

A novice's A-Z of the SIPR

A - is for Arran. That beautiful hunk of granite (and presumably other rocks) sitting in the Clyde that plays host to the final leg of this three-headed running monster, if that's not mixing my metaphors too far. Best not to think about it too much as you stand waiting for the start in Oban as it that seems an awful long way off at that point.

B - is for bow-man. One of the new bits of sailing lingo I picked up over the weekend, and in our case, I'm talking about the irrepressible Mark Taylor, the Mr Motivator of our crew.

C- is for cramp; the enemy within and my arch nemesis in long distance runs, which decided to take its first bite on my calves soon after summiting Ben More. A combination of disrupted training, heat, distance and anything else I can think of, all contributing to making a long run back to Salen total purgatory. Thanks to Robin for sticking with me.

D- is for Doldrums; being becalmed- the enemy of sailing, and one of the potential big factors in the SIPR. We, along with much of the fleet, encountered this somewhere round the Mull of Kintyre. The prospect of a midnight start to our Arran run slipped later and later as our sailors manned the oars for hour after hour to keep us moving. What an effort!

E- is for endurance. The name of a famous sailing ship that had a rather unfortunate fate, but all of its crew did survived. Fortunately, the SIPR never gets that drastic and both our boat and crew finished in one piece. This is an endurance running event for sure, but no-one shouldn't underestimate the endurance required of the sailors. Basically, these guys don't sleep for a weekend.

F- is for food. No matter what time of day or night it is, whether you're running or sailing, you need to keep eating. Even if that's the last thing you want to do. You might find that your normal eating pattern is completely thrown out by this event. For instance, Robin and I found ourselves tearing into chilli and rice for breakfast at 9am on Sunday morning. It tasted great!

G- is for Goatfell. I've only ever raced up this hill, and must make a point of coming back to it and the other impressive peaks on Arran with more time to spare. This time the racing was a tad slower than the straight up and down hill race, which falls on the same weekend, but reaching its summit at sunrise on a clear, still May morning was something else, and required the shortest of pauses to take in the view. Rumours that there was a brief faff to try and get a photo are entirely base-less.

H- is for hoodie. What can I say? A great value, high quality, sustainable and actually rather cool bit of race merchandise. Note to other races; do race merch well, or just don't bother!

I- is for Islay. OK, its not on the SIPR route, but we did sailed past it, and I could just about see the cottage I'll be spend my summer holiday in. The hills on the island's east side also looked a reasonable size and it did briefly occur to me that the SIPR could maybe squeeze another island stop off after Jura*. (*Note to organisers..I'm only kidding. Don't do this!).

J- is for Jura. You forget how big it is until you have to sail the full length of it....its huge! The Paps occupy just a wee corner of it really. That's another trip I'll need to do without a race number pinned on.

K- is for kayak. The giant rubber banana that Mark bought and insisted Robin and I use for shuttling back and forward between the boat and land, rather than the more conventional dinghy chauffeuring service provided by sailors to their runners. Robin wasn't convinced, partly as a result of an unfortunate capsizing incident last year involving his fellow runner (sorry Mark Baugh!) in a similar craft, but Mark T. was having none of it. *"The kayak will save crucial minutes"* he said....*"but its a race of hours. It won't make much difference in the long run"* argued Robin. In the end we had to concede Mark was right, and we needed every second of the advantage that the banana gave us...who would have thought? Well, Mark, I suppose.

L- is for Lamlash. A beautiful sheltered bay to sail (or even row) into, enclosed by Holy Island, which I couldn't help but notice also had a reasonably sized hill on it.....just saying! My previous visits to Arran for the hill race had left me in no doubt that Brodick was considerably closer to Goatfell than Lamlash, but here we were facing a 19.5 mile run instead of a 10 miles run...what's that all about? Oh, and there's some painful extra climbing thrown in for good measure too, both there and back....Nice!

M- is for Mull. My favourite Hebridean island, but one that really tested our relationship with its near marathon of tarmac, track, trail, and hill, (refer back to **C**). One look at the map to see how far it is from Salen to Ben More would rule that out as an evening run in any other circumstances, but this is the SIPR, so you just get on with it. To be fair, short of sailing round to Loch na Keall, its hard to see a point that's any closer to the hill, but getting there could take days! Anyway, still love you, Mull xx.

N- is for Nic "French Nic" to be precise. So called, because he's, well, French. A top sailor and unflappable presence in the boat no matter what was going on or how much Mark shouted at him!

O- is for Oban. The start point for the madness. Oban harbour is a busy wee place, not least thanks to the frequent comings and goings of Calmac, so a short run to split up the pack and stagger the fleet of boats trying to squeeze out of the narrow harbour entrance seems on the face of it to be a good idea. I understand a wee loop round McCaig's Folly used to suffice, but here we were standing on the road outside the sailing club preparing for a 5 mile hilly trail run round Druim Mor. Like most teams, I'm sure, Robin and I had decided to take this one easy, in anticipation of the epic we would face on Mull

(see **M**) a few hours later, but also like most teams we seemed to be trying quite hard to gain a few meagre seconds that would probably end up costing minutes on Mull. Then its the game of “find the yacht” in the harbour...they all look the same to me, but Robin spotted Requiem moving towards us, and we were soon dragged on board. Only then do you feel like you’re really doing the SIPR.

P -is for Paps. These mountains need no introduction from me. Their reputation precedes them and there are three of them, which is a bit bizarre given their collective name and a bit painful from a running perspective. I don't need to say anything about how steep they are, how much rock and scree you need to go over and how tough the run out and back is, but one statistic from our run stayed with me, and that was that a single mile that started somewhere on the climb up Beinn Shiantaidh and finished well down its other side took over 30 minutes!!

Q- is for queasy, which was a close as I got to being sick on the SIPR. Previous SIPR-ists I knew couldn't wait to tell me how sick they were on the event, and given I couldn't accurately describe my stomach as cast-iron, I was prepared for the worst, but, whilst the weather wasn't necessarily great for sailing, it spared me. So, one sickness tablet and a wee lie down near Machrihanish and I was right as rain.

R (or the 3 R's in this case) -

Firstly **Requiem** - I can't claim to have roughed it at the SIPR. This boat was VERY comfortable and at the time of the SIPR was also for sale. I checked the price and she is just outside my budget, so I'm negotiating instead on the inflatable kayak. Thanks to its owner “The Major” for letting us borrow her.

Rowing - Did I mention that there was a lot of rowing involved this year? The 5hr stint by our guys to Lamlash was particularly impressive. When Robin and I had finished the Arran leg, I thought my work was done, but a few hours later I found myself on the rowing rota for the slow motion race to Troon, but more of that later.

Robin. My running partner who's patience I no doubt tested with my numerous fuffs and comfort breaks! I'd known Robin's reputation from his cycle racing career as a bit of a beast, but the handful of training runs we managed together suggested we were a good match, albeit after a bit of an injury lay-off I was sure he'd be murdering me. As it happened, he thought the opposite, so really put the miles in, the result of which was that he did murder me. To be fair, we worked well and other than my tribulations on Mull I didn't hold him up too much, but I could now easily pick out his backside in an identity parade.

S- is for Steve, our Oban based sailor who knew the Sound of Mull like the back of his hand. Steve was the baby-faced assassin who's steely nerves guided a quarter of a million pound of yacht into the narrowest of gaps

between Bequia and Troon harbour wall to give us a crucial advantage to secure 2nd place, overall and the all important “first in class”.

T - is for Troon. The finish line of this epic adventure. I had images in my head of a relaxed sail into the harbour and stroll up the harbourmaster's office to claim our place, whatever that might be. I had no idea how it was actually going to end. I remember watching Greg LeMond snatch the 1989 Tour de France from Laurent Fignon by just 8 seconds in the final time trial on the Champs Elysees. It didn't seem possible that a three weeks race could be decided by such a small margin, and as the 4 boat slow motion race across the Clyde neared its conclusion it was clear that after two days of sailing and running this was also going to be very tight. With a mile to go it was clear that Tri Mhor had got it, but 2nd place and 1st in the fast mon-hulls class was up for grabs, and this was the one that meant the most to our crew. Steve's F1 move into Troon Harbour (see **S**) set us up for the final just ahead of Bequia, so now it was down to Robin and me not to mess it up. Lowering ourselves into the kayak one last time and then hanging onto the side of the Requiem doing 7.5 knots was quite an experience. It was then a case of paddling like crazy to get to the pontoon and one final sprint up to the office, just 22 seconds ahead of Stuart and Catriona from Bequia. I have to say, it all felt a bit undignified to pip them like this as Stuart and Catriona had ran brilliantly all weekend and Bequia were so dogged on the water, but we owed it to our sailors to finish the job they had done, and its fair to say they were delighted when they saw us wave the champagne bottle in the air.

V- is for volunteers. An amazing band of people who make this event possible each year. It must be a logistical nightmare. It was great to see some familiar faces at the island kit checks and it was only afterwards I realised how long they would have to be on duty. THANK YOU SO MUCH TO EVERYONE INVOLVED WITH MAKING THE SIPR HAPPEN - TRULY AMAZING!!

W- is for Waverley (as Bequia was named during the event). We were in awe of Colin's human powered paddle-steamer as it chuntered past us on the way to Lamash and had to applaud the innovation. Wonder how many of these will be rigged up for next year?

X- is for the X-ray I got done on my left foot a few days after the event as I was convinced my big toe must be broken, it was so sore. It had given me some jip for a few weeks before the event, but was now like toothache... anyway, it doesn't seem to be broken and is not misbehaving quite as much, but I'm still none the wiser.

Y- is for Yellow Brick. Having tracked the SIPR last year on YB, I found it quite addictive watching the race unfold. The various sailing route options taken, seeing boats climb mountains and where everyone is morning noon and night. I'd mentioned the app to friends and family before the event, and was amazed how many followed it. I was getting a constant stream of messages on the way over to Troon on Sunday morning as they were gripped by how tight the race for the win was. Feedback from those watching was

that following the race on YB is great, but why don't all the boats go up the mountains? We inadvertently left our tracker on the boat at Jura, but carried it otherwise. Personally, I'd say that it should probably be mandatory for runners to carry them, then there's no issue and they seem a great piece of safety kit, but others will no doubt disagree, I'm sure.

Z - is for Zzzzzzzzz - and all the sleep I needed to recover from a most amazing weekend.

Grant Baxter, 2019



Robin and Grant before the off at Oban.



Sailing team of Mark, Steven and Nic guiding us out of Salen at sunset.



Party time!!!

