# Give them an Inch…

Over 160 swimmers, plus friends, family, spectators descended on Rathmullan on Saturday for the annual Inch Mile Swim Festival. Despite the changeable weather the atmosphere was superb. The events, the Inch Mile and the Kinnegar 500, were organised by Gartan Open Water Swimmers in conjunction with Swim Ireland. A range of swimmers arrived from all over Ireland, from those giving it a go for the first time to experienced veterans of English, North and Dal Riata Channel swims. For some the challenge was to complete it quickly, for others it was simply to complete it.

Karen Crawford, one of the organisers, said, “We are delighted to see such a full range of swimmers—those who have taken part in many of our events returning, those who started only a couple of years ago growing in ability and confidence, and those who are just starting out taking courage and persevering.”

The conditions meant that the route had to be changed from swimming from Inch to Rathmullan, so swimmers boarded the Swilly ferry and were taken to the start line up the Swilly. Motorists and foot passengers watched bemused as 110 swimmers then leapt off the nose of the ferry and into the water ready for the starting gun.

The swim route took the swimmers further up the Swilly before they turned around an orange buoy and headed for home into the wind. Owing to that somewhat stiff breeze the turn marker had shifted a bit adding to the overall distance—as one swimmer quipped on finishing, “Give them an Inch and they turn it into a mile and a half!” Despite this, swimmers took it in their stride and embraced the challenge, and there were plenty of smiles and ribbing at the finish.

A flotilla of kayaks, boats and the RNLI provided safety cover for the swimmers on the water with the Red Cross and paramedics on shore if needed.

The event was won for the second year by Limavady youngster, Jude Williams, in a time of 33 minutes 5 seconds, chased home by Ryan Lundy just 12 seconds later. Eimhear Duddy was first female wetsuit (34:49) and second Niamh McDaid (44:44).

There was a sizable contingent of swimmers who opted to go without a wetsuit, with Termon’s Siobhan Brennan finishing first in the non-wetsuit category (4th overall) in a time of 37:44, followed by Jeff McCormick (45:57).

In the veteran’s category, prizes went to Colin Lindsay (41:54), and Darina Barrett (45:06). The Junior prize went to Emma McKinney who completed the swim in 47:14.

It’s not all about speed—sometimes it’s about determination and finishing—and special achievement awards were given to Noel McBride and Joan Melanophy for sheer dogged determination and will to finish.

The Kinnegar 500 saw 51 swimmers make their way 500m down the beach to the start line and race back towards the pier, eagerly cheered on by spectators from the shore. Exiting the water, they ran the blue carpet to clock their times at the finish line, with 15 year old Mia Hehir (9:27) leading the charge from Catherine Boyle (9:35) and Faye Hehir (9:51).

Patsy Doherty (wetsuit) and Kevin McLaughlin (non-wetsuit) took prizes in the 70+ age category. Both put in incredible performances, with Patsy storming to the line in 11:05, just a minute and a half behind the winner.

(More results and photos can be found on Gartan Open Water Swimmers’ Facebook page and all times on Coretiming.ie)

The atmosphere in Rathmullan was great. Each swimmer, right down to the final one home, were cheered and applauded as if they had won.

Keith McClean, the Race Director, said, “We were delighted with the day. We couldn’t pull it off without our sponsors, without an army of friends and helpers, without advice from those who know the waters, without Swilly Ferries, without our boats and kayakers—these events are about cooperation and community spirit, and it was fantastic to see everyone having such a great time.”

Paddy Bond from Gartan Swimmers, “It was a great community occasion. We couldn’t do it without the support of local swim groups and kayakers and the tremendous community support in Rathmullan who put so much in to making it happen.”

Mark McCollum, another of the organisers, added, “What an incredible atmosphere in Rathmullan today as the Kinnegar 500 and the Inch Mile Swim took place – a truly great event celebrating community, courage, and the love of open water!“

Gartan Open Water Swimmers want to thank the Rathmullan Sailing and Watersports Club for all their advice, boat cover and use of their facilities, Lough Swilly Ferry, Sheephaven Sub-aqua, the kayakers, Swim Ireland, The Kitchen for food, Swilly Sauna for free slots for the swimmers, and Gary Gardiner and the Irish Red Cross for medical and first aid cover. And everyone for coming and making it a special day. The local support from the community in Rathmullan is second to none.

The event was run in conjunction with Swim Ireland and sponsored by: Mowi Ireland, Donegal Oil, John Crossan & Sons and Donegal Sports Partnership.