

The Inaugural Three Peaks Mountain Race

Sunday 4 March 1984

Report with major contributions from John McMecking (OHRA), Ed Stevens (Leith) and Peter Hughes (Leith) compiled by Marc Boullé

26km Mountain Race (*distance approximate*)

Route: *Woodhaugh St, Flagstaff, Swampy Summit, Mt Cargill, Chingford Park*

This was the year that Sarah and Peter Haines, an English couple residing in Dunedin, established the Three Peaks Mountain Race. John McMecking, runner and participant, was also extensively involved in the establishment and organisation of this event under the auspices of the newly formed Otago Hill Runners Association (OHRA). The event was modelled off “English Fell Running” where competitors can run up to 25 miles with 7500 feet of climbing. Runners have to check in at various control points and can pick their own route between each control point. In the case of the “Three Peaks Mountain Race”, those check points were Flagstaff, Swampy Summit and Mount Cargill for a distance of approximately 26km. (Note that since 1995, runners were no longer allowed to find their own way, but were required to follow a set marked course, though still checking in at the three summits)

The 1984 Race

The first race was eagerly looked forward to by many runners in Dunedin and beyond. It was a keenly contested affair. Unfortunately, we do not have from our sourced archives any time records or records of any runners apart from the podium finishers in various age and gender categories. John McMecking reports that the first race was a very foggy morning with many runners becoming disorientated on the run north from the Flagstaff concrete pillar (the link track wasn't there then) and in true fell running style one made one's way north across the tussocks to the Swampy Track a kilometre or so away. Some including Bruce Ramsey and John McMecking came out of the fog near the Bull Ring going completely in the wrong direction. They had been on the course the weekend before! Times that day were slow for some. The Red Cross did well to keep track of all the runners.

This first edition of the race was won by Dr Charles “Chip” Dunkley, an Otago running legend in the 1960s and 1970s who had won the Otago Cross Country title six times in succession. He was also the New Zealand Cross Country Champion in 1979 and was controversially left off the NZ team for the 1980 World Championships. Winning this inaugural event was a fitting accomplishment for a runner of his stature.

Second Open Men's runner across the line was notable mountain runner Andrew Shelling, a University of Otago student. Third Open Men's runner to finish was the accomplished runner, Murray Fleming another University of Otago student. Fleming would go on to represent New Zealand twice in the Marathon, in Macau and Birmingham with a personal best time of 2 hours 18 minutes. He would also run under 65 minutes for a half marathon and sub 29 minutes 30 seconds for the 10k.

The Open Women's race was also keenly contested with Sarah Haines, co-founder of the event, winning the day. Leith's Sarah Rees finished second. Sarah Rees, one of the best runners to hit the Otago running scene, would go on to win the Open Women's title at the Dunedin Marathon in three successive years - in 1985, 1986 and culminating with her best winning time in 1987 of 2 hours 55 minutes 54 seconds. Leith's Anne Judkins finished third. Anne Judkins, is a fine runner whose speciality is race walking. (note: in 1985 she went on to win the NZ Athletics Championship inaugural 3000m race (running) and later in 1990 she earned a silver medal in the 10,000m walk at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland.)

Marathon runner Bill Harper won the Veterans Men (40+) title, with sub-3 hour marathoner Laurie Melton from Hill City Harriers Club finishing second and RD Clarkson third.

Anitra Dowling, who is a well known competitor in orienteering won the Veteran Women's title (35+ grade) with Beverley Creighton second in that grade.