

Challenge records expected to fall

IRON MEN and women from across the UK are to descend on Badenoch and Strathspey on Saturday to line up for the 14th annual Corrieyairack Challenge.

Teams from as far away as the English South Coast and the Republic of Ireland have signed up to take on the Monadhliath Mountains in arguable the strath's greatest test of willpower and endurance.

The grueling 43-mile running and mountain biking duathlon from Fort Augustus to Kincaig broke all records last year as 500 entrants raised a staggering £80,000 for the Badaguish Outdoor Centre by Glenmore.

The centre, which provides respite care activity holidays for people with special needs and disabilities from all over Scotland and the UK, has received more than £400,000 in sponsorship since the event began in 1993.

The money has helped to purchase specially adapted minibuses and activity equipment, as well as furnishings and equipment for all-accessible lodges and a covered sports area with soft flooring to allow for safe play.

For the second year running, the event is fully subscribed with teams of three of all abilities starting off with a 17-mile run, walk or stagger from Fort Augustus along the historic route of General Wade's Military road.

The competitors will have to conquer the road which spans the Corrieyairack Pass, reaching its highest point at 2,350ft, before rushing downhill to Garva Bridge to begin a 26-mile cycle through Laggan, Newtonmore and Kingussie on the way to a rapturous welcome at the Kincaig Village Fete.

Organiser Paul Corrigan said he expected this year's finishing times to smash current records – with competitors from across the Border dashing to the finish line in time to see England's World Cup quarter-final against Portugal.

However, Mr Corrigan added that he was delighted to see a boom in local interests with a large increase in teams from across Badenoch and Strathspey taking on the Corrieyairack Challenge.

“The great thing this year is we have seen the number of local teams taking part go up which is fantastic to see,” Mr Corrigan said.

“Yet again, we have a number of top mountain bikers taking part, but we also have a huge number of people competing who want to complete the course for the personal challenge and achievement. It's a tough, challenging course and a lot depends on the weather, but as always we will have stewards from the Cairngorm Mountain Rescue Team, Inverness Raynet, Red Cross and GPs on hand to ensure the safety of the competitors.”

Last year's duathlon male runner-up Stuart McLeod from Edinburgh's Bicycleworks team, is aiming to go one place better this time while 65-year-old Andrew Wright from St Andrews is back to defend his male vintage crown.

The 2005 ladies' winner, Marietta van der Linden, will also be taking part with reigning ladies' veteran winner Erni Hamilton from Edinburgh attempting to finish first once again.

In the men's mountain bike category, Norman Gillan, from Glasgow, will be hoping to make it four wins on the trot as

well as attempting to finally break the elusive record of two hours and 45 minutes.

Whatever the results, all competitors can expect a warm welcome in Kincaig where refreshments, masseurs and aromatherapists will be on hand to ease the aches and pains.