

4th August 2014

Ardbeg ISLAY HALF-MARATHON



Having been coming to Islay in the Inner Hebrides for years to visit my mum, I had seen the Half Marathon runners in action but never thought for one moment I would be joining them. However, when I found out that the Islay Half 2014 coincided with my trip and being a 'newish' convert to running I entered.

I did lots of cycling and running on Islay prior to the race, mostly in boiling hot sunshine which was tough as it is hilly and the road surfaces are not the best so I was relieved that when race day finally arrived that it was considerably cooler and was actually pleased when it started raining at about mile 3. I was also pleased that Joe Atherton decided to 'def' his 'nut' job race 'Total Warrior' and join me for the Islay Half!



The organisation was great; we drove past the marshalls putting out the mile markers on our way to Bowmore. We also drove past wild red deer! 'Sign on' was quick and we waited in the square listening to the bagpipes for a 'wee' while and then it was 'the start' which got underway really quickly, so quickly I nearly didn't have time to switch on 'Runkeeper'!

The start was up a steep hill towards the Baptist Church – thankfully we turned off into a couple of side streets before re-joining the hill to run up and round the corner, up and up a few more hills before finding a nice long downhill and a few more lumps and bumps before joining the rather hillier 'High Road' which we ran along for 3 ½ miles past spectating Highland Cattle to the link road which took us down to the originally named 'Low Road'.



This was the bit I had really been dreading as it is 3 ½ miles of long, straight, blustery road with seemingly no end in sight! It actually felt like we were running in glue as we didn't seem to be getting any closer to the clump of trees which I knew signified a welcome bend in the road and a less than welcome hill!

We finally made the bend and started a slog up a hill closely followed by a group of girls who took a strong

dislike to the ***** hill (their words not mine!). They gave me the incentive to speed up to avoid getting passed on the last couple of miles. We finished with a fantastic downhill straight to the finish line, well almost straight down as we had to turn left by the square which was not obvious so I reckon I lost a couple of seconds there as I stopped to look for the finish line! The finish was actually just one bloke with a stop watch. They really could have done with an arch! I completed in 1:51:31 which is a PB. I was especially chuffed to get that time as my mum and kids had come to see the race.



We made our way to the hall for refreshments: copious amounts of sandwiches; lager and drams of Whisky! As for the prizes, I have never seen so many, and they all involved varying sizes of bottles of Ardbeg up to 4.5 litres. Everyone got a medal and a smart T shirt.



Whilst it is true that the Scottish accent can be hard to decipher (lol), the currency looks like play money, the midges can be ferocious ('Smidge' works a treat) and a lot of the whisky to my mind tastes like TCP, it is also true that the Scots are extremely generous hosts and that the scenery is stunning with wildlife a plenty!

This picture probably sums the Islay Half up, so for all of you serious Harrier 'party animals', I mean 'athletes' I would highly recommend signing up for Islay Half 2015 and making the 7 hour road and 2 hour ferry trip. You wouldn't be disappointed and you might even win a 4.5 litre bottle of whisky and have the after party of all after parties!



Caryl Gibson