

SHOE CLINIC BELL HILL CHALLENGE 2019

RACE REPORT

A record entry of 260 runners and walkers lined up at the Baldoon Farm start-line in stunning weather for the 2019 Bell Hill Challenge Running Event on a new route in the Bell Hill Forest Block.

In previous years competitors have been faced with a vertical climb directly above Baldoon Farm to the Bell Hill Summit, descending on the tracks and forestry roads back to the finish line at Baldoon Farm.

Race Director Chris Cox said that every year over the last 4-5 years, organisers have been having to make changes to the course due to logging and forestry operations in the forestry block. This year there was major excavation and a new logging skid site on the ascent to the summit, so it was decided to run competitors up the newly-formed forestry road and into the 4-wheel drive track (that had previously been the descending track), onto the Bell Hill Summit.

It was while checking the route on the weekend prior to the event that Cox realised that organisers could make the Bell Hill Challenge a more runnable event to the summit in place of what was a very steep power-walk to the top.

Walkers started at 9.30am, followed by a mass run start at 10.00am.

The field was led by Alex Procter for the first 6km. Procter was caught by Paul Livingstone at the entrance to the 4-wheel drive track (3km to the top). Both Procter and Livingstone were then caught by Brad Williams who reached the summit (9km) in 41 minutes.

Marshals were amazed at Williams' pace and the speed with which he was able to descend from the summit down to the skid site, as this section of the route was very steep and rocky under-foot. Williams continued to extend his lead over Livingstone, finishing the 19.8km course in 1:28:49, 5 minutes ahead of Livingstone who finished in 1:33:32, with Procter just under 2 minutes behind in 1:35:11.

In the Women's race, Rangiora's Angela Doig led all the way and was never seriously challenged, finishing in 1:44:46. However, 2nd place Michelle Panzer was closing in on Doig towards the end of the race, finishing in 1:46:23, with Westport's Cath Casey finishing in 3rd place, in 1:59:03.

After the race Cox was pleased with the response and good comments from competitors about the new course. He is confident that with logging almost completed on the forestry block, there will be no significant change to the course in the foreseeable future. However, there have been some runners suggesting that there be a race to the top of Bell Hill on the old vertical climb route. Cox will be looking to introduce this into next year's event and will call it the "Bell Hill Grunt". This separate event, which will start after the main start, will take competitors up the vertical climb to the summit and return directly down through the paddocks to the finish at Baldoon Farm.