

Isle of Jura Fell Race: 28 May 2011

Phil Hodgson and Mandy Goth of Todmorden Harriers were looking forward to more spare (running) time and wanted some one else to take over the main organisation of this race. I said that sounds like fun, thinking they would be inundated with applications, but they weren't, and the rest will be history. So if you have a yen to take it on in five years or so, yes, it really is fantastic fun. Things don't always go as smoothly as you expected, or hoped, first time round, of course, so to anyone who was subject to any of the little glitches, my apologies and let's hope it is even better next year. The glitches I know about are all mentioned below, so if you have any more, feedback is always welcome. Many thanks and acknowledgments are owed, and are later in the report.

For weeks before the race on May 28 the weather had been unseasonably poor, and on the Monday before, storms disrupted all travel systems, cut off power to Islay and Jura for many hours, and prompted us to design an "atrocious weather alternative route", as the normal bad weather alternative would have been out of the question. On most days before race day, the full route would not have been feasible. Ongoing travel disruptions made it difficult for many people to arrive on the island as early as they had planned.

Then on race day, a short weather window opened with mere strong westerlies and occasional squally showers of rain or hail forecast. The full course was run, and with clear tops and good visibility the race was enjoyed by all who finished. The fairly strong westerly wind made life difficult on the tops for runners and marshals, and squally hail and rain showers did occur. Conditions underfoot were much boggier than usual after weeks of above average rainfall, but the Corran river was crossable.

Defending champion Rob Jebb (Bingley) was very disappointed not to be able to attend, and a contest between him and the new champion, Es Tresidder (Dark Peak), would have been wondrous to behold. In 2010 Es led for much of the race, but went astray and finished third behind Jebb and Ian Holmes (Bingley). Determined to improve on his position, and having just spent several weeks alpine ski racing, he duly put over six minutes between himself and the older Holmes to finish in 3:21:51. Andrew Fallas (Carnethy) was a close third.

Dave Aucott (Dark Peak), 4th this year, was 6th in 2010. Dave's dad, Ray Aucott, ran the Jura three times, also in his V40s, in 1983, 1984 and 1985, and was 4th, then 2nd, then 1st in a time of 3:18:36.

First lady was Sarah Ridgway (Eryri) in 4:09:29, followed by Fiona Maxwell (Shettleston, FV50) in 4:19 and Sarah O'Neil (HBT). Alison Raw (Bingley), overcoming illness, was 4th. We apologise again to Alison for not calling her up at the prize-giving due to her race number of 48 being mistakenly recorded as 148.

This year, for the first time ever, there was an FV60 category, and both Alison Brentnall (6:10:17) and Wendy Dodds (4:59:14) completed the course. Congratulations to them.

In all, twenty runners, all men, achieved the engraved whisky glass for a time under four hours. Over the years, five ladies have achieved under four hours: Angela Brand-Barker and Sarah Haines (1988), Tricia Calder (1992), Helene Diamantides (1994) and Angela Mudge (2002, 3, 8 and 10). Angela was also very disappointed not to make it to Jura this year due to injury.

Two more youngish men, Martin Hirst and Selwyn Wright, were awarded plaques for 21 completions of this race. Ian Holmes is planning to complete his 21 in his 50th year, so five

to go, and to have a crack at Joss Naylor's V50 record at the same time. Remarkably, all five holders of the 21-year-plaque, past and present, entered for this year's race and four registered and completed. Jack Holt (Clayton, V60) in 4:29, just held off Alistair Meikle, the surprise newcomer who was 2nd at Stuc a'Chroin.

The radio controllers, Raynet, put up a projection of the names of the leading group at each check point, which was exciting for the supporters as the order jostled around. For practical and cost reasons we are unable to provide split times.

With improved radio communications and after consideration of local facilities, we felt able to allow up to 250 starters. An entry list of about 247 dwindled to about 230 on the day, mainly from injuries and other good reasons, and 203 registered, which was as expected given the travel and weather problems beforehand. 192 finished. Ten dnfs reported back correctly. One did not make himself known to Race Control which caused problems. A useful description of this incident is later in this report.

This is a serious race, requiring significant experience and ability, due to the terrain, climatic conditions and remote location, and almost everyone who enters is clearly aware of this, providing good evidence of a couple of recent ALs or similar on their entry form. Every single claim was checked. With greater experience, this system of qualification will be refined for 2012, and I did allow much latitude in interpretation this year, which turned out to be justified. Situations can arise where, for example, a time of 1h 45 on Ben Nevis would not qualify, whereas a tail-end on Ben Rinnes would. Or of a CL race which, if you cut out a few of the flat miles, would then turn into AL. What we shall be looking for is checkable results you think are evidence you could complete the Jura safely and within the cut off times. Examples would be arduous long British fell or hill races or at least a reasonable time on a C course or harder in a 2-day mountain marathon. The admin side can also be much easier if you have done any Scottish hill races from 2005 onwards, or are a member of a British fell or hill running club.

Known glitches

- a. It was hard to hear what was being said at the marshals', Raynet and MRT briefing in the cooperage on Friday evening. Solution: exclude other people from the room during the meeting, and have the mike and speakers system available.
- b. I did not get runners into and out of the holding pen then to the start line quickly enough resulting in some runners still waiting to hand in their first tag when GO was announced. As the starter, I was completely unaware of this, seeing only an eager mass of runners bouncing up and down waiting for the off. Solution: get people into the pen earlier; collect tags on the way into the pen; enlist another helper or two to herd the supporters back away from the start line; actually look to see if everyone is out, rather than just eyes glued to my watch.
- c. Certificates were not all available for people to collect after finishing. Reason: the distillery normally provides the blanks, usually the day before, but they could not be found until quite late in the afternoon during the race due to knock-on effects of the bad weather and ferry disruptions earlier in the week. There was then very little time to fill them in. Geoff did his best. Solution: to reduce admin load during the race, in consultation with Willie, we shall attempt to pre-print the certificates from the entry list so that we have them well beforehand and only the times need to be filled in. See certificates below.
- d. T-shirts were hard to collect. Every runner, including children, and other parties including the marshals and radio operators are supposed to be given a T-shirt. A

number of people had problems obtaining their T-shirt. The T-shirts are designed and donated by the distillery, who normally distribute them in whatever way they feel is best. Solution: in my opinion and experience, the only good way to distribute T-shirts to runners, especially at the end of a long and arduous race, is to ask them just after finishing what size they would like, and hand it to them there and then. In consultation with Willie, I'll look into this. See T-shirts below.

Thanks and acknowledgments

It was humbling to see the way so many people – runners, non-runners due to injury, family and friends – noticed when a job needed doing, and did it. Thanks to all of them.

The marshals cannot be thanked enough. They will in future receive more personal recognition from the race organisation; some have a history of marshalling the race going back over many years, even decades, and this needs to be recognised and recorded. Some participants may not be aware that most of the marshals are local, or associated with Jura, and are organised and led by Donald Ewen Darroch who lives and works on the Feolin estate, one of the four estates the race passes over. This year we were still short of four or five marshals the evening before the race, so there was a recruitment drive. Two people who would like to have run but couldn't due to injury, were still able valiantly to get up to CP1 for us, and two others made the expedition to CP4. One of these was Geoff Howard who nobly forewent his own race opportunity (having once said he was never going to do another AL).

Thanks again to Phil and Mandy for passing on a ready-to-use race and for being of huge assistance before and after the race. The Race was so appreciative it presented them with a beautiful framed picture by the local photographer Konrad Borkowski (see website). We borrowed Tod Harriers' PA system, but the Race has now purchased its own complete system for the princely sum of £249.

You may have recognised Alan Brentnall (Secretary of the FRA) and Don Booth on the kit checks table. Don resurrected the Jura race in 1983, and visits every year. He says "you have all these rules and regulations these days – kit checks? In my day it was just a bloke in a van ... " etc.

Sue, Janet, Jeanie and others on the registration and finish team were superb.

Last, but definitely not least – Laurie Anderson (Fife) – who is the standby organiser, and who was responsible for many tasks, including keeping the Fifers in order.

Certificates

Please let the organiser know if you would like your certificate posted out to you. If you would like to send an SAE, they are 24x30 cm. 2011 certificates will be available for completion and collection at the 2012 race.

T-shirts

I think there are T-shirts left in the cupboards at Craighouse. If you didn't get one and would like one delivered to you in one way or another, please let the organiser know. It may be possible for some to be put aside for collection next year – please register with the organiser. I already have some requests.

Children's races

The previous local organiser has left the island, and the organisation of children's races was taken on a week before the race by Polly Gibb. They were greatly enjoyed, but due to local

uncertainty did not attract the usual large numbers. We hope they continue to thrive. The infrastructure is there, and the local community is very keen to help with them.

TV programme

BBC2 Scotland made a programme at this year's race for an edition of The Adventure Show. The film crews on the island were from the production company Triple Echo. The broadcast date has not been announced yet, but will appear on the website as soon as we are informed. I hope you were filmed and interviewed and are about to achieve your ambition of TV stardom. This team has produced programmes from outdoor locations wilder, more frightening and far more technically difficult than Jura, and I am sure you found them friendly, unobtrusive and highly competent.

Tail-end group story and check point cut-off times

About five or six runners arrived at CP4, Bheinn a'Chaolais, a minute after the official cut-off time. The two marshals sought advice from race control about whether to let them continue. Knowing one marshal was a highly experienced fell runner, and the other an ex-mountain rescue person, we felt it best to leave the call to them on the spot. This turned out to have been exactly the right thing to have done when we looked at the final results and communicated with the runners concerned.

The marshal had to communicate with the radio man; the radio man with the base control radio man; the base control radio man with the organiser; then back again the same way – in order for every question and reply to pass back and forth – which led to very limited, slow and possibly inaccurate information flow, while a group of five runners huddled, freezing in a bitter wind, for quite a few minutes. Food for thought.

The system of cut-off times, following some feedback and incidents such as this, needs re-thinking, in my opinion. Many say that CP1 is too tight. I say that there is no point in turning anyone back so early in the race, and would propose that there are no official cut-off times before CP4. The actual cut-off times for CP4 and beyond will be subject to revision, bearing in mind that the principal reason for cut-off times is so as not to keep the marshals out on the hill for longer than reasonable, and to allow enough daylight to deal with most incidents, should they occur. In 2011, wishing to make minimal changes in my first year, the only change made was to delay the CP2 and CP3 cut-offs by ten minutes – to allow for otherwise competent runners who went astray in the clag before CP2, and who were well capable of finishing.

Lost person story

This is a cautionary tale which should be noted by all runners and organisers.

As prize-giving ended, approaching 18:00, I was informed that runner number n was still unaccounted for. N had checked in at CP5 but not at CP6, these being the last two main Paps, and not ones with a mountain rescue team stationed between them. CP6 reported that another runner had informed them that runner n had retired at the bealach before, and asked him to pass the message on. That was all we knew. Therefore for us – the Race Organiser, Raynet central control, Donald Ewen (chief marshal) and the MRT – he could have been almost anywhere down a glen either side of the bealach.

We looked up his name and club from the entry list, and made PA announcements to everyone in the cooperage, which was very busy, for his name or anyone in his club, which was not a small club. No one came forward, and none of his club members we asked knew him or what he looked like. We trawled the camp site and the pub and places between without luck.

MRT began to get concerned. N's entry form had an almost illegible mobile phone number. We tried reasonable possibilities, without response. The police MRT contacted their base in Glasgow, and via the police in Edinburgh, a car was sent round to his address to see if any contact had been made. PA announcements were made on the Calmac ferry. The operator of the fast rib passenger ferry was telephoned to check his passengers, in case n had made a quick getaway by that route. Nothing.

Gradually, over the next hour, people who had not been at Craighouse, who might have been camping up the road at Corran Sands, or still marshalling at Three-arched Bridge, none of whom knew of each other, heard of the story and began to materialise with their bits of information. Some were runners who had not raced for one reason or another, but were on the hill.

One guy had met n at the bealach and jogged down to Three-arched Bridge with him. So with a sigh of relief, MRT stood down – having been getting mentally ready to go back up on a search, or even call out a search helicopter.

Another guy had accompanied n some or all of the way along the road back to Craighouse. So far everyone gave the same description of n's appearance, so we were confident it was the same person.

Later, Rob Darroch, a very seasoned marshal, arrived from the bridge, CP8, and showed us his clipboard on which he had written the race numbers of people arriving there who had already retired. N's number was on the list.

At least two of these people said that n was staying at a B&B, so we began to assume that was where he probably was, and then, basically, just tried to forget about it.

When n did get in touch, he said he had reached the finish, and had to tell people not to clap him as he had retired. He wrote that he had reported to a gentleman "doing numbers" (we only had two ladies on the finish) and had asked a lady if she wanted his tags, and that she had said no. You will recall that when you finished the race, a lady cut off your remaining tag or tags and put them in a poly bag – and there would have been no exceptions. The important point to note is that this runner, for whatever reason, did not report back to Race Control or the finish timers. This had knock-on effects regarding post-race sorting out and clearing up, but could have been far more costly. We never met n.

Lessons learnt include getting detailed contact and location information from every runner when they register, such as tent colour, tent location, other accommodation, car details, companions, intended departure ferry – anything which can help locate a missing person on a small island.

Facilities (Distillery, hotel, Antlers, shop, camping and accommodation)

The Isle of Jura distillery was once again extremely generous with their provision of the cooepage, gallons of malt whisky for prizes, T-shirts, 4-hour glasses, and general organisation on their side.

The hotel provided excellent service and meals, as usual, in spite of Andy and Cath welcoming their first child into the world in Edinburgh the night before the race. Islay bottle-conditioned ales were an innovation this year, after they found that bottles of Deuchars IPA sold out last year. Unfortunately 14 cases were not enough, and they ran out on Friday. I am hoping for a bigger supply next year.

The Antlers provided excellent café and snack facilities before and during the race; the wireless internet connection was invaluable and the coffee and snacks excellent. The lease runs out this year, and one of the owners, with his wife, one of the GPs, is moving back to Devon. Whether anyone else will be taking on the facilities next year remains to be seen. They ran the Small Isles catering van last year, but this year that had already been taken over by new operators on the island, providing an excellent snack van.

The Spar shop was probably quite busy, but did not get any advance requests for supplies, which they are always willing to order in.

I did not have to camp this year, living for a week in luxury up at Feolin farmhouse a mile or so from the hotel. If anyone who camped has useful feedback about facilities, please let me know. If anyone would like to spend the whole week before the race in the farmhouse in 2012, please let me know, for a priority booking. I need to defray expenses. It sleeps about ten.

2012 dates and travel

As part of the great calendar of hill races in Scotland and down south, we are slotting in at our usual date of the last Saturday in May. The Monday is not a public holiday in England and Wales in 2012 because of royal things. If you are among the many who normally take Friday to travel to Jura, and Sunday to travel back, you will not notice any difference (except greater ease in booking). If your school is delaying its half term to the second week in June in 2012, and you normally like to stay on in the islands for a week, then that is going to be difficult next year. Likewise if you like to leave on Sunday and cycle via Arran, it might be trickier, but maybe not impossible. On the other hand, there are some people who can never make the normal date, but are thrilled they will be able to go next year.

Let's hope for a good one.

Graham