**The Last Highlander – Glen Cannich 2016 - Controller’s report**

We have mixed emotions wrapping up the Highlander after 10 years. On one hand there is the euphoria borne of a successful weekend, and the sense of knowing that we have given it our all over a decade. On the other is the weariness of the uncertainties and hard work of all the preparation. The two are very different beasts and don’t just balance out against one another. But if you’re going to stop, then what better way to do so than this.

In theory this was to be one of our “simpler” events; our plans had secured one large estate at an early stage which covered the event centre, the mid-camp, and most of the control sites. Maps had been prepared and courses planned; then in early April due to a change of heart at the estate we lost the lot, and had no better idea than any of you where (or if) the event was to take place. It’s thanks to Ray and Ian’s efforts that the event happened despite this – they shaped a new event area from the land we could access at amazingly short notice, and so Glen Cannich happened. And apart from the inconvenience to us of losing all the initial work and the rush in getting the new area up and going, the result was a better event for the competitors – big peaks, better and more varied terrain, and a return to the perfect campsite we had last visited on the Strathfarrar event in 2009.

You’ll have seen Ray and Ian’s planner’s reports. They’re so experienced that all I have had to do is reign in some of their wilder excesses and to haul Ian back from creating overly manufactured control sites. The results show that this year’s course lengths and difficulty were just about right. You were lucky that the mist blew away each day when it did, as the terrain was potentially very confusing in poor visibility. The ground conditions were dry and fast underfoot – compare and contrast the boggy flogging that is the norm. We had lots of positive comments from you on the courses, many thanks for those, and there appeared to be lots of happy/relieved people at the end. Even the breeze which brought the morning mist each day had a dual purpose as it kept the evening midges away and meant that everyone could enjoy the stunning mid-camp.

The only real control issues were the following.

On Day 1, the OOB road in Strathfarrar caused a problem for some teams on the Score as they felt it gave insufficient time to reach the controls north of the road and still get to mid-camp in time. (That didn’t deter our team with a combined age of 139 however; and also the D course coped with controls on the north side of the road, so we put it down to some Score teams not planning their route effectively.) The road was placed OOB for 3 reasons. First, as one of the conditions of land use was that competitors stayed 400m away from estate buildings and this was a way of meeting that condition. Second, to make clear we did not want you crossing the River Farrar below Inchvuilt with a view to reaching the road, as usually it’s a large river and there was a safety issue there. Third, in order to plan a balanced Score course with appropriate points values we needed to know that you did not have the option of just cleaning up lots of points south of the road then performing a 7km time trial down the road to the camp – we were going to make you plan as well as work for the points.

On Day 2 there was a problem with control DT which stopped working. The reason for that was that it got dropped by a team on the cairn where it was situated. Lesson - t may “only” be a control on a MM but it is also a delicate piece of electronic kit which will react poorly to being stotted off a rock. Also on Day 2 there were definitely trains forming on the latter stages of the set courses, something that a MM should try to avoid as it takes away from the navigational challenge and reduces the enjoyment of making your own way in the mountains. Unfortunately this was unavoidable what with a small area and a greater number of entrants coupled with our staging the starts to narrow the window of finishing times at Cannich.

Other than this there were a few mis-punches, minor misdemeanours etc, but little to cause us concern. The final pairs came in each day at a perfectly respectable time, again a sign the course lengths were about right, and that people who entered generally knew what they were doing and chose the right class.

The A class was extremely competitive with some top runners entered who might normally be expected to perform notably at Elite level. We still weren’t tempted to produce an Elite course – it would have resulted in an extra course with a small number of entries and would have diluted what was an exciting and well populated A class. And no-one seemed to be complaining about not having been out long enough!

We had a map issue – early hill testing had shown the maps held their detail well and it took a bit of effort to scrape it off. However sun cream had a major impact, removing all detail and leaving sections of the map looking like the winning entry in the “most boring grid square” contest. The best advice we can give for this is that sun cream works better when applied to one’s person than to one’s map. (And think – if it does that to your map what does it do to your skin?)

We were surprised to find a complete tent abandoned at mid-camp on Sunday morning – the tent having been deliberately left round the back of the marquee. This is (a) cheating (b) littering and (c) a safety matter. Almost enough to make us do a compulsory kit check at the finish to shame the culprits. Needing to lighten your rucksack is not a reason for dumping your tent – but it might be a reason for not doing another MM.

Big thank yous to our helpers who made the event work “on the hill” - control distributors; our hill marshals; our helpers at the starts and finishes; Dundonnell MRT who collected all the Day 1 controls; Miles Davis for the maps; Martin of SPORTident for doing the timing and exuding calm; our course planners Ian and Ray; our medical team – we had an incident at the finish when a competitor suffered what appears to have been anaphylactic shock; the best moment for me of the whole event was seeing that person walk out of Cannich Hall unaided, past the ambulance sent to help him, to find somewhere shady to sit so he could enjoy the prize giving!; And of course Alasdair and Linda for sticking with the event over the years for the love/hell of it - as it certainly wasn’t for the financial rewards. Thanks too to my family for putting up with my solo absences on undisclosed hills over the last 10 years in all weathers, you have been very tolerant!

Well done all of you for your efforts over the weekend, and thanks for making the journey both to this year’s event and over the years to join in on our adventures. We have hugely enjoyed our 10 years of the event. We have admired your attitude, your sense of humour, and your perseverance. The Last Highlander may have come and gone, but the Highlands are always there, and I hope the Highlander will have widened your knowledge and appreciation of them.

Alec Keith