

## The Hardman Bantry Middle Distance by Aoife McEvoy

### The Stats:

Distance	1.9k Swim, 90k Bike , 21k Run
Location	Bantry Cork
Price	€135 excluding Medal and T shirt



### The sales pitch:

“Stunning, challenging course which takes in the very best of West Cork and the Sheep’s Head peninsula. With the start and finish set on the spectacular setting of Bantry airfield you will enjoy a swim in Bantry bay, a cycle through West Cork and the Mizen peninsula before taking in the Sheep’s Head peninsula. The run takes you along the Sheep’s Head again with the stunning backdrop of the Atlantic ocean for company.” <https://hardman.ie/races/hardman-bantry-bay-triathlon/>

### The T&C's:

50% refund up to the 30th June 2021, refunds paid on 15th July 2021

### The Promise:

A hilly course with marshals at every junction, a cycle water bottle provided on route and 2 water stations on the run where you bring your own bottle and refill it. There was supposed to be a 750ml cycle bottle in the transition bag to bring and if you paid extra for a medal and t-shirt these were supposed to be in your transition bag

### Race Report:

Covid has changed a lot about racing, some things for the better. Waivers were completed electronically so no need to arrive early or on the day before for registration. I stayed in Clonakilty as there was no accommodation in Bantry, this was a 40min drive on quiet roads and parked at my hotel 1mile from the start. It was great to park up and see numerous other racers buzzing about, that once, so familiar, feeling of anxiousness and excitement in the air was electric. I packed everything I needed into 1 rucksack and cycled down to the Airfield, I thought it was an extremely hilly 1 mile – I was naïve at this point.

At the entrance we had to show our TI license and identification. Numbers were all allocated a spot in transition and registration bags with our race stickers were hanging at our spots. There was a Hardman buff in the bag also. Everyone was quite friendly and chatty in transition and I met

a few people I knew but it was fantastic to see Michelle and Sharon appear before the start, such a treat to have the girls there, it really made the race day more enjoyable. I could hear the bell tinkle on the course before I saw them.

Transition was relaxed. There were 2 waves and the briefing was held at the entrance to the water. Everyone wore masks until they entered. The swim was clockwise keeping the buoys to your right, as the water was too choppy to keep the original planned route. The water was full of jelly fish but in the race mindset this didn't seem to bother anyone. Even though the sea was mild in comparison to all other sea swims I have competed in, it seemed very long, in particular to get to that last buoy and out – it was almost like we were getting pushed backwards.

I clocked 2.05km on the watch @ 42.45mins

Out onto the bike, the mount line to exit was possibly the only 100m flat on the whole route, the surface was full of gravel and I wasn't sure I'd get out without a puncture. And that was it..... the climbing began.

Possibly one of the nicest challenging cycle courses I have completed. There were relentless hills and beautiful towns. Ballydehob was our first town to pass, it was still early and the streets were empty, there was an eerie beauty about it. I passed Budd's which was already pre-booked for the next day's breakfast which did not disappoint. There were 2 right hand turns with no marshals, I did notice small Red Hardman signs mixed in with a host of B&B, hotel and tourist signs but really only made the 2<sup>nd</sup> turn as I spotted Alan Hewison down the road. Schull was next and already busy when we passed, full of early morning tourists getting breakfast and all the sailors and swimmers. They gave great cheers to anyone passing.

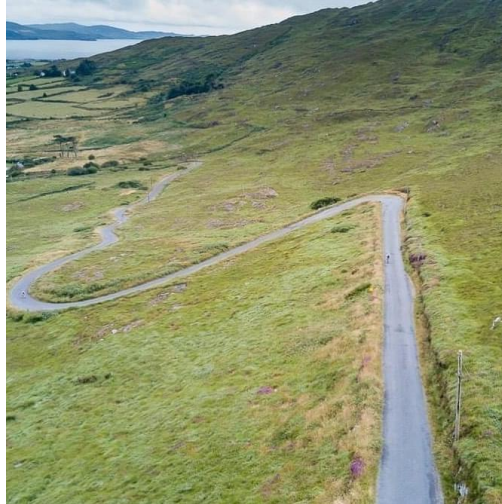
Around 50k there was a water stop at a very dangerous turn, almost back on yourself. Only for Sharon and Michelle were there, I knew there was a junction coming. The marshal, who was on her phone, directed me out to turn and get up the sharp short climb but also directed a jeep out, meaning I couldn't see to my right what was coming but I also had to cross the white line to turn. I was lucky nothing was coming, as it was so steep I couldn't get my foot out and the corner was



full of gravel.

We had been warned all along about the descent at 67k, that it was sharp, fast, a narrow road and the surface not as good as the rest. At this point all the roads had been brilliant, all the descents manageable and not as "dangerous" as the signs suggested so it felt a bit like "boy that cried wolf" when I was coming up to this and I had it in my head that as all the other climbs were manageable this would be fine too. I was in for a real land, at 63k looking up at 18% hairpin climb, on already tired legs. It was fantastic to get up it without coming off the bike. The road surface on the descent wasn't as good but really the severely sweaty palms from the climb were what gave me

trouble, my hands kept slipping each time I hit a rough patch.



What got me through most about going up was the promise, at the brief, of the “last 20k flat and fast” I thought this would be a great rest almost and a chance to spin the legs out. At 80km I was cursing the Race Director. Those hills continued right until we got on to the airfield. I misjudged how close we were and got my feet out too early, the struggle was very real, trying to hang onto the shoes on the last hill ! I had taken Panadol and salt tables before finishing as my stomach started cramping but they didn't work.

Bike 3.10hr 1,000 metre elevation



Off the bike and all seemed well. I ran out over the first hill and the inside of both my knees started to spasm and my stomach was in bits, taking the impact of running downhill. I had to stop to massage my knees which seemed to do the trick. Then straight into the first 5km steep climb of the day. I walked this and at the top got a refill of water, I brought a 250ml running bottle.

The downhill was a great relief until we hit about 6k and I could see all the hairpin climbs again. I thought I was hallucinating and seeing the bike route! At 13km we hit the second water stop and my now the sun was really shining and water was badly needed. I knew that 250ml for the remaining run would not be enough. I would have picked up any bottle off the ground if I came across one, Covid or not ! The water stop was on the left hand side of the road and many runners stayed running on this side with traffic which was quite dangerous. I ran from the last water stop and there was great support coming in to finish.



Run 2.:24hr 500m elevation.

It was very disappointing to see only a tank of water at the end, to fill your own bottle. We were in the middle of nowhere, the "COVID" excuse didn't cut it, as the medals and t-shirts were getting handed out of the boot of a car at the finish and not in the transition bag as stated in the brief ! Easily bags could have been made up for finishers to grab or added items to the transition bag, I would have given anything for a can of coke and snickers!

I also think for the price of the race, medals and/or a t- shirt or proper run bottles could have been included and there definitely should have been more water stops for that course and that weather. Would it have broken the bank to have a few gels or bananas? I think you really notice when a business is running a triathlon versus a club and I for one will try to ensure all TI races I enter are run by a club to support them next year.

### Conclusion

All in all, it's another part of the country I have got to see on pedals and foot. It is a beautiful part of the country. I am glad I did but I wouldn't be rushing back.

