

Kintyre Way Ultra 35 Tayinloan to Campbeltown 10 May 2014



Kintyre Way sign at Tarbert and beautiful Tarbert harbour

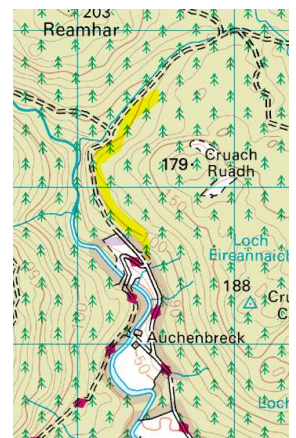
A long drive up from the midlands of over 400 miles meant I started off early Friday morning to avoid traffic allowing me plenty of time to rest and wander round Tarbert on Friday afternoon. I decided to register too rather than wait until Saturday morning even though I'd opted for the short course rather than the full 67 miler. For me the 16 hour cut-off might have been tight and with a few days rain to soften the ground and more rain and wind forecast for the event on Saturday I'd made up my mind not to push my luck.



So a quiet night kipping in the car at Tayinloan after eating tea and watching the sunset out to the island of Gigha. I did awake in the early hours and thinking if I was doing the long course I'd be up now (start 5:30am) but allowed myself to have another few hour's sleep as our start was 9:30am. At 7am no one had arrived at the village hall and I was beginning to wonder if this was actually the right place. Eventually organisers and competitors started to roll in, all laid back and a jovial atmosphere percolated.

Ready for the start were 52 of us Ultra 35 runners and also the short relay runners leg one, a few in fancy dress (or fancy skirt). The race director addressed the starters, clearly stating we would go sharp left and then out to the coast and along the beach. Ready steady go and we're off, most went sharp left but Sam (Samuel Way) hadn't heard and nearly caused a pile up by going straight on. Somehow I found myself at the front going along the beach after the first half mile -oops. Anyway once the first hill arrived I maintained a steady slow pace and gradually got overtaken. It can take my body an hour to really get going, as the muscles warm up and the kit fit improves to become comfortable. I'd reckoned on up to 3 hours for this section so carried 1.5L, but I had not bargained on there being a watering post after 3 miles. Oh, I thought, I'm carrying too much, maybe there will be lots of these watering posts and I did not need to carry any, certainly some of the runners were carrying nothing - apart from perhaps a mobile phone. *[it turned out there were no other watering spots]*

Up we went past the Deucheran wind farm - very close to the bottom of one of these giants. I wonder if they ever fall over? Then some descent work - from forest track with a bit of cushioning onto tarmac with no cushioning. I was holding position just, until Sam minus any top came thundering past enjoying the slope and listening to his music. At the bottom of the descent was the bridge over the Carradale Water stream. We then had a distinct fork with the choice being sharp right or sharp left. From a distance I thought I'd spotted a fellow competitor going right, but when I arrived at the fork others in front - a group of 4 and Sam had all gone left so I did-derr! Four others followed behind me so I assumed it was correct. I looked out for the blue vertical posts that are the Kintyre Way markers but there were none. After perhaps 10 minutes of gradual uphill I caught Sam and asked his opinion - he said he was just following those in front. I checked my map, I should have done so earlier as it was obvious to go right after the bridge. *[see map]* Back I went, down to the bridge and 15 mins lost. After the bridge it was perhaps 0.5 km before the first Way marker confirmed the route. It felt like I had gone to the back of the field as I passed competitors who were obviously struggling now.



On the Ultra 35 we had three legs, 15.5, 6 and 14 miles. It certainly felt a long leg to the cp as we climbed up to Croc nan Gabhar with spectacular views out West to Arran. A steep descent through the forest, outskirts of Carradale, not quite there, another km and then emerging from the trees at the cp. Now for some water. "If you want water you can get it in one of the toilets". But both toilet doors were locked as they were occupied. Eventually I was informed there was another tap, which I used – but the water dribbled out. No sign of any food to nibble. So I was off down to the coast.

This short section began along the seashore as the previous section had except we were now on the West coast not the East coast. Take care on the wet rocks then up the road and off to Ifferdale. In plotting out the route maps I had read the route description here and wondered if it might be tricky nav, but actually quite easy as the markers and extra markers clearly pointed us on the way, past the cottage, farm buildings and up the steep hill. Competitor traffic was building here with the pace taking its toll for some. I spotted Emma David high up ahead and set out to catch her – it took 8 miles!

Along more forest tracks taking us near the top of Cnocmalavilach (not a name you'll find in the regular spell checker) and then an amazing plummet down (is this really the way?) through a churned up cow field and then a grass field (quite rare on this event) before the final track to cp at Ifferdale farm. Emma had visited the cp and was coming back along the track so we exchanged greetings. As with previous cp water supplies were scarce – eventually located at a high tap on the wall, so another few minutes lost whilst bottle was filled. Thankfully I still had some of my 1L extra supply left for later.

14 miles to go. Forest rack beckoned as we wound our way up around Ifferdale burn. At last I managed to catch up with Emma, fairing better on the uphill sections. We jogged together for a few miles, descending down to the splendid panorama of a calm Lussa Loch. I pulled ahead of Emma – she was waiting for her 'second wind' to arrive. Hardly any other competitors around – just a couple of third leg relay people coming past including one of the NW Glasgow runners.

Cramp in my lower legs was now hampering my progress with flat and especially downhill becoming tricky. A few well wishers urged us on with cryptic shouts of things like – "it's all downhill from here – nearly". As it turned out the tarmac road was downhill at the end of the Loch but then climbed alongside Ballywilline Hill which for me was great as I felt more in control of my legs going up. Once the downhill to Campbeltown began Emma came past fluently jogging into the distance it seemed – before another few small hills held her back and I caught up. With toes trying to turn under my foot and leg desperate for a stretch (or stop) I pressed on. The A83 was reached, houses, garage, shops, cars and the quiet drizzle dampened bustle of the town. Emma had slowed so we could finish together – thanks – so it was left at the Coop and jog to the finish gazebo. I was feeling a bit out of it and very glad to give the legs a break.

Pity about the drizzle but it didn't really dampen my spirits which were soon on the rise after a drink and bite in the youth café – commandeered as race finish HQ. The 400 metre walk to the showers was worth it – feeling clean and refreshed and managed to negotiate a lift back to my car with one of the NW Glasgow relay runners.

Kintyre is beautiful, the race very well organised, and if you can make a few days of it (perhaps after the race) then well worth the trip to this largely unspoilt part of the world.

Nigel Aston