

2014 Westport Sea 2 Summit Race Report

The final race of the 2014 National Adventure Races series was in Westport last Saturday where a sell-out entry of 1700 competed in the Expert class Supreme and the Sport class Spirit events.

In the Supreme race the newly crowned National Expert Champion Dessie Duffy was looking to cap a super year with his 5th win in a row but had plenty of opposition including recent Connemara Rough Diamond Shawn Stewart who was a standby list late entrant and his Cavan Kayak club mate Killian Heery who was 3rd in Achill ROAR and a close 2nd in Moxie pro behind Duffy.

On the opening greenway 4+k sprint Duffy led his teammates Heery and Mike Reilly, Stewart, O Farrell and Tuohy with Cromie just behind.

Duffy again was a marked man on the ride out to the base of the reek with plenty willing to tuck in behind but Stewart and Tuohy flexed their muscles and somewhat showed their “hands” with strong bike legs to lead onto the mountain.

On the steep rocky ascent Duffy put in the fastest ascent but the fastest overall mountain run time of the day was set by O Farrell with Stewart a good second best as he led out on to the long bike leg via the steep Maum climb.

Duffy bided his time once he caught Stewart who valiantly tried to hang on but, as he had in Gaelforce West in August, the effort to stick with the leader was to prove too much as he slowed dramatically towards the end of the leg finishing 10th in the end.

In contrast Tuohy showed much improved mountain running and descending skills in particular compared to his recent Connemara Rough Diamond outing and showed every sign of having done his “homework” on the holy mountain in recent weeks and thus not losing too much time to his more experienced mountain running rivals. He then followed that up with the fastest bike leg of the day which brought him up to 2nd place just ahead of Heery as Duffy went into a the final transition on Westport quay with a big lead.

Duffy recorded an easy win in the end in 2:51:32 some 6 min clear of the well supported Mayo man Tuohy with Heery just behind in 3rd ahead of vet winner Cromie in 4th with Cavan Kayak clubmen Reilly and Kieron Cosgrave rounding out the top six.

In the ladies Expert race the favourite Fiona Meade led into the first transition 15 secs ahead of Aine Donegan and Denise Casey with Breedda Mc Fadden next in.

On the bike to the reek Meade extended her lead as would be expected from the 2014 women’s road race champion.

Donegan and Casey were next best with Christina Mc Kensie moving toward the front with her 2nd fastest bike leg.

On the mountain Casey showed her strength with the fastest split of the day marginally faster than Meade who still held a good lead starting out on the long bike leg where she tried to built on her

lead but Donegan moved into a strong second place with the fastest bike split of the day as Mackenzie similarly moved into 3rd with the second fastest bike leg.

On the final run of the finish however Meade had a snug lead and took her second Series win of the year in 2h 31' 42" over 2 min clear of impressive debutante Donegan in 2nd and Mackenzie 3rd with Casey just behind in 4th after the fastest final run leg.

Erin O Connell took 5th after some strong biking with Suzanne Scanlan in 6th

In the men's Sport Series race Jerry O Sullivan knew that anything other than a win for his only Series rival Damien Kelly would be enough for him to retain the title but the field also included proven mountain runner Des Kennedy and last year's race winner Brendan Conway as a late addition to the field.

Kennedy led out at a ferocious pace ahead of O Sullivan, Kelly and the well touted local junior Sean Flynn, Pearse West, Conway and Brendan Gill.

On the bike leg to the base of the reek Flynn set the fastest time just ahead of Kelly and O Sullivan and all were closely packed heading up the mountain.

Kennedy set the fastest ascent time but O Sullivan put paid to many other's ambitions by a close 2nd fastest ascent and significantly fastest descent to build up a margin of 2 mins just on the mountain leg over Kennedy with Gill another min slower and Conway and Jimmy Lawlor 5 min down on O Sullivan as Kelly and Flynn slipped down the rankings.

On the bike leg back to Westport and the final run leg O Sullivan showed his strength in depth setting the fastest legs on each to take the win in 1h 35' 31" some 3 min clear of vet Kennedy in 2nd and Conway 2 min back in 3rd with vet Jimmy Lawlor next best in 4th ahead of West.

Places 6th to 10 were only separated by a mere 16 seconds with contrasting finishes in evidence as a steady pace throughout meant Martin Nee took 6th, Kelly 7th, Flynn fading badly on the final run to fall down to 8th, Gill 9th and John Paul O Connell in 10th.

In the ladies Sports Series race recently crowned series Champion Mary Daly lined up but did not figure with injury causing her withdrawal.

New comer to the adventure racing scene was vet Sonia Knox from Triangle Tri club and she held a min lead over Eimear Kelly and Ann Marie Egan by the first transition with Mairead Durkan 4th and Marian Murray 5th.

This was to be the first of 5 fastest legs of the day for Knox as only local cycling specialist Egan could come close to the pace on the bike leg to Croagh Patrick with Elaine Halpin next fastest on this leg.

On the mountain run Knox was in a class of her own some 3 min faster than Durkan who was now closely match with Egan and Kelly.

Knox set sail for home to take a comprehensive victory in 17th position overall in a time of 1h 51' 31" and was some 8 mins clear of Egan in the end who's final bike leg helped her to a margin of just over a min on Kelly in 3rd with Durkan next in 4th.

Murray was next home in 5th with Niamh Garvey finishing strongly with the 2nd fastest final run leg to take 6th overall.

Duffy has the confidence that winning brings and as long as the effects of a long season and a recent marathon in Dublin do not take their toll he should confirm the placings with Heery who follows a sparser racing schedule which might prove valuable here if Duffy shows any signs of end of season fatigue.

The newcomer to the AR scene that might challenge this pair if in the sort of form that saw him compete at a high level on the triathlon scene previously is Art Mc Manusa. He will of course have to have developed his mountain running skills as the Reek is no place for beginners as we saw in last year's race but Mc Manusa is a competent mountain biker and may indeed have good all round skills that translate into mountain running if he is in good shape which he will need to be if he is to figure here.

There is likely to be tight battle for top vet here with Peter Cromie showing good form and Kieran Cosgrave moving up to the Expert class after a dead-heat win at Achill ROAR sport.

It will be interesting to see if he can overcome the severe cramping problems he had in Gaelforce West when he faded badly after being in contention whilst Cromie showed improved form with his mountain descending in particularly at that race and again more recently at Killarney.

These pair will be battling it out for top 6 placings with Lonan O Farrell who recently was 2nd in Connemara Rough Diamond and triathlete Tim Downing and next best may be Gareth Bracken and possibly Barry Cronin if he has returned to early season form after a very disappointing race in Killarney.

3rd in that race was Peter Tuohy and he will be suited by the biking nature of this course but his mountain descending skills will need to improve to figure up front whilst 2013 Series winner Chris Caulfield will be aiming for a top 10 placing in this strong field.

The ladies contest looks to have a strong favourite in Fiona Meade who looks to make a winning return to form after a disappointing 3rd at Killarney after a facile win at Waterford early in the season.

After a season where she won the national road biking crown her priorities will have changed but making the long trip up from Cork shows serious intent and she looks to be the one to beat here.

Likely podium contenders include Christina Mc Kenzie who should prove strong on the bike and Patsy Winters who won at Connemara Rough Diamond after 3rd at Achill ROAR whilst Anne Marie Egan could also figure if she has returned to decent form after a long layoff with injury.

Emma Mc Gee who was 2nd at Gaelforce North, Joanna Cullen are others who will be aiming for 6 placings here.

2011 and 2012 Sport Series champion Jerry O Sullivan leads the series but needs a good result here to secure it here as it can still be won by Damien Kelly and these pair have a win apiece in the two head to head encounters so far this season.

Essentially if either of these win on Saturday then they will take the National Series.

If Kelly wins and O Sullivan is 2nd then Kelly will take the title even though they will be level on points.

It is not however going to be a 2 horse race and the presence of the veteran Des Kennedy in the field will make it a likely intriguing 3 way battle with Jonathan Caulfield another one likely to figure in the race for the podium.

Kennedy is in good running shape and has yet to win a series race but is usually well matched with O Sullivan and this pair will be best suited by the running biased nature of the Sprint race.

Next best in the race for top 6 is likely to be Jimmy Lawlor with others like Brendan Gill, Derek Middleton, Brendan Ward and Martin Nee all aiming for top 10 finishes and former soccer international Kevin Kilbane will be another being watched for signs of potential form ;-)

Ladies Sport Series champion Mary Daly looks set to cap a fine season with a 4th win in 5 races and is a strong favourite here.

Niamh Garvey and Mairead Durkan look most likely contenders for the other podium sport whilst top ambitions will be harboured by others like the mother and daughter pairing of Louise and Sara Jan Cullen, Breeda O Hora and Sinead Weldon.

Prize for the Series as provided by [Crannmor Pottery](#) will be presented to the winners at the after race party at the [Castlecourt Plaza](#) on Saturday night