

Highland Fling 2011 Race Report

Saturday 30th April 2011

53miles from Milngavie to Tyndrum

Before the Race

Stuart Mills stayed with us on Friday night before the race so it was great to chat to him about the race and loads of other things as well. I really enjoy the way Stuart approaches his running and he always makes me think and re-evaluate.

At one point Stuart asked me why I'd be happy to finish two and half hours behind him. He's aiming for 7.30 and I'd be happy with 9.55. He said my recent half marathon is 1.25, his is 1.18. So he's 7mins faster. The Fling is four half marathons. So I should be 28mins slower.

Even allowing for a progression I should be no more than one hour or one and a half hours slower. I didn't really have a answer to than but it got me thinking. Can you predict your Fling time from a half marathon (or marathon) time?

Anyway back to the race ... with well over 400 starters the Fling now has four start times from 6am to 9am. As I'm in the Male Super Vets my start time is 6am with the women and the rest of the 50 plus guys.

I slept okay but woke about 2.30am. I dozed a bit more but got up at 3.45am. I got changed, eat some breakfast and was ready for Colin Knox arriving at 5am. Even though Colin wasn't starting until 8am he was keen to see the start of the other waves and had kindly agreed to give me a lift.

Tim Downie also arrived as he was leaving his car at our house. They both arrived at 4.50am so we were on our way.

Stuart was starting with the main field at 8am and so I'd arranged for Thomas to pick him up at 6.45am. I did wonder where I would see Stuart and Thomas. Given that they were starting two hours after me I hoped it would be quite near the finish.



It was good to meet Colin and have a chat in the car on the way to Milngavie. We arrived just before 5.30am and I spent the 30mins getting registered, making sure my drop bags were in the right car and greeting friends. Oh and taking some photos and video clips.

I had a quick chat with Caroline who'd been there since 5am. I asked how Neal was feeling and she replied, 'He's moaning about not being ready to run!'. That means he'll go out and run sub 9hrs!

Soon enough it was 5.50am and time for the race briefing and the start. I love the fact that even though the race has grown from 18 to 450 in 6 years the basic rule is the same ... 'Enjoy and if you have to stop tell someone.'

Milngavie to Drymen

It was quite cool at 6am starting off but it was pretty clear that it was going to get pretty warm. I wore a short sleeved top and a long sleeved top. The plan was to take off the long sleeved top at Balmaha where I'd arranged with Marco to take it from me.

There are lots of things you can control in the race like this but the one thing that you can't do anything about is the weather. I just hoped that we'd get a good way up the track before it got too hot.

I don't run well in the heat and wondered how I'd manage if it did get very hot. Even so I set off quietly confident in my plan and splits to run sub 10hrs. My friend Dave Troman had sent me a text the day before with his guess of 9.59.59 saying don't push too hard as the whw is only 7 weeks away.

I was even quietly confident that for the first time for a few years I might be able to finish ahead of Debs. Talk about wishful thinking!!

Debs and I set off together and had a good chuckle when Kate Jenkins not once but twice set off to go the wrong way. Sharon kept shouting to keep them on track!

Debs was working on Marco's splits for her which called for a 1.55 to Drymen. I was aiming for 1.48 so wasn't surprised when she dropped back a bit obeying Marco's every instruction as always (?!?!?).

I was feeling good and slowly caught up with Sharon who was ahead. As I caught her she was chatting away with another female runner. Sharon turned and said John, 'This is Claire - she's an Everton supporter!'

I chatted with Sharon for a while and a Dutch runner called Paul who had read my blog and was keen to follow my splits for a sub 10hr run.

There were a group of 6 of us as we ran along the track by Drumgoyne. I did joke that we have a tradition that any one new to the race has to open the gates but that only worked for the first couple and then it was left to me!



We ran through Beech Tree right on my splits. I saw Claire Shelley who I'd ran with a bit last year. Claire had planned to run but pulled out through sickness and was now supporting the race.

I settled into a nice easy rhythm chatting with Claire and Paul and another male runner. At some point Sharon dropped back a bit but I knew she'd be back soon enough.

Just before Drymen I realised Claire had her chip on her ankle and not on her wrist so having pointed this out she stopped to change it.

One of the key things I wanted to work on for this run was my nutrition. In the first two hours I'd eaten two peanut butter and jam sandwiches which went down well.

The four of us ran into Drymen where Caroline was waiting for us with the timing pad. I was happy to note that I'd gone through Drymen in 1.47.40 against my plan of 1.48.00.

Leg: 12.17 miles in 1hr 47mins 40secs (8.51pace)

Drymen to Balmaha

It was getting a little warmer but it still felt okay. Another thing I wanted to try was to send some tweets as I ran. I'd set them up as drafts on my phone so I just had to add in the time. Hopefully friends enjoyed following the race.

My friend Richard from the club sent me an excel sheet that he'd used to follow my progress and predict my finishing time!

As we ran through the forest I started chatting more to Claire and found out what a superb athlete she is. Claire ran the London marathon two weeks ago in 3.03 (running alongside James Cracknell for most of the way).

Claire's also completed 5 Ironman Triathlons with a pb of 11hrs 30mins. But she'd not run more than 30miles so was a little apprehensive about how she'd find it after 40miles or so.

Besides our passion for Everton I also discovered Claire is an English teacher and is about to take up a post in an International School in Kuala Lumpur. As we'd lived overseas for 8 years we had lots to chat about.

It was fun to be able to chat about the route and give her an idea of what to expect over the next 6-7hrs.

We climbed up Conic Hill and then set off down to Balmaha. Claire and the two guys seemed happy to descend at my pace so for once I wasn't overtaken on the way down!

As we approached Balmaha Marco and Cairn came towards us so I took off my long sleeved top and gave it to him. I was also looking forward to wearing my sun glasses that I'd put in my drop bag as it was getting very warm and bright by now.

I arrived at Balmaha 3mins up on my plan, still feeling very comfortable and positive about the rest of the run. Murdo McEwan and his team were ready with our drop bags. I took my mashed potato and banana and refilled my water and I was off again.

Leg: 6.86miles in 1hr 11mins 36secs (10.26pace)

Overall: 19.03miles in 2hrs 59mins 16secs (9.25pace)

Balmaha to Rowardennan

Claire and I set off together and then Paul and the other member in our group joined us. We ran through the trees when I sent another tweet update. I was getting some replies. I didn't always

have time to read them but every time my phone beeped it encouraged me knowing that someone was thinking about me!

After 15mins or so the two guys ran on and Claire and I resumed our conversation. We'd seen a few people on the way, especially who were at a few places and they commented, 'We could hear you two coming ages ago.' I suppose two scousers running along Loch Lomond is not too common.

It was definitely getting warmer now and you could really feel the difference when we came out of the shade into the direct line. I was glad I had my sun glasses on as it really helped with the glare.

I was still feeling really comfortable but was very conscious that I wanted to get as far as I could before this started to hurt. My aim was to get to Beinglas with enough to run the last 12 miles.

On my menu for this section was my mashed potato and cheese. At each little hill I tried to eat a mouthful or so. I'd tried this on my training runs but I did find it harder to eat in the heat and didn't eat as much as I'd planned.

I was taking my sodium tablets every 90mins or so as I was aware how important it was to keep my salt levels up in the heat.

We went through my next mini-split right on time but then lost a couple of minutes on the next one. We could see the guys ahead and then they were away.

Sallory Car Park was a bit different as they are doing some work there. We ran along the edge of the shore rather than the road.

We continued to chat and soon enough we were heading down the last hill into Rowardennan. At some point along this bit another female runner caught us and the three of us arrived at the checkpoint together. I was bang on my plan which meant I'd dropped a couple of minutes from Balmaha.

I hadn't eaten as much mashed potato as planned but I remember Cara had said don't try and play catch up. Just leave it and move on to the next food. I decided to sit down for a couple of minutes and I ate my pot of beans. Well most of them.

As I did so Debs arrived and said, 'Come on JK, it's not a picnic!' She looked really comfortable and I realised my hope of a victory was less likely!! I'd be looking at that back once again!

Leg: 7.94miles in 1hr 26mins 44secs (10.55pace)

Overall: 26.97miles in 4hrs 27mins 09secs (9.54pace)

Rowardennan to Inversnaid

Debs set off first but Claire and I soon caught up and the three of us ran together for the next hour or so. Debs would love to do an Ironman one day so Claire gave her some tips. Number one being - don't worry about the swimming as it's only a small part of the event!

On one of the long hills we started running and came going on the long downhill. I didn't look but realised that Debs had dropped back. I wondered whether she'd pushed too hard to catch us and was paying the price. I really must stop this wishful thinking!!!!

Again I was feeling fairly comfortable and we ran the majority of the wide path with just a few walking breaks on the steeper bits. Just before we came to the single track as we were chatting suddenly Debs joins in the conversation and she was back with us.

Claire and Debs now lead the way and I was starting to struggle a bit to stay with them. A little gap would open up, I'd work hard to catch, then it would open up again, I'd slowly catch up and then on the third time they were away.

The last mile or so into Inversnaid is often a section where for some reason I struggle. I'm not sure if it's because I'm almost at the hotel or what but more often than not in a race I'm caught on this bit.

For the first time in the race I was on my own and needed to regroup. I ate a few jelly babies and hoped they'd kick in. I started counting my breathes and was looking at my garmin to see how much further I had and whether I was losing time.

Thankfully the hotel arrived. It had taken me 1.21.51 so just a couple of minutes outside my plan but for the first time I felt I'd struggled a bit. Debs was away but I saw Claire was still there stretching.

David Mac from my club was marshalling. He did a great job getting my bag and refilling my water. I ate my rice pudding and took a banana to eat on the way.

*Leg: 7.17miles in 1hr 21mins 51secs (11.25pace)
Overall: 34.14miles in 5hrs 51mins 07secs (10.17pace)*

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm

I assumed that Claire would stay with Debs but had waited for me. She said that she was still a bit concerned about pushing too hard and blowing up in the last 10miles. So she was happy to stay together. Earlier I'd said that I had a cold milk shake at Beinglas and she said she fancied some of that! So I think that promise had something to do with it!!



We made our way through the more technical parts of the route. For the past hour or so we were meeting more and more walkers but they were all very encouraging and willing to let us past. I did wonder though whether their patience would last as they was another 300 or runners to come!

I made the mistake of mentioning to Claire that we would go past Rob Roy's cave. She wanted to know all the history of it so I tried to remember as much as I could ... and made the rest of it up!!

Anyway I thought it was worth a photo for Claire (left) to remember it by ...

We continued to run when we could and I was still feeling okay. I decided though to ditch my times and just run as I felt. With the whw race only 7 weeks away I didn't see any advantage in trying to push too hard.

I don't think I could have gone much faster anyway but the simple decision to not worry about the time made the rest of the run far more enjoyable. Instead of worrying that I was falling behind time I ran when I could and was happy to walk when I needed to.

Plus the fact that Claire really didn't care how long it took as long as she finished. So we chatted some more and the miles and time slipped by.

As we approached the top of the Loch I told Claire about Dario and some of the history of the race. It was good to be able to pass on my feelings for this race and my friendship with Dario. We paused for a photo at Dario's post ...



Over the next few miles into Beinglas we were overtaken by Andrew James and then Jez Bragg. They had started two hours after us and had caught us by 40miles. They both looked strong but I reckoned that Jez would catch him.

We were caught by a couple of girls who were going very well. Claire stayed with them while I fell behind a bit. I wondered whether Claire would go with them but once again she slowed down to let me catch up. That milkshake was very tempting!

I wasn't surprised to see that it had taken us 1.41.16 for that section against the plan of 1.35 but it didn't bother me as I knew that a sub 10 was not on today.

Marco and Sharon were waiting for us having seen Debs through. Sharon said that she'd fallen on Conic Hill and her knee looked quite swollen. I really hope it clears up soon.

I sat down and drank my milk shake. I'd been looking forward to it. I'd wondered how to keep it cool so decided to freeze it and hope it had de-thawed by the time I arrived. It had and was perfect. Just a little bit of ice left and really cold. Claire enjoyed it as well.

I also ate some milk jelly and grapes. I drank some water then Marco refilled it for the last section. Thanks for your support Marco. I did ask for my vest that I'd left in my drop bag at Balmaha that Marco had picked up. He said, 'It's in the car, I didn't realise you wanted it!' Marco kindly offered to see us at Carmyle Cottage and I could change into it then.

Leg: 6.68miles in 1hr 41mins 16secs (15.10pace)
Overall: 40.82miles in 7hrs 34mins 53secs (11.09pace)

Beinglas Farm to Tyndrum

Just as we were about to leave Andy Cole arrived. He said he was wilting in the heat but he looked in good shape to me. He would catch us later on and finish a few minutes ahead winning the Vet 60 prize. Congrats Andy.

Once more I asked Claire whether she wanted to push on and even though there was no more milk shake on offer she was happy to stay together. I really appreciated it as I knew it would make the next few hours a lot more enjoyable.

So we chatted some more and I'm afraid Claire had to put up with some of my whw stories. I think I've told most of my friends so it was great having a new audience!!

We were both starting to count down a bit now so I explained to Claire we had four mini-sections left 3.22 miles to Derrydaroch, 2.75miles to the big gate at the start of the forest, 3.64 miles to Auchtertyre and then 2.32 miles to the finish. It sounded so better than 11.94miles!

One or two more of the 8am runners went past and I was wondering where Stuart was. My question was answered about half a mile from Derrydaroch. Murdo was at the top of a small hill with his saltire taking photos.



As we said hello Stuart ran past without a word. I shouted to him and he turned back and waved before heading off down the hill looking good in his Montane sponsored kit.

I was a bit concerned about getting enough water over this last section but thankfully there were some supporters waiting. One guy kindly refilled my water bottle.

As we went past Derrydaroch I saw John Kennedy sat on a rock. He looked to be in a bit of trouble but waved us on.

As we approached Carmyle cottage we saw Marco, Cairn and my friend Chris McGlennon. Marco had my vest so I quickly changed. Chris offered me an olive saying it would be good for the salt. I don't like olives and said so. He said just suck it! I tried but it was horrible. Thanks Chris!!

As we approached the tunnel under the railway line I said to Claire be careful you don't bang your head. I should have told myself the same as I caught the top of my head half way along!

Silke was waiting at Carmyle with a nice refreshing water spray. I also knew that Thomas must be catching us.

As we went under the A81 we saw Peter (Caroline's Dad who was supporting Neal). He said Neal's not far behind. Now Neal had started two hours behind us so I thought he must be going really well. It turned out he wasn't quite as close as Peter intimated but I spent the next hour or so wondering when he would catch me.

Rob Souter did catch up though. Rob had started an hour behind and was going strongly though looked as hot as the rest of us.

One or two more went past on the next section including Thomas but I can't quite remember when he caught us.

Once we arrived at the big gate I said to Claire we have 6miles to go. She shouts out, 'yes 10k let's do it! Claire is such a positive character. Throughout the whole run together she never failed to say hi to each and every walker and runner who we passed or passed us.

Over the next few miles she told me more about her background and teaching. She worked really hard to go to Cambridge and then become an English teacher. She's obviously a great inspiration to the girls in her school and many have taken up sports after seeing her example.

They are going to really miss her when she moves to Kuala Lumpur. Claire asked me to count down the miles so as the 5mile then 4mile point went past we had a quick celebration. By now this was feeling far more like a training run than a race but it made it far more enjoyable on a hot and tough day.

Claire is planning to keep a blog to share her experiences with the girls in her school (you'll have to do it now Claire!). I look forward to following how she gets on.

We ticked off the miles then arrived at the bottom of the hill by the A82 where Stevie Hards was waiting with Silke. Oh maybe Thomas was still to pass us then? Anyway another squirt with Silke's magic spray and we were off.

Managed to get across the road without being killed and then ran into Auchtertyre. Another history lesson about Fillan the missionary on the way.

We set off from Auchtertyre with just over 2miles to go. By now I knew I'd be slower than last year's 10.14 but wanted to make sure I wasn't slower than my first Fling in 2007 which was 10.36.

We continued to run and walk and then we were on the path along the river. As we approached the last half mile I saw Silke running towards us. She didn't greet us which I thought was strange but we learnt later Thomas had fallen and she was going back to help him.

I didn't see him. I'm really sorry Thomas ... I didn't ignore you.

As we approached the finish we heard and saw the piper which Claire thought was a great touch.



We ran up the finish together where Katrina was waiting to take our final time. I thanked Claire for such a fun day and even though I was slower than I'd hoped I had enjoyed it and was grateful to finish feeling okay and ready to finish my preparation for the big one in June.

Just an aside I sent a request to be Claire's friend on Facebook and discovered that we share the same birthday (which is also Caroline's)!!

Leg: 11.94 miles in 2hrs 24mins 52secs (13.38pace)
Overall: 52.76 miles in 10hrs 22mins 10secs (11.48pace)

I have now finished 5 Flings and each one is different for different reasons. This is the first race that I've run with someone for the whole race and I really enjoyed it. I know Claire could have gone faster but hopefully this has given her a time to beat next time.

It was good to chat to lots of friends. Some had great runs like Debs who finished 2nd Lady in a superb time of 9.39.32 and Ross Moreland who shattered his pb with a time of 9.22.30.

I'll be looking at the results in more detail later but I train with Deb and Ross and know how well they are running and how much they have both improved over the last year or so.

The results are now on the Fling web site. For the record I came 75th overall out of 321 finishers and 5th Super Vet.

Finally a massive thank you to Murdo, Ellen and every single person who helped Marshall and help the race to run so smoothly.

Highland Fling 2011 Plan	2011 Plan				2011 Actual			
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Milngavie to Drymen		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
start	end of wood	2.14	19:00	19:00	8:53	2.21	19:42	19:42	8:55
end of wood	wall	2.20	20:00	39:00	9:05	2.21	19:23	39:06	8:46
wall	beech tree	2.71	23:00	1:02:00	8:29	2.71	23:39	1:02:44	8:44
beech tree	steps	2.62	23:00	1:25:00	8:47	2.61	23:00	1:25:44	8:49
steps	drymen	2.44	23:00	1:48:00	9:26	2.43	21:55	1:47:40	9:01
1:46:57	Leg Total	12.11	1:48:00		8:55	12.17	1:47:40		8:51
(09 times)	Rest		00:00	1:48:00			00:00	1:47:40	

Drymen to Balmaha		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
drymen	path junction	2.22	21:30	2:09:30	9:41	2.24	20:33	2:08:13	9:11
path junction	bridge	2.38	22:30	2:32:00	9:27	2.36	22:41	2:30:53	9:37
bridge	balmaha	2.24	31:00	3:03:00	13:50	2.26	28:23	2:59:16	12:33
1:10:12	Leg Total	6.84	1:15:00		10:58	6.86	1:11:36		10:26
2:57:08	Total	18.95		3:03:00	9:39	19.03		2:59:16	9:25
	Rest		1:30	3:04:30			1:09	3:00:25	

Balmaha to Rowardennan		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
balmaha	bridge	2.18	22:30	3:27:00	10:19	2.17	22:25	3:22:49	10:20
bridge	bridge	2.90	29:30	3:56:30	10:10	2.93	31:11	3:54:00	10:38
bridge	rowardennan	2.75	32:00	4:28:30	11:38	2.84	33:09	4:27:09	11:40
1:20:28	Leg Total	7.83	1:24:00		10:44	7.94	1:26:44		10:55
4:20:04	Total	26.78		4:28:30	10:02	26.97		4:27:09	9:54
	Rest		1:30	4:30:00			2:06	4:29:15	

Rowardennan to Inversnaid		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
rowardennan	single track	4.46	46:00	5:16:00	10:19	4.40	46:06	5:15:21	10:29
single track	hotel	2.80	34:00	5:50:00	12:09	2.77	35:45	5:51:07	12:54
1:17:13	Leg Total	7.26	1:20:00		11:01	7.17	1:21:51		11:25
5:39:16	Total	34.04		5:50:00	10:17	34.14		5:51:07	10:17
	Rest		1:00	5:51:00			2:31	5:53:37	

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
Inversnaid	gate	2.53	38:00	6:29:00	15:01	2.51	38:46	6:32:23	15:27
gate	bridge	2.00	29:00	6:58:00	14:30	1.93	31:33	7:03:56	16:21
bridge	beinglas	2.10	28:00	7:26:00	13:20	2.24	30:56	7:34:53	13:49
1:30:54	Leg Total	6.63	1:35:00		14:20	6.68	1:41:16		15:10
7:11:38	Total	40.67		7:26:00	10:58	40.82		7:34:53	11:09
	Rest		1:00	7:27:00			4:26	7:39:18	

Beinglas Farm to Tyndrum		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
beinglas	derrydarroch	3.21	41:00	8:08:00	12:46	3.22	42:11	8:21:28	13:06
derrydarroch	big gate	2.75	40:00	8:48:00	14:33	2.74	40:26	9:01:55	14:45
big gate	auchtertyre	3.64	40:00	9:28:00	10:59	3.63	52:34	9:54:29	14:29
auchtertyre	tyndrum	2.32	27:00	9:55:00	11:38	2.35	27:41	10:22:10	11:47
2:35:43	Leg Total	11.92	2:28:00		12:25	11.94	2:42:52		13:38
9:49:09	Total	52.59		9:55:00	11:19	52.76		10:22:10	11:48