

Barrett surprise entry in Routeburn Classic

STAFF REPORTER

FORMER Olympic and Commonwealth Games walker Craig Barrett is a surprise entry in next month's Routeburn Classic alpine run.

Barrett won a Commonwealth silver medal in Manchester and gathered 32 national senior titles during his career.

He will perhaps be best remembered for his spectacular exit at the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur when he was overcome by humidity and collapsed within sight of gold.

Barrett said although he has

retired from competing at an international level, he likes to stay fit and is looking forward to the race.

"My wife's involved in tramping and some of her friends mentioned the race.

"I liked the sound of the track and straight away I was keen to sign up.



Craig Barrett

"I've recently completed the Triple Peaks in Hawkes Bay as part of a team and I'm running four times a week, so I'm in good condition. I'm not looking to break any records, just get out there, have fun and enjoy the run," Barrett said.

Interest in the 38km Routeburn run, to be held on Saturday, May 10, is high with the 225-strong field at capacity and a waiting list well under way.

Coach to Coast champion Richard Ussher has confirmed his return and will be looking to eclipse the race record of 2hr 51min 57sec he set in 2001.

This will be his fourth time competing in the race.

Last year's winner, Jim Hawkrige, of Queenstown, has also entered and is relishing the chance to take on Ussher, who was unable to compete in 2007.

"Richard is one of the world's top mountain runners, so to get close to his time is really cool. It's great that he's taking part because that will really lift everyone's game, I think."

In the women's event international endurance racer Elina Ussher returns to the Routeburn Classic after a one year absence.

In the 2006 event she set a

women's record of 3hr 30min 58sec. Elina Ussher's presence should generate competition in the women's category where she will face Emily Miazga, the 2008 female Coast to Coast winner, and Eveline Coombe, category winner of the 2006 Motatapu Marathon.

Although the race has been oversubscribed, event director Evan McWhirter encouraged competitors to continue registering on the waiting list. Thirty runners had already withdrawn because of injury and other commitments and McWhirter expected that figure to increase.