**Gaelforce West 2025 Race Report**

Adventure racing wasn't always my sport. I started running in my early twenties to get fit, but it wasn't until I was introduced to trail running that I truly got hooked. For many years, I marshalled at the Achill Roar, every year saying "next year". Regretfully, the Achill Roar is no longer running and if there's one event I'd love to see return, it's that one. Gaelforce West, just across Clew Bay, was also on my radar long before I ever owned a bike.

Fast-forward 10 years, a season of Sport events under my belt and now based in Westport-there was no reason not to sign up for Gaelforce West. In the lead-up to race day, nerves and excitement were building, especially knowing I'd be lining up beside Laura O'Driscoll, whose consistency and dominance in the Expert series I've long admired. Even on tired legs, I knew she'd be tough competition and hard to beat.

My race strategy was simple: don't blow up early. Pace the first run along the Western Way, stay relaxed, and build into the race. It's a beautiful route - 13.5km through the Inagh valley trail with the Maumturks and Twelve Bens to either side. I reached the kayak stage right where I wanted to be: feeling in control and about ten seconds behind Laura. The 1km kayak on Killary Fjord was a welcome rest for the legs and a chance to reset.

A short jog to Transition 1 followed and luck was on my side - my bike rack spot meant a clean exit onto the 36km bike leg which got me out ahead of Laura. Training buddy Gavin Hughes and I worked together to get out of sight quickly. In Leenane village, I locked eyes on a Team West jersey up ahead-Shane McGrath. There's my train ticket out of here. I buried myself to bridge the gap, knowing if I could hang on, I'd be pulled along. "Fuel now to go fast later" I reminded myself on the main road from Leenane in to Westport. A sharp left off the main road and a gradual climb up to the Croagh Patrick transition area - this hurt, and the cramps began to tease hello. Getting off the bike in one piece is always a win. I whispered a thank you to God, my grandparents, and anyone else who might've been keeping an eye.

No bike racks here - just throw the bike into the green field and head up Croagh Patrick. Misty, unforgiving, but familiar. Friendly faces cheered through the fog, keeping me moving. At the summit turnaround, I glanced at my watch-Laura was close. No time to dilly-dally. The descent was a balance of pushing without being reckless. One wrong step and it could all slip away. I made it down of the mountain still in the lead, equal parts focused and terrified. The final bike leg and cramps were now in full-blown conversation. I pleaded with my legs to hold it together for just 12km more.

Seeing Westport's Skate Park come into view was a genuine sight for sore eyes. I racked my bike and was cheered across the finish line by friends and supporters. Filled with relief, pride, and gratitude. This wasn't just another race - it was the end of a long wait.

Huge thanks to Adventure Racing Ireland-especially Barry and Loraine who were out on course all day -the Gaelforce organisers and volunteers, fellow competitors, and all my friends including the Westport Tri club and training mates who came out to support. The course tested me but reminded me exactly why I love this sport.
I think back to marshalling on the Atlantic Drive, watching the Achill Roar unfold from the side-lines. Back then, I kept saying "next year". So if you're sitting on the fence about signing up-don't wait. Whether it's your first adventure race or your first time going long, go for it. Don't let it be the one that gets away!


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