

Just Out Pedalling

GBDuro – Preamble



GBDuro / Off-road Lands End to John O' Groats via Wales / A long squiggly line from the bottom to the top of the UK



Map Credit: Philappa Battye

Around 2000km in total

4 stages – Stop at the end of each stage to recover and all start at the same time.

Lowest aggregate time ‘wins’

Taking the decision to only race in the UK this year, it only seemed right to put an entry in for GBDuro, and luckily I got in. With just starting a new job a few months prior, the run up was a bit of a blur to be honest, but surprisingly I had the bike built and bags packed earlier than the usual night before mad packing spree. I must be getting the hang of this thing now.



10th August – 2 days til the start

I pedalled the 10 miles or so and caught the long ol train from Durham station to Newton Abbot to meet with Andy, an old pal from university.

On the way down, I managed to get seated and talking to Kirsty, who was also doing the race when she got on the train at Sheffield. This saw the hours go by nicely and before I knew it I was rolling into Newton Abbot and saw Andy on the platform.

Not feeling 100%, I wasn't too keen on his suggestion of riding up Haytor before tea, but hey I might never get the chance again, so instead of taking my heavily loaded bike, I dropped it off and borrowed one of Andys nice light road bikes.

The ride up was tough, but worth it for that decent.

After a lovely night of food, wine and chat, I slept amazingly and was pleased I did.



11th August – 1 day till the start

After a nice ride into Newton Abbot with Andy on his way to work, I got the train to Penzance, the end of the line.

There was another rider on the train who was doing the race too and we exchanged previous racing stories and talked of what we expected of the week or so ahead.

I stopped for some lunch by the sea in Penzance as it was fairly warm and I made the most of being able to sit and not look at the watch, as this is a constant pressure in races. I now never take

sitting in cafes and not looking at the time for granted anymore, its great.

I cycled the 10 mile or so to St Just, where my bnb was for the night above a pub. I relaxed for a bit then headed down to Sennen Cove, where there was a pre-race meet up on the beach.

I stayed for a couple of hours chatting with other races, which was good to swap excitements and anxieties before the race, but after a while I was ready to head back, faff with the bike, get some food and sleep. So I did just that.



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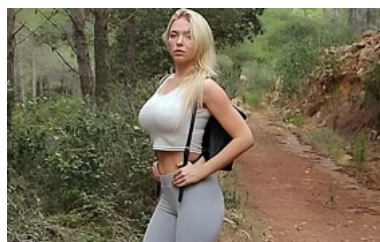
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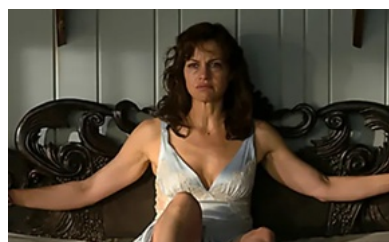
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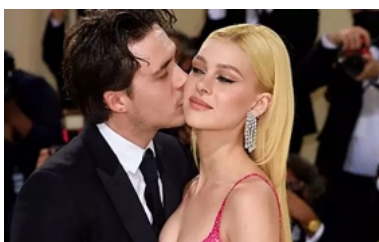
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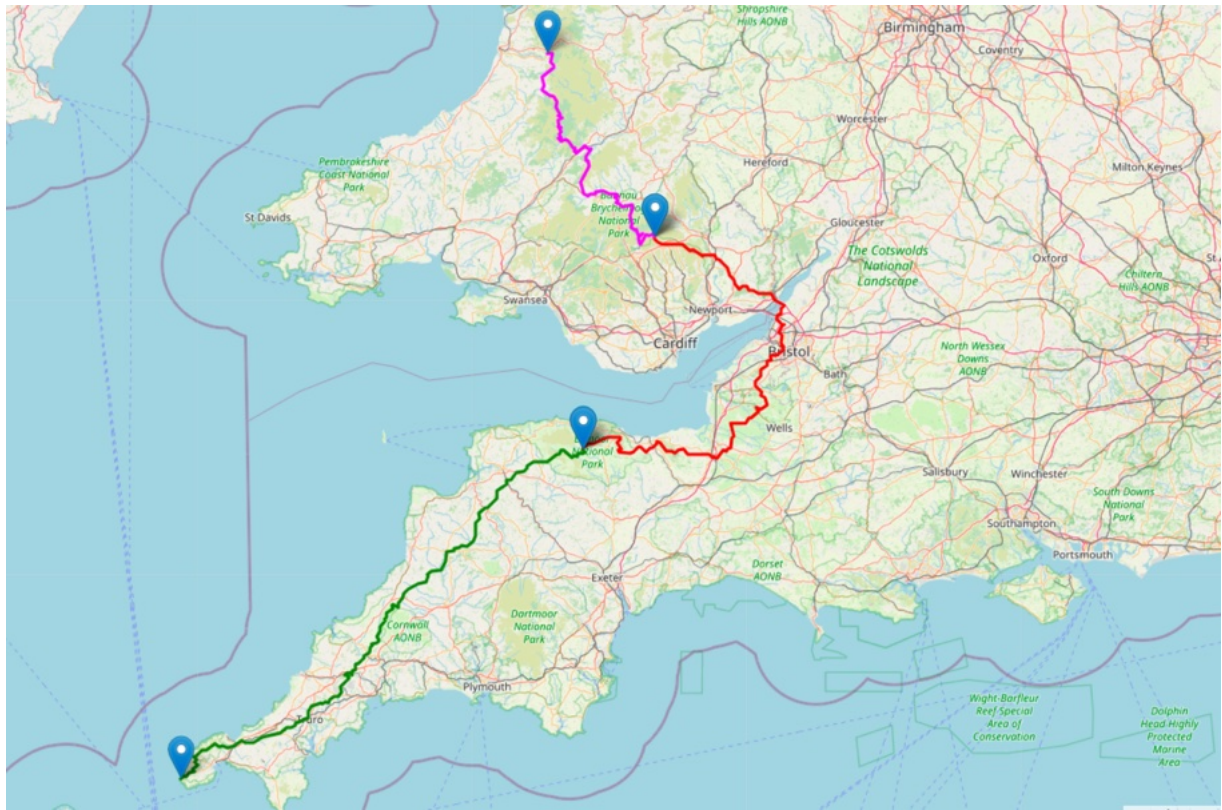
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Just Out Pedalling

GBDuro – Stage 1



60 hrs 17 mins 409.44 m 38,100 ft elevation gain



Day 1 – Saturday 12th August

My 30th Birthday. And what a way to spend it.



The day started with a pedal down to the start line, around 10 miles or so, with a couple of other racers who were staying at the same accommodation. The early morning chill woke me up and before we knew it, it was nearing 8am and we were lining up at Lands End,

ready to head north until we reached John o'groats, with a few squiggles on the way.

Sam came and we were off. I am always wary of not pushing too hard in the first few hours of these events, and I tried not to chase when people overtook me on the uphill. The smooth road quickly turned to cut through field bridleways, which were mostly dry, so a good start. Chatting sporadically with riders was nice, but also was the solitude and taking the first few hours to get into the rhythm of the race up and now the Cornish hills and rolling into Devon before I knew it.

The weather changed and the rain started to come on and off, ensue rain jacket on and off, a constant battle between correct riding temperature and staying dry.

I tried to keep stops to a minimum, and only stopped for just over an hour for the whole day. My first stop had been planned and was Great Torrington at around 127miles done. It was around 7pm. Here I dashed around the co-op and got some fish and chips to eat in. The race rules were that you had to carry all of your own rubbish to the end of each stage, so this was logistically difficult, so the more times I could eat in somewhere without any rubbish, the better.

At the chippy, Pete, another racer, came in and joined me for a chippy tea. It was good to chat and compare days and plans for the night. After a farewell, I packed my bags with snacks for the night and the following morning and headed off into the rain and dusk.

The rain really came down and after a few up and down road climbs, I reached the edge of Exmoor National Park in complete darkness. I came across a pub still open and took the opportunity to fill my water bottles for the night. I entered the national park and a 15 mile or so off road section that I wanted to complete before sleep.

The going wasn't too bad, mostly field and gates. What really annoyed me was that most of the gates were open. This was obviously done by another racer as no one else would have been going through these at 11pm on a Saturday night. So I closed all the gates and put a message in the race WhatsApp group to remind people to close gates.

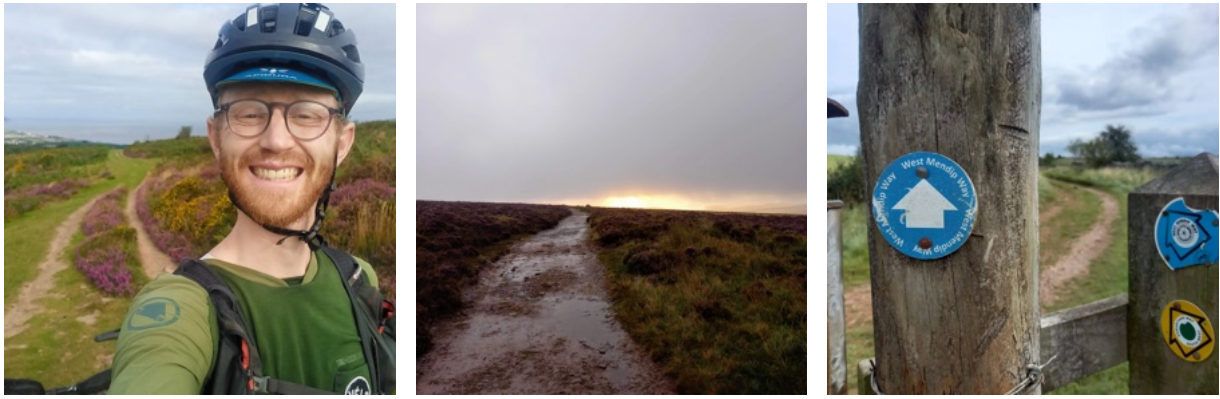


After getting through the off road section, I was now thoroughly soaked through and knackered, it was around 1am. I found a piece of grass over a fence, threw my bike over and awkwardly set up my tent in the rain. First day over.

Day 2 – Sunday 13th August

Early alarm, 5am after 3hrs30 of restless sleep. Packing up always takes longer than it should, but I was away for just after 5.30am and the weather looked to be much better today.

After a steep decent off road, there was a great off road climb through the Quantocks with stunning views out to sea.

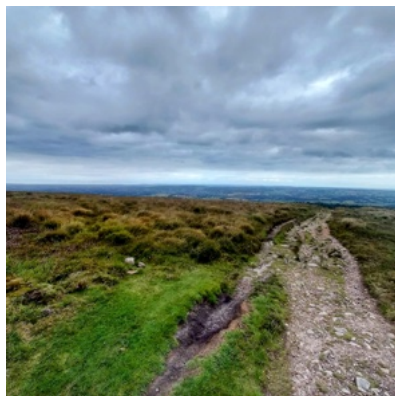


After a brief stop at a petrol station in Bridgwater for some overpriced pastires and coffee, I was aiming for Bristol. The next 30 miles or so were pan flat, mostly on road. To my surprise, Karl, who I had raced with in Italy in 2022 and at All Points North this year was on the road ahead of me. He lived close by and rode with me for

about 30 minutes. it was great to catch up and I was so thankful he came out to cheer me on. He gave me a run down of the route to Bristol and knew I was in for a big off road climb and some awkward off road sections to get there. Thanks for coming out Karl!!

The Mendips were tough. I didn't really think about them too much as thought I was close to Bristol, which I was, but the Mendips were in the way. A big off road climb, a lot of pushing ensued and some muddy descending saw me pop out in Bristol around tea time. It was very tempting to stop and waste some time in one of the many restaurants I passed, but no, head down and aim for the Severn bridge to Wales.

Another great surprise was a dotwatcher out cheering riders on. I stopped for a few minutes and we chatted about long bike races and our favourite sweet snacks, then I set off and the excitement grew and I got closer to the Severn Bridge.





Over the bridge and into Wales around 6pm.

I stopped at a petrol station to stock up on snacks as wasn't 100% sure what resupply would be like heading into the hills.

The excitement of being in Wales soon died down as the rain, cold and tiredness came. I was struggling, mostly tiredness, but also hunger. Who knew. All I knew was that a pub I passed with a log burner wouldn't have seen the end of me if I stepped through the front door. I winced and continued to push my bike up a steep road climb.

I had planned on getting to Brynmawr to get food at Mcdonalds, but that was looking less and less likely as the going was slow through the valleys.

A second (or third or fourth) wind caught me when the constant calculations made it slightly possible that I could make Mcdonalds before closing time. The draw of the golden arches spurred me on through the night and I made it for 10.30pm, 30 minutes to eat, warm up and look where I was going to sleep that night.



The rain was pounding on the window, but I had to go, they were closing up. I had planned on riding another 10 miles or so into the Brecon Beacons and try and find a sheltered place to camp.

20 miles later, the rain and wind were really slowing my progress and I still hadn't found a place to camp. It was now nearly 1am, so I found a half sheltered spot, not ideal, but no one around and set my tent up as quickly as I could in the rain and jumped in and fell asleep almost instantly.

Day 3 – Monday 14th August

My alarm woke me up at 4.30. The rain was hammering on the tent, the bottom of my sleeping bag was wet and now my feet were. I set

another alarm for 5.30 and turned over to sleep.

The alarm went again, the weather was exactly the same. I packed up and headed back out into it. This was going to be a long day to get the last 100 or so miles to the 1st checkpoint done.

Little did I know, I was headed to the infamous The Gap climb. I didnt really clock on until I reached the top beacuse the fog was so bad I couldnt see anything around me. I only clocked on beacuse I noticed the track at the top from a photo of the race i had seen a couple of years back. It was raining, I was pushing uphill, I was soaked through, my headphones had broke and I was starving, but I was absolutely loving it. How much a few hours of sleep and a new day can change perspectives. I was in the race and I knew that morning that I was going to finish it no matter what. I still had a long way to go but nothing was stopping me.

At the bottom of The Gap, I spotted another racer hiding from the elements in a bus shelter. I went over and we chatted about the mornings ride. I ate a whole bag a sharing crisps plus some chocolate of some sort, then tried to convince the other rider not to scratch as he was seriously considering it. We only had 70 miles or so to go until the checkpoint. I found out later that day he scratched only a few miles later.



The weather cleared up in the afternoon and just above Llandrindod Wells I bumped into Anthony, a race photographer. He was on his bike, so we rode together for a little while and he took a few photos, then he turned around to wait for the next racer.



Photo by Anthony Pease <https://anthonypease.co.uk/>

I then dropped down to Llandrindod Wells, a place I have always wanted to visit. I was ready for some hot food and a coffee. I found a lovely cafe and a seat next to a raidator. I filled myself with a panini, chips and cake alongside coffees and coke. I only had around 50 miles to go to the checkpoint, but they were mostly off road and up and down. So i thought this feed would help me through them, and they really did.

The next 50 miles were an absolute joy. The going was tough, but the gravel was smooth and the views were stunning. I listened to an upbeat playsit and just enjoyed being in the moment through the Elan Valley. I bookmarked a few places and promised myself I would be back here when I had some more time on my hands.



The race was turning into highlights reel of the best of Britain, and I was loving it.

I descended into Ysbyty Cynfyn and with it CP1. I was pleased to see it. A field with a few tents scattered around, a couple of big tents with hot food and somewhere to recharge.



Stage one complete. It was time to try and dry out!

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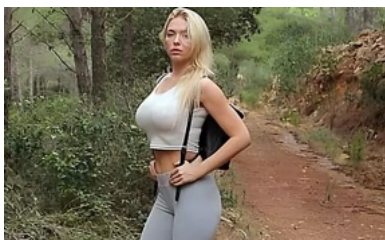
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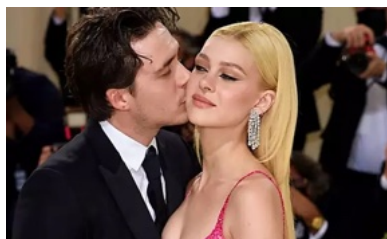
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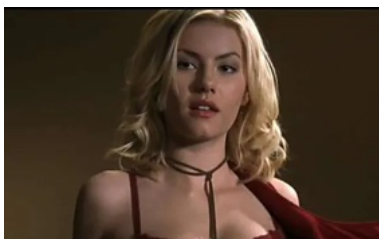


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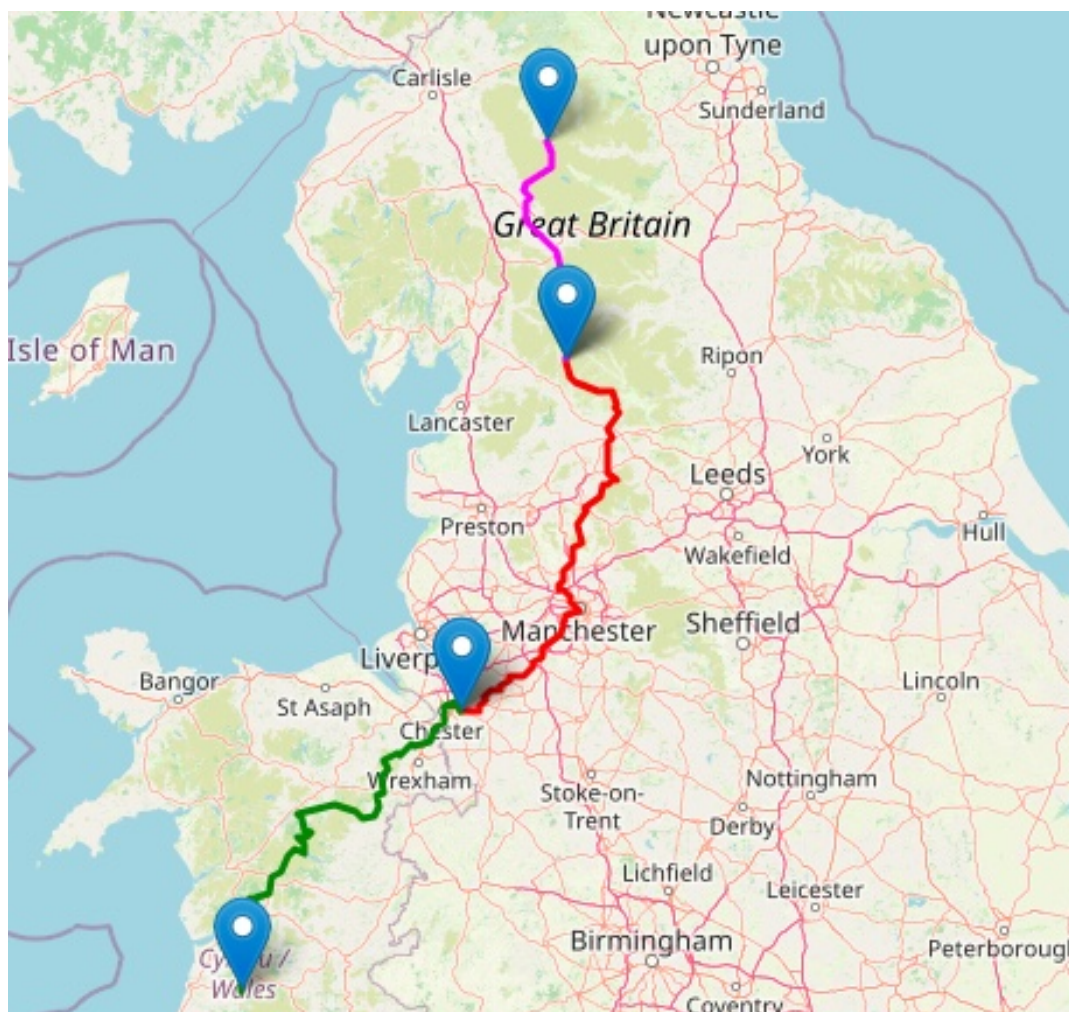
GBDuro – Stage 2



55 hrs 17 mins

293.65 miles

29,478ft gain



Day 4 – Tuesday 15th August

After trying to dry my kit in rather damp conditions and getting a pretty good sleep, I woke up around 6 to try and finish this process and pack my kit away to give me plenty of time before the start of stage 2 at 8am.

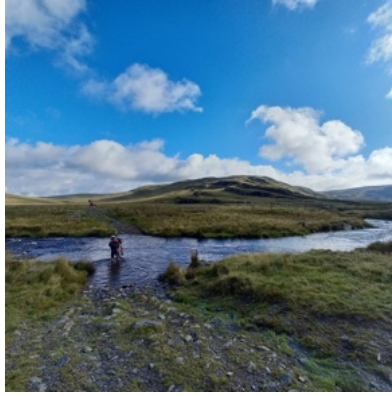
There were riders who came in only in the early hours of this morning and were getting some food and getting ready for a quick turnaround. Amazing, the determination to keep going from these people is something I would find hard to muster, especially in a damp field in the middle of Wales.



After chatting with a few other riders about the experiences of the first stage and chatting with trepidation and excitement about the next stage, I wolfed down some porridge and coffee and was ready to go.

Sam came and only me and Will were ready to roll out. So we chatted for the first few miles along some small singletrack roads and then when we hit the first off road section, Will sped off and the front runners started to overtake me one by one as I found myself midpack and happy with my pace. Not wanting to over do it to early on and wanting to conserve energy. We still had a very long way to go!

The painstaking effort to dry my socks at the Checkpoint became useless as after about 10 miles, we had to dismount our bikes and walk through a river that came above our knees. Luckily the weather was nice and temperatures quite high.



The route soon found its way into Dyfi Forest, with some impeccable Gravel climbs, descents and a bit of MTB trail singletrack thrown in. Today was a good day.

Bwlch Y Groes loomed. This is the second highest public road mountain pass in Wales, with a summit altitude of 545 metres. And my word, is it steep. It is straight up, with no corners. In the midday heat with not really much food in my belly, it was a toughy. I had no issues with getting off and pushing my heavy rig up the climb. What cheered me on was a group of LEJOG cyclists who overtook me on the climb with their support van clapping and cheering me on.

After the big road climb and decent, upwards again into Coed Y Glyn. This was an expansive off road climb, taking me to some beautiful views for miles on end.



The decent was chilly, so I knew food was needed because we were still in the middle of the days heat. So I dropped down to Llandrillo, and found myself pretty sleepy. So found a corner shop, stocked up on Welsh Cakes, and think I might have had a little snooze on the pavement in the sun.

The next section, I was looking forward to. It was a piece of history for this kind of cycling. A piece of history without, events like GBDuro would not exist today.

The Rough Stuff Fellowship the original off-road cycle touring and mountain biking club has its roots firmly in the ground over this

next pass I was about to embark upon, the Berwyns, Bwlch Nant Rhyd Wilym, in central Wales. ‘Wayfarer’ was the pen-name of Walter MacGregor Robinson, (1877-1956), one of the pioneers of rough stuff cycling.



Rough Stuff in the early years: cyclists on the Bwlch Nant Rhyd Wilym in the footsteps of ‘Wayfarer’, May 1919.

<https://www.rsf.org.uk/about-us/history-and-beginnings.html#1919-1933-prelude>

At the top of the pass, there is a commemorative plaque to the Wayfarer, put in place by the Rough Stuff Fellowship in 1957 and its still standing strong in the photo below.

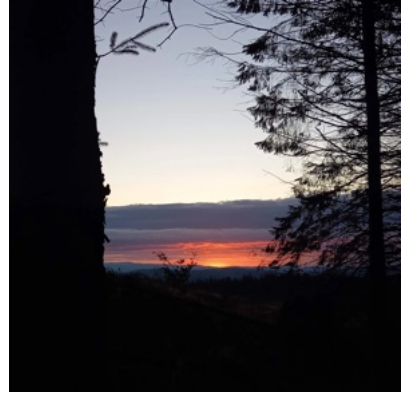


I took a moment to understand everyone who had sweated up this climb and enjoyed being in the outdoors in these hills. With all of these events, I just feel lucky to spend a long period of time outdoors with no real worries apart from food, water and sleep.

The decent was rocky, and then after a pretty cheeky steep road climb, I pedalled through a busy but beautiful Llangollen, another place to come back to visit when I had more time.

Worlds End! I used to go to university in Chester and I started to recognise to roads around here when I used to train on the road bike around these parts. Worlds End was one of my favourite

climbs, so this brought another smile to my face and at the top, a volunteer from the race was there cheering and I stopped to have a short chat. This spurred me on to tackle Llandegla forest and some mtb trails.



The sun was just about gone for the day as I popped out on to the road decent and the flat lands to Chester. I was almost TT racing thought the well known roads to make sure I was going to catch Mcdonalds in time. I did and spent about an hour eating, faffing and sitting in the warmth. I also decided to try and make it another

20 or so miles to Delamere Forest, where I would try and find a place to sleep for the night.



I left Chester around 10pm and fought through the nightlife onto the cyclepath. I then entered the small lanes of Cheshire and sleep started to get the better of me. It was super quiet and I passed a field that looked too perfect not to camp in. So I hopped over the fence with my bike, set up the tent and settled down for the night.

Day 5- Wednesday 16th August

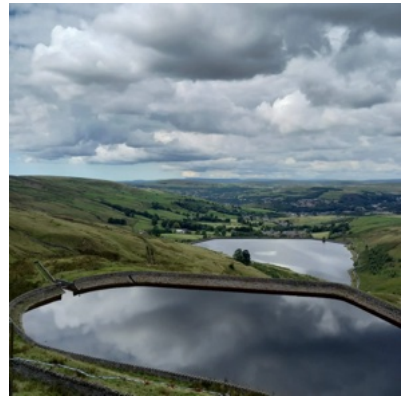
I had slept well. Only got up once when nature called, and the sky was clear and the stars were out in force. I had a bit of a lie in. Still a long way to go, but these extra minutes of rest help in the long run. Well they do for me anyway, finishing and enjoyment is the priority.



The day started with a few back lanes of Cheshire, then through Delamere forest and onto bridleways and canals edging closer to the centre of Manchester.

It was busy, but not so bad. I was pleased to cycle straight through the centre and start to escape the cars and noise of a big city once

more as I cycled through Bury and into the Pennines. A breath of relief, quite and hills once more.



All of the buzz of a city must have had an impact on me as as soon as I hit the Pennine Bridleway, I started to fall asleep. I took no time

to hop off my bike and lie against a gate in the sun and was only awoken 20 minutes later when Paulius cycled past, a great alarm clock and I felt ready to face the hills.

Another dot watcher was out on the track and I gave him a wave and a quick thank you for coming out. The route now entered the Pennines proper and memories of previously ridden sections came back to me as a sort of comfort, as i knew I had ridden this before and I made it through the other side in worse conditions. An upbeat playlist saw me keep a decent average speed up and before I knew it I was descending into Gargrave for a chippy tea.

Full up and stocked up at the shop for the night, I continued on for a few miles with Paulius back into the hills. The next section was through a lot of muddy farmers fields with lots of gates and the sun was setting.

I made a pact with myself I would keep going until Horton in Ribblesdale and then find a place to camp after that. The riding wasn't too bad, some rocky uphill and descents and then I found myself looking for a campspot just after 11pm. It was very dark and with not much moonlight, really hard to find a good place to pitch up. I tried a few potential places but wasn't happy. I then hopped over a fence and although on a slight hill, this spot would have to do. The rain and wind started as i put my tent up. Then a pole connector snapped on my tent, and gorilla tape and super glue to the rescue, I was finally in my sleeping bag just after midnight. CP2 loomed tomorrow.

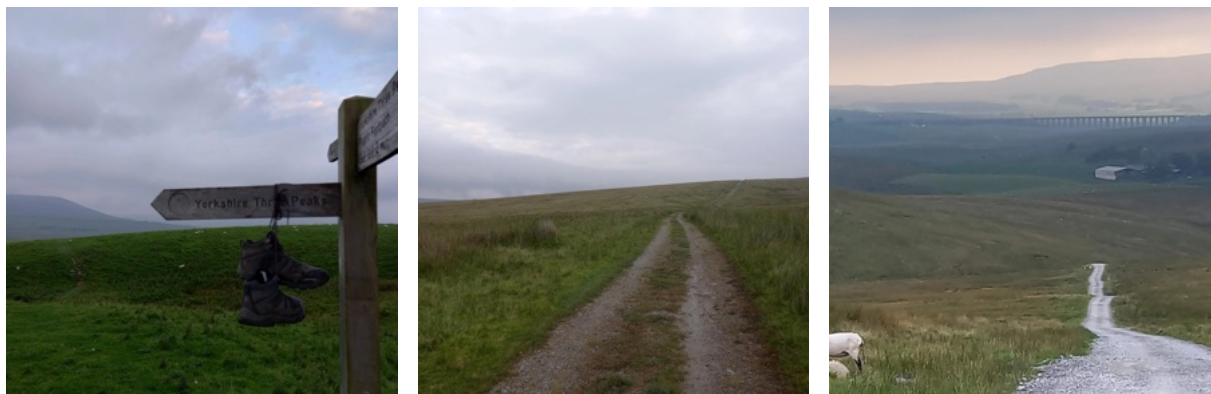
Day 6 – Thursday 17th August

I woke up with the bottom half of my tent collapsed where the pole had broke, so not a great fix. It was dark and I was pretty tired, so I gave myself a break. The field I was in was full of sheep, so not a bad shout and there wasn't really much flat ground around either. I packed up and lifted the bike back over the gate and headed north again by about 6.20am.



The weather was a bit rainy, but not too bad for this part of the world. These roads I had been on many times and it almost felt as if I was riding home, the next checkpoint is only about 40 miles from my house, so I suppose I was.

Skirting Cam High Road and descending it into Gearstones, I actually got to see the Ribblehead Viaduct clear as day for only the second time in my life. The other time being during Dales Divide and all the other times I had been up here it was either the middle of the night during an all night ride/race or it had been too foggy to see it.



Whilst I was overthinking what to do about my broken tent, I back and forthed a bit with a few other riders, Alex, Adrian and Paulius in the mist on the hills above Hawes and then descended down the road to Kirkby Stephen.

Here I stopped for a quick resupply and went to a few outdoor shops to see if they had the part I needed to fix my tent. They didn't. they also didn't have any 1 person tents for sale. I gave up the search and headed for Great Dunn Fell. The 'Ventoux of the North Pennines'. It sits at 848m above sea level, and is said to be the highest paved road in Britain. This was tough, and having done it a couple of times before it doesn't get easier, but I knew how bad the bridleway walk/bog/decent down to the checkpoint was and that was more at the forefront of my mind rather than the climb.

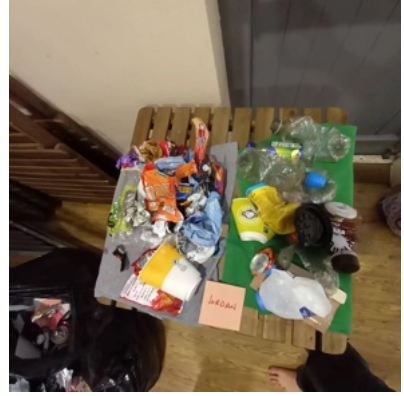




I reached the top, put on a jacket and started the off road decent. I then came across a used single use BBQ, alongside it was a 2 litre bottle of lighter fluid and all of the rubbish of the food wrappers along with most of the uneaten burnt sausages. Someone had obviously thought it was a good idea to come up here, try to have a bbq, then not eat any of it and leave the rubbish. This mindset I really don't understand. So in the spirit of the race, carrying all my own rubbish to the end of the stage, I knew it was only about 1 hour to the CP, so tried to stuff all the rubbish in my bags and strapped the lighter fluid to my handlebar bag.

The decent was a walking fest as know, but somehow was over sooner than I thought and I freewheeled into Garrigill and the

Checkpoint mid afternoon in the sun and warmth. I had made it. Pretty much half way and nothing too damaged. I went about eating, cleaning and fixing things with my kit and bike and switched off for the afternoon and evening.



This stage had been a tough one, but I had loved it all and was quietly excited and eager to get back on the bike again tomorrow to head up to Scotland on tracks and roads I knew all too well.

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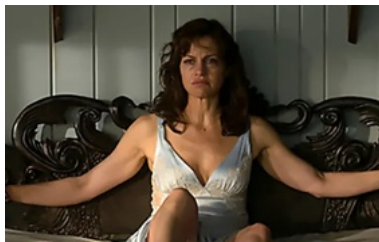
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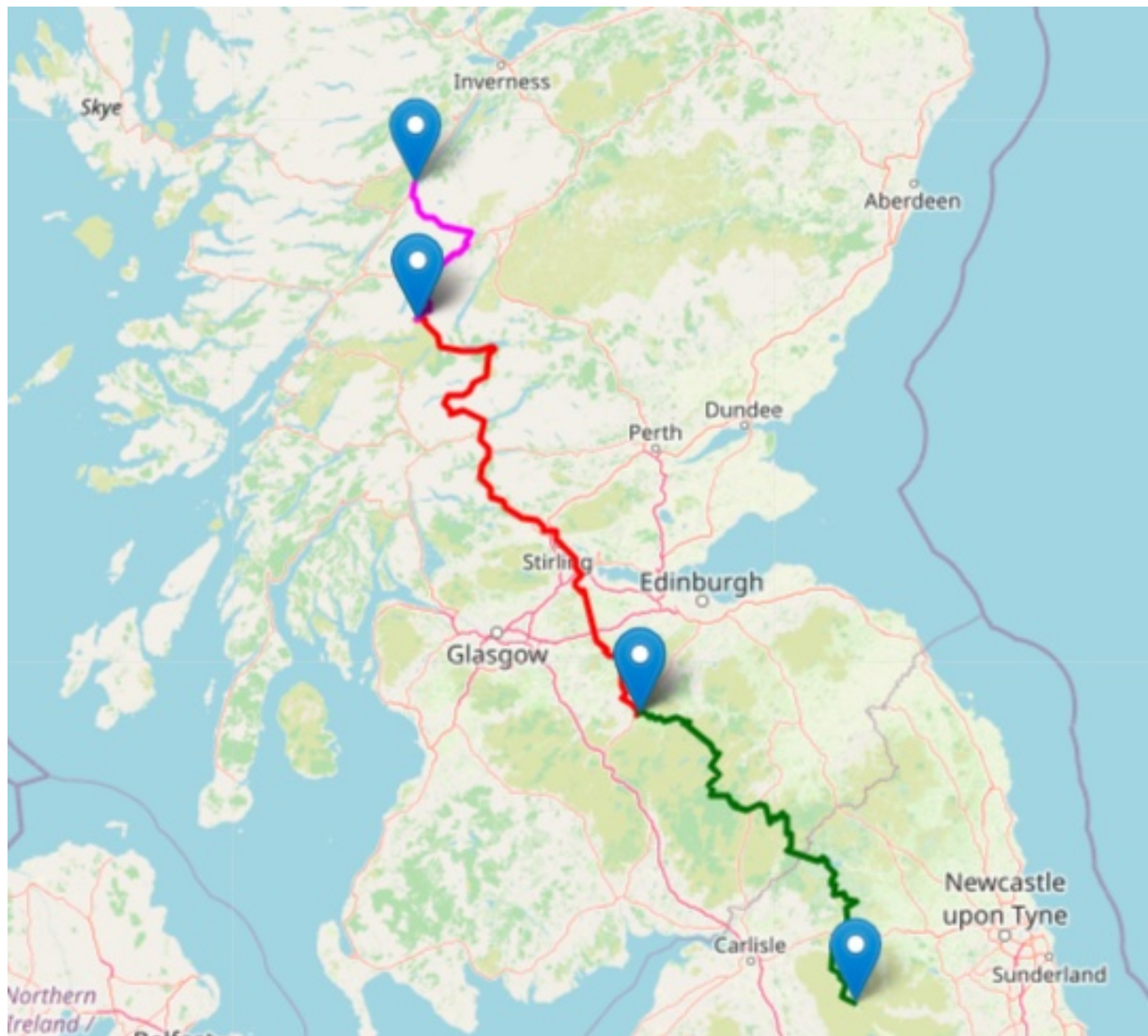
GBDuro – Stage 3



52hrs 44 mins

319.52miles

26,741ft gain



Day 7 – Friday 18th August

After an evening of lots of food, chat and clothes drying in the Garrigill village hall with the amazing volunteers supplying endless food and drinks, an early night beckoned. I had luckily managed to fix my tent pole with a mixture of zipties and gorilla tape, which I was pretty sure would hold for the rest of the race.

After a great nights sleep, I fuelled up on a full breakfast, again made by the volunteers, downed some coffee and got ready for stage 3. Garrigill to Fort Augustus.

Kirsty who was taking part in the race hadnt been at the CP long, maybe only a couple of hours, and was getting her kit ready to set off again! Unbelievable!

Sam came around and we were all soon off again and once through Alston (unfortunately no time to stop at my favourite Spar) the cyclepath took me all the way to Haltwhistle and the Tyne Valley. Local tracks for me. A quick stop at the co op for resupply for the day and i was off into Kielder Forest.

I have ridden these tracks countless times before and this spurred me on, I started pushing on the pedals that little bit harder and really enjoyed the solitude of the forest.



Topping my water bottles up near Kielder Water, the route turned off the reservoir and headed north on the Bloody Bush Border trail, to take me to Scotland.

Once past the border and at the top of the climb, I paused for a breather and feeling completely alone, Laurens and Bart came flying past and then Pete did too. This happens regularly on these events. Everyone is riding similar paces, but you can feel like you are riding by yourself with no one close by. Then you stop and actually they really aren't that far ahead or behind you.



I down some water and food and start the decent. After a couple of minutes, Bart and Laurens are by the side of the road with a puncture. There is not much help I can offer with it being self supported, so I wish them good luck and carry on. I then come across Pete a little further down the decent. Again, I wish him luck with the repair. It just shows how quickly things can change, and being in the borders, there aren't many shops or help out here. So I remind myself to take it easy and that finishing is my main aim.

The next few hours passed by pretty quickly and after some hike a bike through Craik Forest, I turned onto a gravel track and started the climb up towards Blackhouse Forest. It was a tough climb and I

was feeling strong, so I pushed on. I reached the top, stopped, put my rain coat on for the decent and then set off.

The start of the decent was pretty sketchy, so I actually said out loud to myself, take it easy, don't fall off because this isn't the place to do it.

30 seconds later, I saw John by the side of the track and then saw he was looking after Alan who looked to have fallen off.



Turns out Alan had come off and looked to have broken his collarbone. Me and John made sure he was warm with extra layers and set about phoning mountain rescue as we were a good few miles from a road and there was really no other option at that time. We got through and they would be with us as quick as they could.

Then after not too long, Laurens and Bart passed and checked everything was okay, then Adrian and Pete stopped and offered some more help. The next hour or so was trying to keep all of us warm, whilst keeping spirits up for Alan and keeping his mind off the pain. Luckily the weather wasn't too bad, but the light was going down and we were all getting cold and hungry.

Then, mountain rescue got there and were excellent. They brought their 4×4 and a team of people took Alan (and his bike) to safety. Turns out the ambulance also made it a good way up the off road climb, so fair play to the driver! And massive thanks to the mountain rescue team. What would we do without them up and down the UK. Donate below! Tweed Valley Mountain Rescue.

<https://donate.justgiving.com/donation-amount?uri=aHRocHM6Ly9kb25hdGUtYXBpLmp1c3RnaXZpbmcuY29tL2FwaS9kb25hdGlvbnMvMDQ4OTZmMzgzZDc4NDM4ZGFjNWJhZDgoMzVmNDZhMDA/aXNDaGVja291dEFwaT10cnVl>

After the commotion, the four of us had to make it down the hill safely too and try and find some food. It took much longer than I thought and I started to really struggle with lack of food.

I finally made it to Biggar and luckily John and Pete had managed to bag us some Pakoras from the Indian restaurant. Forever grateful! It had been a long day.

We all decided to find somewhere to camp together for the night. We found a showground, hopped over the fence and pitched up for the night, think it was around about 11.30. I was pleased that Alan was safe and just to be off the hill!

Day 8 – Saturday 19th August

I was last of the 4 of us to wake up and pack my tent away. Always slow!

Me, Pete and Adrian went to the petrol station to try and find coffee and food. We then all set off at different times and paces. The weather was damp. The first couple of hours were time to think about last night and try to refocus and get my head back into the race.

Close to the Caledonian Canal, I passed a cafe and jumped in to treat myself to a big fry up. I was still starving after not really having a good feed last night. I saw Laurens at the bike shop attached getting something fixed, and he later joined me for breakfast, with Adrian coming in too.



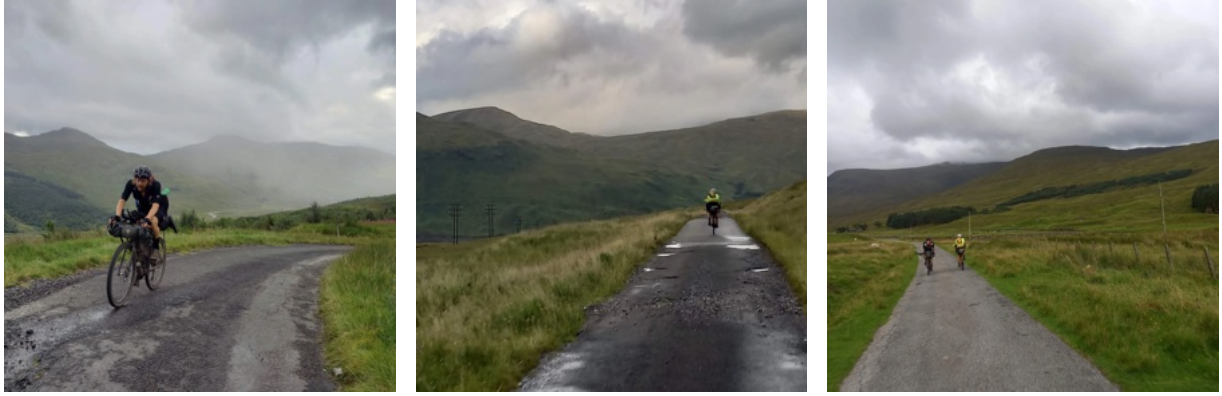
After the big feed, I felt much better and went into the rest of the day with a positive outlook, making good time through Stirling and Bridge of Allan. I made it to Callandar early afternoon and stopped at the co op for some snacks as the rain come down heavy.

The route followed a cycle path past Loch Lubnaig and through The Trossachs, which is a beauty and got me ready for the next challenge, heading further into the wilds of Scotland.

I reached Killin around 4pm and stopped in another Co op to refuel and pack up with food for the night and the following morning, knowing there wasn't much chance for resupply before the CP.



The route then follows the River Lochey and it start to feel wilder and wilder. It turns right, up a roughly paved switchback climb, where my slow pace saw me overtaken by Bart and Laurens.



On the decent and joining the HT550 course close to Loch Lyon, a rainbow paved the way and set the scene for the upcoming evening and night.

The question on everyones mind was whether to stop for the night or to keep going all the way to the CP. In my mind, I knew we were passing Loch Ossian and the Youth Hostel there. Which I have stayed inside before, but really wanted to camp outside of one day as the views are extraordinary and it is a real place of mystique.



First plan was to get there.

The weather came in with the darkness and I slipped on a wet tree route on a descent, reminding myself that I had to concentrate, I had been on the bike for a long time and still had a way to go to reach the youth hostel.



There was a road section for half an hour or so past Loch Rannoch. Then the route went off road on Rannoch Moor, heading towards Loch Ossian and the youth hostel. Here I caught up to Bart and we road together up the climb and on the decent to the hostel, which took longer than expected in the pitch dark! We were both pleased to make it there.

We used the toilets at the hostel and set up our tents by the loch in the rain and I went straight to sleep. Long, but beautiful day!

Day 9 – Sunday 20th August

CP3 Day!

Alarm around 5.45 and away by 6.20. The first part was along the shores of Loch Ossian, a great way to start the day.

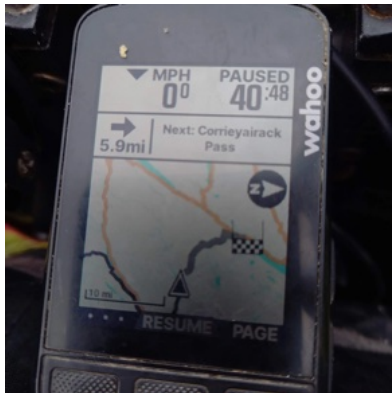


The route weaved its way though Laggan and then joined General Wades Military Road, which would take me all the way to Fort Augustus, the Checkpoint.

Just the small matter of Corrieyairack Pass to get up and over in between then. At the same time, the Woman's World Cup Final was on with England in the final against Spain. The signal on the radio was on and off, so i was getting snippets. And started to push the bike up the hill that bit quicker to try and reach the CP in time to see the end of the match.



The climb was tough, the descent was perfect. It is one of my favourite descents around.



Rolling through Fort Augustus and up to the Checkpoint, I managed to catch the end of the match. Unfortunately England lost, but I had reached the CP with plenty of time to relax, eat and sleep. A great stage, my body really was feeling the weeks worth of riding, I was ready to be finished. Just the small matter of stage 4 to contend with.



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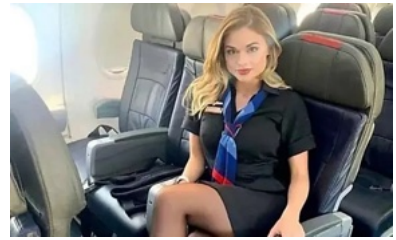


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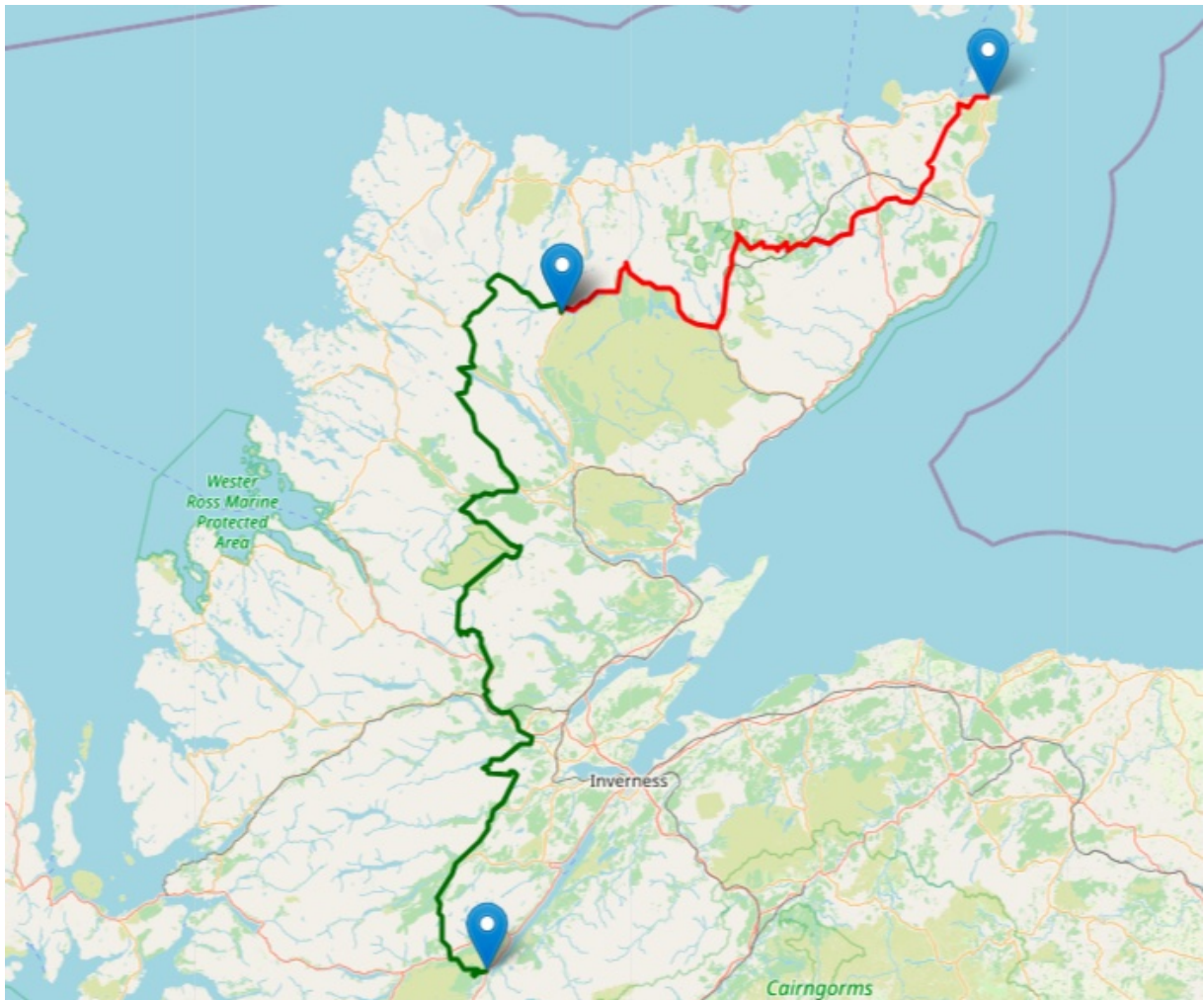
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GBDuro – Stage 4



**236.57miles
min**

**3ohrs 1
16,467ft gain**



Day 10 – Monday 21st August

Last stage. As there was no where to sleep outside, at this CP all the riders slept inside, and to be honest I think I got my worst nights sleep. Snoring, walking, doors slamming. I would have rather have been in my tent.

Oh well. Big breakfast and pre-stage faffing over with, it was close to 8am and the 15 riders that were left from the 35ish riders that started at Lands End hobbled outside and looked as ready as we could be for the last push to the end.



My legs and mind really were not in it this morning. I just wanted to be finished to be honest. I let everyone go ahead and found myself towards the back. I just wanted to ride alone. I had to get out of this headspace. I was doing this for enjoyment and no other reason. A few hours later, after chatting with Wouter at Contin Stores, my spirits were raised and I remembered how lucky I was to be riding my bike in such a beautiful part of the world.



I passed the point on the Highland Trail where my cleat bolts snapped last year, and I prayed for something similar not to happen again, as if the forests above Contin were tainted with some sort of Highland Trail/Strathpuffer demons. Luckily, I got through unscathed.



The route roughly followed the HT550 route, so I was in familiar territory and enjoying the riding through Alladale reserve. Hitting Oykel Bridge around sunset, I went to the hotel and filled my bottles up at the outside taps, resisting the temptation to go inside and get a warm meal.

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I then passed another pub, where I saw a couple of other racers bikes outside, I continued on, trying not to think of the warmth and draw of a cosy pub on a dark and rainy night.

Then the sun went down, and the rain started coming heavier and heavier. The route was a mix of road and off road and the descent towards Loch Shin was grim!

I stopped at the bottom and think I Put all my clothes on, I was freezing and soaking. I ate some food in the shadow of a disused building and carried on along the road until the turn off towards the Bealach Drover road. Here Laurens caught up with me and we rode for the next few hours through the dark and the rain, trying to keep each others spirits up. Time and miles were moving slowly.

I did think about riding through the night to the end, but then the next section I had never ridden before. I may not get the chance to again. I wanted to see it in daylight.

I always find myself in these dilemmas in my head in these races. Push on through night night and do the so called 'heroic' thing. Or get a few hours rest and enjoy the views and ride the next day in the light of day. I was also pretty knackered.

The more events I do, the more I sway towards the latter and taking time to rest my body and mind and start fresh the next day. So when we got to Altnaharra and saw Bart, the 3 of us found a semi sheltered spot to pitch up the tent. Not beautiful or perfect, but it was to us that night!

Day 11 – Tuesday 22nd August

Final Day!



After a pretty rainy and stormy night, the 3 of us packed our tents up whilst fighting the midges off and all set off at different time, I was off just before 7am. The longest sleep I had had since starting the race. My body was definitely ready to be finished!

I was so pleased to ride this section in the morning light. The roads were quiet and the view of the lochs and mountains were spectacular. The end was in sight and the day was going to be a good one.



I didn't want it to end. Well I did, but I savoured the last days riding.

So much so, I passed a cafe and stopped for breakfast. I was starving and didn't want to finish in a state. The race for minor places was all but wrapped up, so 30 minutes having a nice breakfast and coffee only made the last day that bit sweeter.



What also made the last day sweeter was the roaring tail wind. Thank you weather gods!

Dark Caramel biscuits and the allure of the taste of the finish line pint spurred me on and I rolled into John o Groats early afternoon with a big smile on my face when I was greeted by all the riders I had been riding with for the past week or so.

I just about managed to lift the bike above my head, then went to the pub for a few pints and lay flat on the floor, not having to think about the clock ticking or where I had to be next. It was done.



I really had enjoyed the ride as a whole. There were some down times, but these were massively outweighed by the ups. I find keeping emotions as steady as possible on these long events really helps completing them.

By finishing on my own terms I had set out what I had planned to do. Enjoy it and finish. Yeah, I didn't win or battle it through the

stormy night to get a good position, but that really didn't matter to me. I had some long days on the bike, I had finished and I had a smile on my face for the whole ride, all the way to the finish line. And that's what really mattered to me.



FINAL STATS:

8 days 14hrs 4 mins

1259.18 miles

110,786ft elevation gain

30 Caramel Bars

10 Co Op Halloumi Wraps

11th place

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