

The Highland Fling – Saturday 28 April 2007

Race report by John Kynaston

What a great day! I woke about 4am and lay in bed thinking about the day ahead. There was a mixture of anticipation and concern that I'd run the race sensibly and get to the end in one piece.

I was up at 4.30am and in the next half an hour made sure Katrina, Emma and Hollie were up and ready to go. Drank some water and had a fruit bread with honey. Thankfully the car started all right and we were away for 5am.

We arrived at Milngavie at 5.30am and there were a number of runners and helpers all getting ready. I went over to register and chatted with Joe Sheridan in the queue. I'd run with Joe once in December.

I then took my bag to the car for Inversnaid. There were four checkpoints and there were cars going to each so you could leave a bag with them. Katrina, Emma & Hollie were my back up so I just left a bag for Inversnaid as it is very difficult get there.

Stevie Hands arrived about 5.45am on his way to work on his bike. Stevie is part of my back up team for the whw race. He was working until 12noon and then planned to ride up to Beinglas Farm to see me there.

At 5.50am there was a briefing. Basically the Highland Fling only has one rule. If you drop out you must inform the next checkpoint.

We then all wandered over to the start and right on 6am we were off. I was determined to set off nice and easy so found a spot in the middle of the runners and stayed there. After about 2miles I found myself just behind Ian Beattie so thought it would be a good idea to run just behind him. Then after another mile or so ran alongside and we spent the next couple of hours chatting.



Another runner Alan joined us and the three of us ran together to Drymen and then Balmaha. We went through 5miles in about 41mins which was a minute or two quicker than I'd planned but felt fine. At Beech Tree Inn Katrina, Emma & Hollie were waiting and gave us a cheer as we ran through. They looked cold but it was a great temperature to run in.

The route is fairly flat up to Drymen so we ran most of the way and I was feeling good. Alan had entered the whw for this year but he hasn't run further than a half marathon so Dario suggested he entered the fling this year with a view to entering the whw next year. He seemed to going well but was unsure of what pace he needs to run at for 53miles. The furthest he has run is 32miles. My longest training run is 42miles so Ian with 6 whw races and numerous other ultras was definitely the veteran among us.

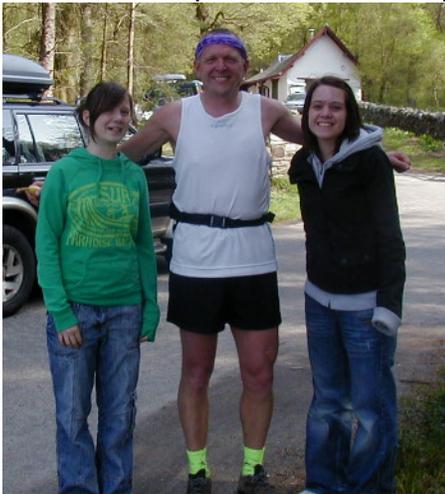
We went through 10miles in 1hr 26mins and arrived at Drymen in 1hr 50mins. I had predicted 2hrs

for this section but felt I'd ran it steady and wasn't too concerned. Katrina, Emma & Hollie were waiting with my fruit bread and banana and drinks. They did a superb job with the back up. I'd given them a list of the food I wanted at each stop and they had it ready which saved a lot of time. After a couple of minutes we were off again.

The run through the forest was fine and again we kept up a constant pace and chatted. Running with others certainly makes the time go quicker. The weather was superb and I was enjoying being on the route. We walked up Conic Hill and could see a few runners ahead. We had passed one or two since Drymen. The view from the top of Conic Hill is great. Loch Lomond opens out in front with Ben Lomond to the right.

We descended carefully off Conic Hill. We all agreed it was better to be cautious than slip and get hurt. We arrived at Balmaha in 3hrs 9mins. I had predicted 3hrs 25mins so I was a little ahead of my schedule but feeling good. At his check point I had took another fruit bread and tangerine. I also changed from my long top to a short sleeved top as it was starting to get hotter.

After a 5minute we were off again. Alan had a longer stop so it was just Ian and myself. After about 30mins of running Alan caught up with us. I was feeling good and felt I kept the same pace but I noticed both Ian and Alan were dropping back a bit. I didn't really want to go off on my own but also felt that I wasn't going any faster. So decided to keep it easy and if they dropped off then I'd go on alone. At one point I looked back and Ian was about 50yards behind and then a minute later I couldn't see him. I found out later he'd stopped to change his shirt and decided to let me go as he felt the pace was a little quicker than he wanted to go.



So I was on my own for the next 45mins into Rowardennan. I was still feeling good and arrived at Rowardennan in 1hr 25mins which was right on schedule and about 20mins ahead overall. At Rowardennan I had some pasta but it was hard to swallow much. I also took an energy gel and banana to eat on the way. I changed into a vest and was off.

Throughout the day I passed a number of walkers but didn't see many other runners. After about an hour I was passed by one runner who was going well and I passed one runner just before Inversnaid so I probably kept my position whatever that was. Hollie thought I was about 23rd at Balmaha.

I arrived at Inversnaid in 1hr 22mins (3mins ahead of prediction for that section). It was good to see Tim Downie who was marshalling there. I'd Tim briefly in December when he ran the whw from Fort William to Milngavie on the shortest day of the year. I had a rice pudding here and took a banana and tangerine to eat on the way.

This next section is definitely the hardest as it very difficult to run. My mantra was to say to myself 'run when you can, walk when you have to.' My legs were starting to hurt and lifting them up and over rocks was getting harder. I tried to keep a good pace going though and was still happy with my progress. I passed another couple of people on this section. One lady who said that her knee was really sore. This is a 10mile section and I'd given myself 2hr 20mins to cover it. At various points I felt I was behind that and at others thought I was ahead!

I had been receiving a number of text messages along the way from friends and family but there is no reception at the top of Loch Lomond. But once I came back into range my phone was bleeping again. John from Kilbarchan AAC was sending me regular updates on the Everton - Man Ut game. We were 1-0 up and then 2-0 and that lifted me!!

I ran into Beinglas farm and Stevie was there. He told me that Debbie Cox was about 5mins ahead so that was an encouragement. There was now about 3-4miles to the next checkpoint at Derrydarroch Farm and a good path so I tried to run as much as I could.



I went past another runner with a sore knee and then after another 20mins or so caught up with Debbie. She was suffering a bit with cramp as she didn't have enough water. I went past her then she went past me and then we ended up running into Derrydarroch together. I had done that section in 2hrs 20mins - right on schedule. This meant I was now 28mins ahead of 11hr pace with just (!!) 9miles to go. I drank some more here but didn't eat much. Changed my vest and just as I was about to go Ian Beattie arrived. He must have had a really good section and was looking good. As I set off I knew he'd be chasing me for the next 9miles!

Debbie was away first from the checkpoint and I knew I would be difficult to catch her once she'd had some food and drink. She is sub22hr whw runner after all.

In my mind I'd been viewing the race in three parts. Part 1 – warm up from Milngavie to Balmaha. Part 2 – Balmaha to Derrydarroch – the main core and Part 3 – the finale.

So here I was with 9miles to go in the finale. As I started I did a mental check. My feet were fine, head good – still felt positive. The main problem was my legs – they felt very tired! This was emphasised about 5mins into this section. I went through a gate and set off running down a slight downhill only to trip and go falling to the ground! Fortunately I fell on grass and didn't do any damage. I was more concerned I hadn't damaged my new watch!

I kept expecting Ian to catch up but as the minutes went on I decided if he caught me he caught me. There's not much I can do. I was determined not to look round which I kept to pretty well. Once you have gone under the underpass and been greeted by a family cheering the runners on there is a long undulating road. I could see Debbie ahead and another runner but I was finding it hard to run. The ground is uneven and every time there was an incline I walked. On one occasion when I did run I tripped again. This time onto stony ground. I banged my elbow and grazed my leg but again not too bad. I will have to be careful though as it would be so easy to do more damage!

Near the top of the hill before you turn into the forest I was caught by a runner. I was fully expecting it to be Ian but it wasn't. Not sure who it was but he was going well. Running steadily up the hill. You may have gathered by now that I was thinking a lot about Ian catching me! When we were running over Conic Hill I'd said to Ian 'please don't feel you have to wait for me if you are going well.' Ian had said the same for me if I was going well. But he did say that if we were still together with a few miles to go then he would be racing me for all he was worth and would expect

me to do the same! So I had this thought in my mind of being caught with a few miles to go and whether I could manage a sprint finish!!

I ran as much as I could through the forest but there are a number of steep uphill and steep downhill and both were hurting my legs. I was trying to make out what time I needed to do to make 10hrs 30mins. With an hour to go I realised it would be difficult to do that so I settled on 10hrs 40mins as being a realistic goal. I thought I'd need to be at St Fillans with 3 miles to go at 10hrs giving me 40mins for the last 3miles.

It was good to get down out of the forest over the road and the river and along the tarmac for half a mile and then reach the 50mile mark. 3 miles to go and right on 10hrs. I caught a runner after a mile or so and ran as much as I could. I was hoping I was going at 12mins a mile. Finally Tyndrum came into view and I realised Ian was not going to catch me!



I went past the train station, through the gate down the path over the stream and could see the finish. I could see Stevie, Katrina, Emma & Hollie cheering me on. I must admit I filled up a bit but held it together to finish looking good. Well I felt I looked good. Seeing the photos I look as though I've just run 53miles!!

I did the final section in 2hrs which was just 5mins slower than schedule for an overall time of 10hrs 36mins 10secs well inside my 11hr goal.

The race official said that he thought I'd finished 13th or 14th which I was very pleased with as over 70 started. After a couple of minutes I was awarded my medal and bottle of champagne. As I don't drink I'll give that away!

Ian came in a few minutes later. Not sure of his exact time. We'll have to wait for the results to be posted on the web site. Ian said that he'd had some cramps on that section.



I rang John McLaughlin as he had sent a text saying he was waiting to hear how I'd got on. He was really encouraging so I'm glad I rang.

We waited around for half an hour or so before buying ice cream and setting off home. I sent a text to all those who had sent a text on the way letting them know my time.

We arrived home about 6.45pm. I had a shower and then a soak in the bath before sitting down to a nice meal. I was in bed by 10.30pm and looking forward to a good sleep.