

# West Highland Way Race

Saturday 23 June 2007

Race Tale by John Kynaston

## Friday 22 June - the day before the race

One of things about this race is that it starts at 1am so working out what to do regarding sleep was a puzzle I wasn't sure about. I went to bed around midnight on Thursday night hoping to sleep in as long as possible. I even bought a blind fold and ear plugs to try and help but I still woke at 5.30am. I dozed on and off until 9ish and then got up. I spent the morning getting everything ready. After lunch I went for a stroll to Morrison's and then went to bed at 3.30pm to try and sleep. I dozed for an hour or so but then was up for a meal and final countdown. Our friend Renita came for tea so it was good to chat about the race ahead. At 7pm Stevie and Donald came round to check on any final instructions and to make sure I had everything ready and they knew where it was. The plan was for them to take over from Katrina and our girls at Beinglas Farm at 9.30am. They stayed for an hour or so and we chatted about the day ahead. They seemed as nervous as me! They have really taken their role very seriously and were so keen to help me as much as possible. As they left I wondered what state I'd be in when I saw them next!! Jo came in at 9.30pm from work and gave me a final massage before we set off at 10.45pm to Milngavie .... the race was getting closer. My back-up for the first part of the race was Katrina, my wife, and our four daughters Jo, Emma, Laura and Hollie. Plus Dougie (Jo's boyfriend). We set off in the VW transporter van we'd borrowed for the weekend. The journey to Milngavie was uneventful, the atmosphere great but I was feeling a little apprehensive. Ready to get going but nervous about what I was to face.

## Milngavie - 11.15pm

We arrived at Milngavie Railway Station Car Park at 11.15am where Renita met us. The next hour or so went very quickly meeting people, going to the registration and changing into my running gear. It was good to see many friends who I'd met on various training runs and others who I'd not met yet but been in touch with through this blog and whw race forum. Ian & Rachel McCuaig brought over two t-shirts with Renita's poem '95 Reasons' printed on so that was great.

We interviewed Ian Beattie for my video diary. At the end of his 'piece' he wished everyone all the best and finished by saying he hoped I had a great race but was 30secs behind him! Since I first met Ian I have always felt that he was just a bit quicker and stronger runner than me. On our training runs he has always finished better so I was surprised to beat him in the Highland Fling Race. We had a great battle that day and I suspect that Ian would have caught me if he hadn't had cramps. But I knew he was keen to put that result right. My good friend John from Kilbarchan had warned against trying to race Ian. Just let him go and run your own race. So that is what I planned to do. Also I knew Ian was aiming to beat his personal best of 21hrs 39mins which was well ahead of any schedule I was aiming for!

At 12.30am we headed over to the church for the pre-race briefing. Unfortunately by the time we got there there was no room so I listened from the corridor but didn't hear much. Ian was standing nearby and gave us his version of what Dario was saying until someone told him to be quiet because they couldn't hear Dario!

After the briefing I headed over to the van, took my bug bag, took off my hoody and walked over to



the start. It felt incredible that after 8 months of planning, preparing and training for the race it was about to start. I was determined to go off slowly and see how things developed. I wished a number of runners all the best including Peter Duggan who I'd run with a couple of times. Peter is a strong runner who I knew should finish ahead of me but his strategy is to take it very easy to Balmaha and then catch runners from there on. So I asked him when was he going to pass me? He replied somewhere between Balmaha and Fort William! I also had a quick chat with Joe Sheridan. He has trained so well for this race and I knew he would be going well.

### **Milngavie to Drymen (12.5miles) in 1hr 59mins (plus 2min stop)**

There was quite a crowd of supporters ready for the start and then suddenly it was 1am and we were off. I'd arranged with Emma to run up the right hand side of the steps so she could get a video of me starting. Great preparation or what??

The first five minutes were strange in that here we were actually running the whw race. A race I'd been thinking about and planning for was now here. I ran along with a number of folk and chatted a bit. I met Keith Hughes, the famous Australian, as well as others who I heard about.

The group I was running with took a slight wrong turn through Mugdock Wood but soon reappeared on the right path. On my night run three before I'd taken a number of check points in the first 10miles just to make sure I wasn't going too fast early on. I was bang on target for the end of the woods where the route goes left down the road for 100yards and right. At that point I joined Aileen who had run with us on that night run. We ran together for the next 30mins or so chatting away. We both agreed that it was a lot darker than it had been three weeks ago. I was so grateful for the head torch that my friend Ernie from church had lent to me. It has two options -either 4 small lights giving a wide beam or a very strong single beam. I used the single beam most of the time and it was excellent really lighting up the path.

By the time I got on to the long straight path past Glengoyne Distillery I was running on my own but catching people. Not too far before Beech Tree I caught up with David Atkins and we chatted together for a bit. I'd not met David before but we'd emailed a few times. David had ran really well in the Fling finishing in 9hrs 44mins. I remembered him as he was the only person older than me ahead of me! I was thinking I'd better be careful if I'm going past him at this early stage. It was great running through Beech Tree. I'd arranged with my team that I'd put my head torch on to flashing so they knew it was me coming. I gave them a wave as I went past.

The next section through to Gartness I ran on my own but enjoying the feeling of running without pain. I'd been so concerned before the race that my right shin was going to hurt for the whole race. I'd resigned myself to having to run with the constant pain. After about 20mins I felt it and thought here goes. But amazingly it went away never to return (until after I'd finished). So here I was running pain free and it felt so good!

I arrived at Gartness in 1hr 34mins - again right on target. The next 2miles are along the road and

there was the possibility of a slight diversion due to the road subsiding. In the end Dario and two other marshals were there to guide us through safely so it was no problem. I was passed by one runner as we approached Drymen but then he stopped for a wee so I entered the field before Drymen just ahead. I put my torch onto flashing again to let my team know I was on my way in. I had asked that they had my Terroc shoes ready in case I wanted to change for Conic Hill but my Asics Culumbus were feeling good so decided to keep going. I only stopped for 2mins to change water bottles and grab some food. It was good to see my team as they all looked happy and enjoying themselves in the middle of the night!

### **Drymen to Balmaha (7miles) in 1hr 29mins (plus 3min stop)**

#### **Overall 19.5miles in 3hrs 30mins**

I ate a rice pudding as I left Drymen. It was a lot darker than I thought it would be at this point so I kept my head torch. I had thought of swapping it for a lighter one. The guy who had passed me just before Drymen went past me again and he ran up the hill from the road so I let him go. I passed a couple of people on the way up to the Forest.

I was feeling good and felt I was going at a steady pace, walking where I needed to, drinking plenty and eating every half an hour or so. I came to the part of the course where you turn left, run 25yards on the road and then turn right into the car park and through Garadhban Forest. There were a number of people there supporting but suddenly one of them said there is a diversion, keep on running down the road and turn right at the bottom. I continued down the road wondering what was going on. I ran for a few minutes hoping that I wasn't going to have to go back. A car came up the road and the passenger shouted 'Have you been told to come down here?' That didn't feel me with confidence either but just as I was wondering about what to do I saw a runner come up the hill and we saw the path to the right with a large yellow diversion sign. The runner was Colin who had missed the sign and ran about half a mile down the hill, then ran back up. I felt really sorry for him as he must have lost at least 10-15mins. We ran together through the forest and eventually we were back onto the proper path. I was very grateful to have someone to run with through that bit as it was very disconcerting to not be totally sure you are on the right route so early in the race.

I ran with Colin for the next few miles. The weather was getting worse with the mist all around but it wasn't too cold. Colin was a little quicker on the way down but once we'd crossed the bridge and started walking up the hill I was in front and stayed there all the way up. After 10mins of strong walking I saw a runner ahead so kept going until I caught him. To my amazement it was Ian! I assumed I wouldn't see him until the end knowing how well he was running. He said that he was going through a tough patch. He said he arrived at Drymen in 1hr 55mins which was a little quicker than he planned. Also the diversion had unsettled him. Ian likes to compare all his times and splits and so he was thinking that the diversion had put his times out. Anyway we walked/ran together into Balmaha. We passed the scouts who were out to see the sun rise. I had been looking forward to seeing the sun coming up over Conic Hill but the mist and cloud put paid to that.

As I arrived into the forest just above Balmaha my mobile phone rang and it was a friend from church. May had woken early so decided to ring me at 4.30am in the morning! It was sop strange chatting on the phone in the middle of the night running the whw race.

I arrived at Balmaha in 3hrs 29mins which was 6mins ahead of schedule. I started looking for the

check point but was told there isn't one at Balmaha. Katrina showed me where the van was so ran over to that. Time for a change of top from my long sleeved one to a short sleeved top. Took some more food and drinks and set off after a break of 3mins.

### **Balmaha to Rowardennan (7.5miles) in 1hr 29mins (plus 4min rest)**

#### **Overall 27miles in 5hrs 2mins**

As I left my team I felt the outside of my left knee. I was limping for a number of paces but once I started walking then running it was fine again. From that point on I knew I wouldn't be able to stop for very long at any of the checkpoints as it would seize up again. This didn't concern me too much as it wasn't hurting when I kept moving which is the main thing. I saw Ian with his back up at the far end of the car park. I fully expected to see him again in the not too distant future!

I like this next section and continued running steadily. David Atkin caught up and we chatted for a bit then I was on my own again as he slowed down. It was fully light by now and it was good to run without the head torch. The temperature was just right and everything was going according to plan. The next hour and half passed uneventfully. I think I passed a couple of runners and saw a few spectators. I continued to eat and drink as much as I could and stay at a steady pace. I was working really hard at just thinking about the next stop rather than what was coming way ahead. So for this section the only thing I was concentrating on was getting to Rowardennan feeling as good as I could.

I arrived at Rowardennan right on target for that section 1hr 29mins. Katrina and the team were ready with a towel, change of top, food and drinks. I did a quick video clip, rub down, took my food and drink and I was off again.

### **Rowardennan to Inversnaid (7miles) in 1hr 29mins**

#### **Overall 34miles in 6hrs 33mins**

As I was about to leave Rowardennan Mark Collins, who I run with a couple of times, was also leaving and said do you want to go together. As we set off my knee was sore again but very quickly eased as I walked then ran. We were joined by David Atkins and ran together. After 10mins or so there is a long up hill so Mark and I ran but David continued running. Over the next hour or so we joined up, separated joined up again. It felt a bit like a yoyo. David and Mark both stopped for a toilet break and I was left in the front on my own. I kept going and assumed they would soon enough catch me.

At this point I started my mental checks. As I ran along I would do a mental check on how I was feeling. I would start with my head asking 'How are you doing eating, drinking, thinking?' before doing the same for my shoulders, back, groin, thighs, calves, shin, feet asking 'How are they feeling?' Everything seemed to be fine but I knew my knee would seize up if I stopped for too long. Amazingly my shin was fine and my groin wasn't sore at all. So overall I was feeling good and I was enjoying the race and the tremendous scenery.

I ran into Inversnaid ahead of Mark and David and another runner who I'd passed a few minutes before the check point. I'd left a bag for Inversnaid as it is very difficult for back up to get there. I only stopped for a minute and then I was off again. I walked for a few minutes eating and drinking but keeping going.

## **Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm (7miles) in 1hr 41mins**

### **Overall 41miles in 8hrs 15mins**

I was on my own for the next hour or so and knew I was ahead of my schedule and so didn't need to try and push. So I ran where I could and walked where I had to. It was at this point that I looked at my sub 23hr race schedule that I'd worked out and given to my back up teams. It said that I was due in to Beinglas Farm at 10.30am (9hrs 30mins running) but it was only 7.30am and so if I took the 1hr 45mins planned then I'd be there by 9.15am. I couldn't understand why I was 1hr 15mins ahead of my schedule but I was concerned because I'd told my back up team (plus friends who were coming to watch and support me) that I wouldn't be there before 10.30am. Plus Katrina was going to hand over my boxes to Donald & Stevie at Drovers in at 9.30am. So at this rate I'd get to Beinglas Farm and no-one would be there. So I rang Donald at 7.40am explaining I would be early. They were just going over the Erskine Bridge so should make it. I also asked them to ring Katrina and see if they could make it to Beinglas Farm by 9am.

Since finishing the race I have discovered that my schedule times were all wrong. I had added up the times wrong on my plan so it should have read Beinglas Farm by 9.45am but I had it 10.30am. In reality I was there at 9.15am so I was 30mins ahead of my sub 23hr schedule but not the 1hr 15mins ahead as I thought. Another lesson to learn! Learn how to add up!!!!

About 4miles out of Beinglas Mark caught me up and we ran in to Beinglas together. Mark had suffered a bit with cramps so I gave him some of my succed tablets to help him. This was Mark's first attempt at the whw race. His Dad has run it and was part of his back up team. I also discovered later that Mark was the subject of a short documentary made by BBC Scotland but being the modest guy he is he didn't mention it!



So we started off from Rowardennan together and ran into Beinglas together but only actually ran together for about 45mins out of the 3hrs 9mins. The whw race is that short of race. You have good times and bad times. That is why is so difficult to run with someone because even if you end up with the same time you will do in a very different way.

As I ran into Beinglas it was great to see Katrina, Jo, Emma, Laura, Hollie, Dougie plus Donald & Stevie plus John McLaughlin. They had their midgie nets on and it was clear they were battling with them. They never bothered me but I didn't hand around. Again time for a quick towel down, change of top to a vest, grab some food and drink and off again.

## **Beinglas Farm to Auchtertyre (9miles) in 2hrs 17mins (plus 2min stop)**

### **Overall 50miles in 10hrs 36mins**

I set off with Mark for the three miles to Derrdaroch and then on to Auchtertyre. After the rough terrain of the path along Loch Lomond it was good to be to run/walk on this stretch of the route. It is undulating so a combination of walking and running. I stayed with Mark and we chatted and encouraged each other along the way. One topic of conversation was 'where was Ian?' We reckoned that he would be not too far behind us and we were expecting him to be with us at some

point. My team had given me quite a bit of food at Beinglas Farm. Some of it I tried to eat but some I knew I wouldn't be able to so I planned to ditch some of it at Derrardaroch. Donald met me quarter of a mile before the checkpoint and gave me some pasta to eat as we walked in. I was not stopping at Derrydaroch as we'd only just stopped at Beinglas Farm. So it was a quick stop to sort out my bag and off again. Stevie walked with me for half a mile or so as I ate a rice pudding and yoghurt. Mark had stopped at the checkpoint but soon caught up again as we crossed the A82 and we continued to run together along Glen Falloch valley and into the Forest above Crianlarich. In the Fling this was the stretch where I fell twice and found really tough. This time I was still feeling all right. I was starting to feel my thighs but I was running on the flat and downhill without a problem. It was good to get into the forest but there a lot of hills both up and down through this section so it there is a lot of changes from walking as hard as possible uphill to trying to run as easily as possible downhill.

I enjoyed having Mark for company during this part of the race and we continued our conversation of 'where is Ian?' Talking of Ian I remembered during our two day run Ian had said you know when you've come to the final uphill when you reach a certain point but I couldn't remember what that point was! So that was a lot of use. Eventually we did reach a signpost and I remembered that was the point! It was good to have the final down hill to the road.

At the road we were able to get across without too much wait. There were a small crowd of people cheering us on. I said to Mark it amazing what an encouragement a small group of people clapping and shouting 'well done' 'keep going' 'you'll looking great' can do to your morale. So anyone reading this who sees runners in a race do encourage them!



We crossed the field, over the bridge, along the tarmac road, past the St Fillian's Chapel and headed towards Auchtertyre which is just over half way. We met George (Ian's support runner) who was waiting for Ian to arrive. Again Donald came out to meet me with a bowl of pasta. Also John, Neal and Michael from Kilbarchan were waiting cheering me on. As we arrived Mark said that he was stopping here for a while to recoup but I was keeping going so we wished each other all the best.

Waiting at this checkpoint were friends Jay and Susan as well as my family and Stevie and Donald. They all watched on as I had a quick towel down, changed vest and was fed more pasta by Donald. I was still aware my

knee would seize up if I stopped too long so quickly grabbed my replenished bag and set off again. Stevie walked with me as I ate another rice pudding and creme caramel.

### **Auchtertyre to Bridge of Orchy (9miles) in 1hr 55mins (plus 1min stop) Overall 59miles in 12hrs 33mins**

Just as I walked away from Auchtertyre I got the answer to our question 'where is Ian?' He came running in as I left. I gave a shout to Alison (Ian's wife) who was getting everything ready for Ian. So I knew within the next section I would be seeing more of Ian. I ran out with another runner and we chatted for a few minutes. I asked him what time he was aiming for and he said sub 25hrs so

he had plenty in reserve as we were on a target well under that. I reckon that at Auchtertyre I was 34mins under my sub 23hr schedule.

Once we crossed the road and headed towards Tyndrum I was on my own for the first time for a while and enjoyed the solitude. I did my mental check and still felt good overall though I was feeling my thighs and knew that the 43miles ahead were going to be tough.

Just before reaching Tyndrum I was caught by a runner called Tim (I think). He had caught Mark and I on the way into Beinglas but we didn't see him again so I'm not sure if I was ahead or behind. Anyway the first thing he said to me was 'I feel I know you really well' He has been reading my blog! Tim had done the Marathon de Sables which is a 6 day / 151 mile endurance race across the Sahara Desert in Morocco last year but he said this race is tougher!! We ran into Tyndrum together. Donald took a couple of photos. He had his midgie net on so they must have been out in force there as well.

It was starting to rain so Stevie gave me my jacket as I crossed the road by the Green Welly. I carried it but never used in the end as the rain didn't last long. John, Neal and Michael gave a quick cheer as I headed up the hill out of Tyndrum.

Tim ran up that hill and within a few minutes he was away in the distance. I would say that this was one of my low points in the race. I think it was a combination of things. Firstly as I crossed the finish line of the Highland Fling I thought that from now on it is new territory. I had never run this far in one go before. This is what I'd been preparing for and it wasn't a great feeling knowing that I had 42miles to go. Secondly I knew that Ian was catching behind me and would no doubt be running strongly on this section as I knew he has often said it is one of his favourites. So I was really finding it hard to run. I expected to walk the up hills but found it hard to get going on the flat and down hills.

After about 45mins of plodding along I was conscious of a runner catching up. I try as much as possible not to look behind as it can be quite demoralising plus for the runner catching you it gives them a boost!

After I crossed under the railway line (just after 54miles) and onto a long downhill section I ate some grapes and tried to hang in there but it was hard. Then to make it worse Ian comes running past looking strong. We exchange a few words 'well done John, keep going' and he was away .... 20 ... 30 .... 40 yards. I suddenly said to myself 'is that it ... are you going to let him run past you without even a fight?' I don't know whether it was sheer pride or the grapes kicking in but I started running and felt so much better. Within a few minutes I'd caught Ian and we ran for a bit together. Ian said that he was with Mark at Tyndrum but he wanted to run on his own. Whether it was a hint to me or not I wasn't sure but I pushed on and found myself opening a gap from Ian. No doubt he had worked really hard to catch me. I then walked for a bit and Ian caught me again and went ahead. I ran and caught him. Back to the yoyo!!

By now we were approaching Bridge of Orchy and we were catching Tim (in the white hat) who had been way ahead and another runner. With them in my sight I set off and caught them and just keep running into Bridge of Orchy leaving the three of them in my wake! John, Neal and Michael had walked up the hill to see me in. I met Donald just before the train station and then saw Katrina and the van parked (Dougie and Laura were catching the 1.30pm train back to Glasgow). Donald



had some pasta ready but I wanted to enjoy this feeling of running strongly so said I was going to run into the checkpoint and then eat on the way out.

So I had covered the last 9miles in 1hr 55mins compared to my schedule of 2hrs but it was the way I'd done it that surprised me. The first 45mins were so tough and I wondered whether I'd run again and the last 30mins I ran as if I was on a 10mile training run. Looking back on what happened from here on in I probably went too fast at this point!

Stevie was waiting at the checkpoint. I was very aware of my knee at this point so only stopped for 1min. Just enough time to grab my drinks and towel down.

### **Bridge of Orchy to Kingshouse (13miles) in 2hrs 46mins (plus 2min stop) Overall 72miles in 15hrs 20mins)**

Stevie walked with me up the hill out of Bridge of Orchy as I ate some more pasta and a rice pudding. I knew I had 35miles to go and was confident that I was going to finish this race. I was still 47mins ahead of sub 23hr schedule so even if I slowed as I felt I may well do I was still on for a sub 23hrs. I was on my own for the next 2miles as Ian must have had a longer stop at Bridge of Orchy. I have done this section to Inveroran Hotel twice but I couldn't remember much of it at all. Maybe because both times I've been running with a group and having been early in the training run I was chatting to folk and hadn't taken much in. I walked all the way up the hill and then once I got over the top I could see the Hotel and at that point realised that going downhill was going to be very hard. My quads were burning and every step down was so sore. I couldn't even think about running so very gingerly made my way down the hill. Stevie met me about half a miles from the hotel and said that Donald was going to run with me over Rannoch Moor. I tried to protest as our plan was for Stevie to run from Kingshouse and Donald from Kinlochleven. But by the time I'd got to the Hotel and saw Donald with his kit on ready to run I realised I needed company and support.

We walked for a bit down the road with Donald encouraging me on how well I'd done so far and how proud he was of me. Then he suggested we run which we did. We crossed the style at Victoria Bridge and started the long gradual climb up to Rannoch Moor. Half way up the hill Donald said that he could see Ian running up the hill behind us. He had almost caught us by the top of the hill. Donald suggested that we make it hard for Ian to get past. We both knew that he was going to pass us but we decided he would have to work for it!! So every downhill or flat Donald gently got me running. Very quickly the gap between us lengthened. Then we'd walk the uphill and the gap reduced. Then we'd run and the gap lengthened again. This happened over the next 45mins or so. Donald had the theory that Ian was running at a very constant pace ideal for ultra running whereas I had two paces. Pace 1 - walking which was slower than Ian's constant pace and Pace 2 - running which was faster than Ian's constant pace. Donald was suggesting that I need to learn how to run slowly but for longer. Something else to remember and practise for next year! Anyway the result of all this was that I was still ahead of Ian! At one point Ian shouted out for help. I carried on and Donald went back to see if he could help. Ian needed water and asked to go into the stream to refill his water bottle.



Finally we crossed came over the top of the hill and could see Kingshouse. We passed Blackrock Cottage and enjoyed the cheers of the watching spectators and ran along the road into Kingshouse with Ian still behind. We passed George who was waiting for Ian. I think he was surprised to see me still in front of Ian (so was I!!). John, Michael and Neal encouraged us as we passed. I was now exactly 1hr ahead of my sub 23hr schedule but I wasn't thinking of anything but trying to beat 23hrs. I knew the next 23miles were going to be really tough, my thighs were killing me and it was all about being mentally tough enough to complete the race. Plus Ian still had to get past me!

Once again a very quick stop at this checkpoint. My knee was fine if I kept walking but as soon as I stopped I could feel it so didn't want to risk it seizing up completely. Katrina and the family were not here but I

didn't have the energy to wonder where they were! I found out that they missed the turn into the Hotel and just carried on to Fort William as planned to put up the tent, get something to eat and be at the finish.

### **Kingshouse to Kinlochleven (8miles) in 2hrs 56mins (plus 1min stop) Overall 80miles in 18hrs 18mins**

I left Kingshouse on my own leaving Donald and Stevie to sort out what food I needed. I was still wearing my vest and hoped that Stevie would bring a long sleeved top with him as it was starting to get colder. I walked along the road trying to keep my knee from seizing up. As I did I was calculating my times. Worst case scenario - it is now 4.20pm (15hrs 20mins running time) if I take 3hrs to Kinlochleven, 2hrs to Lundavra and 2hrs to Fort William then that is 7hrs. So 4.20pm plus 7hrs equals 11.20pm which means 22hrs 20mins finishing time. So that became my goal. I felt I could achieve that even if I had to walk the majority of the way. So that worst case scenario still gave me 40mins extra to do a sub 23hrs. So even though I was suffering I still had a clear goal to motivate me.

After 5mins or so of walking Stevie caught me up with food to eat. I think it was more pasta and a yoghurt but I can't be sure. We left the road and headed up the track continuing to walk. Stevie was skipping along full of life whereas I was plodding to put it kindly. As we headed back down the road Ian and his support runner George caught us running well. I tried to respond and followed them along the path but I had little left so very quickly they were away never to be seen again (well not until the prize giving the next day!). It was a great battle while it lasted!! Ian went on to record a new personal best of 21hrs 11mins. I was so pleased for him as I know his main goal for this year was to record a pb in the whw race. Well done Ian.

Donald met us at Altnafeadh at the foot of the climb to Devil's staircase. I had changed into a long sleeved top by now and didn't need anything else unless I could have Stevie's legs!! I had arranged with Stevie that I would like to lead the climb so I could set my own pace but after a few minutes I asked Stevie to lead and I would try and hang on to him. We made a steady pace up the climb but Ian and George were disappearing quickly. Eventually we made the top and started the

descent. It was then that all my fears came to pass. Every step down was so painful. I was finding it so hard to stretch out. I knew I had a long downhill walk to Kinlochleven and then another long downhill to Fort William so I would be using everyone of those extra 40mins I had calculated I had. We also tried rubbing my thighs to break up the lactic acid. Normally I have a little flabby bits under my thighs but they were absolutely rock hard!

You may have wondered whether I have just missed out mentioning stopping for a wee or poo. But the reason I've not mentioned it is because I didn't have a wee or a poo until this point! So I went almost 17hrs without a wee or poo. But once I needed one I really needed one. I won't go into details but suffice to say it took quite a few bits of bracken to cover it!! Also my wee was bright orange - a sure sign that I had not drunk enough though I thought I had.

After 10mins of painful downhill walking I suggested to Stevie I walk backwards. So holding Stevie's arm as a guide I walked backward down the hill on and off for the next mile or so. By the time we got to the flatter bit I was feeling slightly easier and managed to walk all the way into Kinlochleven without having to walk backwards again. We were passed by a few runners and I knew that we would be losing places from now on. At Kingshouse I think I was 13th but to be honest my position wasn't the thing that motivated me. I didn't really care what position I finished in. My time was the thing that kept me going. I really wanted to break 23hrs and felt I had run well enough until now to deserve that.

Once we arrived in Kinlochleven Stevie suggested trying to run to see how it felt but after 50 strides or so I knew it was foolish to try. I felt I could keep walking at a good pace but if I tried to run too much I could end up not even being able to walk.

It was good to see Donald ready. I literally stopped long enough to replace water bottles and I was off again. 15miles to go .... and 4hrs 42mins to do it. Still possible? YES! I remember Ian saying that he walked from Kinlochleven to Fort William one year in 4hrs.

### **Kinlochleven to Lundavra (8miles) in 2hrs 22mins (no stop) Overall 88miles in 20hrs 41mins**

Donald caught me up by the time we turned off the road and started climbing up the hill. At least on the up hills my thighs weren't sore but I was feeling the effects of being on my feet for over

20hrs. It was a long climb. Donald walked behind and fed me some food but said let's get to the top and then we'll aim to get more food inside me. It was a long tough climb but I was aware that I was going to find the downhill to Fort William hard so I needed to go as fast as I could on the way up to compensate.



With Donald encouraging me along we reached the top of the climb and onto the Old Military Road that goes over Lairigmor. This road is a good path but quite rocky and undulates for mile after mile. You can see the route winding ahead for ages. On a good training run I have ran this road from the top of the hill to the forest into Lunavra in about an hour but today I knew it was going to be hard going and a real heads down lets get this

done.

This is where Donald came into his own as a support runner. After unsuccessfully trying to see if I could run at all he set himself the target of trying to make sure I ate as much as I could. Donald ever since we started planning this weeks ago he had been concerned about my food intact. He knew from the Fling that I felt I hadn't eaten enough and so wanted to make sure I learnt from that. Knowing that he would be doing the last leg with me he didn't want a collapsed runner on his hands! So for the next 3hrs Donald the pattern went like this. Donald hands over a jelly baby (or friend egg sweet or wine gum or energy gel or honey stinger). I struggle to eat it. Donald hands me my isotonic drink. I take a swig (by now this orange flavour drink tastes absolutely horrible). Donald hands me a bottle with water in. I take a swig of water which at least tastes good. For the first 10 or so exchanges I say thank you each time but after that I don't react much and Donald says don't thank me I'm just doing my job!

So this is the pattern for the next few hours. The other thing that interested us along the way was the runners going past! I was losing places over this leg. Not loads but in Kinlochleven I was 16th and by the time we reached Lundavra I was 21st so 5 runners went past us. Most of them I recognised from the run. Mark Collins went past with his Dad and friend. It was good to see Mark again as we'd run a lot together in the first half of the race. His Dad said that Mark had had a really tough time over Rannoch Moor but was going well now. Mark finished in 22hrs 16mins which was superb. The bbc Reporting Scotland did an excellent piece about Mark which was showed on Tuesday after the race.

One of the fun things about being overtaken by these runners is that everyone said 'love your blog' 'keep it going' so that brought a smile to my face.

Just before the Lundavra checkpoint we were passed by a runner I think called Jody. We were surprised to see he was running on his own and Donald asked him whether it was his first attempt. He answered casually no my 7th! So we reckoned he knew what he was doing.

Finally the bonfire at Lundavra arrived. I went straight through. Donald stopped to replace drinks and try to find some food I might be able to eat.

### **Lundavra to Fort William (7 miles) in 2hrs 4mins Overall 95miles in 22hrs 45mins 19secs**

I couldn't work out if some of the runners who had passed us were now still at the check point but I thought they would soon be passing us again. Donald quickly caught up with new supplies and restarted his pattern of force feeding!! I have a confession here. There were at least three occasions when I spat out the jelly baby! Sorry Donald but there are only so many I could eat!

Ever since I didn't need to wonder where Ian was I began thinking where is Peter? I had ran with Peter Duggan a few times in training and at the start you may remember reading my exchange with him. His last comment was 'I'll pass you somewhere between Balmaha and Fort William.' Ian had mentioned seeing him at Tyndrum and so I had been really surprised that he had not overtaken me seeing the pace I was going. I assumed that maybe he'd had to drop out. So when I heard a cry of delight and looked round to see Peter with his two support runners ready to run past I knew he had not dropped out and his prediction was correct but he'd left it pretty late! The splits were posted on the web site and it is very interesting to see Peter's positions ...

Rowardennan 44th, Bridge of Orchy 20th, Kinlochleven 24th, Fort William 20th. Maybe there is something to being at Balmaha in 4hrs!! So well done Peter. I never doubted you (much!).

The thing that was upper most on my mind now was how I was going to feel on the long down hill into Fort William. Donald was reassuring me, we'd be all right but I wasn't sure. We were still on schedule to beat 23hrs but there wouldn't be much room for error if I struggled on the way down.

As we got into the forest with about 4miles to go it was getting very dark so Donald got his torch out and we used that for a while and then I put on my head torch which really helped again. Donald was had a bit of trouble getting it the right way round for me to put on. So I had a go, lost my balance and fell into the ditch. Donald pulled me out and we were away again.

We kept a good walking pace going and with the end in sight I pushed as hard as I could. We crossed a style where Katrina and I had walked up to 2 weeks ago to watch the Devil o' the Highlands race. I knew it was about 50mins of walking there to the car park so again mentally did the sums and felt we were still on for a sub 23hrs. As we started the descent my quads were sore but Donald went just ahead and by holding his shoulder it helped me get down easier.

We continued striding out down the hill with Donald providing support which made the walking a lot easier. It was then I knew that I would be able to get down and I was going to finish most probably inside 23hrs. After 20mins Stevie appeared running up the hill. So the three of us walked down into Fort William together arm in arm. We had such a laugh as we talked about the race, the highs and lows, how we all felt, how bad Stevie's pasta was!, the achievement of finishing the race, my nickname had become 'John the blog' after all the comments from runners.

Sooner than I thought possible we were at the Braveheart car park where Katrina, Jo, Emma & Hollie were waiting. Time for a quick photo and then we were off down the road to the finish. One or two folks out for an evening walk congratulated us. Donald was quick to point out I was the one who deserved the congratulations but to be honest we all deserved the praise. Rosie Bell and her support runner went past but I couldn't have run for all the money in the world so congratulated her on a great run and concentrated on getting to the end.



We went past the official end of the whw, over the roundabout and round the corner and there was the sign for the Lochaber Leisure Centre. Donald & Stevie held back and I tried a shuffle across the car park. I walked into the Leisure Centre and gave my number 93 has finished! That felt good to say. My official time was 22hrs 45mins 19secs. I had beaten my goal medal goal of 24hrs by 1hr 15mins and was under my best possible time of 23hrs by 15mins. I was HAPPY! I had run a competition on my blog to 'guess my time' and our of the young people in our church Barry was the closest with 22hrs 43mins.

### **After the race**

Katrina and the girls came in and offered their congratulations. I then sat down for the first time in 24hrs. I had worn the same socks and shoes throughout the race. It hadn't been my plan but once the knee was sore I didn't want to stop so didn't change socks. Stevie helped take them off (is there no end to their willingness to help?) and my feet were a very strange white looking colour. Donald said it was the start of trench foot. I hobbled down into the shower and hobbled back again. I then had a massage from one of the physios. She worked for a good 40mins on my quads. It really hurt but I felt it must be doing me good. I chatted to the physio and friends and family as she worked on the right leg but once she started on the left I lay down and closed my eyes and would have been asleep if the pain hadn't kept me awake.

Once the physio was over I just wanted to get to our tent, crawl in and try and sleep. I hobbled across the car park to the van, climbed in with difficulty, put the heater on and tried to get warm as I was feeling sold by now. When we arrived at the camp site the gate was down (well it was after 1am by now). So we had to walk about 400yards to the tent. I held on to Katrina and we made it. I climbed into bed and tried to sleep. After 10mins or so I was shaking violently but soon warmed up. It was hard to sleep as my knee was sore but as I lay there I had a real sense of achievement.

### **Next day Sunday 24 June**

I woke around 7am and crawled out of the tent but couldn't stand! I waited until Donald and Stevie were up and they helped me up and into a chair! We chatted for awhile, had some breakfast and then headed over to the prize giving.

The prize giving was a very special time with everyone who had finished receiving their crystal goblet. Dario has a word or two to say about each runner and when he came to me said some encouraging comments about my blog. I received a big cheer and felt very proud of my achievement.

### **Thanks ....**



I think one of the amazing things about a race like this is how many people it affects and how many people support and help. So I'd like to say a big thank you to all who helped me along the way from fellow runners to family to friends.

On the day my family Katrina, Jo, Emma, Laura & Hollie plus Dougie, who did the back up over night. To Donald and Stevie who were the greatest support runners I could have had. To friends Renita, John, Michael, Neal, Jay & Susan who came out to support on the day. Also a special thank to two physios Richard and Catriona at the RAH (Royal Alexandria Hospital in Paisley) who

helped me be ready for the race.

I will be back for more next year aiming to beat my pb!!