



Hello !

After the London and Rotterdam marathons, the ARCH running club is extremely happy to announce the organisation of the 40th edition of the “Descente de la Lesse” race.

This nature race of 20.750 km will take place between the towns of Houyet and Dinant in French-speaking Belgium.

You will find, underneath, the essential information so that you can, and we hope you will, give an echo to this event via your information channel.

Taking advantage of this exceptional anniversary, of the vitality of this race and of the current interest for races on such routes, the 2020 slogan will simply be “Come and run, walk, support and celebrate this 40th edition”.

Proud of respecting the original slogan “A race organised by runners for runners », the number of participants will be limited to 1000 for the 20.750-km race (500 for the shorter race) to ensure the comfort of the runners during the race and at the arrival site.

We thank you in advance for announcing the opening of registrations and for insisting on this limited number of participants.

## History

At the end of the 70s, a new movement began in the running world making running accessible to runners outside stadiums and cross country events, making it popular with people who were not registered with a club.

In Belgium, it started with “Les crêtes de Spa”, “Les hauts de Fagnes » in Malmédy, etc ... and in 1981, a few members of the ARCH running club decided to organise a race along the itinerary tourists use to go down the river in kayaks between the towns of Houyet and Dinant. They opted for a distance that was very popular at the time : the semi-marathon. It was an immediate success as 326 participants made it to the finish line but there were also negative reactions to this new way of running and the next day a Belgian sports journalist wrote the following headline : a 21-km cross country race !

## Participation

This race gradually imposed itself as a classic of nature races (half road, half paths). There have been Flemish participants since the first edition. Then came runners from bordering countries and from Great Britain with, as soon as 1984, the victory of Mike Gratton, who had won the London marathon in 1983. There were victories of the best Belgian athletes but also a lot of famous international athletes : the Irishman Alan Harding, the Czech Jozef Vibostok, the Chilean Angel Aguilar, Bernard Mvuyekure , Hilaire M’Tirempeba, Vital Gahungu from Burundi, the Kenyans Jackson Omweri (record holder), Richard Yatich and John Mutai Kipkorir and the Russian Alexander Kristianinov.

There is a lot to say about the female winners too ! Ursula Koether who is German, Ine Valentin and Jolanda Homminga from Holland ; Wendy Breed from New-Zealand who beat Jocelyne Villetton the bronze medalist at the Rome marathon world championship in 1987.

The French athlete could not do as well as 2 other French laureates : Fabienne Curiaze and Maryse Petrus. Three Kenyans Grace Chebet (record holder), Windfridah Nyansikera and Mercyline Jeronoh, Alemitu Bekele from Ethiopia , the Spaniard Paula Mayorbe, two Brits Julia-Frances Smith and Julia Downes and just like in the male ranking, top Belgian athletes such as Véronique Collard.

As soon as 1988, the objective of 1000 finishers was reached and sometimes there were more, which made the organizers realize the limits of the route and the welcoming capacity at the arrival site. One edition separating the female and male runners did not solve the problem. That is why since 1995, a second Descente de la Lesse has been offered starting from the bridge of Gendron and covering the last 12 kilometres of the race. After those changes, the objective of 1000 finishers was not reached for a about 12 years of slow-down, except for the 20th anniversary. Over the last few years, a new wave of people got interesting in running and if the Top'Lesse keeps attracting a lot of runners, the Lesse Douce also has to be limited to 500 participants to avoid overcrowding.

Out of 39 editions, this represents 40,000 finishers in Dinant.

#### **Challenges :**

The Descente de la Lesse is part of the **Léon Delhalle Challenge**. Paul Wilmet, coordinator of the race, is one of the initiators of the challenge.

A new **Challenge of « legendary races »** will be launched in 2020 with 2 French races : the 36th edition of the Montée du Poupet in Salins-les-Bains in the Jura region (31/05/2020) and the 48th Marvejols-Mende en Lozère (19/07/2020).

#### **Information :**

##### **Sunday 30 August 2020 in Dinant**

10.30 a.m. : Lesse Douce, Gendron-Dinant, 12km, 500 numbers

**11.00 a.m : Top'Lesse, Houyet-Dinant, 20.750km, 1000 numbers**

**Registrations on line until 28/08/2020 : [www.archathle.eu/lesse](http://www.archathle.eu/lesse) . T-shirt offered to the first 1000 registered runners**

#### **And there is more ...**

Guided walks, races for the young, canicross, various animations in Houyet, along the race and in Dinant, transmission on a giant screen, special 40-year-anniversary brochure,... all that is taking place during the last weekend of August.

**A detailed programme will be sent to you over the next few months.**

At your disposal for any information :

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