

After marathons, triathlons et al, adventure racing is the next step. 2010 saw the first Nokia Coast To Coast race across Scotland, covering 105 miles from Nairn to Glencoe. Some people complete the event in two days, but the winner, athlete Bruce Duncan, did it in nine hours and 15 minutes.

+ SCOTLAND THE BRAVE

START (DAY ONE): NAIRN, MORAY FIRTH COAST

1 Seven-mile run

A gentle start, along the beach and through the cornfields of the Grampians. "The main challenge of this first leg is not to exceed your target endurance race heart rate, around 80 per cent of the maximum," says GB tri- and adventure-race coach Ralph Hydes.

2 48-mile road cycle

Transition at Cawdor Castle, on to the rolling hills round Inverness. The Tarmac is slick and high winds gust. "Drafting can save you up to 30 per cent energy," adds Hydes. "If you are taking turns, swap frequently to prevent lactic-acid build-up." The highest point is a quad-melting 1,300ft hill in a stark, open valley. "Keep your cadence fast – 90/100rpm; keep your hands on the handlebars, sit back and push forward, not down."

3 Two-mile run and kayak

Jelly legs hit poorly trained competitors as they make the transition back to running towards the Loch Ness kayak. "In paddling, you look ahead, pulling with not just your arms but your shoulders and core, bracing your body with your feet," Hydes explains.



+ KIT STOP

MUST-HAVE GEAR TO ENSURE YOU LAST THE DISTANCE



THE BEST BIKE

With such a varied course, the ultimate machine is a cyclocross such as the Cannondale CAADX Rival (£1,399.99. evanscycles.com). It is designed to be fast on the road, but equally good on single track.



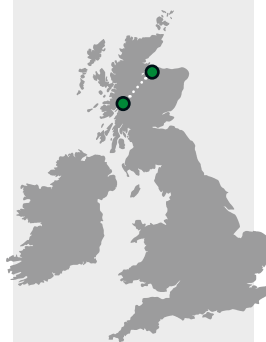
VISION AID

With high likelihood of rain and flat light, you will need glasses with coloured lenses to sharpen the depth in your field of vision and protect your eyes. Oakley Radars (£160. oakley.com) with hydrophobic lenses are ideal.



EAT RIGHT

You risk an energy slump if you get this wrong. Carry a bag of jelly babies, mixed nuts and dried fruit in the waist of your running rucksack. The protein in the nuts will slow down the energy release from the sugars.



HALFWAY POINT (DAY TWO): FORT AUGUSTUS

1 16-mile off-road cycle

After purring down the Caledonian Canal, the track skews into the forest and on to a single track where you will encounter churned terrain with roots and rocks, abrupt ramps and steep descents. This section repays mountain-bike aficionados with strong biceps and practised technique, and spills those who don't.

2 17-mile road cycle

The roads to Fort William have more climbs, but plenty of descents. "Stay as low as possible with your knees and elbows tucked in," says Hydes. "Stay in a hard gear in case you want to pedal."

3 14-mile trail run

The most challenging part. "The last run is all in your head," says Duncan. "It is agony, but I enjoy the pain and focus on the finish." It kicks off with the West Highland Way, then up to 1,500ft on the flank of Ben Nevis. The ground changes from firm paths to tracks that have become streams. After ten miles, the route crosses a freezing, thigh-deep river. There are a series of false summits before, at last, the top, and a fleeting view across the bruised, purple Monroes, then a mudslide down the other side. "You have to lean forwards down the hill," he says, "to keep your weight over your feet."

4 One-mile kayak

Across the stunning sea loch of Loch Leven, realisation of the achievement comes into sight, boosting strength and speeding rhythm. The water is rough, but the crowds are cheering; a last glorious push and over the finish line. **Rebecca Newman** ratraceadventure.com