

OVER THREE DECADES ON THE ROAD – BALLYCOTTON ‘10’ HISTORY

1978: A dull, grey March Sunday, towards the end of the ‘Seventies. Jack Lynch was Taoiseach, John Treacy and Gerry Deegan were winning NCAA Indoor titles in Detroit and here at home ‘The Rare Auld Times’ by Danny Doyle was No. 1 in the charts. It was also a ‘rare old time’ as far as road running was concerned. A typical field of 31 male runners lined up on a village street for the untypical distance of ten miles. Just after 50 minutes had elapsed, Richard Crowley had added another trophy to his mantelpiece. Twenty four of the 31 would break the hour, all would proudly go home bearing a time certificate and promising to return in a years’ time, hopefully to a bigger and better event.

1979: Three runners from Raheny on a pot-hunting weekend took in the Waterford Glass race on Saturday before moving up to Cork on Sunday. Pat Hooper, the reigning National Marathon champion, became Ballycotton victor in a new course record of 49:12. Liam O’Brien repeated his second place of the previous year and that well-known ‘Rod Stewart look-a-like’, Des O’Connor, finished third. Mary Dempsey from Youghal became the first female winner. Five women in all took part, with the total finishers numbering 82. And this time they all got a mug to take home.

1980: Better known for his track exploits at the time, Liam O’Brien made it third time lucky by breaking away from Pat Kerrigan of Dundrum after six miles, coming home in a time of 49:25, 17 seconds ahead of Kerrigan. Prolific racer John O’Toole also broke 50 minutes in third. Marathoner Jean Folan set a new women’s mark of 62:31, with Marion Lyons less than a minute behind. The word was already spreading as, from an entry of 198, 151 completed the distance, including a team from Lisnagarvey in Northern Ireland.

1981: After the interest generated by the inaugural Dublin Marathon the previous autumn, an unbelievable 323 entries were received. The number of finishers, at 230, was up almost 50% on the previous year. A somewhat slower pace suited Liam O’Brien as he coasted away from Dick Hodgins to win in the slowest time to date, 50:53. The late Tom Jordan finished third with Pat Whyte from nearby Castlemartyr fourth, ahead of Paddy McGrath from Belfast Olympic. Another Belfast man, Jim Kennedy, missed out by one second for third veteran. In years to come his son Brian would become slightly more famous as a singer. Leevale’s Marie Buckley added her name to the women’s roll of honour, beating Brigid McCabe by just six seconds.

1982: Former Boston winner Neil Cusack proved he was still a world-class force, winning in a new course record of 48:01. Liam O’Brien also broke 49 minutes, by just a second. Despite running faster than the previous year, Marie Buckley had to give second best to Catherine Hourihan, who also set a record of 61:08. The three Griffin brothers – John, Stephen and Liam – combined to win the team award for St. Johns. It was a year of change. Ballycotton Running Promotions came into being to organise the race, New Balance came on board as title sponsor, and a race programme and results booklet (which showed 429 finishers) were published for the first time.

1983: The title ‘King of the Road’ had just been coined for Jerry Kiernan, and he added the Ballycotton title to his crown by scorching to a new course best of 47:04 (which, incidentally,

was the number on the local lifeboat at the time). Both Ray Treacy and Neil Cusack were also under the previous best, as the first eight all broke 50 minutes and 124 finished under the hour. Mairead Cotter from the Riocht club in Kerry edged the women's best nearer the hour with her winning effort of 60:34. The number of finishers rose by over 200 to a total of 647.

1984: Emily Dowling became the first woman to break the hour in Ballycotton, and she did it in style by reducing Mairead Cotter's time to 57:42. Anne Murphy, second, and Catherine Hourihan, third, also got under the sixty minutes. Up front, Liam O'Brien, in the build-up to a summer track season which would see him reach the semi-finals of the Olympic steeplechase, had to give second best to Tony O'Leary. Pete Flatman from Hull set a new vets record of 50:32 in tenth, also leading the start of the cross-channel invasion to the race. Another 200 finishers were added to the previous highest, leading people to believe that the race had surely peaked at 848. The race now had its own distinctive logo, along with a range of sportswear.

1985: The graph that had continued to spiral since 1978 finally showed a downward curve as the number of finishers dropped back to 646, signalling the cessation of the Irish running boom. It was a new era as far as sponsorship was concerned, as Nike started their association with the event which has lasted to this day. Emily Dowling set another new women's best, bringing her time down to a remarkable 56 minutes flat. Jim Dingwall (who tragically passed away in 2005 from cancer) already had a 2:11 marathon to his credit and there was no doubting his class as he inflicted an 11-second defeat on another marathoner, Dick Hooper, in a time of 48:05

1986: Robert Costelloe equalled Dingwall's time of the previous year, with Liam O'Brien again runner-up. John Buckley wasn't too far off of Pete Flatman's vets record as he ran 50:57. Louise McGrillen won a close women's contest from Christine Kennedy, 57:23 to 57:36. Exeter Harriers were another new club to travel from England, gaining third team prize. The number of finishers had now stabilised around the 650-700 mark. Among the 679 who made it across the line was local man Seamus Hartnett who just got into the prizes in 24th spot.

1987: Despite a strong easterly wind against the runners on the homeward run, 14 runners broke the 50-minute barrier, led home by Jerry Kiernan in 48:06. The highest ever number of 166 finished under the hour. Ailish Smyth led a D.C.H. sweep in the women's, from English-based Mary Brayley and record-holder Emily Dowling. Exeter returned to become the first overseas club to win the team award, led home by Rob Williams in fourth. 741 finished.

1988: In one of the greatest races seen in Ballycotton, Liam O'Brien just got the better of Chris Buckley of Westbury to record his fastest Ballycotton time of 47:57. Again the standard was very high, with the likes of John Scanlon, Roy Dooney and John Griffin in the top ten. George Blackburn, coach to Buckley, was first M50 after a close tussle with Derry O'Driscoll. The late Ursula Noctor, who would die sadly at such a young age a few years later, became the fourth Dublin City Harrier to take the coveted title, with Mary Brayley again finishing second.

1989: In the 'Year of the Big Wind', Liam O'Brien made it two-in-a-row and his fourth win in all when defeating Jerry Kiernan in a tactical race dictated by the conditions. Another Dublin runner, Olive Bollard from Raheny, won the women's race in 58:37, twenty seconds in front of Ursula Noctor. A gale-force wind almost blew some runners off the road on occasions, although the weather record of remaining virtually rain-free continued. The elements did not prevent 755 runners - the second highest ever and which included 121 women - from completing the ten miles.

1990: John Griffin finally achieved his first Ballycotton win, depriving Liam O'Brien of his expected hat-trick. Shay Faulkner from Wicklow was a rather surprising third with just the top three breaking 50 minutes. Mick Neville set a new M45 record of 53:30, while George Blackburn was only four seconds outside his M50 record of 54:55. Another category record set was Flor O'Leary's M55 time of 59:30. Connie Kelly ran the second fastest time by a woman, her 56:44 giving her 25 seconds to spare from Catherine Smith. Another innovation was added to the race with the provision of on-the-day results by Epsilon Computing.

1991: Numbers increased significantly to 823 finishers, as John Griffin and Connie Kelly were again triumphant. Griffin's 48:22 gave him a winning margin of 1:26 over Jerry Kiernan, the second biggest ever. Liam O'Brien in third maintained his amazingly consistent record, while John Buckley set a new M45 best of 52:45. Connie Kelly won in 57:29 from Bernie Stankard (59:48) and Brid Murphy, who was the last of the 134 runners to break the hour, 59:59.

1992: John Griffin became the first runner to win three-in-a-row, but he had to work hard to see off Jerry Kiernan, 48:17 to 48:23. Connie Kelly matched Griffin's achievement, taking her third title in 57:32. Helped by being part of the *Running Magazine*/Nike Race Series, a record number of 862 finished, with eight under 50 minutes and the highest number ever of 160 breaking the hour.

1993: The 16th edition of the race finally saw the magic finishing barrier of 1,000 broken. It was an exceptional year for quality as well. Eight broke 50 minutes, with 200 under 60:00, making it one of the highest standard ten mile races ever in the UK & Ireland. Gerry Curtis was the country's top road runner at the time and won in 48:07. John Ferrin from Belfast finished second in 48:20, with John Griffin third in 48:24. Another D.C.H. athlete, Catherine Smith, not only won the women's section but also set a F35 best of 57:16. In fact, all the female records from F35 to F55 were revised on what was a great day of quality and quantity.

1994: After his slight blip of the previous year, John Griffin was back to claim his place in the record books by winning the race for the fourth occasion. The time was a modest, by his standards, 49:43, with Gerry McGrath second on 50 minutes exactly. Catherine Smith won her second title with Mary Sweeney, the inaugural women's winner back in 1979, finishing second. But probably the most noteworthy performance of all was Flor O'Leary's – breaking 60 minutes at the age of 60. A total of 1,020 (slightly less than the previous year) finished – and the race now had its own song!

1995: Finally, after twelve years, Jerry Kiernan's course record was broken. Gary Staines, a European 5000m medallist (with a best time of 13:14.28) and Commonwealth champion, erased Kiernan's time by four seconds, stopping the clock at 47 minutes exactly. He did not have it all his own way as Noel Berkeley in his first Ballycotton appearance finished just 17 seconds down. Another new record (50:06) was set by Liam O'Brien in the vets, with Kiernan (50:33) just outside the previous best. In contrast, Catherine Hennessy's winning time was the slowest by a woman for twelve years, but a just reward for the Kilkenny athlete.

1996: This time it was the turn of the women to make the headlines as Scot Karen MacLeod (who would go on to run the Olympic Marathon the same year) improved Emily Dowling's course record to 55:34. Noel Berkeley triumphed in the men's race, after a tough battle with John Griffin, while there were two other outstanding performances at opposite ends of the age

spectrum. Philip Harty came within 37 seconds of Eric Bergin's long-standing MJ record of 53:05, while 71-year-old Jack Kirk from Middleton Harriers in Manchester ran 70:11.

1997: The biggest ever entry, a record 1,101 finishers and the appearance of Olympic and five-time World Cross-Country champion John Ngugi marked the 20th race. And what a race it turned out to be, for both men and women. Noel Berkeley led from gun to tape to record a marvellous 47:38, with 39-year-old Keith Anderson second in 48:15 and Peter Mathews third, 49:45. A tremendous battle was waged between Marian Sutton and Cathy Shum, with Chicago Marathon winner Sutton gaining the verdict by one second, both breaking the course record with respective times of 55:28 and 55:29.

1998: By now the clamour to run the race had reached an unprecedented level, with entries closed before the end of January. The 21st celebrations had, no doubt, played a major role in making the race the biggest ever with 1,182 finishers. Paul Freary from Bolton, the winner of one of the previous summer's 5-milers, returned to win in a time of 49:25, with Pauric McKinney second. John Buckley set a new M50 mark of 54:09, with Adam Jones (58:05) doing likewise in the M55 section, while Maureen Harrington took the women's title to Kerry. It's not too often that a time of 68:12 attracts huge media attention, but when your wife is the President of Ireland, it can be expected. President Mary and Martin McAleese certainly added to the celebratory occasion.

1999: Noel Berkeley returned after a year's absence to win by over two minutes from John Griffin, with East Cork's John Kearney in third. Trudi Thomson became the second Scottish woman to win, her 57:30 also establishing a new F40 best. Despite the second biggest number of finishers (1,173), the decline in standards had reached alarming proportions. Just the winner broke 50 minutes, while the 88 under the hour was the lowest since 1981. However, that January *Runner's World* ranked the race second only to the London Marathon in their Top 50 races.

2000: The biggest race in history (1,222 finishers) saw another epic battle to rival that of 1988. Noel Berkeley and Jamie Lewis were nip-and-tuck all the way to nine miles, before Lewis, opening a slight gap, appeared to have the race won. But Berkeley is not called the 'King of Ballycotton' for nothing and in a dramatic last half-mile edged ahead to win by five seconds as both broke 48 minutes. Teresa Duffy, on her first Ballycotton appearance, won a high-class race in 55:56, with seven more women finishing inside the hour.

2001: What's this, a Ballycotton '10' in June? – you must be joking! The foot-and-mouth crisis dictated what would once have been considered inconceivable with the race having to be postponed from March to a sweltering mid-summer Sunday. It was an ideal day for spectators and the huge crowd who turned out to see Olympic silver-medallist Sonia O'Sullivan were not disappointed. Finishing 13th overall, even she was affected by the conditions as her time of 55:37 was nine seconds shy of Marian Sutton's record. Noel Berkeley notched up an unprecedented fifth title, just breaking 50 minutes in the process. Understandably, due to the postponement numbers were well down, with just 763 finishers. But, with the President of Ireland, the 'Queen of the Track' and the 'King of the Road' in attendance, who was complaining?

2002: For the 25th Anniversary, the clouds certainly did not have a silver lining as the wind blew and squally showers made conditions difficult. Still, the sun also shone intermittently as

Noel Berkeley and Gerry Ryan battled the conditions together until the last 400m when ‘The King’ utilised his famed kick to come home with a three-second advantage, the clock reading 50:16. It was the first time since 1981 that 50 minutes wasn’t broken. One record that finally went was the MJ best as William Harty underlined his tremendous talent by taking all of 1:41 from the old mark, finishing third overall in 51:24. Teresa Duffy repeated her victory of two years before, but she was the only woman to break the hour. The recording and timing of the biggest-ever number of finishers – 1,636 – was made easier with the introduction of the ChampionChip technology.

2003: All good things come to an end and Noel Berkeley’s reign was finally broken as Andy Coleman from England prevailed by six seconds after a cat-and-mouse tussle, winning in a time of 49:52. For the first time ever, the two titles went overseas as Gladys Ganiel from Maine in the USA (who was studying in Dublin) gave herself a timely 26th birthday present when beating Welsh runner Melanie Ellis by ten seconds, recording a time of 59:37. The number of finishers was slightly lower at 1,539.

2004: Normal service was resumed as, after the un-typical Ballycotton weather of the past two years, a calm, crisp and sun-filled day greeted the largest ever entry which saw a record 1,648 finishing. The race had its first Kenyan winner as Charles Kiplagat beat his countryman Isaac Kimuge by 46 seconds, recording the swiftest time for many years of 48:00. Valerie Vaughan kept the Cork flag flying as she realised her main target of the season to cross the line in 56:51, with Rosemary Ryan second in 57:18.

2005: Another crisp and cold morning gave way to an ideal sunny day and the crowds gathered at the many vantage points witnessed an epic race with just ten seconds covering the top three finishers. Dave Mitchinson from Newham & Essex Beagles took the honours in a PB of 48:26 with Jackson Kipngetuny and Seamus Power also inside the 49 minutes. Claire Gibbons made it a perfect mothers’ day as she defeated former winner Gladys Ganiel in a fine time of 57:52. Incredibly, the number of finishers went up by another 300 to 1,950.

2006: The race entered further new territory as, from an entry of 4,200, a total of 2,813 finished. Again blessed with ideal weather, the mammoth operation went off smoothly although the numbers were now reaching a dangerous level. First-time visitors to Ballycotton, Vinny Mulvey and Pauline Curley, took the honours in respective times of 49:03 and 56:33. Mulvey became the first Raheny man since Pat Hooper in 1979 to win the event. After almost three decades, the race had come full circle.

2007: The 30th anniversary race saw Alan O’Shea become the first Corkman since Liam O’Brien in 1989 to take the coveted title. The time of 51:04 was the slowest winning effort in history but, as no doubt the four-time Middleton man would agree, winning is what it’s all about. Pauline Curley made it two-in-a-row, her time of 57:36 just over a minute slower than the year before. Despite the worst weather in years leading up to the day, the sun shone once again as the near-2,000 runners headed off on their ten-mile journey.

2008: Despite a severe weather warning for later in the day, conditions were as ideal as one could hope for as 2,202 runners – the second biggest in history – brought the total finishers to an incredible 31,585. Vinny Mulvey made it two wins in three years as he crossed the line in a time of 50:37 while Rosemary Ryan deprived Pauline Curley of her hat-trick, the winning time of 56:48 being the 11th fastest on the all-time list.

2009: A cold wind and occasional showers of rain and hail was the mixed menu but the sun also shone and a strong tailwind produced fast time for many. Up front, it was very much a Dublin affair with Vinny Mulvey recording his third win in four years. Pauline Curley also got her name on the winners' list for the third occasion, although she was the only woman to break the hour. The re-introduction of the ChampionChip saw the second highest number of finishers (2,402) recorded. And the race was honoured with an appearance by Ron Hill, a true running legend.

2010: St Patrick's Day had come and gone as (because of a fixtures mix-up) the third Sunday in March marked the latest-ever race – apart from the foot-and-mouth year. Mild south-westerly wind and sunshine was some compensation for the harshest winter for years and in a surprise result, two newcomers, Greg Roberts and Barbara Sanchez, took the honours. Derryman Roberts recorded 50:17 for a 22-second victory over Mick Clohisey while Sanchez (in 58:45) won an even closer contest, with just 26 seconds covering the first three. And, in Sean Kearns, the race recorded its first-ever M80 finisher.

2011: It was back to the first Sunday and race day dawned ideal with cool and calm conditions. Two new names were added to the list as Sergiu Ciobanu and Lizzie Lee were victorious. Prolific winner Ciobanu pulled away from Alan O'Shea for a 22-second victory in 49:36. A delighted Lizzie Lee became the first Cork woman in five years to take the title. Her time was 58:47 with Angela McCann also under the hour (59:15) in second. Showing no signs of slowing down, inaugural winner Mary Sweeney set the only category record, a new F50 mark of 66:10.

2012: A crisp north-west wind blew and a runner from that part of the country – Maria McCambridge of Letterkenny – provided the main shock when setting a course record of 54:48. The previous mark of 55:28 had stood since 1997 to Olympian and two-time Chicago Marathon winner Marian Sutton. Lizzie Lee ran a minute-and-a-half faster than the year before to take second in 57:17. The men's race saw a repeat by Sergiu Ciobanu, his 49:20 a 16-second improvement on 2011. The 2,617 finishers was the second highest in all of the 35 races.

2013: Repeat wins for Sergiu Ciobanu and Maria McCambridge marked the 36th edition of the race, although both had to contend with opposite conditions to the year before as a strong headwind faced the runners on the return journey. Therefore, McCambridge's 55:01 was an excellent performance and only 13 seconds outside her record. The Letterkenny athlete now has the two fastest times in a race which can claim Olympians Sonia O'Sullivan, Marian Sutton and Karen MacLeod amongst its winners. Ciobanu joined John Griffin and Noel Berkeley as a three-in-a-row champion, his 49:18 being two seconds faster than 2012.

2014: Sergiu Ciobanu became only the second runner (after Noel Berkeley) to win the race four years in a row. In near-perfect conditions, Ciobanu was on his own from three miles and at the finish had almost two minutes to spare over 2007 winner Alan O'Shea, in the bargain recording a personal best of 48:58. With Maria McCambridge having to withdraw due to illness, Siobhan O'Doherty moved up from her second the year before to take the title in 57:32. John O'Leary, one of the original 31 from 1978, set a new M75 record of 82:28 as finished again surpassed the 2,500 mark.

