

Hoka Highland Fling

Saturday 27th April 2013

This was the 7th time I have run this race and I can honestly say I was looking forward to it as much as the previous 6. My training had gone well, I've lost some weight which I feel has helped me a lot and I decided to give it a good go.

My aim was to try and run under 10hrs. I knew it was going to be a real challenge with very little room for getting anything wrong. But for me part of the 'fun' of these races is to challenge myself and to aim as high as I can.

The race weekend started on Friday night when I registered at Milngavie at 6pm. Stuart Mills was staying with us for the weekend so I then drove to Glasgow Airport to pick him up. I always enjoy chatting to Stuart and I thought others could benefit as well so we did a podcast interview before heading to head.

I set the alarm for 4am though I didn't actually switch it on!! I only discovered this at 3.30am when I woke up anyway. Breakfast of porridge and tea and we left the house at 4.50am. Easy 30min journey to Milngavie, parked the car and got a lift down the road with Ryan Mackenzie (thanks Ryan!).

Made sure all the drop bags were in the right place, greeted a few friends and soon enough it was 5.45am and John's brief briefing (if you need to stop tell someone) and the start. It was quite chilly so I decided to wear a short sleeved top, long sleeved top and my jacket. I also put on my Hardmoors buff at the last minute.



With Dave Troman before the start (photo from Thomas L)

Milngavie to Drymen (12.13miles)

I set off at the back of the sub 10hr group. This year John Duncan, Race Director, had decided to have a mass start but in waves. I gather in the end though the groups just followed each other and it was fine. I referred everyone starting together.

I quickly settled into a nice easy run and was glad to be moving and warming up. At the top of the first little hill I was joined by Andy Cole. Andy & I started running ultras at the same time and I always enjoy reading Andy blog and chatting.

We ran together for the next 5miles or so. Andy kept saying I'm going to let you go as you are running faster than my plan but we stayed together for a good while. Andy hasn't broken 10hrs in the race and one of his goals is to do that but he wasn't sure whether today would be the day.

We ran with Donald Sandeman for a while. Donald & I ran quite a bit of the Jedburgh ultra together and Donald finished ahead of me. I wondered whether today might be similar when I left him ... would be catch up in the final third of the race as he did in Jedburgh??

The new path either side of the Beech tree is a big improvement and makes that section a lot easier to run on. As I was chatting I didn't really look at the watch much but at each of my mini-splits I was pretty well bang on so quite happy with that.

I ran with Iain Wallace for a bit. Iain was struggling with a sore calf and wasn't sure whether he wanted to risk running the whole way if it was going to get worse. The whw in 8 weeks is the priority. Iain walked up the hill of the Gartness so I pushed on.

There was a bit group just ahead so I caught them up and chatted to Jeff and a few others as we approached Drymen. I was happy to see that I was bang on my 1.50 target and feeling good. During this first section I'd eaten a peanut butter & jam sandwich and a brioche bun.

It was good to see Neal & Caroline marshalling at Drymen. I made sure I got a high 5 from them! Neal made his usual comment about me being too slow!!

Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Milingavie to Drymen		12.11m - 1:50:00 (9.05 pace)				12.11m - 1:50:00 (8.59 pace)						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
start	end of wood	2.14	20:00	20:00	9:21	2.18	21:08	21:08	9:42	223	32	127
end of wood	wall	2.20	20:00	40:00	9:05	2.20	19:25	40:33	8:50	131	42	133
wall	beech tree	2.71	24:00	1:04:00	8:51	2.72	23:12	1:03:45	8:32	19	406	133
beech tree	gate	2.62	23:30	1:27:30	8:58	2.60	23:04	1:26:49	8:52	82	49	133
gate	drymen	2.44	22:30	1:50:00	9:13	2.43	22:10	1:48:59	9:07	288	216	140
	Leg Total	12.11	1:50:00		9:05	12.13	1:48:59		8:59	743	745	133
	Rest		00:00	1:50:00			00:00	1:48:59				

Drymen to Balmaha (6.84miles)

This year we had to have a slight detour through Drymen as the forestry commission are doing some work. It meant that we ran past the 'Kip in the Kirk' B&B which is run by Francis and Jonny. Jonny is a work colleague of mine in Active Schools and Jonny was running his first ultra.

Francis very kindly had cut up oranges into quarters and was handing them out. I was also able to leave my long sleeved top and gloves as it was warming up and I didn't think I would need them again.

As I ran walked up the long hill out of Drymen I saw Murdo Ewan ahead. When I caught him he said he'd gone off a bit quick and was struggling a bit. I had a feeling it wouldn't be the last I saw of him and that proved true!



According to my splits I reckon the diversion was an extra 0.36mile. I was continuing to slowly catch folk and have a chat with each as I went past. I was pleased to see that the new path leading up to Conic Hill was now dry and the top layer of mud has gone. It was a lot easier to run on.

I reached the bridge at the bottom of the hill 1min under my plan. Things were going well! I was still catching folk with 1-2 going past me. The path up Conic Hill meant that it was a lot easier to run some of the sections and walk a fair bit faster on the way up.

Half way up the hill Murdo caught me and we chatted a bit more. He looked as though he was going better which was good to see. I paused for a photo as we reached the top of the climb.

I was had my head cam and was taking short clips of the route so watch out for that appearing in a cinerma near you or on this blog!!

The path down was a lot easier and safer to run down as well. Murdo was a lot quicker on the way down but I seemed to hold my own which was fine with me. The new steps were also good so, even though I know some will hate the new path, it is a lot better.

I ran into Balmaha right on plan.

Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Drymen to Balmaha		6.84m - 1:12:00 (10.32 pace)				7.18m - 1:13:36 (10.15 pace)						
		18.95m - 3:02:00				19.31m - 3:02:35						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
drymen	path junction	2.22	22:00	2:12:00	9:55	2.58	23:44	2:12:42	9:12	364	121	146
path junction	bridge	2.38	24:00	2:36:00	10:05	2.37	22:13	2:34:55	9:22	275	262	142
bridge	balmaha	2.24	26:00	3:02:00	11:36	2.23	27:40	3:02:35	12:24	593	984	142
	Leg Total	6.84	1:12:00		10:32	7.18	1:13:36		10:15	1232	1367	143
	Total	18.95	3:02:00		9:36	19.31	3:02:35		9:27	1975	2112	
	Rest		1:00	3:03:00			0:24	3:02:59				

Balmaha to Rowardenna (7.78miles)

The super efficient marshals handed me my drop bag and refilled my water and 24secs later I was off again. I walked through the car park getting my food sorted. I realised that I'd forgotten to put a spoon in to eat my mashed potato!

I did try and 'borrow' on from Murdo's wife but she only had one. So I ate the mashed potato without a spoon so anyone who saw me with mashed potato all over my mouth will know why.

I ate it while walking up the steps just after Balmaha. Antonia was there making sure people didn't miss the turn. I had a group of 3-4 runners including Melanie from Carnegie just behind me but I realised that I needed a pit stop.

While I took a pee beind a tree 7-8 runners went past. It me most of the run to Rowardennan to catch them back up.

I was feeling good and went through my splits pretty much on time. Murdo caught me again, having stopped longer at Balmaha. We ran together for a good part of the way and then I went ahead and I was on my own.

Neal & Caroline were waiting on one of the road crossings. Neal said I'd better get going as Katrina was only a mile behind!! I suspected there was not much truth in the statement but I did wonder how Katrina was getting on.

I went past a few more runners who I suspected had gone off too quick and were starting the pay the price. I remember thinking if you are starting to struggle now there is a long way to go. The weather by now was almost perfect. Warm without being too hot and very little wind.

Just a mile or so before Rowardennan I past Mike Raffan. I was surprised to see him down the field rather than near the front but it seems he was using it as a training run and was quite happy though he had suffered from some cramps.

I ran into Rowardennan 44 secs slower than my plan! I was really pleased that not only was I on target but feeling good. In some years I might have been on target but I'd worked too hard to get there.



I saw Caroline (not sure where Neal was???) who helped get my drop bag. It was also really good to see Fiona Rennie after her recent operation.

Fiona kindly took the photo of me about to eat my rice pudding!

Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Balmaha to Rowardennan		7.83m - 1:22:00 (10.28 pace)				7.78m - 1:22:46 (10.38 pace)						
		26.78m - 4:25:00				27.09 - 4:25:44						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
balmaha	bridge	2.18	22:30	3:25:30	10:19	2.16	23:39	3:26:38	10:57	173	190	142
bridge	salloch	2.90	28:30	3:54:00	9:50	2.91	28:42	3:55:20	9:52	314	334	149
salloch	rowardennan	2.75	31:00	4:25:00	11:16	2.71	30:24	4:25:44	11:13	456	452	146
	Leg Total	7.83	1:22:00		10:28	7.78	1:22:46		10:38	943	976	146
	Total	26.78	4:25:00		9:54	27.09	4:25:44		9:49	2918	3088	
	Rest		1:30	4:26:30			1:15	4:26:59				

Rowardennan to Inversnaid (7.25miles)

I ate my rice pudding and took some jelly babies for the journey to Inversnaid. I suspected that this next section was going to be key as to whether I could manage a sub 10hr time. I'd given myself 1hr 18mins to run the 7.25miles. It is a big climb with almost 900 ft of ascent but also a similar amount of descent in the leg.

I ran until the Youth Hostel then adopted a walk/run strategy up the hill. There were a few others around me and we yoyo'd a fair bit as everyone deals with it differently.

After each section I'd been tweeting my time. I'd set it all up on my iphone so all I had to do was fill in the actual time and copy to a text. It didn't take too long. After I'd sent each one there were messages being sent in reply. I didn't manage to read many of them at the time but it was so encouraging just to know friends were following my progress.

I did read one from Shelley Marsh (Caroline's Mum). Shelly told me she'd seen Katrina at Salloch. I worked out she was probably about an hour behind me. So if I was on target for 10hrs there was a good chance Katrina was on target for 12hrs.

After about 3miles Murdo caught me again and we ran together. This is the first Highland Fling he'd been able to do due to injury so it was good to see him running again after various problems. He pointed out to me that it would be a pb for him as long as he finished!

We arrived at the point where the wider path goes to a single track. That is one of my mini splits and I saw that I was now 3mins 26secs down on my plan. I knew I'd found that hill quite hard. On my pb year of 2008 I'd ran a good portion of that hill.

Anyway I still felt okay and decided to try and run the final 2.8 miles to the hotel as best I could. Murdo was going well now so I tried to hang on to me. After half a mile or so he moved away and was a good 100 yards ahead.

I was left with a choice of accepting the gap or pushing on and trying to catch him. I went for the latter and within the next mile I caught back up. From there to the checkpoint I just concentrated on staying with him. I thanked him for helping me and he kindly said it was mutual so that was good.

We came in to the hotel in just over 5.52 against my plan of 5.44 so I'd lost 6mins. I suspected it might be difficult to make that up but I was keen to give it a go.

The marshals were again excellent and refilled my water, found my drop bag and generally helped as much as they could. I had a pot of beans to eat here. I ate maybe a quarter of them. Better some than nothing. I also had a bottle of flat coke which was just what I needed.

Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Rowardennan to Inversnaid		7.26 - 1:18:00 (10.45 pace)				7.25m - 1:25:48 (14:05 pace)						
		34.04m - 5:44:00				34.34m - 5:52:47						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
rowardennan	waterfall	2.46	26:00	4:52:30	10:34	2.11	25:17	4:52:16	11:59	308	52	135
waterfall	single track	2.00	22:00	5:14:30	11:00	2.35	25:41	5:17:57	10:56	291	449	134
single track	hotel	2.80	30:00	5:44:30	10:43	2.79	34:50	5:52:47	12:29	298	364	139
Leg Total		7.26	1:18:00		10:45	7.25	1:25:48		11:50	897	865	136
		34.04	5:44:30		10:07	34.34	5:52:47		10:16	3815	3953	
Rest			1:00	5:45:30			2:08	5:54:55				

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm (6.70miles)

Murdo pushed on while I updated twitter! Just as I was sending it I saw Andy Cole go by. 'Andy' I shouted as he was about to ignore me! He said he'd had a great lochside and was feeling good. We ran together and it gave me someone to hang on to.

I'm so impressed with Andy. He is 64 and still running so smoothly and has a great attitude. He is out for a great day and takes things as they come. If he's having a good day like yesterday he goes with it but if not (which are rare) he gets on with it and does the best he can.

Andy has a very relaxed and economical running side and I can see how he can keep on going at the same pace for so long. A couple of times he pulled away but I was able to catch up again. On the second time when I caught him he was chatting to Murdo.

They are both in the over 60 category so challenging for the winner's prize. I joked that they were trying to psych each other out but Andy explained that Murdo was struggling with cramp. After a brief chat I went past Murdo and chased after Andy. It was the last I saw of either of them!



Andy went on to finish in a superb 9.57.56 and Murdo in 10.20.49. I was so pleased for Andy as this was a pb in 7 attempts! His challenge is now to carry that on to the whw and crack that sub 23hrs he's after.

I was now on my own and tried to run into Beinglas as hard as I could. I was hoping to get there in 1.35 which would mean 7.30 overall. That would leave me 2.30 to make it to Tyndrum. I knew that gave me an outside chance but not very likely.

I really felt the coke had kicked in and I had a really good run for a mile or two. I caught up with a runner in white who I thought might be Andy but wasn't!

I paused at Dario's post for a photo and to remember our friend

I was pleased that I was still running okay as one of my aims for the race had been to try and finish strong. My quads were starting to feel it a bit but I was still moving okay.

I ate some of the jelly babies to give me some help for the last couple of miles into Beinglas. I'd also been taking a succeed tablet every 90mins or so. I was so glad I'd brought my buff as it was getting hot now and I love soaking my buff in a stream to keep my head cool.

The relay teams had been going past me fairly regularly over the past few hours. Maybe 6-7 teams. About a mile before Beinglas I heard a cry of Mr Kynaston and it was Christopher (Caroline's brother) finishing off his leg. He was going well and was passing over to his wife Susan.

I arrived at Beinglas Farm in 1.34 for an overall time of 7.29.18.

Peter Marsh was at the checkpoint helping with their relay team. Peter very kindly helped me sort out my drop bag. I had a fruit pot which went down well and I took a bottle of coke and a packet of cliff bloks for the final section. Peter asked whether sub 10 was still possible. I replied it was going to take an exceptionable effort but I was going to give it a go. Realistically I felt if I could run the last 12miles in 2.40 for 10.10. I'd be more than happy.

Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm		6.63m - 1:31:00 (13.44 pace)				6.70m 1:34:23 (14:05 pace)						
		41.67m - 7:16:30				41.04m - 7:29:18						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
hotel	gate	2.53	37:00	6:22:30	14:37	2.50	36:13	6:31:08	14:29	239	255	136
gate	post	2.00	27:00	6:49:30	13:30	1.99	29:10	7:00:18	14:39	275	229	138
post	beinglas	2.10	27:00	7:16:30	12:51	2.21	29:00	7:29:18	13:08	331	344	136
Leg Total		6.63	1:31:00		13:44	6.70	1:34:23		14:05	845	828	137
		40.67	7:16:30		10:44	41.04	7:29:18		10:57	4660	4781	
Rest			1:30	7:18:00			1:20	7:30:38				

Beinglas Farm to Tyndrum (11.83miles)

I tweeted my update and I wondered what my friends following me would think. I'd purposely given myself a very generous last mini-split from Auchtertyre so all was not lost. It would depend on whether I could pick up the pace and stick to my splits.

I split this final section into four parts. First one to Derrydaroch (2.50miles), next to the Big Gate before the forest (1.99miles), then Auchtertyre (3.64miles and finally Tyndrum (2.65miles).

So I just concentrated on getting to Derrydaroch in 40mins. I could see a couple of runners ahead and tried to focus on seeing if I could catch them or at least not fall further behind. I was running okay but needing regular walking breaks.

My main mantra for times like this is 'Slow and steady, make it last'. If I feel good I try and make it last as long as possible rather than push too hard and find it only lasts a few minutes.

I ran into Derrydaroch in 39.34 which I was pleased with. As I ran through the forest Lorna caught me. She was going really well and we then ran together for the next 30mins or so. It really helped me as it was good to have someone to chat to.

Lorna's pb was 10.18 and she was hoping to beat that. I knew she could do that no problem if she could keep it going. Lorna will be first to admit that she can be quite negative and hard on herself. So I spent most of our chat telling her that she needs to have a positive attitude!!

Once we got past the muddy farm Lorna pushed on. Maybe she'd enough of my 'motivational' chat!!! She turn round and I could see she wasn't sure whether to leave me. I shouted for her to push on and go for it. It is a race after all. She did and I was so pleased to discover she'd finished in 9.51.31. Superb.

So now I was on my own. I'd reached the big gate in 36.40 against 39.00 so was still on track for 10.10 which had become my definite goal. I went past a female runner who was finding things hard but she was keeping going which is what it's all about.

I now had just over 6miles to go. The end was in sight and I wanted to finish as well as I could. I walked all the uphill. There have been Flings when I've been able to run at least half the hills but not today! My quads were sore and even the downhill running hurt.

I tried various running styles and got down as best I could. Up and down, up and down, up and down and eventually the final whw post and the final up and final down.

When I arrived at the A82 road crossing there was a friendly face ... Helen Legget. She apologised that the road was so busy and it did take a minute or so to find a gap to get across. A young guy caught as I went over the bridge. He asked how far to go and I was able to tell him.

I said sub 10 was beyond me but he could do it if he pushed hard. At that he left me and I hope he did make it.

As I ran into Auchtertyre Graeme Gatherer caught me and we ran together for a mile or so. Peter and Shelley were at the car park to give us a cheer and Shelley took the following photo



Graeme is doing the full race in June so we had a brief chat about that. A relay runner caught up with us. He was a 65yr old runner who had run London Marathon last Sunday in 3.30! But his sense of direction was terrible and two times we had to call him back onto the right route!

I could sense that Graeme was running stronger than me so I encouraged him to push on and finish well. I ran the last mile or so on my own realising that I was going to be under my 10.10 target which pleased me no end!

I put my head cam on to record the finish. I came onto the road and expected to see the finish but no-one was there. I was directed into the By The Way Campsite, turned left and saw the finishing tunnel.



It brought a tear to my eye and I absolutely loved the final few yards to the finish. What a great idea from John Duncan! I crossed the line in 10hrs 05mins 59secs.



Photo thanks to Shelley

Ellen was there at the finish to present me with my 7th Highland Fling medal.



Highland Fling 2013		2013 Plan				2013 Actual						
Beinglas Farm to Tyndrum		12.25m - 2:41:00 (13.09 pace)				11.83m - 2:35:21 (13.08 pace)						
		52.92m - 9:59:00				52.87m - 10:05:59						
from	to	distance	time	total	Pace	distance	time	Total	Pace	Asc	Dec	Av HR
beinglas	derrydarroch	3.21	40:00	7:58:00	12:28	3.08	39:34	8:10:12	12:51	544	190	131
derrydarroch	big gate	2.75	39:00	8:37:00	14:11	2.75	36:40	8:46:52	13:20	521	59	135
big gate	auchtertyre	3.64	44:00	9:21:00	12:05	3.62	52:27	9:39:19	14:29	541	777	123
auchtertyre	tyndrum	2.65	38:00	9:59:00	11:47	2.38	26:40	10:05:59	11:12	226	68	134
	Leg Total	12.25	2:41:00		13:09	11.83	2:35:21		13:08	4886	4849	131
		52.92	9:59:00		11:19	52.87	10:05:59		11:28			

After the race

I went for a massage, then a shower before having some soup and bread and wondered when Katrina would arrive.



Silke said that they had seen her at Beinglas at 3pm (9hrs into the race). So she had 3hrs to run the final 12miles. I thought that might be possible but Silke also said he was feeling sick and was quite upset.

It was good to look at the results in so far and see that a number of friends had had excellent races.

I starting watching for Katrina from 6pm owards and was so pleased to see her arriving at 10 past. It looked as though she was working hard ...



Katrina finished in 12hrs 11mins 08secs which was a pb by 15mins. Considering she was been sick at Balmaha and Beinglas and struggled with nausea for most of the race it was a very gutsy performance.

By the time I walked down to the finish I couldn't see her. Friends pointed to round the corner where I saw her being comforted by Silke as she trying to be sick again!

So not quite the sub 10 and sub 12 we were hoping for but a great day out and good solid performances.

My Guess My Time competiton was won jointly by Noanie Heffron (who had a superb 11.47 race herself) and John McLaughlin who both predicted 10.05.00. Katrina's competition was won by Brian Graham who predicted 12:14:30.

Finally a massive thank you to John Duncan and the 80 volunteers who help during the weekend to make sure the race runs smoothly.