

OUTDOORS

UP FOR A WHEELY TOUGH CHALLENGE?

RIDE AND RUN OFF-ROAD

The ABC Monikie Park Winter Duathlon Series is open for entries.

The three-race series takes place at Monikie Country Park, Angus, and is supported by Angus Bike Chain Cycling Club. Round one on December 13 comprises a 4km run followed by a 21.5km cycle time trial.

Round two and three on January 10 and February 14 have the same format: a 4km run and 21.5km cycle followed by a 4km run.

■ To find out more and enter, see www.entrycentral.com/event/103042

SUFFRAGETTE OAK WINS YOUR VOTE

An oak tree planted in Glasgow almost 100 years ago has won the Scottish Tree of the Year competition.

The Suffragette Oak in Kelvingrove Park beat five other trees in a public vote organised by the Woodland Trust Scotland and supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

The Suffragette Oak was planted on April 20, 1918, by a number of suffrage organisations to mark women being granted the right to vote earlier that year. In the Tree of the Year contest, the oak was nominated and championed by Glasgow Women's Library.

KIT OF THE WEEK



TNF SUMMIT SERIES L2 JACKET

Outdoor clothing brand The North Face have relaunched their Summit Series collection for winter 2015.

The exclusive range includes six layers of clothing, from L1 to L6. L6 is next-to-the-skin technical baselayers while L1 is high performance jackets and pants to keep cope with harsh weather conditions.

There are only limited supplies of the collection and they will be sold in specialty retail outlets and online for a short time.

Originally launched in autumn 2000, Summit Series has represented TNF's pinnacle range of products for mountaineers and climbers.

■ See www.thenorthface.co.uk and buy in Scotland from www.tiso.com



MILESTONE
Charlie Kavanagh, dressed in his kilt, and friends at the start of the West Highland Way in Milngavie

Charlie walks all the Way to award

Have you tried?



FIONA RUSSELL

Charlie Kavanagh has walked his way to a silver medal after becoming the only person to hike the challenging West Highland Way an incredible 50 times since 1991 – and he has no intention of hanging up his boots just yet.

Advice and ideas

THE WEST HIGHLAND WAY

Scotland's original walking trail, the West Highland Way, is a magnet for walkers.

Every year more than 50,000 people hike the 96-mile route from Milngavie in East Dunbartonshire to Fort William in the Highlands. Some people enjoy it so much that they return to walk it again.

But no one has walked the long-distance route as many times as Charlie Kavanagh, who is the first to do 50 completions.

Last month, he was presented with a special silver medal engraved "Well done Charlie – 50 walks" by the West Highland Way Management Group.

Charlie, 53, of Greenock, said: "I love this route. From the first time that I walked it until the 50th I have thoroughly enjoyed the whole thing."

He revealed it was folk singer Jimmie Macgregor's TV shows about walking across Scotland in the early 1990s that inspired his annual WHW hikes.

The first was in 1991 with two friends. He said: "Being young and fairly fit back then, I thought it wouldn't prove too difficult."

"We planned to take five days but I totally underestimated what it would entail, walking 20 miles each day."

Charlie ended up walking most of the route on his own after one friend got injured.

He said: "I learned a few things that first time: to train more and buy good quality boots and comfortable, seamless socks."



ACHIEVEMENT Charlie at the end of his 50th West Highland Way walk

He was hooked and has never missed an annual completion of the waymarked route and sometimes he squeezes in three WHW completions each year.

While the average time for the walk is five to seven days, Charlie prefers to do it over four-and-a-half days with overnight stays in Balmaha, Inverarnan, Bridge of Orchy and Kinlochleven.

He said: "I walk around 20 miles each day for the first four days and then 16 miles on the final day. This is doable, I think, but I am now very familiar with the route and the terrain."

Charlie has walked the route solo and with friends and family. One friend, Les Gillespie, 68, has completed 18 of them.

Charlie's wife Catherine has covered the route 12 times, while one of his sons, Shaun, has completed 10 journeys.

Charlie always walks the full route from south to north although he has walked most sections of the route at different times heading north to south.

He said: "It's such a beautiful trail and it is different every time

I do it. If I'm planning to walk it three times in one year, I like to go early season, around April, mid-season and in the autumn.

"I like autumn best because of the stunning colours of the leaves and heather."

His favourite part is walking over Conic Hill, near Balmaha.

He said: "The view over Loch Lomond is so fantastic. Glencoe is also stunning although that is weather dependent."

These days he also uses a luggage transfer firm to take his gear between accommodation.

He said: "As I've got older, I have been kinder to myself and like to walk as fast and as light as I can. I don't want to be weighed down by a big rucksack, I like to be able to walk unhampered."

Charlie has no plans to hang up his walking boots just yet.

He said: "I'll walk the route for as long as I can and without injury. I don't think I'll ever tire of this trail through some of Scotland's best landscapes."

■ Find out more at www.west-highland-way.co.uk

Join me on my adventures in Scotland's great outdoors by checking out my award-winning website at www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk – you'll find lots of great information about walking, cycling, running, other outdoor activities and kit reviews.