

# MONSTER CHALLENGE 2013

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What a great event to follow on from the success of the 'Over Sixtys team' in the Caledonian Challenge two years before. Maggie's Monster Bike and Hike consisted of a 31 mile off-road bike ride from Fort William to Fort Augustus followed by a 42 mile walk along the spectacular Great Glen Way to Inverness. Our team consisted of three doctors Tony (surgeon), John (physician) and Keith (anaesthetist) with an average age of 64. We were probably the oldest team to achieve the gold medal finish which required us to reach Inverness in under 24 hours.

## Training:

Two weeks before I completed the London Marathon in 5hr 26 min 27sec but, apart from building up mental stamina to keep going when the body is suggesting otherwise, I'm not sure that it did me much good. Five weeks before the event the three of us plus Geof and Nick, two other colleagues from the Caledonian Challenge team, but minus Martyn who had almost amputated his left forearm in a chainsaw accident, completed the 73 mile route over 3 days. We arrived at Fort William Station (fig 1) travelling first class on



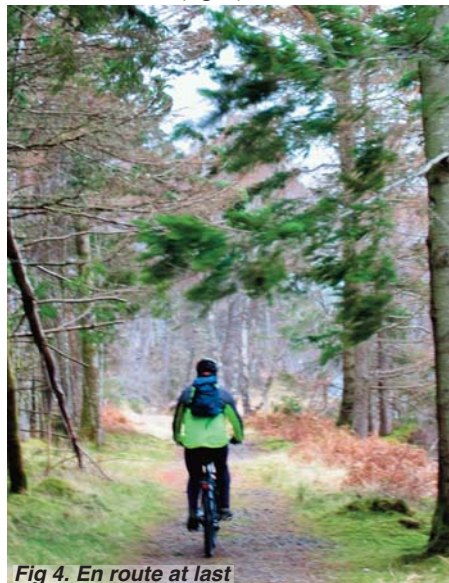
an overnight sleeper (by a bizarre quirk of Scotrail 2nd class was more expensive!) We collected our hire bikes from Nevis Cycles, first stop was the thirteenth century Inverlochy



Castle (fig 2), and then after a minor navigational problem (fig 3), reached



Banavie where the main event would start on May 4th. The 31 mile bike ride went well (fig 4) but was made



more challenging by a cold head wind for most of the way particularly along the shores of Loch Long (fig 5)



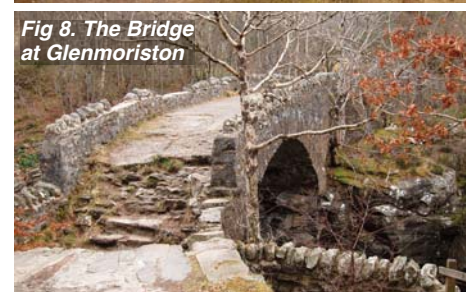
and Loch Oich where there were many wet slippery tree roots across

the path. The most memorable moment for me was when I had just dismounted to cross the final lock gate on the Caledonian Canal before Fort Augustus, a small dark brown head popped up and looked at me for about 3 min until my colleagues arrived and the animal ran away. I had never seen a pine marten before – when I spoke to the lock gate keeper, all he said was 'that wee bugger, he shits all over the place!'

We arrived safely at our B and B just outside Fort Augustus where we were greeted by our charming hostess Natalie and her husband. The following morning we set off on foot (fig 6) to walk the 25 miles along



the Great Glen Way via Invermoriston (figs 7,8,9) to our next overnight

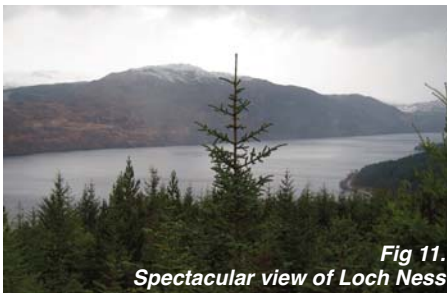


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**Fig 10. Tramps at Drumnadrochit**



stop — *Tramps Guest House* in Drumnadrochit (fig 10) arriving there at 7pm to be warmly greeted by our hostess, a salt of the earth Scottish lady called Mary Beadham. Some of the views of Loch Ness along the way had been spectacular (fig 11).



**Fig 11. Spectacular view of Loch Ness**

We enjoyed dinner at the Loch Ness Hotel and after a good night's sleep and a full 'Scottish' breakfast we set out on the final 17 miles across varied terrain (figs 12, 13) to finish at



**Fig 12. The high point of the walk**

Inverness Castle (fig 14), well in time to meet Dave our driver who would transport us to the airport to catch our Easyjet flight to London Gatwick.

## The Main Event 4-5 May 2013

After meeting up with Heather and Ross, our vital backup team, registering and then attending the obligatory briefing at the Nevis Centre



**Fig 13. In a forest**

**Fig 14. Inverness castle**



in Fort William (fig 15) we checked in at our pre- booked bed and breakfast establishments.

**Fig 15. Pre event registration and chat**



After an excellent dinner at the Crannog Inn, followed the next morning by a 'full Scottish' at our bed and breakfast, we arrived at the start at 07.45, collected our hired bikes and set off just after 8.30 (fig 16) in the third group to set off.

**Fig 16. Ready to go**



We reached Fort Augustus after cycling for 3½ hours along a variety of terrains – the route was slightly different to that which we had done five weeks before as we travelled through forests on the West side of Loch Oich rather than the root strewn trail along the East. There were welcome drinks stops along the way (fig 17).



**Fig 17. Welcome refreshments**

In Fort Augustus we handed in our bikes which had stood up well to the rigors along the route including steep paths, impossible to ride up and even an unexpected 50m river crossing about 18in deep. We were met by Heather and Ross who had kindly left our car in Drumnadrochit. We had a good lunch provided by the organisers in a large marquee which was a welcome shelter from the continuous rain. We then changed into our dry walking gear in Heather's Land Rover and began the 42 mile trek to Inverness (fig 18).

**Fig 18. About to set off from Fort Augustus**



Our first stop, after a few wet miles (fig 19), was the Bronze medal finish

**Fig 19. Rather damp along the way**



checkpoint at Invermoriston where soup, rolls and superb homemade

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Fig 20. Welcome refreshments



cakes were provided (fig 20). After this welcome refuelling stop it was on to Drumnadrochit, the silver finish, which we eventually reached at 10.15pm after trudging along unremitting tracks with the occasional welcoming break for drinks and snacks (figs 21, 22, 23).



Fig 21. The long road to Drumnadrochit



Fig 22. Another welcome break



Fig 23. Just keep trudging on

There we had an excellent dinner provided by the organisers after which I was given a free leg massage by a student physiotherapist who was also a Glaswegian 2nd row forward! After minimal discussion we decided to go for Gold – Martyn would certainly have expected nothing less. I then suggested that Heather took us to *Tramps* (our B and B) for a shower and change of clothing + boots after which we felt re-energised and ready

for the overnight walk facing us (fig 24). I had booked this excellent bed and breakfast establishment for the



Fig 24. Leaving Tramps for the all night walk

Saturday and Sunday night which gave us the option of a bed if we stopped at the Silver medal position or a bed available the next morning if we achieved Gold. Heather then drove us to the checkout for the final leg to Inverness which we began 15 min before midnight. The woodland route was marked every 70m or so by a glow stick (fig 25) – it was



Fig 25. A glow stick

definitely an endurance event, not a navigational exercise, we even found some snow (fig 26). Every 4 miles or



Fig 26. A patch of snow at dawn

so there was a welcoming tent run by *Wild Fox Events* (figs 27) where we were provided with various drinks and snacks including punch and at the



Fig 27. Another stop only 12 miles to go

final one at about 6am – excellent *McSween's haggis burgers* (fig 28).



Fig 28. The sweet aroma of haggisburger

As we neared the finish distance markers became more frequent (figs 29, 30) and there were even people to cheer us on.



Fig 29. Only 3 miles to go



Fig 30. The end is in sight

At 7.30 am we arrived at the finish in Inverness (fig 31) an hour inside the time limit allowed for the gold medal.



Fig 31. Made it at last!

We were tired but elated to have completed the event in reasonable condition in positions 390-392 out of 760 who began the event (fig 32). I was particularly pleased for Tony as two years before he had to leave the 2011 Caledonian Challenge 20 miles from the finish with an Achilles tendon injury.

391st	796 John Armitstead	207 - The Over Sixtys
392nd	797 Tony Jeffers	207 - The Over Sixtys
393rd	795 Keith Thomson	207 - The Over Sixtys

Fig 32. We did it.

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After an excellent cooked breakfast and a massage provided by members of the Athletes Angels team, Heather drove us back to Drumnadrochit where our welcoming beds were waiting. We slept until about 4pm when John and I drove Tony back to his car in Fort William, returning for dinner, a good night's sleep and

then back the following morning, via my mother's house near Forfar, to Edinburgh Airport for our flight to Gatwick.

The spectacular scenery provided by such a beautiful area of the Scotland Highlands, the great organisation of David Fox-Pitt and his Wild Fox

events team ([www.wildfoxevents.com](http://www.wildfoxevents.com)) and the fact that between us we had raised nearly £3000 for Maggie's Centres, all contributed to a fantastic event which I would recommend to anyone.

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