



OFF ROAD AT THE DOUBLE

The Bowhill Duathlon is back for its 17th year, promising a series of low-key, back-to-basics off-road duathlons.

Three races – short, medium and long – will take place on December 2, January 20 and February 17 at Bowhill Estate, near Selkirk, in the Borders.

Entires for solo and relay teams are now open for the races organised by Dirty Events.

■ See www.dirtyevents.com



PUT TRUST IN HELPING

Give something back to our beautiful Scottish outdoors environment by volunteering with the John Muir Trust.

The conservation charity offers a range of volunteer opportunities, including popular work parties. People who volunteer will benefit in a number of ways, such as experiencing some of the best wild places in Scotland and meeting new people.

■ For a list of volunteering roles and dates see www.johnmuirtrust.org

GEAR OF THE WEEK

Saucony Bullet Capri
Saucony's three-quarter length Bullet Capri running tights offer a half-way solution between shorts and long tights.

Ideal for cooler weather, the smooth PowerLuxe fabric offers an ultra-supportive fit. The wide waistband won't chafe and it looks flattering.

Other features include continuous internal drawcord that stays flat and won't get lost, zipped back waterproof storage pocket and side cargo pockets to stow your essentials. There is also a reflective trim for visibility in low light. RRP for the capris is £60. Buy them for a discounted price of £40 at www.saucony.co.uk while stocks last.



Have you tried?

OARSOME
Packrafter transports bike across water

The pack of beyond

Packrafting

What is it? A packraft is a one-person inflatable boat that is designed to be small and light enough to pack into a rucksack. The activity of packrafting includes walking or cycling to where you find a river or loch. You then unpack the packraft, inflate it and carry on with your journey on water. When you reach land again, simply deflate the raft and pack in into your rucksack and carry on with your walk or cycle.

Tell me more: Packrafting is claimed to originate in Alaska, where portable boats make travel in untracked wilderness areas possible.

The rafts have long been used to make water crossings where other transport is not possible. Packrafting as an adventure activity subsequently spread to other areas worldwide, such as Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe.

Packrafts have also been used in Mexico, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Patagonia. Typically, the boats are carried to cross and float on rivers, streams and lakes as part of a longer journey on foot. Many packraft owners now enjoy shorter day trips that mix hiking with paddling.

In Scotland, packrafts have become popular for accessing areas on foot or by bike where large waterways usually require you to go around a shore. Using a raft allows the adventurer to cross directly to the next piece of land. Recently, Munro and Corbett baggers have seen the advantage of packrafts for easier access to the base of a mountain, or to try an alternative route from a trail more travelled.

Anything else to know?

Andy Toop, of Back Country in Aviemore, leads packrafting



FIONA RUSSELL

Inflatable raft that fits into a rucksack is letting adventurers rip up their maps and conquer previously inaccessible territory



RAFT WORK Inflatable boats are then deflated and packed in rucksacks for outings in Scotland. He also sells and hires packrafts.

He said: "Packrafts are by far the coolest thing I've come across. They allow you to redefine how you look at a map. The blue bits are no longer barriers, instead they are squiggles on the map that connect the journey together."

As well as being a useful mode of transport in a country with a lot of waterways, Andy believes a packraft connects people to the landscape in a deeper sense.

He said: "While paddling a packraft I feel immersed amid the elements that draw me to wild places. I often find myself in the back of beyond, soaking wet and cold, but full of life with the thought that just maybe 'no one has brought a boat to the particular piece of water I've just conquered'. I feel like a pioneer."

"I am keen to share this feeling with others and help them connect with the wilds, as well as demonstrating and encouraging good practice in these fragile landscapes."

What kit do I need? A packraft, pump, paddle and buoyancy aid, as well as a rucksack to carry the kit. Waterproof jackets and trousers you wear for walking are

ideal for when you are paddling a raft. If it is going to be cold take neoprene gloves and boots too.

Where to go: Join a guided session if you are unsure about how to paddle a raft. If you fancy setting off yourself, choose a calm and sheltered waterway to start with. After that, just look at a map of Scotland and set out on foot or by bike to see if it's possible to cross the loch or river.

Andy said: "The moist Scottish landscape lends itself perfectly to packrafting. How about travelling into Inverpolly in Wester Ross, via the beautiful loch systems then ascending the mountain of Suilven on foot, before returning by water to the start?"

"Or enjoy a gentle paddle to Isle Maree in Loch Maree in the Highlands to pay your respects to the Viking graves on your way to the majestic and isolated Munros of the Fisherfield."

Safety first: Normal water rules apply, in that it's more risky to paddle a raft alone. Travelling in pairs is sensible and more fun.

Contact: Back Country, Aviemore, at www.backcountry.scot for equipment and guided trips. Anfibio Packrafting Store: www.packrafting-store.de/