

# The Highland Fling - Saturday 25 April 2009

Race Tale by John Kynaston

53miles from Milngavie to Tyndrum

Time run: 9hrs 49mins 11secs

## Pre-Race at home

I was awake from about 3am but dozed until just after 4am when I got up, dressed, had some breakfast, woke Katrina at 4.30am and left just after 5am. I was looking forward to getting going and running my third Highland Fling. This year was going to be different with such a big field (over 300) and also because I am now a Super Vet (over 50) and would be starting an hour before the main field.

## Pre-Race at Milngavie

We arrived just after 5.30am. I went over and registered for the race and dropped off my bag for the Inversnaid check point. Also spent a few minutes meeting up with friends and wishing everyone all the best for the run. I saw Chris and Neil F with Seb who would be starting later. I saw a few folk but tried to get myself ready and not waste too much energy.

I wore my long sleeved white bright yellow top which felt about right for the conditions. I missed the briefing but the Fling prides itself on having very few rules. I arrived just as Murdo said, 'If you have to drop out make sure you tell someone.'

## Section 1 - Milngavie to Drymen

12.11miles in 1hr 46mins 56secs - 8.50 pace



The start had to be moved this year as the underpass was having some work on it. So we started at the top of the steps to the side. To help the start there were markers with estimated finishing times. I made my way to the front where the last time was under 11hrs. So I found myself in the first group. Just before the start I was able to wish lots of friends a good race and then Murdo

counted down the start and we were off. I'd arranged with Katrina to run on the right hand side so she could capture the start on video! I saw Marco & Debs at the end of the High Street.



I found the first few miles very strange. In the past two years in my 4 ultra races on the whw route I have started about a third of the way down the field and aimed to try and work my through the field but this time there were 3 women and a couple of other super vets in front. So after 20mins of running or so I decided to easy off and a few runners went past me including a group with Sharon, Mike T and Aileen. I would be seeing a lot of Mike and Sharon over the next 9hrs!

I had 4 markers between the start and Drymen and I was about a minute per section inside my 1.50 schedule and was pleased with myself that I'd not got sucked along faster. I chatted with a few folks including Ian from England who was running his first ultra.

One guy went past me as we ran along the track past Dumgoyne Distillery. It worked out really well as he open every gate and I just ran through! I did thank him each time.

I had arranged to meet Katrina just after 8miles. I replenished my water and took my first bag of grapes. I was feeling good and my main aim on this first section is to get to Drymen as easily as possible in a reasonable time.

I closed on the group ahead when we hit the small hill after Gartness and was content that I hadn't tried to stay with them. I sensed that when we came to the bigger hills I would catch them. I arrived at Drymen 3 minutes ahead of my 1.50 schedule.

## Section 2 - Drymen to Balmaha

6.84miles in 1hr 10mins 11secs - 10.16 pace

Overall - 18.95miles in 2hrs 57mins 08secs



I ran through Drymen having arranged to see Katrina next at Balmaha. On the first hill up the track I caught up with Sharon, then Mike and then Aileen. Over the next few miles I ran with Sharon and Mike. We could see a group of 4-5 runners ahead and I wondered whether we'd catch them on Conic Hill.

Again I was spot on with my mini targets and comfortable with the pace and effort. As soon as we hit Conic Hill I quickly caught up with the four Super Vet runners ahead. I powered past and by the time I saw Murdo at the top of the hill with his Saltire he informed me I was second Super Vet but the leader was well away!

I suspected that some of those I had just passed would be quicker on the way down and that was what happened. I'm happy taking my time on the way down and trying to protect my quads for further battles down the line. Sharon and Mike also caught up with me again and we entered Balmaha together. I wasn't sure what their stop strategy was but I stopped long enough for some beans, a smoothie and to replenish my water. I also changed into a short sleeved top as it was getting warmer. I arranged to see Katrina half way towards Rowardennan and set off.

### **Section 3 - Balmaha to Rowardennan**

7.83miles in 1hr 20mins 28secs - 10.17 pace

Overall - 26.78miles in 4hrs 20mins 04secs

I went past a couple of people in the first mile or so and then ran the rest of the section on my own. I wasn't sure where Mike or Sharon were and didn't see them at all. I saw Katrina a couple of times but didn't need anything so we arranged to meet further up but I missed her and saw her next at Rowardennan. I replenished my water from a stream and finished off my grapes.

For the final section of the run into Rowardennan I started wondering when Jez would catch me. When I was thinking about this I thought if I could get to Rowardennan before he caught me I would be happy. Just before we hit Rowardennan I heard a runner behind but it wasn't Jez. I thought someone was ahead of him but it turned out to be Ian who I'd run with earlier.

As I ran the final path to Rowardennan I saw Mike so he must have gone straight through Balmaha and was obviously going well. I must admit I was surprised to see Mike so far up the field. Mike has been on several of our training runs and normally is further back. He did say that his training had been going well and it was certainly paying off.

I stopped for less than two minutes grabbed some more food and set off again. Sharon arrived a minute or so after me and stopped to change her shoes. Debs was there waiting for Marco and was please to hear I was ahead of my schedule. At this point I reckon I was 12minutes ahead of my 9.43 plan and so a sub 9.30 was possible but there was a long way to go.

I changed into a vest as I suspected the hill would warm me up!

### **Section 4 - Rowardennan to Inversnaid**

7.26miles in 1hr 17mins 13secs – 10.39 pace

Overall - 34.04miles in 5hrs 39mins 15secs

I was on my own again and set off knowing that these next two sections were going to be very important to how my run went. I was aiming for 1.15 to Inversnaid and 1.30 to Beinglas.

I ran until the first hill then ate my rice pudding while walking. I glanced Sharon not far behind and so set off to run as far as I could up the hill. I got into a good rhythm counting 100 breathes and was enjoying the challenge of getting up the hill as solid as I could.

After about 30minutes from Rowardennan the answer to my question of when would Jez catch me was answered. I was caught by one runner and then a few seconds later I heard Jez say, 'Hi, it's John isn't it?' I've never met Jez but have often left comments on his blog and enjoyed following

his progress but I never knew whether he knew who I was! Anyway we shook hands as he went past and I watched them disappear up the hill.

I reckon I had a grandstand view of the crucial moment in the race as once they had reached the top of the hill Jez went into overdrive and within a few minutes he was away and won by almost 15 minutes.

Two more runners also went past and I found I had to regroup a bit. It could be quite discouraging having these guys going past but thankfully it was quite a while before the 5<sup>th</sup> runner caught me.

Once I got onto the single path I saw Ian and slowly caught up with him and then about a mile out of Inversnaid saw Mike and we ran into Rowardennan together.

I took my drop bag, drank a milk shake, took a rice pudding and set off again behind Mike who hadn't stopped and left Ian who had.

### **Section 5 - Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm**

7.03miles in 1hr 30mins 54secs - 13.01 pace

Overall - 41.07miles in 7hrs 11mins 37secs

This section is one where with legs getting tired you have to work hard to keep the momentum going. I work on the mantra 'run when you can, walk when you have to.'

George Cairns went past me in this section and then there were a group of walkers coming towards me. As I passed them two of the women were complaining about these runners who think they own the path. I chuckled to myself as they didn't realise there were another 300 runners to come!!



I was feeling okay and caught the odd glimpse of Mike ahead and wondered whether I'd seen the last of Sharon or would she appear again.

The answer wasn't long in coming as she appeared on my shoulder. I asked a couple of times whether she wanted to go past but got no reply. I looked behind and realised she was wearing an ipod so just kept going. I caught up with Mike just before the Doune Bothy and then pushed on into Beinglas. I arrived just a minute outside my 1.30 plan which meant I was still 11mins inside my 9.43 plan.

Katrina was waiting for me before the checkpoint with some more food but my stomach was complaining and I ended up just drinking a smoothie and taking some more grapes. Mike and Sharon went past and a couple of other runners. I changed into a clean vest and set off for Derrydaroch.

### **Section 5 - Beinglas Farm to Tyndrum**

12.05miles in 2hr 35mins 43secs – 12.56 pace

Overall – 52.97miles in 9hrs 49mins 09secs

Official photographer 'Subversive Runner' (Dave Waterman) was taking photos and I tried to smile but I knew things were going to get tougher from here on in. My stomach hadn't felt right all day and so I had only eaten half a tin of beans, one rice pudding and maybe 20 grapes plus smoothies and milk shakes. I'd been taking my succeed tablets every 90mins and drinking enough water but I knew I'd not eaten enough and would be found out.

Also I'd given myself 29mins to get to Derrydaroch which was based on our 1<sup>st</sup> March run but we'd started at Beinglas. Today I'd already run 41miles! I went past Mike (again) when he stopped to change top. I was very impressed that his wife was willing to help take off his smelly/sweaty top!

Ritchie C went past me on this section. He seemed to be going well. Sharon also went past me and that was the last I saw of her until the end. She was running very well and fully deserved her 3<sup>rd</sup> place in a great time of 9hrs 41mins 05secs.

I was really battling now and had to use all my positive thinking to keep me going and focused on finishing as well as I could. I was still in 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Super Vets and a pb was a possibility though I knew it would only be by a minute or so if at all.

Iain R went past asking how far Ritchie was ahead. I sensed that there was going to be a steady stream of the main race going past.

As I went past Derrydaroch I glanced back and saw a runner in sun glasses. It looked like Thomas but I was expecting Marco to catch me before Thomas. I looked again and it definitely was Thomas! He was having a storming run and it was great to congratulate him and encourage him to finish well which he did in 8hrs 20mins 40secs to finish 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Male category. A superb run and one which I hope sets him up for a great whw race.



One of the runners who went past congratulated on my race video from last year. I told him I was doing another one today!

I had to stop for a toilet stop as I felt my insides was about to explode. I was also running out of water and knew the next section after the A82 was going to be tough.

Debbie and Silke were waiting for Marco just after Carmyle Cottage and Debs had some water for me which I was very grateful for. It was a battle on the road up to the forest above Crianlarich but I was able to run good sections of it and tried to concentrate on getting to

the big gate at the top.

I finally got there and knew I had 3.6miles to Auchtertyre and then 2.7miles to Tyndrum. I had 6.3miles to go and just under 1hr 15mins to get there to get a pb.

I worked as hard as I could up and down the hills. My quads felt okay but I was running out of energy and having to work hard to run. I was passed by a few more runners including another Super Vet and then Mike T so now I was in 5<sup>th</sup> place.

Just before I reached the A82 another Super Vet went past. He was obviously older than me and was carrying a whw guide book! No offence to the guy but I reached a bit of a low then – being overtaken by a runner with a guidebook!

Once I crossed the road and headed over the field I saw Stevie H, my friend from Kilbarchan. He had come up on his bike to support me. He gave me a piece of tablet and said I could do with a sugar boost. He ran on in his bike gear to Auchtertyre.

I ran into Auchtertyre and was confident now of finishing under 10hrs. There were 4 runners ahead of me now and none of them stopped. I stopped to put on my club vest and I ate a yogurt.

As I started running I suddenly felt a whole lot better. I'm not sure whether it was that bit of food or the knowledge that the end was not far away but I was now running a lot stronger and decided to try and catch those four runners ahead – especially the guy with the guide book!



And catch them I did – one by one. I felt I was really flying now and it's amazing how a strong finish can help you forget the last couple of hours of pain!

So I finished 5<sup>th</sup> Super Vet in 9hrs 49mins 11secs. I was 5minutes slower than last year but I was pleased that I'd got through a tough section.

I received my excellent goodie bag with medal, champagne, bear and Montane lip balm.

### **After the race**

I went straight into the cottage for a shower and massage. Trevor, Ian B's friend, gave me a good post race work over and I certainly felt the benefit.

Katrina and I went for something to eat at the Real Food café and used my magic mug we were given for finishing for a free drink. We sat with Thomas and Silke and it was great to hear all about Thomas' superb run.

We went back over for the presentation and chatted to lots of friends and found out about their runs and stories. Neal had a excellent run finishing in 9hrs 24mins 57secs. Chris in his first ultra ran in 11hrs 20mins 54secs.

Just before the presentation I had a great chat with Jez, who not only is an amazing runner, but a really nice guy.



Murdo reckoned that Kilbarchan had a very good chance of winning with club prize for the top 3 runners but in the end we were 2<sup>nd</sup> to Carnegie Harriers. But to be honest that was probably best as we had Thomas as a guest runner!

*Neal, me and Thomas 'Team Kilbarchan'*

After the presentation I waited with Neal, Chris and Seb for Caroline to finish. She was emotional at the end and rightly so. That was a superb run and the furthest she has ever run.



*Chris, Thomas, Neal, Me  
Seb, Caroline*

So another very enjoyable, though tough, run on the whw. A big thanks to Murdo, Ellen and all the other marshals and helpers who made the day so special.

Finally but by no means last a huge special thank you to Katrina for her support throughout the day. Katrina also won the 'Guess my Time' competition.