

# Three Peaks Race Report for 2021

It had been a two-and a half year wait and there were rumours that Covid 19 delays had provided opportunities for training towards an overdue record attempt on a £500 prize, but past winners of the Three Peaks Race were beaten by two newcomers in a slow event on Saturday.

Garry Greenhow, 42, of Ambleside Athletic Club in Cumbria, finished the 66<sup>th</sup> Three Peaks – last held in April 2019 - in 3hrs 5mins 22secs – well outside the 25-year-old record over the current 37.4km course of 2hrs 46mins 3secs set by Andy Peace, of Bingley Harriers, in 1996.

The Three Peaks Race Association offers a £500 bonus prize to anyone who can beat the male or female records. The race, which has Inov-8, a world leading sports clothing, footwear and equipment brand as its main sponsor, is billed as “the Marathon with Mountains” because it takes runners over the summits of Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough in the Yorkshire Dales.,

Greenhow – believed to be the first over 40 race winner - finished exactly one minute ahead of Jonathon Cox, 30, of Eden Harriers, who was another first timer. The race, which had a slightly modified start and finish in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle, was run in poor visibility with rain resulting in slippery conditions over the wet limestone.

One of the pre-race favourites, Ricky Lightfoot, the winner in 2014 and 2015, and the 2013 World Champion in Trail running, had to be content with third place. The Cumbrian firefighter, who is selected to represent Great Britain in the World Mountain Running Championships in Thailand in February, set 2hrs 49mins 7secs over the Three Peaks in 2016.

Karl Gray, 52, of Calder Valley Fell Runners, who established the over-40 record in 2017, set a new over-50 record claiming fourth place in 3hrs 7mins 34secs. This was almost four minutes ahead of Tom Owens, of Shettlestone Harriers in Glasgow, who won the race in 2011 and 2018.

Alistair Thornton, 24, who said he aimed to be first to Pen-y-ghent summit, achieved his goal in 27 mins 39 secs and won a £100 spot prize. The Howgill Harrier finished in 13<sup>th</sup> place in 3hrs 21mins 17secs – four minutes slower than his previous best in 2019.

The first five runners all reached Pen-y-ghent summit within 29 minutes, with Tom Owens pulling out a short lead on the steep flog up the face of Whernside to record 1hrs 49mins 6secs on the summit. He continued his lead down to the Hill Inn, but slowed on the ascent of Ingleborough where Greenhow and Cox were within three seconds of each other, finishing only 60secs apart.

The female record of 3hrs 9mins 19secs is held by Victoria Wilkinson, of Bingley Harriers, but recovering from injury, did not enter. In her absence, the fastest female was the youngest woman in the race, Rose Mather, 25, of Morpeth, who recently returned to fell running after competing in her teens. She finished 51<sup>st</sup> overall in a time of 3hrs 47mins 38secs, almost three minutes slower than her mother’s second place in 1984.

Second female was Holly Wootten, 27, unattached, in 3hrs 50mins 5secs, and third was Sara Willhoit, 32, of Mercia Fell Runners, in 3hrs 50mins 33secs.

Organisers had accepted 821 entrants for the race, but only 467 started and 52 failed to finish. They included a male runner, who suffered a badly lacerated leg on Ingleborough and had to be stretchered off the summit by the Cave Rescue Organisation which took around four hours. Next year, organisers of the race, which costs more than £45,000 to stage, plan to revert to the traditional date in Spring when it will be on April 30. The 2020 race was cancelled and the 2021 event postponed to October because of Covid 19 restrictions.

Details on the website: <https://www.threepeaksrace.org/>

Brian Dooks, Three Peaks Race Association.