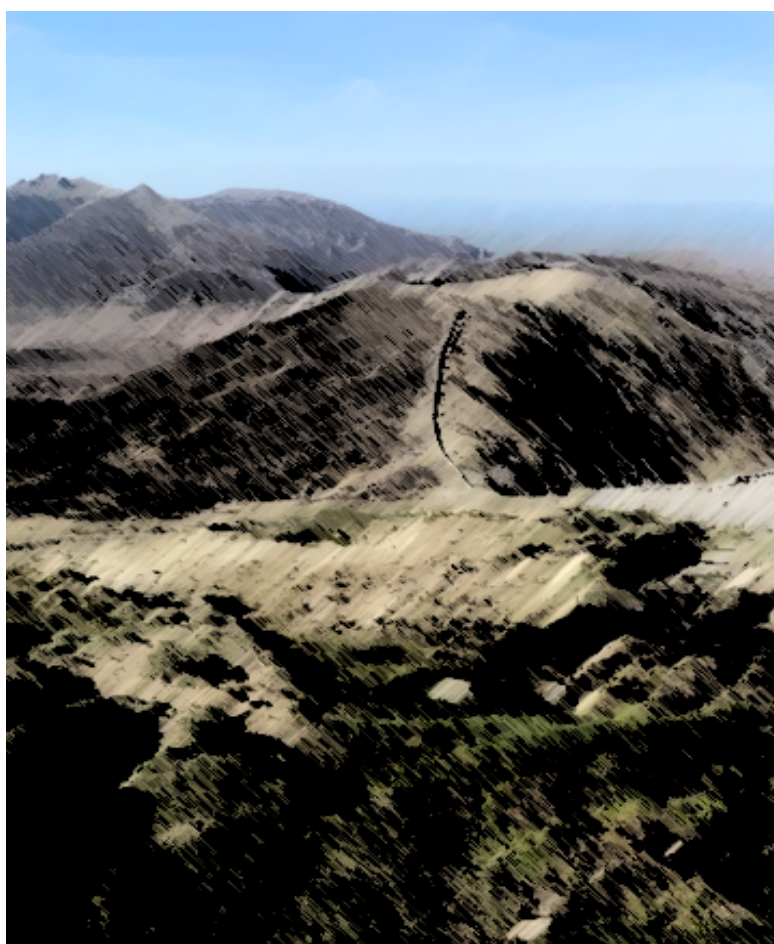


PLANNING A MOUNTAIN RACE

A Race Director's Guide



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Introduction

Northern Ireland Mountain Running Association (NIMRA) appreciate that the annual mountain racing calendar could not proceed, nor would it be as successful as it is without the input from the athletic clubs across the North who engage fully and enthusiastically to host the key events that make up our championship. And we recognise that while there are many seasoned Race Directors who bring vast experience to the field things move on and newer race directors come on board. This Race Directors' guide therefore is presented, largely as an aid to ensure a consistency of approach across all NIMRA championship races.

NIMRA recognises that organising a mountain race is a detailed process that requires careful planning and consideration, and that Race Director plays a pivotal role, overseeing the various aspects that go into ensuring a successful and safe event. So, to that end we offer the following guidance.

Route Choice and Reconnaissance

The first step involves selecting your race route and NIMRA does acknowledge many race routes are long established and hold special significance in the history of NIMRA mountain running. Nevertheless, circumstances can change that require route changes (storm damage, wildfires for example) and this could necessitate alternative routes. Confirming race route therefore should include conducting reconnaissance runs to confirm the suitability of the route, to determine checkpoint/ dibber locations, to establish cut-off times, and to plan alternative routes for bad weather conditions. As Race Director you are designing a course that is challenging yet safe for all participants.

And while most of NIMRA mountain races are unmarked and presented as both a race and a navigation challenge there may be circumstance where route marking is essential for safety or environmental protection reasons for example, or where landowner permission has not been forthcoming. These constraints can be marked on the ground or on an accompanying route map.

With limited exceptions GPS is not used on NIMRA races.

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Safety, Health & Wellbeing Assessment

Ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of mountain runners, marshalls and spectators is a critical aspect of mountain racing and a key responsibility of the Race Director. The Race Director should conduct a thorough assessment of the race route and environs to identify potential hazards and implement necessary control measures. This includes ensuring adequate medical support and emergency response plans. NIMRA has provided a Mountain Races: Operation Analysis and Control detailing Event - Hazard Analysis | Safety, Health, and Wellbeing Controls. The generic document is available on the NIMRA website.

The control measures identified apply to all NIMRA mountain races. Race Directors and your organising teams must consider whether there are any additional specific and/ or local hazards associated with their specific race and add to these control measures, as appropriate. It is essential that this is complied with as it is a required part of the permissions process (see below).

Junior athletes are permitted in some NIMRA races. The applicable age limits and maximum allowed distances are addressed in the generic Mountain Races: Operation Analysis and Control document. For specifically organised junior athlete mountain races there are separate safety, health and wellbeing measures to be addressed and for this a separate generic assessment is available on the NIMRA website.

Environmental and Habitat Impact Assessment

NIMRA expect that all mountain runners respect the environment, indeed it is essential to harmonious relations with landowners and others who use or exist on the mountain region. That includes all native flora and fauna. Consequently, the Race Director is to assess the potential impact of the race on the local habitat and implements strategies to eliminate or minimise any negative effects. As with the safety controls NIMRA has a generic Habitat Impact Assessment available on its website which the Race Director must make specific and return with their permit application (see below).

Permissions Process

This section sets out the entire permitting process, which must take place and be completed before a race can proceed.

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Step 1

Race Organisers should complete a Race Permit form, Mountain Races: Operation Analysis and Control form and, if necessary, a Habitat Impact Assessment form. These are available on the NIMRA website under the Permit tab. The completed forms are to be sent to the NIMRA Permitting Officer (as listed on the permit form). For new or revised courses, the officer will check out any hazards on the course and indicate where extra markings might be required.

Please note that when considering staging a mountain race and in preparation for applying for the race permit, Race Directors should:

- Ensure that the proposed race date does not clash with other events of a similar nature and location,
- Gather a competent race organising team together, with the appropriate range of skills,
- Plan out the proposed race route (see above), including identifying whether navigation is required,
- Ensure that any junior races or junior categories meet maximum distance limits,
- Get permissions from landowners (NI Water, Forestry Service, National Trust, farmers etc.),
- Check that the start/finish location is suitable, booking a venue, if necessary,
- Prepare a race budget, including race entry fees, any sponsorship, prize lists,
- Decide entry system to use, timing system, ensure electronic results as soon as possible,
- Submit race details to the NIMRA committee to enable the event to be added to the NIMRA calendar and considered for possible inclusion in the NIMRA Championship.

Step 2

The Race Director is to send the completed form and the associated documents to the NIMRA Permitting Officer, who once having completed all the checks (note above) will send the forms to Events and Marketing section of Athletics NI at info@athleticsni.org

Step 3

ANI Events and Marketing checks the forms and issue a Certificate and Permit permission to the race organiser and add the event to the ANI online calendar. The current calendar is available at <https://athleticsni.org/Fixtures>

The completed permit process identifies a club's race as being insured under the overall UKA insurance policy. The insurance covers public liability (i.e. third party) risks up to maximum of £5M. It does not cover personal liability to participating athletes (e.g. off work due to race injuries).

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A copy of the insurance certificate is available on the ANI web site at <https://athleticsni.org/Permits> and can be forwarded to landowners if requested. Members of clubs are covered by the fee clubs pay to ANI for their registered athletes. Non-club members or members of informal unrecognised clubs should be asked for an extra £2 on the standard entry fee (SI Systems will do this automatically). Following the race, the club will be invoiced for the £2 collected from each unattached athlete, based on the race results. (So, clubs keep any extra £2 for unattached athletes who enter the event but choose not to run in it).

Step 4

Race results should be sent to the Permitting Officer and the NIMRA Championship secretary (if you are organising a Championship race) and to the NIMRA Press Officer (to ensure that they are listed on the NIMRA results).

Race Entry System

As Race Director you should endeavour to present a seamless process for participants to sign up and receive all the necessary information. A reliable race entry system, such as sientries or another platform, is crucial for managing registrations.

Equipment

NIMRA can provide all the main safety equipment needed to support your race including, Radios, high visibility jackets, emergency tents, first aid kit. Contact the Equipment Officer directly to arrange the collection and return of the equipment in sufficient time to give everyone notice. The contact details for the Equipment Officer is given on the committee page on the NIMRA website.

Information for Dibbers/ Trackers

Whether using dibbers or an independent tracker the Race Directors is to provide clear instructions on their use, emphasising the importance of tracking participants' progress and ensuring their safety throughout the race.

If intending using dibbers contact James Carr (see NIMRA website) and give him plenty of notice to ensure his availability.



Selection of Competent Volunteers

The success of the race depends on the team of volunteers. The Race Director should ensure that competent individuals are selected for each of the roles such as Deputy Race Director, Marshals Coordinator, Marshals, Sweepers, Kit checkers, and First Aiders. The right selection of volunteers will ensure the smooth operation of your race.

Pricing

The Race Director ensures that pricing is fair and transparent. Setting the race fees involves a detailed breakdown of all costs, set against the best estimate of how many race entrants are anticipated. Costs could include car park charging, any landowner fees, catering, prizes, sientries fees, external first-aid provision. There may be other costs. And remember to include the ANI fee (only for unregistered runners, which is currently £2 per athlete) and the NIMRA Athlete Development levy (also currently £2).

If you can get sponsors for your race, you may be able to keep the costs down further.

Logistics

Practical considerations on the day of the race include arranging toilet facilities on site and advising on car parking and car sharing to manage participant flow efficiently.

Pre-race Activities

Prior to the event, Race Directors should ensure that you have:

- Sufficient marshals and the marshal positions (Grid Reference) clearly identified,
- The course marked (if appropriate), with removeable tape or sawdust, not paint,
- Start and finish marshals,
- Waterproof race numbers and pins,
- A registration process to ensure a complete list of race starters,
- Kit check arrangements (note this should take place before registration),
- Considered the need for random kit checks later in the event,
- Kit requirements clearly communicated to racers (including any weather specific kit decided on the day of the race),

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- Let racers know that hiking poles are not permitted on NIMRA races.
- First aid points, checkpoints, water stops and aid stations (as needed) and that they are adequately resourced and staffed.
- Access to toilet facilities (or inform racers and volunteers, if otherwise),
- Radio and/ or phone contact across the race route,
- Displayed any cut-off points and cut-off times,
- A displayed weather forecast, and
- An alternative bad weather route and/ or considered the conditions under which a race may have to be cancelled.
- A system in place for informing athletes of any changes.

Post-race activities

After the race the Race Director and volunteers are to stay on race route and/ or at Race HQ until all the runners are safely off mountains. In addition, Race Directors are to ensure that

- All Dibbers and or trackers are collected and sorted (The pre-race information should inform athletes of any penalties associated with losing or not returning dibbers/ trackers),
- The finish line and registration area is cleared and left as it was found (leave no trace),
- Competent volunteers are sent out to remove any route markings and to check all gates along the race route are closed and locked (if appropriate)
- Prize giving is arranged in a timely manner and that racers are made aware of this in the pre-race briefing
- The race results and a race report is forwarded to NIMRA,
- All equipment is returned to the Equipment Officer, in good working order, alerting them to any issues, faults and/ or breakages noticed during its use at the race.

Other race related activities

Race Directors should consider the need for health warnings/ declarations on race entry, noting that this can be added to the race application through sientries system, if needed.

Race Directors should know when and why to require additional kit (cold weather/ hot weather)

Race Directors may remove runners from the race or prevent them from starting if they have reason to doubt their competence is in doubt, for example if kit is missing or discarded during the race or

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they have inadequate footwear (There could be other reasons). Race Director can direct volunteers on the route to apply this rule too. Racers are to be informed of this in the pre-race briefing.

And finally Race Directors should have an emergency response system in place to address any action needed if a racer goes missing fails to reach a checkpoint or the finish line in a reasonable time.

Conclusion

The role of a mountain race director is multifaceted It requires you to have a blend of logistical competency, great communication ability, a firm knowledge of safety, health and wellbeing needs, a strong awareness of and empathy for the environment, and effective team management skills. With all of these you will deliver a successful and memorable mountain race. One that will be remembered and talked about in a positive way long after the race has been won.

My best wishes for a successful event.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ciarán'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr Ciarán McAleenan CEng MICE
NIMRA Chair (2025-26)