symonds arrive in 2hrs 25mins 44secs. Baker followed in 2hrs 28mins 48secs with Bell two seconds behind. Then it was the long run for home through Sulber Nick with Symonds worrying that he might be overtaken, but making it back to Horton with a 1min 27secs margin.

In her 29th completion of the Three Peaks Race, Wendy Dodds, 61, of Clayton-le-Moor Harriers, the joint ladies winner in 1983, set a new lady over-60 record. Her time of 4hrs 23mins 14secs was quicker than all the over-60 men.

Two runners completed the race for the 21st time to qualify for the special award issued by the Three Race Association. They were Tony Varley, of Horwich, and Jean-Marc Lawton, of Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides, who is in the process of writing a book on the history of the Three Peaks Race.

It was an indication of the difficult conditions that only 641 of the 745 starters finished the race. The Race organisers expressed their gratitude to the marshals and radio operators, some of whom endured up to six hours on the summits in poor weather conditions until all the runners were safely at the finish.

Race Director Paul Dennison and his team woke on Sunday morning to watch gale force winds destroy two marquees which had been vital on the previous day. A marquee used for the medical and first aid staff was blown 200 yards across the event field and the race control marquee was flattened.

Interview with Joe Symonds at: **Joe Symonds wins coveted fell crown**