

If you're up for an exhilarating Scottish sporting challenge, particularly one with a fun, friendly and wacky twist, then swim, hike, cycle and kayak your way through the unforgettable Artemis Great Kindrochit Quadrathlon.

Paddling chest-deep into the eerie waters of a Scottish loch early one morning felt a little mad.

Swimming almost a mile from the south shore of Loch Tay to the north side in deep water was cold and exhausting. Yet our day of racing in the Artemis Great Kindrochit Quadrathlon in Perthshire had only just begun.

Over the following 11 or so hours, my partner G and I hiked and ran seven mountains, kayaked seven miles and cycled 34 miles.

The weather was unseasonably cold, wet and cloudy – but little dampened our spirits. For while the annual event was by far the toughest I have undertaken, it was also the most fun.

Almost 350 people lined up at the start of the Kindrochit Quadrathlon on July 12. Participants raced in teams of two to complete all of the four disciplines together or as relay teams, spreading the sports among four entrants. They came from Scotland, England and as far afield as France, the Netherlands and South Africa.

For many of the quadrathletes, the loch swim was their first experience of Scottish waters.

As they dipped their toes in, I saw many people looking doubtful. Yet everyone made it through the loch swim in times of between 21 and 40 minutes.

Support teams in kayaks paddled alongside in case help was needed.

After a change of clothes and kit, we set off for the challenging mountain section. The total ascent of the seven Munros – Scottish mountains with a summit of at least 3000ft – is 8087ft.

This is almost the same as hiking the UK's highest mountain, Ben Nevis, twice.

The longest ascent is the first Munro, Meall Greigh, from 338ft to 3284ft, while the highest point on the 15-mile route is Ben Lawers at almost 4000ft.

In low clouds and rain, navigation from checkpoint to checkpoint on each summit was vital, especially between Munros five and six.

Unfortunately, many people became disoriented and some went in the wrong direction for several miles. The Mountain Rescue support crews at the peaks did all they could to help participants but they could not be there to check every compass bearing.

I was thankful that G's excellent map-reading skills saved us from any wasted extra miles. But there was still



STILLSMILING
Transition two involves kayaking for seven miles across Loch Tay

FOR THE LOVE OF

“
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FIONA RUSSELL

the seventh Munro to summit and it proved to be a beast.

Before Meall Nan Tarmachan, the route descends almost to loch level and a food stop before climbing again to 3500ft. There is no path and the uphill seemed to go relentlessly on and on.

Finally, we reached the top and I almost hugged the checkpoint team before turning round for the descent.

The downs by this point were worse than the ups and it was easier to run than to hobble-walk.

It was with huge relief that we reached transition two, swapping hiking kit for kayaking clothes and a buoyancy aid.

The amazing support teams cheerily fed us pasta and cake and handed us energy drinks and water before giving us a push out into Loch Tay.

But there was something missing – our ability to paddle efficiently.

With so many sports to train for, we had managed only 30 minutes of paddle practice and this showed in our efforts to kayak the seven miles.

As our shoulders screamed with

pain, other pairs paddled past at speed and it took us a hard-fought 90 minutes to make it from transition two back to the event HQ and into transition three.

Another full change into dry cycle clothing offered a little relief but it was short-lived. After swimming, hiking, running and kayaking, my legs seemed to have lost the ability to function normally. I could hardly walk, let alone contemplate pedalling the undulating roads around Loch Tay.

Yet somehow we did it. G and I worked together to help each other through the hills and along the flats. Incredibly, we even passed a few riders and caught up with another team.

The four of us cycled together until close to the end when I, with a huge surge of adrenaline, found I could sprint for the finish line.

The Quadrathlon is not over until pairs have sliced a watermelon in half with a sword. This we did with pure joy – before sinking into seats to enjoy a well-earned beer.

Amazingly, G and I came home 17th team and second mixed (male/female)

ON THE ASCENT
The mountain challenge

