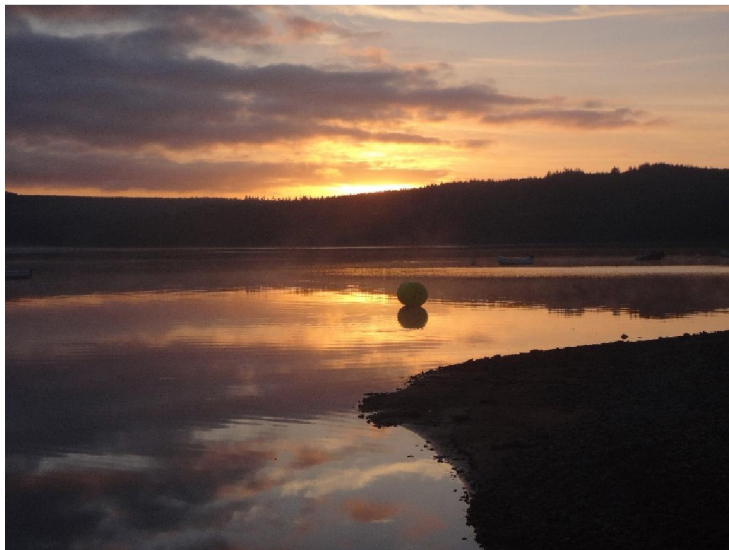


Kielder Iron Distance Race Report by Race Winner Rob Demetriou



Today was my biggest race to date: the Iron Distance Kielder Triathlon: 2.4-mile swim, 112 bike, 26.2 run. It was my first time to go this long; and it happened to be the first year of this event, too—low key and intimate with a small field of athletes.



I chose the race for its fabulous Northumberland setting within Kielder Forest, right up beside Hadrian's Wall and the Scottish hills. The race organiser, High Terrain Events, are known for their challenging races—lots of trail running, like the Scafell Pike marathon and off-road ultra runs of 100km. I could have chosen a flatter, faster course to chase a good time, but I like interesting courses and I'm not scared of hills! Plus I was keen to see how I'd hold up on a tough course (the half distance races I've

done were pretty flat). With a 6am start, I was up at 3am.

The swim was beautiful. Calm lake, blue sky, really friendly bunch of fellow athletes, all apprehensive about the long day ahead. I felt great in the water, smooth and holding drafts where I could. I had slight problems with bright sunlight making difficult sighting of the yellow buoys—never good to add extra distance (and time) from not swimming straight between buoys. The kayak safety crew were great in supporting us, though.



Pre-swim, I was worried I'd come out tired, but I was fine and eager for the bike. I didn't know at the time, again because sunlight obscured viewing, but I think I was 5th or 6th out. Good start.



The bike was incredibly scenic but hard-going. For the most part, we were up in the rolling hills across the border. It was impossible to find a comfortable rhythm with the constant up and down. I just focused on my cadence and power meter, not wanting to expend too much energy too early or kill myself for the long trail run. I kept the thought in my mind that today's effort was just about completion and experiencing the distance; there will be other opportunities to totally hammer myself

and really go for it speed-wise. The hills took their toll, reducing my usual average MPH. I came in at approx 6hrs 15. As I didn't know where I was in the swim, I was surprised to see only three bikes back in transition. On dismounting, race staff informed me I was 4th and around 3 minutes off the lead.



With jelly legs, I took off for the prospect of a messy marathon. Luckily my legs settled quickly into run mode and felt loads better. Out of the three sports, running is usually a strength (compared to others in my age-group)--yet it's the one I probably enjoy the least and train nowhere near as much.

Knowing the run was challenging, I wanted to hold right back for the first few miles. I crashed and burned badly in my first marathon from going too hard too soon. I went out at 3 hour 45 pace, which felt very easy. I saw the third-place guy ahead, he was pulling away. I told myself to run my race, don't chase, be patient, there's a long way to go and it was also warming up with the afternoon sun.



At about mile 7, I saw second place being passed by third. I soon passed him, too. He was actually first off the bike, but maybe now paying for his efforts. We had a quick chat and his breathing told me he was probably destined for slowing up a little more.

A few miles later, I saw the new second had started short walks—up the hills. I was

taking these slow; high cadence, short strides, making things more manageable. I caught him at the first Feed Station, where we learned first place was around 4 minutes ahead. I said he's pulling away—good luck to him.

There was a little cat-and-mouse with being in second and third for a while. I stuck to my plan to remain steady, hitting an easy pace. The other guy continued walking steep hills, then coming back at me on the downs and easier sections. We had a few chats--nice guy, but I sensed he was fading from the incessant up and downs. It's really not easy on the body and, again, impossible to find a comfortable rhythm. At mile 10, slowly, I pulled further and further away, reminding myself to keep speed down, keep it easy and manageable, get the fluid and calories in, be patient and wait to see how you're feeling in another 10 miles.



Unexpectedly, mile 11 brought my first glimpse at the leader--he was walking up a hill. I continued with my pacing, turning my legs over quicker but much shorter on the ups and trying to reduce the muscle-bruising impact of repeated downhills. At a water station, I caught him. I topped up my hand-held bottle and continued with him. On chatting, I could tell he was eager for the win. I let him know it was my first attempt at Iron distance and I was just focusing on getting around in one piece. We were both definitely aware that fatigue, hot conditions and the long run ahead was starting to hurt body and mind. I hoped that my pacing hadn't been too much for me to maintain over the next half of the marathon.



We ran together for almost ten miles. I commented it was amazing that over such a long distance, with such a small field, two competitors were side by side for so long. I seemed stronger on the ups, but he could run very well on the downs, catching and passing me on many occasions. At mile 17, we hit a mile stretch of flat tarmac, crossing an impressively large dam. Due to the

surface, I found myself able to pick up the pace. We continued to run together, but I got my first hint that I may soon be alone--I could hear his breathing becoming more laboured.

Back off-road, the hills resumed; I pulled away even further on the ups and he had to work harder on the downs to pull me back. We soon turned a corner and were confronted with the steepest hill yet; long too. Almost involuntarily, I let out 'That's crazy!' Up I went, slowly pulling away. I then heard from behind, something like, 'That's it, I'm done, I need to walk this one. Good luck to you.'

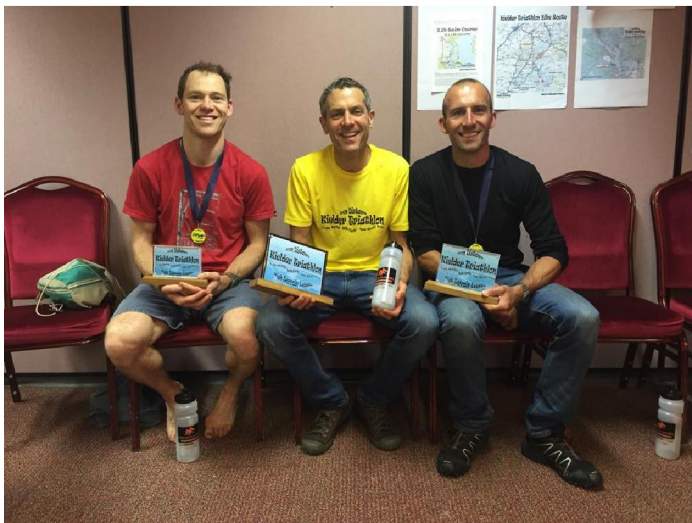
So mile 20, I was alone and in first place--Wow! Just 6 miles to go; just 6 more miles. I now couldn't resist the idea of winning my debut Iron race. In shorter course races, I've won my age-group a few times, but this would be my very first overall triathlon win.



I needed to keep it steady, keep being disciplined with the fluid and gels. It's so easy to forget this and risk blowing up. I knew those I'd passed were not going to get stronger, so I just had to keep going, run my race, my pace, and be smart. Then again, I was also aware that there could be someone back there who was, say, 15 mins behind on the bike, but capable of going under 3:30 for the marathon. If so, they would catch me! However, after the 2.4 swim, 112 bike, they'd have to be a pretty tasty runner on this course, so it'd be well deserved.

At mile 24 I tried to pick it up, but I soon felt a painful twinge in my abdomen and I reduced my effort. A few people were spectating and knew I was in the lead. Their support and encouragement was great—my body was very ready to stop but the situation was boosting me and carrying me through the discomfort.

At just over 25 miles I had a chance to look back a fair distance, a view behind of approximately quarter of a mile: no one there! I then reached another spectator who informed me I was practically home; she clapped loudly, giving huge praise at being first.



When I saw the finishing line, I looked behind again and couldn't believe it. I crossed the line and race organisers took my photo and congratulated me. It felt so great to complete my first Iron distance event. I was exhausted and hurting but totally ignoring my body! When second and third came through, we all offered congrats, handshakes and smiles. My total time was 11 hours 12mins. My watch made the run a 3hr 42 effort. Considering the terrain and heat, I'm chuffed with that.

All in all, a special day for me. Big efforts in my training are paying off. I'm improving and getting stronger. I'm very, very happy to have completed this race at Kielder. The High Terrain organisation and support was top class. And to actually win is an awesome feeling; the icing on a great big sweet cake.

Rob Demetriou