

WELSH WONDER

COMPETITORS PRAISED THE SPECTACULAR SCENERY AND ORGANISATION AT THE SECOND ROUND OF THE ENDURANCELIFE COASTAL TRAIL SERIES

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Running in Wales has always seemed like a picturesque way to see the countryside and enjoy the off-the-beaten-track delights. And yet, often, shy Wales usually puts on a stinker of a storm and shrouds its beauty in mist. However, the elements were proven wrong when the Gower Peninsular opened its doors to a running race, bathing competitors in the winter sun.

Inaugural runners were lucky enough to marvel at the spectacular course laid down by Endurancelife in one of three distances - marathon, half marathon and 10k. This addition to the seven strong winter off-road race series is said by co-founder Gary Jolliffe 'to tick all the right boxes, it is stunningly beautiful, has a wonderful variety of trail running terrain and is populated with friendly and enthusiastic locals who love showing off and sharing their special place'.

Capping each distance at 500 participants enabled runners to have a less congested time on the trails and meant minimal impact on the environment. The Gower was the first in the UK to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty over 50 years ago and remains one of only five in Wales. Runners were in for a treat as the course wound through unspoiled coastal paths, across wild

beaches, over sharp mountains and through boggy reserves.

Plagued with children removing signs, the race director informed all that the team had worked hard to ensure the course was signposted so athletes could find their way along the rugged terrain. However, as this was an off road run, it was up to the individual to know the way. Scrambling to have one last look at the map before the hooter



Conditions underfoot were mixed



Runners coming off the mountain

went, runners ran single file down the hill ramp and were off. Each start, staggered by an hour and a half, was all part of the plan by the Endurancelife team who want to 'create an experience for each athlete, basing them in small personable locations generating camaraderie in a congenial atmosphere.'

Competitors followed the course out of Llangennith Village and straight up over the first of many mountains



The course was certainly challenging

of the day. A slippery goat track early on caused a pile up of athletes as heart rates escalated from the shock of the incline. Over the top and down the other side, revealed breathtaking views of the Gower and the bay below as the course ducked through a camp ground and out on to the coastal path.

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As the course developed along the coast it was a continuous repeat of challenging terrain, sand, mud and rock outcrops coupled with distracting views, it was testing to stay upright. Teasingly, at various distances along the course, flags pointed inland to take the 10k and half marathon option back to the start.



Jostling for position in the dunes

Several last slogs over some nasty inclines and then calf deep boggy mud to finish pushed all athletes to their limits. Happy about the level of challenge, the organisers aim to have each race 'very accessible and achievable and at the other end extremely challenging and difficult.'

Ultra marathon man Ian Corless, training for his Arch to Arch run, pushed the lead pack in the marathon. However it was vets Andy Jones and Chris Parker who formed an early partnership. Working with each other, they came in to the final checkpoint neck and neck. Jones pulled away in the final leg over the bog to finish 3hrs 21mins 41secs, a little over three minutes ahead of Parker. Neil Bryant completed the podium in 3hrs 38mins 43secs and was first Open Male home.

The woman's race was sown up with Endurancelife regular Angle Sadler and running partner Michelle Laws, both finishing in a very respectable 4hrs 1min 24secs. Third went to Claire Akin-Smith in 3hrs 48mins 43secs.

Over 200 runners have signed up to attempt to complete the 7x7x7 challenge, the penultimate of the race series, where athletes complete all seven races over seven months. After completing two of the seven in the series, Sadler was questioned on whether she would complete the 7x7x7 challenge. 'I might, but I will recover from this race first,' she said.



The course had it all

Milling around the warm post race reception, the vibe was one of awe at the stunning course, perfect cool, dry conditions and only a few missing markers. One competitor gushed: 'Sometimes everything is just right with a run and today was one of my all time favorite days in my entire 35 years on this planet. The perfect weather, the awe strikingly beautiful and varied surroundings; I mean sand dunes, beach, muddy single track, wood, hills and bog land all in one run, and it was just happening today.'

■ At £45 to enter, the course is well designed and takes athletes to remote areas, challenging both the mind and body to perform. Needless to say the race was a sell out in its first year. If you missed this one, have no fear there are four more set over the winter with most contested yet to come in South Devon on the 21st February 2009 and the Cornish stage on the 4th April 2009 (www.endurancelife.co.uk).