

# THREE PEAKS RACE REPORT FOR 2019

It was his first attempt at the Three Peaks Race, but Brennan Townshend demonstrated he is a fell runner of great potential when he won the 65<sup>th</sup> event - beating international athletes including past victors Ricky Lightfoot and Tom Owens.

The former professional cyclist, who runs for Keswick Athletics Club, planned to visit the Yorkshire Dales last week to reconnoitre the 23.3-mile route over Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough, but his car broke down, so he just turned up and did his best.

His best already looked promising when the 25-year-old reached the summit of Pen-y-ghent (2,777ft) in 27mins 53secs, which gave him a newly introduced spot prize of £100 for the fastest person from the race start in Horton-in-Ribblesdale, near Settle.

Veteran Three Peaks watchers were impressed, but confident Townshend would burn himself out before the finish, but it was not to be. He was eight seconds faster than the 2014 and 2015 winner Ricky Lightfoot and was to stay ahead at every checkpoint except the Hill Inn where he was beaten by two seconds.

Townshend climbed Ingleborough (2,372ft) 1min 27secs quicker than Lightfoot and set off down the long sprint to Horton to claim another new £50 spot prize for the fastest decent to the finish in a time of 27mins 12secs. Townshend's winning time of 2hrs 50mins 22secs claimed the £200 first prize.

He was 4mins 19secs outside Andy Peace's record over the current course set in 1996. Townshend missed the £500 bonus on offer to a record breaker, but plans to return. He said: "I will definitely be back next year. It's a really nice course."

On a day of torrential rain, hailstones, sleet, changing visibility and strong winds, Townshend can be proud of his run. Lightfoot, World Champion Trail Runner in 2013, finished second in 2hours 52mins 5secs, his second best time over the Three Peaks, before driving back to Cumbria to start a nightshift as a firefighter.

Carl Bell, 36, also of Keswick AC, finished third in 2hours 55mins 44secs ahead of Tom Owens, of Shettlestone Harriers in Glasgow, who set 3hrs 15secs. Owens won the Three Peaks in 2011 and 2018. Owens, 37, and Lightfoot, 34, are members of the Salomon International Team.

Owens, who left it to the last minute to enter Yorkshire's "Marathon with Mountains" hoping to be fully fit, has been at Salomon's medical institute in Annecy in the Rhone Alps with foot and ankle problems and then suffered a glut injury two weeks ago.

The Three Peaks female record holder, Victoria Wilkinson, 40, of Bingley Harriers, who is an ambassador for the race sponsor, the all-terrain footwear and equipment company Inov-8, was fastest lady in a time of 3hrs 20mins 1sec. Her 2017 record, when she finished 13<sup>th</sup>, is 3hrs 9mins 19secs, but her 26<sup>th</sup> place out of 753 starters on Saturday was two minutes quicker than last year.

Victoria's 32mins 47secs to Pen-y-ghent summit claimed the ladies spot prize of £100 for the fastest ascent and she also won another £50 spot prize for the 32mins 34secs she took to descend from Ingleborough to the finish. These were additional to her £200 prize for being first lady finisher.

The four times Ladies Champion was followed home by Annie Roberts, 24, of Todmorden Harriers, in 68<sup>th</sup> place in 3hrs 41mins 2secs. Third female was first timer Katie Kaars Sijpesteijn, 35, of Keswick AC, who was 81<sup>st</sup> in 3hrs 45mins 7secs.

Prized were presented by Colin Robinson, who ran for Rochdale Harriers when he won the Three Peaks 50 years ago, and his wife, Brenda, who competed in the first women's race in 1979. Colin's time in 1969 of 2hrs 44mins 44secs was over the original route, which started at the Hill Inn. The current route is significantly longer.

David Parker, 54, of Littledown Harriers, travelled from Bournemouth on the eve of the race to complete his 21<sup>st</sup> Three Peaks to claim the special award made to men who finish that number and women who finish 15. His step-father, Roy Breakall, who achieved the award 21 years ago, normally helps to flag the course.

The race was not without incident. The Yorkshire Air Ambulance, the Cave Rescue Organisation and RAYNET, were involved in the evacuation of two runners from Whernside. The helicopter took one casualty to a site near the Hill Inn, where he was collected by a road ambulance, and another was taken to the Royal Preston Hospital for treatment.

Further details are on the race website at: <https://www.threepeaksrace.org/>

Brian Dooks, Three Peaks Race Association.