



Having run various sections of the Fife coast over the years I began to wonder if anyone had ever been daft enough to run the whole route. The path used to be about 80 miles from the Tay Bridge to the Forth Bridge which is not out with the capabilities of some ultra-runners with far more stamina than me.

In 2012 the route was extended at either end to include sections from the Newburgh to the Tay Bridge at the northern end and from Kincardine to North Queensferry at the southern end. This takes the path to 116.5 miles so I wondered if anyone had recorded a team attempt. It transpired that a group from Carnethy had done just that in October 2013. They had run a 6 leg relay from South to North with each runner doing between 18 and 20 miles. They set an impressive time of 15 hours and 10 minutes.

For those of you who have explored the Fife coast you will know that the terrain is as beautiful as it is varied and includes a bit of everything; steps, beach, fields, hills and the very occasional stretch of flat path. The Carnethy group wrote an excellent report of their run here http://carnethy.com/reports/2013/rep_fifecoastal.htm Having been inspired by this I thought it would be great if we could have a go at emulating their run and if possible get close to the record with a Fife based group.

So what started as a bit of a half-baked idea gradually took shape this spring. We got 6 runners together from Bill Smith's group in Newport / Wormit. Each of us did a little bit of a recce on our legs and we set a date in August when the tides were favourable and there would be enough light to run the whole thing without starting and finishing in the dark.

There are a lot of variables in a run like this; weather, tide times, handover points and not least getting 6 runners together at the same time relatively free of illness and injury. We managed to do it though and decided to give it our best shot. I will let each runner tell their own tale of their leg and you will need to read to the end to discover if we made the time or not....

Leg 1 Kincardine to Inverkeithing



Calum Grant

Distance: 20.7 miles Elevation: 966 feet

Alarm goes at 4am after fitful night's sleep...quick bowl of porridge and bananas and a cup to tea, and then Jane, Dad and I are off into the night heading for Kincardine Bridge. Jane decided at the last minute she was going to take the mountain bike and accompany me along the first leg. For the record we agree that no advantage should be gained from this and she will cycle in lee of me or behind so that I'm not drafting my way round. This turns out to be irrelevant anyway as we are just

about knocked off our feet by the strong south-westerly blowing down the Forth. I can see the lights of the Forth bridges and they seem a loooong way away!

We have seconds to get down to the start - headlight on - quick photo and I want to make sure that I start at exactly 5am on the dot. I'm feeling remarkably good and up for it - my preparation has been poor and after last week's recce run, I had wound back my own expectation. However, I'm going to make a good fist of it regardless. The tail wind is a blessing and by the time the sun comes up at 5.40 am I'm almost 6 miles in, I know I'll blow at some point but so far everything is OK, so I push on. The path is quiet at this time except for a few surprised early morning joggers/dog walkers. Bit of a climb up over Crombie and into Charlestown starts to take its toll but it's a fast descent into Limekilns. Thirteen miles in on the road to Rosyth (1.31) - still feeling OK - I've only been running on 4 occasions in the past 3 months and can't quite believe I'm still moving, hey ho. Jane is looking a bit bored on the bike and I'm not engaging in an awful lot of conversation at the moment!

Climbing out of Rosyth towards North Queensferry we take in the view of the new bridge and myriad of roads under construction. Dave and Wendy are there and Dave joins me to ask how I'm feeling - I agree to run on to St David's bay to hand over as planned as I'm not fading too badly yet although I'm soon regretting this as I slog my round under the bridges, Carlingnose point and up Inverkeithing high street. I remind myself it's all downhill from here.

I realise going under the Forth Bridge (1.59) I'm up on "record" pace - this is a pleasant surprise and a real morale booster. The tide is in and it's now a beautiful morning approaching St David's Bay and I glance over toward Cramond and Edinburgh beyond - I see Dave waiting, Dad and Wendy are there too. A quick high five and it's over to Dave. My Garmin says 20.74 miles, elevation 966 feet. I'm chuffed to have got us off to a good start and set the tone for the day, I text the rest of the crew and tell them "it's over to you". I'm indebted to Jane for the moral support and bottle carrying at this ungodly hour.



Time: 2 hrs 29

Leg 2: Inverkeithing to West Wemys

Dave Shepherd

Distance: 20 miles Elevation: 735 feet

We met Calum at Ferrytoll as he approached the Forth Bridge and confirmed that he was feeling fit and strong to run to St David's Harbour as planned saving me 2.5 km which would have felt a long way at the end. We got into position at St David's and waited for Calum to appear.

He came in strongly at 07:29 and I set off. I had in mind that 50 minute 10k pace would be

good going and seemed to hit that pace about right as I snaked around the headlands and bays of Dalgety. The tide was in and the views were great across the Forth in the morning light. Into Aberdour, past the harbour, over the Hawkcraig and down onto the Silver Sands for my first check with my wife Wendy. I plodded on along the path by the railway on the shore, taking care not to collide with an occasional mountain biker.

I passed Wendy again at the Beacon leisure centre in Burntisland and picked up a snack. Along the esplanade with a quick glance under the railway to see if the ice cream kiosk was open. Passing the caravan park on the road up to Kinghorn, I knew I was at my halfway mark and still feeling all right. I dropped down to the lifeboat station, climbed back to the railway and then off along the path to Seafield. The flowers on this stretch are great, the tide was dropping to reveal the beds of rock running out into the sea and then, along at Seafield Tower, I spotted a group of seals.

I approached the Kirkcaldy seafront not looking forward to 2km of tarmac and traffic. However I was pleasantly surprised to find the road closed to vehicles in preparation for a motorbike race on the beach and it didn't seem long before I was climbing up to Ravenscraig Castle. I had been able to see my end point at West Wemyss for a while now and this helped me keep driving against the tiredness that was starting to bite and reduce my slippage against my target pace.



I lolloped along through Ravenscraig Park, tottered over the cobbles at Dysart Harbour and staggered up the steps to Frances Colliery. Despite feeling very tired, I took heart from being slightly up on the Carnethy time here and gave my best down the steps and along the back of the beach to West Wemyss harbour. Wendy ran along with me for the final few hundred metres and I gratefully handed over to Bill and sat down for a rest.

Time: 2 hr 34

Leg 3: West Wemyss to Pittenweem

Bill Smith

Distance: 19.5 miles Elevation: 435 feet

Being a postie and hence an earlier riser I thought I might as well text Calum a good luck message at 04:40 then try and relax before my 06:30 alarm, but I was wide awake and raring to go.

I wanted to get going early so I could show my wife Pam where I wanted her to be with the car and I could get some food and a change of trainers if need be.

Just after 10 o'clock we were able to see Dave bounding along on the horizon in his purple Wormit Runners top. 'Oh dear' I thought 20 miles to go and I've not really done a long run this year although I have just ran the Tour of Fife (5 races in 5 days), jogged the Dundee park run and then run the Ceres 8 mile race all in the last week so hopefully that will help!

Heading along from West Wemyss to East Wemyss was really nice; a mix of tarmac and gravel paths. It was a bit blustery and very warm so thought I may have to slow it down with all the racing last week as both hamstrings were niggling already.

I managed to settle into a nice strong comfortable pace that I thought I could sustain for most of the road section from Buckhaven, Methil and on into Leven where Pam would be waiting with the boot open ready with the supplies.

I smiled and waved as I ran past saying "I'm ok see you later". Then it was on to the beach singing "Methil no more, Leven no more, Skye no more..." I couldn't see the sky as all the sand was swirling around and the wind was coming in from the side as I moved over to hard sand and skipped along the beach.

Onwards to Lower Largo and passed the Alexander Selkirk memorial (of Robinson Crusoe fame) and thought I better take a gel. Went through 10 miles in 1 hr 17 a bit slow but I'm still running strong on the 'sandy slither route' over the sand dunes and then back onto the beach before rounding the Cocklemill burn and through the caravan park to head up to the mast with magnificent views back to the wind turbines in Methil and in front to the lovely Elie harbour.

15 miles in and I'm now at the Ruby Bay car park in Elie where Pam was there to shout some words of encouragement. I decided not to change my shoes and try and hang on the last 5 miles on the undulating narrow pathway, dodging lots of people out with their dogs and families and trying to shout "excuse me please" or cough loudly as I jogged past them.

Finally I headed into St Monans and thought I'd better phone Lee and say I'm on my way. Almost 20 minutes later I galloped down the last little hill and on to Pittenweem harbour and could see Lee in the distance bouncing and ready to GO...

I made it, the hamstrings held out and the time passed really quickly. Pleased to have had a good strong run most of the way - job done.



Time: 2hr 40 min 30 sec

Leg 4 Pittenweem to St Andrews

Lee Strachan

Distance: 19.2 miles Elevation: 546 feet

My day was off to a very positive start when I came out of the shower and read a text from Calum to say that he was off to a great start. I had to go to work in Dundee for a few hours then had a bit of a mad scramble to get myself down to Pittenweem in time to meet Bill. My parents collected me and we had a smooth journey down the road. In the end I was in place in plenty of time.

The winds were really strong down at the harbour and I knew that it would help me initially and hinder me after Fife Ness. I received a call from Bill to say he was advancing and ran a few strides to warm up. Last minute my Dad suggested that I take his wraparound sunglasses to protect my eyes from the wind and sand from Fife Ness to St. Andrews, a very good idea! Bill came storming along the road at Pittenweem with his trade mark sprint finish and I was off! Feeling excited I shot off a little too fast but quickly settled into a good rhythm and used the tail wind well into Anstruther and through Crail. The terrain between Anstruther and Crail was rocky but I felt I was moving well and it provided a good taster of things to come. My parents met me at Sauchope caravan park 7 miles in and I grabbed some water. I received a few strange looks as I bounded through the caravan park spilling water over myself and waving goodbye to mum and dad!

The section out to Fife Ness became very rocky in places and although I was still feeling good my pace inevitably began to slip. I was just focusing on maintaining effort rather than pace as I knew there was tougher terrain to follow. As I turned the corner at Fife Ness I realised that the wind would no longer be my friend, although from here to St. Andrews it would affect me more at times than others as the cliffs provided good protection in places.

I ran into the wind over Crail golf course and the first of the beach sections and onto Kingsbarns. The trails were very tight and winding in places and it was a case of maintaining concentration with foot placement. Nearing Kingsbarns the path begins to open up and I was lifted by the fact I was nearing my next water stop. As I approached 12 miles my niece and nephew came running along the track towards me and I grabbed some water and a gel. Eden (5) also presented me with a handful of shells which I thanked him for and then had to hand straight back! Onwards I went towards Boarhills. I was joined by a sheep for around 500m. I think it thought that I was some sort of scantily clad sweaty shepherd and I wondered for a while if he was going to join me all the way to St Andrews. Thankfully he thought better of it.

As the path moved inland towards Boarhills I could feel that I was beginning to tire a little. The climb up from the beach was tough on the legs but the dark twisting section through the woods felt good. It was nice to be out of the wind and I prepared myself for what I knew would be a gruelling final section. I had a final drink of water and a gel at Boarhills and was again cheered on by my family. I set off down the farm track and almost came a cropper at the first stile on this section as I pushed on down the hill. A Jack Russell tried it's best to trip me up but I stumbled over the stile and on down the hill.

As fatigue set in, the final 4 miles became a bit hazy. There seemed to be endless ascents and descents up and down the cliffs. Foot placement was difficult as I tried to maintain pace up and down the boulder steps. I popped up at the St Andrews Bay course a couple of times before descending once more. I caught my first glimpse of East Sands Leisure Centre and decided to push on as hard as my aching limbs would allow.



When I came up at the castle course I knew that the climbing was over. I pushed on through the caravan park descending the awkwardly spaced steps. There was a small rise then I could see a group waiting for me. As I ran down towards the beach it felt like rush hour and as I danced around to avoid the Saturday afternoon strollers I felt my

calf cramp. There were only 100m to go so I pushed on. My nephew again ran towards me but I decline his request for a kiddie back! I high fived Gus and wished him luck before falling to the ground and cramping.

Just over two and a half hours of running and finally I could stop. We estimated that we were possibly around 20 minutes ahead of the record. I refuelled and cramped again getting into the car before heading to Tayport to cheer on Gus.

Time: 2 hr 33

Leg 5 St Andrews to Newport

Gus McGhie

Distance: 19 miles Elevation: 295 ft

Despite what must have been a tough final stretch of his leg, it was great to see Lee charging down the path with a smile on his face towards the East Sands for our changeover.



I'm lucky enough to work in St Andrews and know that the streets can be packed at weekends but no problems today dodging past the holiday-makers past the Castle and Old Course and then out of town. The wind was starting to get a bit wild between Strathtyrum and Guardbridge with my legs getting sand blasted by grit blown up off the road but I soon arrived in Guardbridge and got the wind behind me.

Into Tentsmuir and I was treated to a sight of a young white-tailed eagle, with its wingspan easily wider than the Landrover track I was on. A warning to anyone planning a run through Tentsmuir in summer; it seems that horseflies much prefer to buzz round a puffing, sweaty runner than anything else so no time to let up in pace here.

Out of the forest at Tayport and enjoyed a good cheer from the Wormit bunch supporting or already finished their stretch just as the body was starting to notice the miles. Encouraging words from Bill helped me up the last rise and before I knew it, a gently downhill charge into Newport and over to Keith.

Time: 2 hr 23

Leg 6 Newport to Newburgh

Keith Taylor

Distance 18.2 miles Elevation: 1839 feet

I had volunteered myself for the last leg only because I felt familiar enough with the paths to run in the dark if it came to that. It had been quite an exciting day following the messages from the rest of the group en route. Calum's good start had given everyone a boost as the day wore on we seemed to be managing to consolidate a bit of lead over the target time. A very

small part of me was wishing we might have blown it by the time it came to me and I could just have a nice wee amble through the hills to Newburgh.

On the drive out I dropped a couple of bottles of water in Glenduckie and Balmerino trying not to take any notice of the humungous amount of elevation in between and arrived in Newport in plenty time to have a pre-run power nap in the car outside Lee's house. By this time the sky was getting cloudy and the wind was really getting up and blowing strongly from the West right up the Tay.

Reports filtered through from Tayport that Gus was running strongly despite the wind and we looked to be about 10 – 15 minutes up on the record time. So no pressure then. We were all on the side of the street to see Gus sprint down under the road bridge and with a slick two handed low five I was off into the wind and rain.



The first 2-3 miles to Wormit bay felt very comfortable despite the conditions and I knew they would be virtually the only flat point of the run. After Wormit bay the path twists along a few short ups and downs on the trail with a several steps and gates but no major elevation. Fortunately running through the woods gave a brief respite from the headwind.

Turning up past Balmerino abbey at about the 5 mile mark Bill was on hand to offer encouragement. From then on it's a long progressive slog uphill and inland towards the road to Creich. Leaving Balmerino I caught my first sight of the foreboding brow of Normans Law a few miles ahead. The first part of the climb was steady despite the wind but then takes a left turn up the first of what would prove to be several steep inclines where I was pretty much close to maximum effort.

Turning on to the road again was a relief and I soon felt my legs return to normal and had an enjoyable middle stretch undulating past Creich castle and Brunton. This is a decidedly inland stretch where the coast isn't even visible but it's beautiful all the same. I had to mumble an apology to a runner going in the opposite direction that I knew from years ago but I couldn't stop and chat!

Just after Pittachope farm the path leaves the road and takes a steep climb up towards the North brow of Normans Law. The path here was pretty muddy and churned up by horses and cattle. After a few painful minutes I crested the hill and began the delightful descent downhill for a mile or two to Glenduckie trying to relax, lean forward and not break my ankle. Dave was in place at the Glenduckie turn off and we managed a kind of semaphore exchange intimating that I was feeling good.

After Glenduckie the path takes a right turn back up yet another hill and my quads were starting to feel it. The main difference was the path got a lot less runnable here and the verdant summer mean that it had virtually disappeared and been replaced by long grass, tussocks and nettles. This made for a strength sapping climb but I knew that after reaching the top it was downhill to Newburgh.

It was a magnificent sight looking down to Newburgh three or four miles away and mostly downhill. I had the feeling of a pilgrim having a vision of their destination. Unfortunately this coincided with another exposed and very windy stretch with at least half a dozen gates and styles. Looking at my watch I knew we were still on target unless I blew it and I allowed myself a few Brownlee style celebratory running high fives with a couple of disinterested sheep.

Down into Newburgh I felt really strong on the road but then the path takes you down to the sea and hence the wind for what seems like a very long last mile. Dave was on hand to run with me for the last few hundred metres offering congratulations and encouragement in equal measure (although nearly clipping my heels and sending me into the water!).

Turning into Mugdrum park I could see the rest of the group waiting and cheering at the sign that marks the end. Rather cruelly the finish is at the top of yet another twisting incline although to be fair I'm not sure the folks who created the path expected many people to be running the length of it.



The last climb was one too many for me and my plans to have a celebratory sprint to the finish left me looking like I'd been just been tasered. Reaching out to touch the finishing post I slumped to the ground and stopped my watch dead on 2 hours 18 minutes.

I felt like I had just broken a world record such was the excitement and relief in the group. Like Hannibal (possibly) said to his troops in the Alps "you can't take the glory if you can't handle the hills" but anyone who wants to run this leg next time is more than welcome!

Time: 2 hr 18

Final time 14 hours 58 minutes (new record by 12 minutes)
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Final thoughts

After being helped to my feet and a few cheers, hugs and photos we made our way down to the Ship Inn for several beers and an enormous curry buffet that merits a race report in itself. My main memory from the day will be the communal effort, enthusiasm and encouragement and a real feeling that the total was greater than the sum of the parts. Running can at times be a very solitary activity but today was all about the team and I am absolutely certain that each of us ran harder, further and faster than we ever thought we could just to try and help each other out.

To be honest at the outset I thought we would have a great day out but I never really imagined we would get near the time set by Carnethy who have a very high pedigree of trail and hill runners. I suspect our record might not last all that long and I would really encourage any other group to have a go at what is one of the most beautiful long distance routes in the country. Who knows we might even do it again one day but for now I am delighted to say that the record remains in the Kingdom!

Keith Taylor, Calum Grant, Dave Shepherd,
Bill Smith, Lee Strachan, Gus McGhie

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