

West Coast, Highlands, Glens and Inner Isles Audax – It ended with a bump

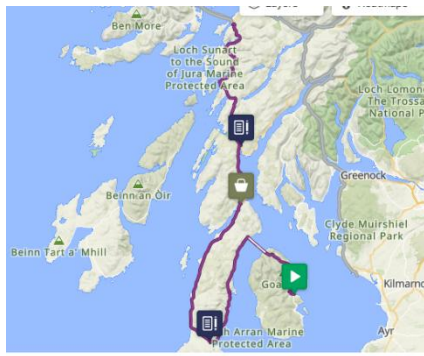
6th -10th July 2026

Start with the end

The end was not what I expected; it was becoming aware that I was in an ambulance, connected with lots of wires, and a bandage around my right forearm, and feeling like I'd been badly winded. Then seeing other riders pop their faces into the ambulance, Andy, Dan and Jason as I remember. I think I had my phone with me as my wife Ruth rang me asking where the car was and she also talked to the medic; then a call from a close friend Sarah having heard from me on WhatsApp that I'd come a cropper. I was quite disorientated and it felt like I had a Deja Vue memory. Apparently, I'd been found unconscious in the middle of the road an hour ago, still clipped in, by a passing motorist. Other riders had stopped and talked to me, something I still have no memory of. Soon we were off to the hospital in Oban.

From my tracker, Ruth was able to see exactly where I had stopped around 11 in the morning on the B8074 in Glen Orchy

In the beginning..



Some time ago, the organiser Mark Rigby reprised an event he ran back in 2015 that looked fantastic and challenging in equal measure. At 1,300km it was going to be X rated and in a part of the country I knew nothing about but sounded superb. So, I signed up and later booked my hotels at Ardrossan, Oban Poolewe, (to become Gairloch) and Fort William, plus Ardrossan again for my planned return

Hotel panic.

Although I'd booked all my accommodation, I hadn't checked when they would be open and if I could get to my bed even in the early hours. The first one, Pier rooms, was fully automatic, the last one at Fort William said it was manned 24 hours, but Poolewe didn't answer, so I thought I couldn't risk it and found another hotel in Gairloch who told me over the phone that they would find a way, so they were duly booked and Poolewe cancelled, an expensive mistake as they did not refund me!

On Sunday, well after the warm weather of the South had given way to miserable grey skies in Scotland, I turned off the motorway to make my way top Ardrossan. I got to the Red Squirrel which is situated on a rather glum retail park with the delights of KFC and Dominos, amongst others, on offer.

I checked into the Red Squirrel well ahead of Jason King and Humphrey Dunn, who I'd been chatting to. It gave time to assemble the bike in calm and organised way, making sure I had what I needed and not too much of anything; and I turned on my tracker – something that would be a godsend on the coming Friday.

There were a few rather obvious riders in the hotel, the sort who I looked at with envy in that they'd finish days before me. We settled in for dinner and in walks Mark Rigby, looking white as a sheet, having just been inches from a nasty road accident on his way up. It wasn't helped that Mark had pre-booked a modest sized van and ended up with a monster, much to his disgust.

Apparently, the van he booked had been involved in an accident which is a standard excuse in the van hire industry, as I was told by Jason who'd spent some of his life running such a venture.

Day 1 – To Oban

It was the night of the England Mexico match which I decided to miss and managed to stay away from it until about 06.00 when I saw that we had won. We all had plenty of time in the morning – the start was at 12.00 and we needed to catch the 9.30 ferry to Arran which would get us into Brodick at around 10.40, making for a civilised breakfast and a great way to start.



We were soon on our way to a rather wet Saltcoats to catch the ferry and there met up with a number of other riders. It was a nice calm trip across the sea to Arran and good opportunity to get to know our fellow riders.



We disembarked, found the start café very quickly and met up with Mark again, who very quickly briefed all the riders and we were off. Well before my Wahoo was on and eBrevet started! Well, that was my first panic of the ride, (I panic a lot!).



The first stage was a short 24km to Lochranza so we were mostly together, and on arriving at the 1st ferry of the ride found it made no difference trying to outpace each other as we were all on the small ferry and it was still raining. The ferry from Lochranza to Claonaig soon arrived and we were off back to the mainland.



It was going to be 70km to get to the first control at Campbeltown. The going to put it mildly was lumpy, impossible to get any consistent pace and I found myself between Humphrey and another rider my soon to be a riding companion Dan Howard. Dan had been showing off on the ferry that even with a dynamo he still carries a battery pack that could run a small data centre for a week.

Campbeltown arrived, looking rather dead, eBrevet logged and off to try and find some food. No obvious bikes or other riders, so found a café and store and had a less than wonderful macaroni cheese pie and coffee. Well, it was fuel. Dai Harris then turned up, who I'd met before, and was to become another companion of the ride.



Soon I was out of Campbeltown with Dan and onto a somewhat flatter and faster section that was a dream after the first 70km, punctuated, by what were about to learn, were numerous false turnoffs the main road that were an interesting feature of Mark's published route. This would become quite annoying a few days later in the dead of night.

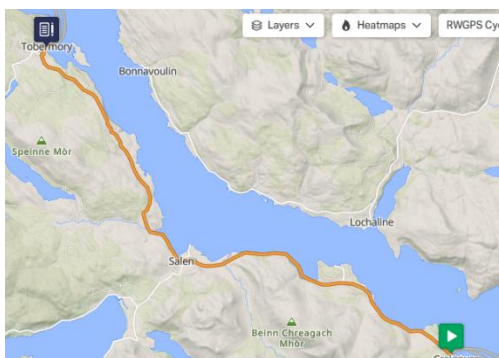


It was now dry and stayed that way as we ran into the next control in the late afternoon at Lochgilphead at 151Km. Another skimpy meal deal, only to annoyingly find out from a couple of riders that there was a fish and chip shop around the corner. One rider on a recumbent, full of fish and chips, I'd see a lot of over the next day or so. I was very aware on the run up to Oban that I was running without proper refuelling, so the morning would be critical for further calorie intake.



The light was starting to fade now and so was the dry weather so on went the wet weather gear. The next stage was very lonely but soon on my Wahoo showed the last climb of the day. I was soon in Oban and after a couple of false starts I found the Pier Rooms at around 12, which was the earliest finish for any of my days of the event. It wasn't a shipping container, but an automated unmanned hotel and I duly logged in and made my way to my rather small room, just big enough to swing a kitten. I had 6 hours of planned sleep time until the ferry the following morning, a luxurious start I thought, and good way to get into the event. Tomorrow with three ferries and finishing in Gairloch would not be so leisurely!

Day 2 – a tale of 3 ferries and facing my demons



Morning soon came and it was great to meet the other riders, (many from the Pier rooms) waiting for the Oban to Craignure ferry, there was talk of at least one rider who had bailed, but I was feeling no reason not to continue, desperately wanting a good excuse, but I couldn't think of one! Once on the boat I made a B line for the restaurant to for the 1st of 2 breakfasts, which made themselves felt when we disembarked.

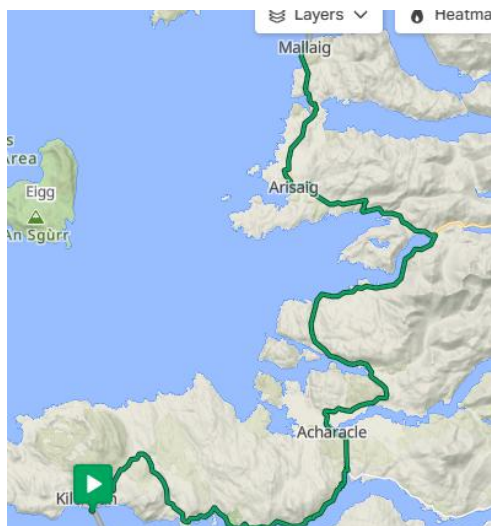
We were soon landing on the Isle of Mull and I was back with Dan, having seen Jason shoot off. Latterly Humphrey and I shared the view that we were envious of his relative youth and athletic capability! The line of riders soon thinned out, and we were shortly in a very damp Tobermory at 243km. Not exactly the weather to get some nice pictures unfortunately. eBrevet tagged – it was physically impossible with the ferry times to make this control on time. Supermarkets were raided and then we all congregated in a café for lashings of tea and large chocolate brownies.



Onto the Tobermory to Kilchoan Ferry we went – a very small boat with a small room to get out of the rain, sleep felt like it wanted to come back so spent some time, vertical but with eyes closed.



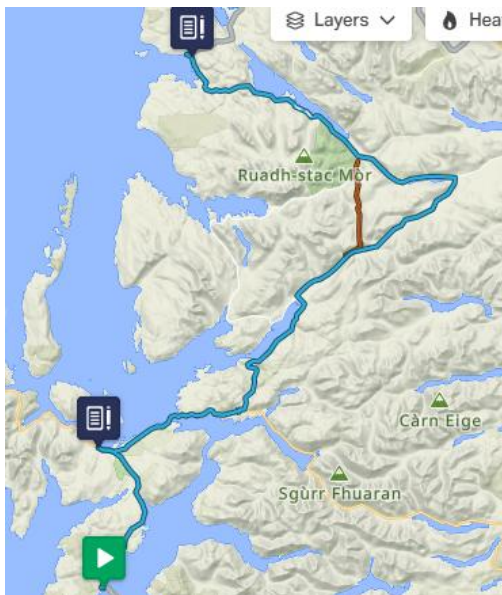
I don't remember much about the ride to Mallaig at 337km, except the weather and Marks



random diversions off the main road did not improve. Soon with Dan and Dai we were at the port, queued up, knowing the faster riders had probably found some real food. Jason told us that Humphrey had bailed and was going over to Fort William and that left me wondering if my lack of escape routes from this point onwards was a sensible idea.



The Mallaig to Armadale crossing took about 45 mins and there was not much to eat on the ferry so my focus was going to be on getting a good meal at the next control at Broadford at 363km.



After brief undulating ride down to Broadford to the control, I met a throng of riders who were already well through their food and about to set off. I dived into the shop only to come out to find myself with only one rider, (Tony Davis, I think). I had to say I was plain frightened now. It was 8,00pm with 120km to Gairloch and I was feeling I couldn't do it, for no reason other than, I thought I couldn't do it.

As we were getting off the ferry a couple of other riders had been telling me of their plans to get to Achnasheen and bail where there was a train station. I was tempted by the idea but I would have completely missed the last train by the time I got there, and it was still well short of my night stop planned for Gairloch.

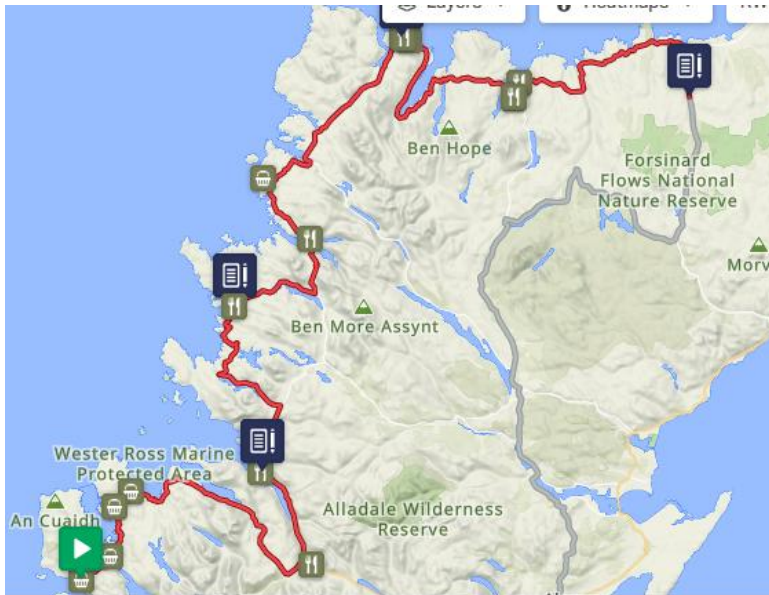
Tony is a bit older than me and was having his second attempt at this route. He was staying at Achnasheen at 438km and I was glad of the company to that point. Off we set and soon we were across the Skye bridge and into some very lumpy territory. I pulled ahead for a bit, but was then caught up by Tony, but eventually as darkness fell, I was alone again.

I remember using the road signs to start to count down the miles and eventually I passed the rider on the recumbent, it was a great relief to realise I was no longer alone. They were a bit surprised when I told them that they were a sight for sore eyes! With hindsight the going at this stage was good, I had plenty of snacks and water, and soon the clock went past midnight and Gairloch became a possibility, eventually to roll in at 3 in the morning at 485km, a long day to kill 275km!

I stopped in the middle of the town to get my phone out only to find out that I'd have to cycle back a short way to my hotel. It was great to finding the front door open and some clear instructions of how to get to my room and where to store my bike.

Straight in the room, devices on charge; kit off to dry; shower and bed. The end of a 21 hour day.

Day 3 – I am not alone! a day of revelation and a long one too.



I stayed in bed for a bit longer than planned and became aware that there was movement in the hotel. I hadn't planned to, but ended up having a very good breakfast, making sure I was sat well away from the other residents, given how I must have smelled.

By 7.30 having grabbed 3 hours of sleep I was back on the bike. This was going to be a long day to get to the one provided overnight stop, with few opportunities to refuel on the

route after around lunchtime. The weather was a real change, it was still cool, but now bright and dry as I slowly made my way over the hills to Poolewe which was 6 miles away, grateful for the fact that I didn't stay there, as given the hills I think I would have thrown in the towel that morning. The going was lumpy but beautiful, I was really beginning to enjoy the scenery. I remember one big climb that involved being escorted through some roadworks, a first for me, but would come again on day 4. There was a lovely long sweeping decent and as it had warmed up, I felt the need to eat something and stopped at the tourist centre just before Ullapool at 555km.



The weather had really turned warm, necessitating a further coating of sun cream. I spent a few minutes thinking about where I was and then set off to enjoy the last part of the decent and into Ullapool control at 575km. I didn't stay long and was quickly off. Soon I was off the main road and was told by a cycle-packing lady that there were two riders not far ahead and I instantly recognised Dan's yellow carrier bag on the back of his bike. It was great to feel I was not alone.



I caught up with them quite quickly and found myself ahead again, not intentionally, I was enjoying the amazing countryside, hills, valleys, rivers, waterfalls and non-stop beauty.





Before I realised it I was at the next control in Lochinver at 627km, which was dead as a door nail. There was power cut and even the Spar was closed. I managed to blag a water bottle refill from a closed cafe. Soon Dan and Dai arrived, and we went back and forth through the town a number of times before Dan spotted a full Spar carrier bag and that signalled the power cut was over. We were finally able to refuel, something I was aware was rather critical at this point. My meal wasn't that healthy comprising of a pint of milk and a rather large cold sausage.

Off we set again, up and down, up and down, plus a few toilet stops. It felt like a very long way but eventually flattened out at around 10 pm on the run into the next control at Durness, at 709km, getting to Spa 10 minutes before it shut. We were now past the half-way point at last. So to celebrate in true Audax style we had a shared supper in a bus shelter as darkness fell and it began to feel much colder. It was going to be another 96km to get to the night stop.

This was a magical stage as although darkness fell, it never went totally dark and it was sometimes warm. The hills, and everything else, continued and the hours passed by and the light started to return as we approached the memorable Betty Hill. I was reminded of my Ride Across Britain trips in 2017, 2018 and 2021 but this time I was doing it in the early hours. Now it was a case of spinning up the hills; enjoying the long sweeping descents; and waiting for the right turn to get to the control. Well, it came suddenly and I found some extra wind for the remaining 8km or so to get to the hut at Halladale Hall, just after Achiemore at 805km. Speed was now important – to eat, charge stuff and lie down as it was now 5 am; that had been another 22 hour day!

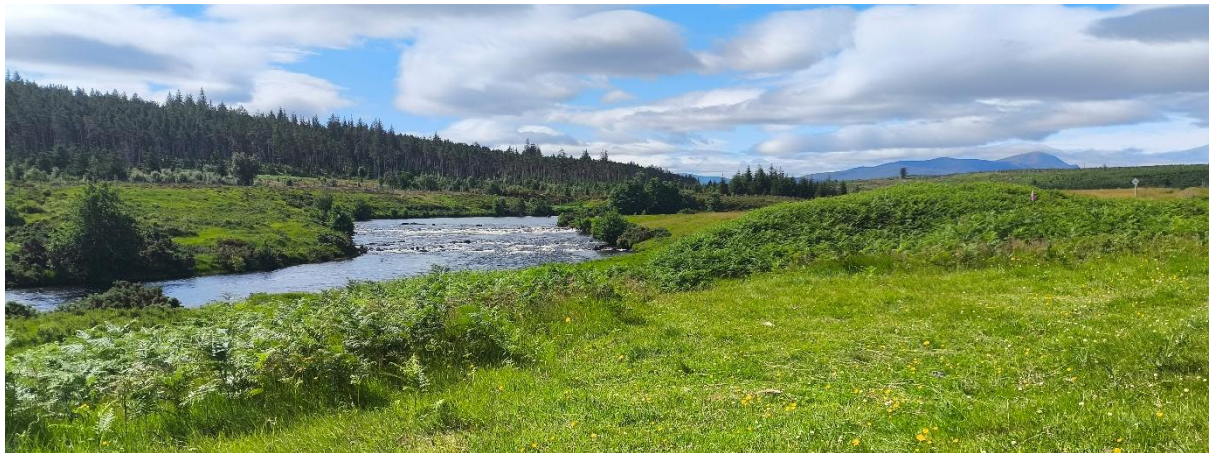
There wasn't much rest with much snoring, it was light now and after an hour Mark started clearing the hall which he needed to hand over by 7.30 So we were ejected in what was now day 4 even though we'd only arrived 2 hours or so before! Happy I was not. What did make me happy though was seeing quite a few familiar faces again.

Day 4 – a trip up memory lane

So we were heading down south through beautiful undulating country side on the route to



Altnaharra. All I remember was that I was with Dan and Dai again and this section just seemed to go on forever. We eventually stopped when we got off the track for some snacks and just to take in the views.



Off we went again and soon we approached Altnaharra at 873km, more memory lane stuff from all 3 Ride Across Britain trips. I knew this was going to be all about a long, long climb, which it duly was, only to be followed by a head wind and a long downward drag without much reward for all the climbing.



I have memories of it being very bright and hot before we pulled into the next café to meet the other riders, which as you can guess were well into their food by the time we arrived. We were now at Lairg at 909km, with 178km to go for the day. With hindsight it was good to know I was not too far from the rest of the group.



A lovely pork and mac cheese was consumed plus much iced water and then we were off again. Before we knew it, we had crossed Bonar bridge and what followed was a brutal climb eventually making its way onto the main road. My 38/46 easiest gearing made the very long climb bearable. Once on the main road there was a sharp right to join the back roads to Dingwall, the next control point at 971km. Again memories of 3 Ride Across Britain adventures flashed by. In the centre of town at the control point I happily met up with Dan and Dai again and we made our way to a Chinese takeaway, who were very welcoming and put out chairs and a table for us to eat at, very civilised!!

All too soon we were off again, undulating climbs, which never seemed to stop, and a very rapid white-knuckle descent as we approached Milton. We stopped as the light was fading to gear up and make our way to the A82 to go up the side of Loch Ness. After a short climb we were faced by roadworkers who were letting a short convoy through once an hour. Fortunately, we only had

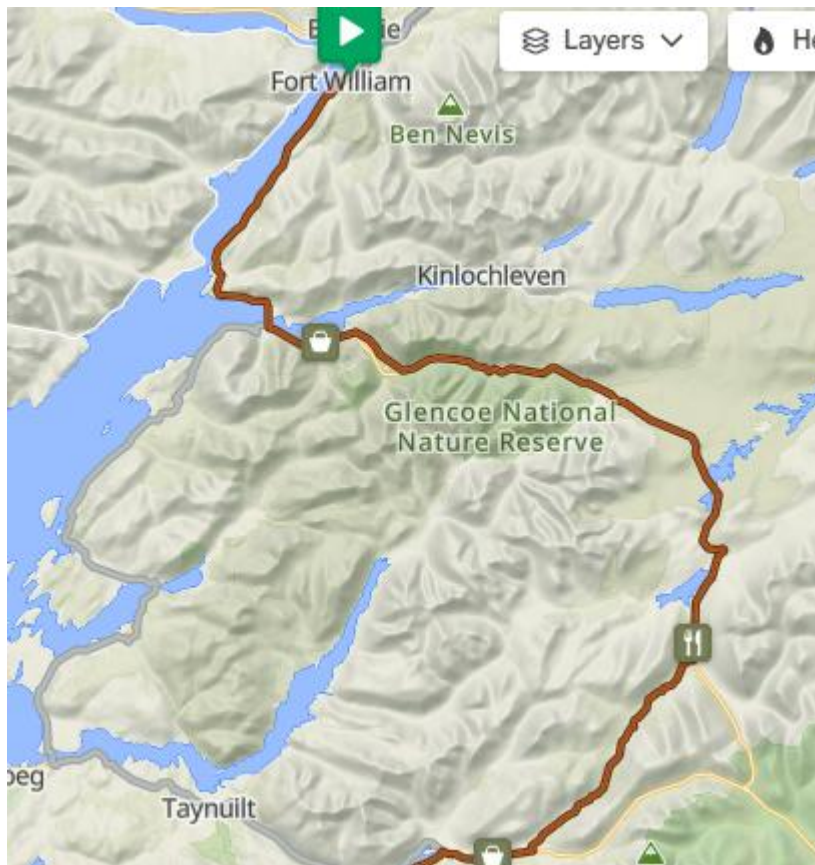
to wait 15 minutes before being escorted through what felt like Dantes inferno – with hot sticky tar everywhere.

The memory was cemented by the accompanying grating of the tar passing through my drive chain, deep joy. It was now dark as we continued, I turned around and I was suddenly alone again. My Wahoo sadly said it was going to be a long way to Fort William. It was now very dark, and I was very much, yes, very much on my own, except for some very interesting tree growth, which seem to morph into giant monsters in the single light of my lamp. I plodded on, keeping thinking I should be progressing faster for what felt like an age, then lights eventually appeared at Fort Augustus before fading again for the run into Spean Bridge which was the last control I would make at 1,074km. At last, I knew the hotel for tonight was in shooting distance.

Getting close

Fort William, eventually came after what felt like an age in the early hours, now to find my hotel and after a number of short detours found myself on the road out of the town, edging towards my hotel to arrive at 4 in the morning – good for 2 hours sleep at 1,087km.

Day 5 the end?



After 2 hours actually asleep in the hotel my alarm woke me and opened the curtain to the most amazing view of a boat coming down the inlet on the smooth waters – it was gorgeous. I'd made it to day 5, under slept but ready to pack up and go for the final push.



On the road outside the hotel was a great photo op, I then slavishly followed my Wahoo to the start of the route for the day only to see Dan traveling the opposite direction, shouting, 'you are going the wrong way!'.



Soon after leaving Fort William the road became very busy with fast cars and some very large trucks, I found a well surfaced cycle path which took me all the way around to the entrance of Glen Coe village . Up and down some really pretty back roads, I'm sure ride across Britain came through here in 2017 in the other direction. I soon rejoined the main road up through Glen Coe, a long but wonderful climb, stopped for some photos only to meet Dan again, who told me he's stopped in Fort William, but Dai had stopped somewhere on the road to Fort Augustus as he was just tired, like the rest of us.



I stayed with Dan all the way up through Glen Coe which was a non-stop picture gallery and I regret not taking that many photos. More memories of RAB 2017 but this time it was not raining and I was coming the other way. After the drop it was a short way before a right turn in to a gravelly track in the Glen Orchy area.



I remember enjoying this section, it was undulating and bit rough, lots of riding next to a river on my right, it was around 11 in the morning, I was looking forward to joining the main road and finding something to eat in Dalmally. I had travelled at total of 1,170km, by this point, excluding ferries.





The end (of my ride!)

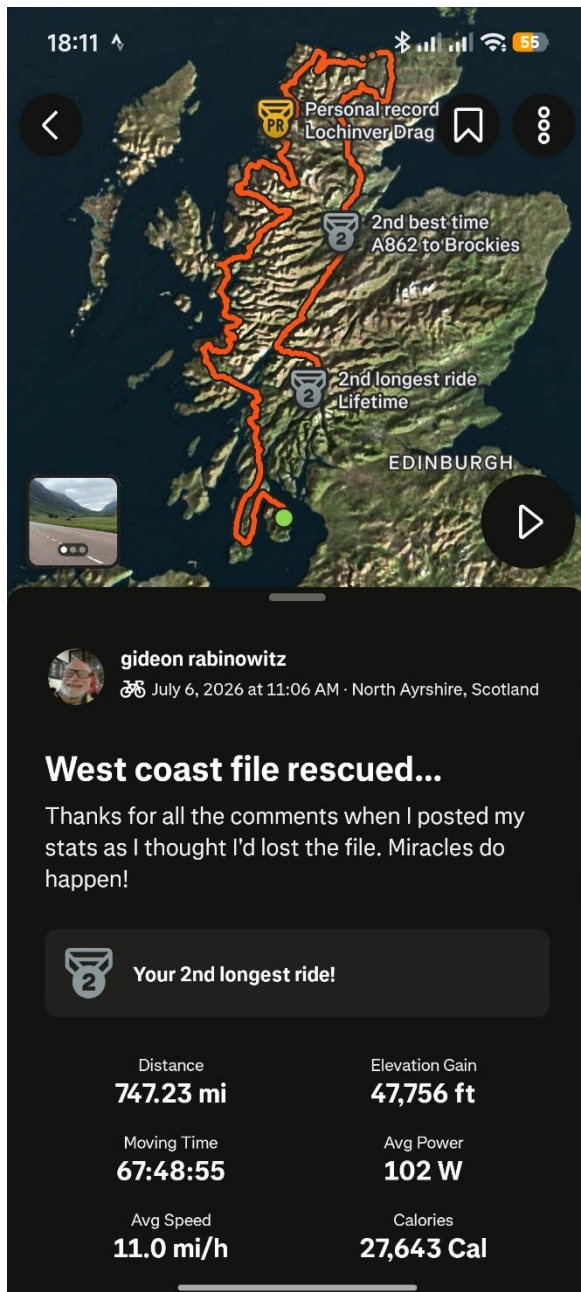
Well the end for me was as per the beginning of this tale. The guys who found me, tried their best to save my ride only to apparently corrupt the file, just leaving the summary stats. Strava refused to accept anything over 1,000km so there it is my cyber record for all to see. Well at least I was in one piece, and I get to tell you this tale.



Another DNF on an Ultra, well it feels different this time, there was no choice, it was ordained that my memory would restart in the ambulance. I take solace that I was cycling well, I was in good time, enjoying the end of the event, which after all is what it's all about.



Epilogue – 30th July



Well it seems there is a god in cyber world. Having given up on my Wahoo releasing its corrupted file, I opened up my feed to see my Strava entry for the day, I did wonder how I jumped over 700 miles on my annual stats. There it was recovered as if by magic my actual record! Funny how things come around. I'd cycled over 700 miles with over 47,000 feet of climbing, and I was probably less than 100 miles away from the finish.

I'm also incredibly lucky, in having an accident like this and to be back riding 2 weeks later, despite the wife's protestations. There quite a few riders I know who have come off much worse, so I count my blessings, which include my family and how worried they were about me.

Will I be back? A month on, if the event was being run today, I'd be there for sure, it's unfinished business. But, knowing what I do now, about the route and the things life unexpectedly throws at you, I'd enjoy it a lot more; and I think I have now conquered some of my demons.