

## **TransScotland19: Fueled by chips and spurred on by Scotland's epic backdrops!**

One of my friends is adamant that even a night out is good endurance training, with this in mind and having ridden nothing more than 100miles, I figured that sitting at my desk for 31 days straight preparing last minute abstracts, was good endurance training.

Between RWGPS, google earth, OS maps, Strava and a blog, I compiled a spreadsheet of my rough timings for all route options. Surely I was missing the obvious route choice...

- Through Alladale or back over the Struie: Through Alladale could be quicker, but with the potential for flats and unnecessary battering, the Struie made sense.
- Over the bealach twice, or just once with a head wind coming round the coast - the latter was most energy conserving.
- Arnisdale to Fortwilliam - 125km and 1700m on the tarmac, or via Kinloch Hourn 96km and 1000m with 14km of broken double track... avoid the double track!
- Greenock in the middle of the night! How to get back into Glasgow in the dark. Not along the sustrans route!

Picture 1: The start - bike optimised for tarmac and rain!



There was no one at the castle so I rode off by myself through the maze of Inverness, Chris caught me at the Kessock bridge and I rode with him until Dingwall chatting about bike builds and single speed racing - I hoped our routes would cross again..

After chips in Garve I rode to Achnasheen suppressing the monotony of this stretch by singing along to King Charles and The 1975, riding the white line, and taking pictures of a passing train...



What followed was a swooping descent to Loch Maree and a pedal down Glen Torridon past Beinn Eighe and the mighty Liathach - no wonder we are passionate about our country...

Picture 3: Down to Loch Maree





Picture 4: The mighty Liathach.





It was feeding time for the midges in Torridon so I quickly got a timed photo, checked my saddle which had started rattling and set off with Miles. We talked about ski touring, TCR, the alternative to racing for landfill junk, and his plan to ride the bealach twice! At Shieldaig my saddle fell off - I hadn't tightened it enough. Gutted I looked about for a missing bolt. I figured it could be bodged with a cable tie. Dropping bags at the bottom of the Bealach to go over and back now seemed smart.

We passed Fraser near the top of the bealach going the other way, he was out in front. Stopping at the Applecross Inn was not in my plan but the descent was freezing and I was happy to still be riding. Chris and Colin joined us and we rode together over the Bealach for the second time. We stopped in Strathcarron to fill our water bottles and pedalled up the hill in the dark and pouring rain leaving Miles in a camping pod. The road to Ratagan was shut so we got some 'sleep' in bus shelters in Dornie

Picture 5: The boys bus shelter.



When the road opened we made our way up Mam Ratagan in yet more pouring rain. Colin, the man from Yorkshire, showed us how to climb hills!

Picture 6: Views through the rain to Kintail from Mam Ratagan.

Picture 7: Knoydart through the rain from Arnisdale









Eventually three drowned rats arrived in Arnisdale, I decided to ride with Chris and Colin through to Kinloch Hourn - just don't mention punctures! The track was as envisaged! Four hours later after several river crossings and navigating 'tracks' akin to mountain scree chutes, we were on the tarmac out of Kinloch Hourn.

Picture 8: You don't get smiles like that on wet tarmac!

Picture 9 & 10: Awesome riding through to Kinloch Hourn









After two chippies each, leaving Chris in Fort William, we rode to Taynuilt and more west coast rain - I got 40 minutes sleep at Taynuilt train station. We dodged some hedgehogs and eventually reached Dallavaich. Colin had a kip in the doorway of Ardconnel primary school.

Picture 11: Ardconnel primary school - even better than a bus or train shelter!





Full up on cake from an honesty box we cruised into Inveraray, now sharing the road with traffic for the first time since Ballachulish. One ferry crossing and another chippy later we followed the sustrans route to Paisley, got lost in Paisley, and finally got to Glasgow. Niall was waiting at the squinty bridge - he asked us if we had ridden from Inverness, yes that was us, we chatted and pedalled off to George square.

Picture 12: Well and truly done!



Picture 13: Cable tie still in place!



