

From Adam Ward, Carnethy, 2005

FOR WHOM THE WIND BLOWS – APPLECROSS DUATHLON

Our team from the Hebridean Challenge decided to re-convene for a weekend's entertainment in the wild peninsula of Applecross for the second Applecross Duathlon. We knew that this was to be a race with a difference as we dropped off our bikes in a cow shed, before driving round the bike route – hard enough in a car, what was it going to be like on a bike in the wind?

The route started at the Venture Trust HQ at Hartfield about a mile north of Applecross and followed an old right of way to the north coast of Applecross at Kenmore, through wild, remote terrain and worth the entry fee just to do the run – with the last mile on the road before picking up your bike for the 15 miles round the undulating coastal road back to the start.

The omens weren't good as the 'Trade Winds' beer that Garry, Andrew and myself had carbo-loaded on the night before, started to make its presence felt – both before the race and in my case about two thirds of the way through the run! – having held it together to the bike, Garry and my attempts at faffing in transition were surpassed by Charlie Taylor in 3rd – surely a future Olympic faffer.

The cycle was HARD! Most of the 15 miles into a headwind and not a flat bit of road in sight – though the views of Rona (nice girl) and Skye beyond compensated somewhat. I managed to pull away on the cycle a bit (overtaking most of the fun runners who had started an hour in front) to win from Garry in second, and Andrew in 4th. Catherine won the ladies event, so it was a successful day all round.

Being described as 'Elite Competitors' at the prize giving was a bit embarrassing, especially as we were getting tore into some beer – but appreciated all the same! The evening's entertainment started with a truly memorable meal in the 'Potting Shed' restaurant. The food was sublime and is apparently the 10th best place to eat in Britain for under £50, and 2nd most romantic! – this according to the "Independent" – actually it was more like £20 a head including wine – fantastic value for money.

Then we repaired to the Applecross Inn – for very good real ale, malt whisky and great hospitality, until Catherine dragged us to the Ceilidh in the 'Flower Tunnel' . This was interesting, both the venue and ceilidh itself, and we're not sure if Catherine's attempts to liven it up were appreciated by everyone – it was at least a novel Strip The Willow – table landing!

Overnight it seemed like hurricane Katrina had hit – not appreciated by Garry in his 'open' bivvy bag and Andrew with his broken tent pole.

Thanks to Gerry McPartlin and his happy band of helpers for a great event in a great area. Hopefully more of you will try this event next year – he will take up to 40 competitors, and only had 27 this year, so there is room for more folk to try it – and if you don't want to compete you can always help out.

And I didn't even mention the Polish waitresses!.....

Adam Ward

From Andy Wright, Fife AC, 2005

The Applecross Duathlon is the brainchild of retired Edinburgh GP, Gerry McPartlin, who settled in the remote Applecross community, in Wester Ross, some years back. From the start, he and his wife Rhona have involved themselves in local activities with Rhona playing accordion in a local group of musicians while Gerry trains with the Torridon Mountain Rescue team.

Gerry completed the Edinburgh Marathon some years ago and has a history of long distance walks through the mountains. Having taken part in the Corrieyairack Challenge, he recognised the potential of Applecross to provide a similar but different duathlon challenge. Gerry has a wide circle of friends and two of these played a significant part in this year's event, Garry Innes and Paul Corrigan.

Garry, a keen sportsman, suffers from cerebral palsy. Despite his physical handicap, he is an avid walker and has been up Munros. Garry himself acted as race starter and handed out the prizes after the race, including the trophy for the winner that he has generously donated.

Paul Corrigan will be known to many as the organiser of the Corrieyairack Challenge duathlon which has raised many thousands of pounds for the Badaguish Centre over the past twelve years. Paul, like Gerry, is a keen mountaineer and the plans for this year's race were hatched during an excursion along the Cuillin ridge. Those of you who have competed in the Corrieyairack will have marvelled at how Paul seems to remember you from the previous year, greets you warmly and offers any help that is needed.

The fourth ingredient in this mix of people is the local community who join in enthusiastically as competitors, as race officials, as musicians and as cooks. Several members of the Torridon Mountain Rescue Team help out as medics and marshals making up one of the best qualified teams of race officials you will come across.

The race itself is a nine mile hill run over a mountain pass followed by a fifteen mile cycle on a single track public road (suitable for road bikes). The cycle route is part of the coastal road from Shieldaig to Applecross with wonderful views of Skye. It is very definitely hilly although it is nothing like as daunting as the nearby Bealach na Ba. Technically you have to concentrate with lots of gear changes and downhill sections with bends in the road at the bottom.

A certain amount of boldness is necessary too in the face of on-coming cars on the single track road. Similar fortitude was necessary in the first year of the race when overtaking a herd of highland cattle on the run route. The last few miles of the cycle are hard going with several of us cramping up and praying not to get a puncture. At the finish a feeling of real achievement, a hot shower followed by a wonderful tea provided by Rhona McPartlin and her team of locals. Because of the relative isolation of Applecross (two hours beyond Inverness) most of the competitors stayed the night rather than dispersing as happens at most races. So we all mixed together at tea, at the local Inn for drinks and dinner and at the late night Ceilidh at the campsite.

What makes this race different? Several things; the involvement of so many locals; the fact that many competitors are not regular racers; the friendliness of the organisers; the challenge of the race itself which is hard but well within the scope of any relatively fit person; the opportunity to get to know the other competitors ; the reminder of our good fortune in having sound limbs and the opportunity of admiring the courage and determination of one not so blest. It's definitely a fixture on my own race calendar.