

Isle of Jura Fell Race 2012

Apologies to all for the lateness of this or any other report on the race. Apart from waiting for more details regarding the sad event near CP4, work has become very busy, and, apart from the rest of life's activities, we are about to move house to the NW Highlands after spending more than half our lives in and around Leeds.

This report may well be edited as more information becomes available later this year.

John Dare

It was very sad for many of us to follow the unfolding incident which happened during the running of the race. John Dare, a long-time associate of this and the Scottish Island Peaks races succumbed to a fatal cardiac arrest on his way up to marshal at CP4. John was staying at Craighouse with his wife and another regular marshal, Vince, at Craighouse. John also had other old friends in this small and tight-knit community. Some of the runners also knew him, having been involved in the Island Peaks race the weekend before, in which he was one of the yachtsmen. That race, which several of our competitors also ran, includes the Paps of Jura and serious runs on Mull and Arran – non-stop. We plan, after a suggestion relayed to me by Dave Ward, to include an annual memento or award to runners who have competed in both.

Entries

In consultation with Donald Ewen Darroch and the Mountain Rescue leader, the top limit for starters in this year's race was set at 250. Entries opened on 1st March and the limit was reached very early on, extras going on to a waiting list. 280 entries were received and approved, and by May 24th this number had dwindled to 230 due to injuries, illness and other commitments.

We had been concerned that entries would be hit severely by the public holiday and school half terms being put back a week, as many English families take the whole week off, and make a family holiday of it. Next year they will be back with a vengeance, but there was a lack of children of school age for the children's races this year.

A very encouraging feature of this year's entry was the 33% of entrants from Scottish clubs, as opposed to the usual 10% or so. May this continue.

The start line

The May 2011 issue of Jura Jottings bore the headline "Can he do it again?", and a photo of Rob Jebb, winner in 2008 and 2010. Unfortunately he was unable to make it, and the race was won by an equally impressive Es Tresidder. This year they were both on the start line, with a strong field of top hill runners. Ian Holmes, (legend, etc...), was on the start line, but had a bad knee and was just hoping to get round this time. He was first back, looking fresh as a daisy, but that is normal, having seen sense at CP2.

Weather

The dry weather started on the Saturday before the race, and against all known principles, was still going strong at least two days after the event. Unfortunately it just got hotter and hotter, and this was not going to be good for the runners. Problems with dehydration and heat exhaustion were anticipated. On the day, the only alleviating factor was a cool easterly breeze on the tops.

Marshals

Donald Ewen rounded up as many marshals as he could from local sources, many of whom have been up on the tops – fair weather and foul – for several years. On the day before the race he was 5 people short, but we already had enough volunteers from the runners' supporters and friends to man CP6, Beinn Shiantaidh, and to woman CP7, Corra Bheinn.

There was a briefing by the race organiser and the MRT leader in the fire station on Friday evening, which was attended by all marshals, RAYNET operators, the MRT teams, and one of the doctors on race duty.

Contact details from most of the marshals were collected so that we can keep in touch and find out more of the stories they have to tell. I am looking forward to this.

The start

Runners were herded into the distillery car park, and their first checkpoint tag collected. When all were inside, they were released to the start line, and the announcer explained the safety procedures (again), the weather, the dangers and location of water on the hill.

Due to lack of a shotgun, the announcer counted down to GO, and at 10:30 the runners set off in silence, due to trepidation – and lack of a piper!

Mountain rescue in action

At about 11:00 to 11:15 we became aware at central radio control (in the distillery offices) that there was a serious casualty. It was rapidly pieced together that one of the marshals on his way up Beinn a'Chaolais had collapsed and was also injured. This quickly developed into a helicopter rescue. There was nowhere to land on the steep hillside, so a Sea King with a winch would be necessary. All in Britain were busy on other callouts, but Dave (MRT base controller) managed to get one diverted to Jura from another job, possibly the search for the missing canoeist near Oban, whose body had been located. It needed to refuel at Oban, but was still quickly on the scene. Tragically, all proved in vain, as the poor marshal had suffered a serious cardiac arrest and passed away. Meanwhile, the nearest MRT team, between Beinn a'Chaolais and Beinn an Oir, had split, two to the incident, and two to the checkpoint to marshal the runners. This could have been a bad place not to have any marshals, as it is the first serious cut-off point.

There were one or two relatively minor cases later on where MRT and marshals had to help runners who, for the most part, had become 'disoriented' by the heat. We can safely say that this year's experience proves how important it is to have expert mountain rescue and radio communications in place for this arduous and serious hill race.

Progress of the race

After the first three checkpoints on the Pips, it was going to be at least a three horse race at the front end. Rob Jebb, Es Tresidder and Ben Bardsley were jostling for position all the way round to Three Arch Bridge. According to Es, Rob and Ben were quicker up the hills, and Es was quicker down the rough stuff – i.e. all the descents. Es gave Rob 100 yards on the road at Three Arch Bridge while he changed into his road running shoes – which many do – but from then on all he could do was watch Rob gradually pull away to win by a margin of about two minutes. Ben was another two minutes behind Es.

[More observations from runners, supporters and marshals will always be welcome, please.]

Rob's time was ten minutes outside the record set by Mark Rigby in 1994. Had the weather been cooler, I am sure the record could have been broken this year – but not by much.

Further back, some runners were getting disorientated and even nauseous by the heat by the time they reached Beinn Shiantaidh. The ladies, and a couple of local lads, on Corra Bheinn valiantly carried up many litres of water for the wilting runners. In the end, 17 of the 208 starters pulled out during the race, and 191 finished.

The winning time was 3:17:39 and the last man home made it back in 7:42:03.

The full results may be seen at www.jurafellrace.org.uk.

All the runners emphasised the horror of the final descent from the last hill into the still air and heat, and the excruciating final run along the road to Craighouse.

New V50 record

What to say: Joss Naylor's 1988 V50 record of 3:48:43 was smashed by Stuart Whitley of Carnethy in 3:42:02. Stuart is well known in Scottish circles for performing well in the heat when others are wilting. Joss's record was also beaten by Mike Johnson of Bowland in 3:47:04.

What not to say: "I bet Joss was in his mid-fifties by then, and there was a terrible headwind, and you had to beat your own tracks through the waist-high heather and rocks in those days, etc., etc.". This is all mythology.

The children's races

At the last minute, the Diurachs were short of some one to organise the children's races again, and Polly Gibb had been unable to make it to Jura this year. Then Beccy Thorpe was spotted as she arrived with Gary at the race-base farmhouse, and to her incredulity a new Children's Race organiser was born. She did a fantastic job. All the kids who could not make it this year because of half term – it should be a good one in 2013.

Presentations and thanks

The distillery generously provide trophies, many bottles of single malt, T-shirts and other nice things for the winners in about the top ten categories. This includes the first three home, first veteran over 40, first lady, and others. Race funds buy numerous other bottles (mainly wine) for prizes further down the list, and Islay Ales are, it seems, establishing a custom of giving us a couple of cases of their fine ale for prizes as well. Given the choice, everyone chose beer! I think we might go easy on the wine next year, and get a few more crates of decent ale in.

There were thanks for all the hard work, time and effort from Donald Ewen, main organiser of the marshals, Gill Darroch, his wife, and their daughter for the spread of food, the marshals themselves, all the volunteer helpers on the day, and Willie Cochrane - who even won a bottle of wine for being "Best Distillery Manager".

Finally, once again we thank Ian for the lovely carved walking sticks. One was presented to the overseas competitor who had travelled furthest, Hubert Gartner, and one – later on – to the last lady home.

Comments, suggestions, corrections and additions always welcome.

Graham Arthur

Race organiser