

West Highland Way Race

Saturday 18th June 201 - starting at 1am
95miles from Milngavie to Fort William

This was my 16th ultra race. A few of those races have gone pretty well exactly to plan. For example in the 2009 whw race I set off with a sub 20hr plan and was able to achieve it. An amazing feeling being able to deliver.

Other races I've had to readjust on the go but was still able to finish strongly and was happy I'd done my best and coped with whatever was thrown at me.

But this race was something else. Last year I tried a few things differently and felt they hadn't really worked. So this year I went back to what worked well in 2009 and all my training had gone really well.

All my times were very similar to two years ago and I set off confident of being able to run sub 21hrs and hoping that if things went well I might, just might, be able to go under sub 20hr again.

The only negative thought I had was that my Fling was 30mins slower than 2009 and day 2 of my 2 day run in May was slower but I put both those times down to the weather. It did concern me though that I'd chosen to ease off. Would I be able to switch it on again when needed?

My tapering had been fine. I had a minor problem just a week before the race when I had to replace my shoes because there was a hole in them but I tried to ignore that and trust the new shoes I had would be fine.

So what happened? Well I assume that anyone reading this will know that I finished in 27hrs 36mins 00secs which is a long way off my goal of sub 21!! For those who like splits then you can pore over them to your heart's content.

The times tell their own story but while it's still fresh in my mind I want to write down how I got on and how I felt.

Pre-race

I'd a really good day on Friday. I spent the morning sorting out my food and gear. Then went for a sleep in the afternoon. Nice meal with Katrina at 6pm, relaxed in the evening and then headed to Milngavie at 11am.

Katrina and Laura were my back-up though the night to Balmaha and then Stevie and David, friends from Kilbarchan AAC, would take over from Auchtertyre.

Arrived at the start about 11.30pm, registered, chatted to a few folk then made sure everything was ready for the 12.30am briefing.



At the start with Laura and Katrina

Milngavie to Drymen

I was still deciding whether to carry my camera or not. In the end Katrina said she'd video the start and then I could take it from Balmaha if I wanted. That sounded a good idea.

Passed on my best wishes to lots of friends on the start line. Caroline looked relaxed and ready for the challenge. I could see Richie and Jan-Albert ready for the battle that was going to take place at the top end of the field.



Adrian counted us down from 10 and right on 1am we were off to Fort William.

I was keen to run the first section to Drymen comfortably but also at a decent pace so I settled in right behind Sharon and Ross. I was chatting to Robert Soutar who was doing his first whw. I've run with Robert on the Kilpatricks and knew he was going to have a really good race which he did.

The first 5 or 6 miles went fairly comfortably. I tried to make sure I was running at my pace and my

first two mini-splits were 30-45secs faster than planned but within reason.

I was chatting to various folks on the way and enjoying the early pace and run. At one point Jamie caught up and we chatted for a bit. She was a bit concerned about whether her ankle would hold up after an injury but she was running very smoothly when she went past me.

When we got on to the track along Dumgoyne I could see Jamie at the front of a line of 8-10 runners with Sharon and Ross just behind. I was near the end of the line and quite happy. I was interested to see whether Sharon would go with Jamie but sensibly she seemed to be holding off and running her own race.

I went through Beech Tree (10miles) in 1hr 6mins. By now I felt I'd settled into the run and everything was fine. There was lots of banter going on as the girls were at the front opening all the gates!

After we arrived at the road at Gartness the group of 15 or runners very quickly broke up. Jamie, Sharon, Robert and others ran off. I was pleased to see Ross held back and was running his own race.

I was running with a guy called Kenny who was doing the race for the first time. We ran into Drymen together.

*Milngavie to Drymen (12.16miles)
1hr 56mins 03secs (9.33pace)*

Drymen to Balmaha

There was a good crowd at Drymen and lots of clapping and cheering which was great. I'd encouraged Katrina and Laura to drive straight to Balmaha as I knew I had enough food and water until then.

This year I've been helped by my friend Cara, from Kilbarchan, with regard to food. We'd worked out a plan for the race which involved splitting it into three sections with different types of food in each section.

In the first section up to Inversnaid I would try and eat more substantial food. So I had a peanut butter sandwich and a honey sandwich to eat before Balmaha.

It was great to be able to run through the Garadhban Forest without having to climb round lots of fallen trees as we did in the night run a few weeks ago.

Kenny and I caught up with Ross along this point. Again I was really pleased that Ross was running sensibly. Last year he pushed far too hard to Balmaha and ended up having to drop out at Glencoe.

This year I've done all my long runs with Ross and I knew he was in great shape and really wanted him to do well.

Once we came to the climb up Conic Hill Ross did open a gap on us and I didn't see him for a while. It was now fully light and a great feeling starting the new day.

The weather so far had been really good. There was a very light drizzle for a while but even though I carried my jacket I didn't wear it.

Kenny & I climbed up and over Conic Hill and made our way down the other side. I was my usual cautious self but thankfully so were Ross & Kenny.

I was looking forward to seeing Katrina & Laura and had planned a 5min stop to eat my mashed potato and cheese.



Balmaha at 4.20am

I changed into a short sleeved top and wore a clean buff. I decided to keep my rain jacket. I also decided not to carry my camera. I felt if I had any chance to achieve my goals I couldn't afford any distractions.

Drymen to Balmaha (6.85miles) in 1hr 21mins 32secs (11.54pace)
Overall: 19.01miles in 3hrs 17mins 36secs (10.24pace)

Balmaha to Rowardennan

The car park was crowded and it was great atmosphere running through. Lots of people seem to recognise me, calling me by name which is always a lovely feeling so thanks.

As I felt Balmaha I sent my first tweet update. I'd decided to do this and had set up lots of drafts so all I had to do was put in the final number and send. It didn't take too long and meant friends could follow my progress.

I was on my own for a while and once again tried to settle into a steady rhythm. I'm aware that this section to Rowardennan is probably the time that my body is switching from burning carbohydrates to fat and I can feel a bit sluggish.

I felt okay and concentrated on my next section mini-section. I could see a couple of runners not too far ahead and slowly but surely caught up with them.

One of them was James who I'd met before. In fact was passed each other in Pollok Park last

Tuesday when I was doing my final run and he was out cycling with a group of kids.

We ran together right into Rowardennan. My three mini-splits were all right on target and I was feeling quite happy with how things were going. I was keen to try and stay with my sub 21 target for as long as possible.

Just as I came down the final hill on to the road before Rowardennan I saw Jamie hugging one of her support team and realised that she must be pulling out. I really felt for her but from what she said it was always going to be a gamble. She'll be back!

I arrived at the check point 5mins ahead of my sub21 plan. I stopped for 4mins to eat my baked beans and refill my water. I saw Mike at the check point. He said he was having some stomach problems but went on to finish in 21.30 so congratulations to him.

*Balmaha to Rowardennan (7.82miles) in 1hr 28mins 20secs (11.18pace)
Overall: 26.83miles in 4hrs 51mins 01secs (10.51pace)*

Rowardennan to Inversnaid

I set off on my own again. Everyone has different stop plans so it often happens that you play leap frog with people for a while.

I was quite happy on my own and settled into running when I could and walking hard up the hills. I sent off my next tweet on the first hill.

Thinking back I don't remember seeing anyone for the next 3-4 miles until I caught up with James a mile or two before Inversnaid.

During the Fling I had a bit of a struggle over that last mile into the check point and I was keen to try and finish this section well. I ran behind James for a bit but when he said did I want to pass I decided to do so and had a good run over the last mile. Looking back maybe I pushed just a bit too hard.

I arrived at the Inversnaid check point 3mins inside my sub 21hr plan. By now I knew that sub 20hrs was not possible but was very happy that I was feeling okay and that anytime around 21hrs would be excellent.

I sat down to eat my mashed potato. As soon as I had one mouthful I knew I was going to struggle to eat it. Thankfully Cara had suggested having a milk shake here just in case I couldn't eat or it was hot so I drank that instead.

Just as I was about to finish who turns up but Debs. That's two races on the trot that she's caught me sitting down! She looked in great shape and we left the check point together.

*Rowardennan to Inversnaid (7.27miles) in 1hr 26mins 22secs (11.53pace)
Overall: 34miles in 6hrs 21mins 33secs (11.11pace)*

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm

Debs said, 'Do you want to hang out together?' I said I'd love to run together but I knew it wouldn't last long as Debs is running so well. But the 5mins we ran together was fun. Debs told me that she'd sent Marco to buy a new pair of trail shoes for her for the race! I thought I was pushing it

buying a new pair with 6days to go but the day before!!

I sent off my next tweet and watched Debs glide effortlessly into the distance. I really hoped she'd get under 20hrs and was so pleased to hear that she shattered that with a time of 19hrs 39mins 57secs for 3rd Female and 18th overall. Excellent and so well deserved.

I knew this next section to Beinglas Farm would give me a good idea of whether I was able to maintain my sub21 pace. In 2009 I ran this section in 1hr 28mins but I feared I would be at least 10mins slower than that today.

I was starting to pay for pushing it into Inversnaid and it took me a few minutes to regroup and get going again.

I'm not sure what position I was in but I would imagine I was about 25th. I finished in 70th position and so from this point until the end at least 45 people passed me! Plus it may have been more as a good number dropped out.

I probably won't mention everyone but thanks to everyone who passed and encouraged me to keep going. I suppose one of the nice things about keeping a blog and writing so much is that people do recognise me and it really helped keep me going.

I lost 6mins on my first two mini-sections over the tougher technical ground. While I wasn't too worried about that I knew it was going to be very difficult to claw that back and mentally I was already starting to think sub 22hrs sounds good.

I was still running fairly freely but my legs felt like they had been running for 8hrs.

About a mile or so before Beinglas Farm Ross and Bob Steel caught up. I was really surprised to see Ross as I just assumed he was well ahead. It seems that he needed the toilet at Rowardennan and had to wait for 10mins or so.

Ross also told me afterwards that he was at Inversnaid when I arrived but I didn't see him.

They both looked very strong and full of running. If I sound jealous it's because I was!! That was the last I saw of them until the prize giving. Bob went on to finish in 20.21.14 (a new pb) and Ross 20.51.18.

I was so pleased for Ross as I've seen first hand just how much he has put into his training this year. There is more to come as well.

I was concentrating so hard on getting up the final hill that I completely missed Dario's post but I did think about the great man as I pushed on to the checkpoint.

I arrived at Beinglas in 1hr 44mins. Overall I was now 7mins over my sub 21 plan.

It was good to see Mags at the checkpoint. Carolyn was waiting for Neil to come in. Neil & Carolyn are from Canada and have run the race together for the last two years. This year Carolyn was supporting Neil.

I asked Carolyn how Neil was doing. She said he'd not too far behind and is using you as a target!

So I suspected I would be seeing Neil sometime soon.

I ate a rice pudding and my milk jelly here and took a banana to eat on the way. I also took an extra bottle of water as I knew it was a long way to Auchtertyre.

Ian was here and told me that the race at the sharp end was really exciting with the top four only separated by 10mins.

*Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm (6.61miles) in 1hr 44mins 55secs (15.52pace)
Overall: 40.71miles in 8hrs 09mins 55secs (12.02pace)*

Beinglas Farm to Auchtertyre

As I set off for the next section to Auchtertyre I had to have a rethink about my goals. I decided to stop worrying about keeping up with my plan. It wasn't going to happen and my goal became to finish in the best time I could.

When I've ran well I was the one who was passing others and working my way up the field. Now it was the opposite and I was being caught and passed on a regular basis.

I started thinking about who would pass me next. I glanced at my overall pace and saw that it was now 12.15mins per mile. I knew that Peter Duggan had set off with a strategy of trying to run as close to 12mins per mile for the whole race.

It was a bold plan as it involves running a lot slower than everyone else who was aiming for sub 20hrs but I admired him for his commitment and hoped he would be able to break that sub 20hr barrier he was so keen on.

About a mile before Derrydarouch Peter did catch me. We exchanged a quick greeting and I watched with admiration as he continued to run strongly along the undulating path.

Peter finished in a pb of 20hrs 44mins 26secs. Congratulations Peter on a great run. I know you didn't break that sub 20hr time but your strategy of an even pace worked well for you.

For some reason I had given myself 52mins to get to Derrydarouch. I arrived in 46.43 and for a brief time I thought I might be able to get back on track but alas it was a false hope as the next mini-section I lost the 5mins I gained!

On the undulating path towards the woods above Crianlarich a few more runners caught and went past me. They all said they were finding it hard but were all running stronger than me!

Just as I went past 'poo corner' Gavin McKinlay caught up and we walked /ran together for a while. Gavin's approach to training is very different to mine. Basically I run 5-6 times a week and Gavin doesn't. I average 50miles a week and Gavin does that in a month.

In our training run in February Gavin really struggled yet once more here he was running well and leaving me in his wake.

We arrived at the big gate which marks the half way point of the race together but Gavin pushed on finishing in 21.41.54. Maybe I should sign up for the Gavin McKinlay training method.

There were a few supporters at the gate so thanks for the encouragement as I went past. I knew I had 3.61 miles to Auchtertyre. I was looking forward to seeing Stevie & David, my support team, and also Cara and her Dad Peter, who were coming up to see me and watch the race.

By now my feet were starting to hurt a bit. Nothing too bad but I could feel the inside of both heels. I was able to run the down hills but I was feeling quite stiff and not very relaxed.

The next person to catch me was Donnie Campbell. Donnie looked so relaxed and running well within himself and once we'd started chatting I realised why. Not only was he running the whw race but was carrying on and running another 95 miles on the roads to Skye.

Donnie was well ahead of his plan but was feeling good. He was taking longer breaks and making sure that he was eating enough. He stayed with me for 15 mins or so as he wanted to take it easy and not push too hard.

While I was writing this I checked on Facebook and saw a short video of Donnie finishing in Skye. Donnie finished the 184 miles in 44hrs 30mins (whw - 22.35) and he was running really strongly right to the tape. There was a big crowd cheering him home - a very emotional moment.

A few more people passed me before Auchtertyre but at least I was still running and while I didn't feel great was pleased to be feeling okay.

At the Auchtertyre checkpoint I was weighed and then I walked down to David's car. It was great to see Stevie & David and have a chat with Cara and her Dad. They were obviously really enjoying seeing the race first hand.

I sat down for 5 mins or so and ate my hot chocolate and thick & creamy yoghurt which went down well.

I saw Carolyn again and asked about Neil. I can't see him yet was the replay but he shouldn't be long!

Beinglas Farm to Auchtertyre (9.52miles) in 2hrs 25mins 59secs (15.20pace)
Overall: 50.23miles in 10hrs 41mins 50secs (12.47pace)

Auchtertyre to Bridge of Orchy

As I left the checkpoint I thought back to last year when I went through a really tough time on this section to Bridge of Orchy. I was encouraged that I was feeling stronger than last year and was able to run all the bits I normally do to Tyndrum.

Half way to Tyndrum I saw Neal running the other way. He was trying out his fibram five-fingers and loving them though he did say his calves were sore!! He told me that Caroline was going well so I told him to pass on my best wishes.

Graeme McClymont and Jody Young caught me as we ran along the new path by the river. They were both going well and finished in good times.

At the train station just past the new Fling finish a lady was handing out banana cake which was lovely. She said she reads my blog so thanks! I later had an email from her. It was Kirsty who owns By The Way Hostel.

I ran into Tyndrum where Stevie, David, Cara and Peter were waiting. Cara & Peter wished me all the best as they were heading home.

Carolyn was also there and when I asked the question, 'Where is Neil?' she answered 'Here he comes now!'

I walked up the hill out of Tyndrum feeling that I'm still going okay. I have another 42miles to go and I know I can do it.

I must say though that from now on it wasn't much fun. It was a real case of getting my head down, running when I could and walking as hard as I could when I couldn't run. My feet were starting to hurt more now and I wondered whether I had a stone in there which is often the feeling you get when there is a blister forming.

Once I'd got to the top of the hill I started running. I ran for 100 breathes, then walked for 20 and ran again. I'm sure anyone looking on would see a very stiff shuffling style of running but I was moving as best I could.

Finally Neil caught me up and we walked together up the hill on the rougher ground. He was going well and was hoping for somewhere around 22hrs. I've not really spoken to Neil before but have enjoyed reading Carolyn's blog about their various races.

As Neil pushed on I said to him I reckon you'll finish in 21.55. I wasn't too far out as he finished in 22.40. A really good effort.

After I went underneath the railway line I did something I've never done in a whw race before. I stopped between checkpoints. I sat on the stile and took off my shoe as it felt as though my sock needed straightening.

I don't think it did. It was the blister forming. When I'm going well I can run from here all the way down to the bridge. But not today. I ran a number of times but could only manage 2-3 mins at a time.

I'd carried my jacket with me from the start until Auchtertyre but as it hadn't rained and I had my support team I left it with them. Now it started to rain and as I wasn't running that hard I was starting to get cold.

It's not good as the body has to work hard at keeping warm which leaves less energy for running. Fortunately Stevie & David realised what could be happening and rang me asking did I want a jacket. So Stevie ran back from Bridge of Orchy with it.

Just then Richard Galbraith caught up. I was really hoping to see Richard at some point. I'd met Richard in February when he joined us for one of our training runs. He ran the Marathon de Sables - 156miles over 6days in the desert.

So it was great to have a chat and it really helped me over the next few miles. Stevie arrived with my jacket and then ran back to Bridge of Orchy to get ready for my arrival. I had decided to change into my road shoes and put on dry socks to see of that would help with my feet.

Just as we came to the railway station Katrina was there waiting for us. She took a video clip of us running in and then we chatted as we headed down the hill.

David's car was at the road junction so I stopped there before the official checkpoint. I changed into a long sleeved top and kept my running jacket on. I also changed into my road shoes. My insoles had split so I had to put them back in, in two parts. I hoped they would be okay.

I had another milk shake and some ice cream and took some liquorice all sorts and a banana for the next section.



Not quite the weather for ice cream but it was easy to eat.

*Auchtertyre to Bridge of Orchy (9.19miles) in 2hrs 25mins 28secs (15.50pace)
Overall: 59miles in 13hrs 15mins 18secs (13.23pace)*

Bridge of Orchy to Glencoe Ski Lift

I set off up the hill with sore feet but a determination to finish as well as I could.

I thought back on last year when I left here really low and how I'd been able to turn things round and finish strongly. I suspected it wasn't going to be as easy this time but you never know!

Half way up the hill I heard the distinctive voice of Keith Hughes. Keith was going well and said he was on target for around 22hrs which would be a pb. Keith finished in 22.40.21 and was very happy when I saw him at the prize giving.

Murdo McEwan was marshalling at the top of the hill with his distinctive saltire. It was really wet and miserable by now and Murdo was going to be there for many more hours.

I really needed a loo stop and so once I was round the corner I stepped off the track, pants down and well you can imagine the rest! Half way through the process a female runner comes along!! I think it was Michelle. She kindly shouted, 'Don't worry I'm not looking!!'

Katrina told me afterwards that she told my support crew ... 'I saw more of John Kynaston than I was supposed to!'

It was a bit of a struggle coming down the hill as each step seemed to aggregate my feet but I ran as much as I could. Stevie and David were waiting for me and Stevie asked me whether I wanted him to run with me over the Rannoch Mor.

I asked whether I was over 4hrs behind the leader. He said that at bridge of Orchy I was 3hrs 50mins but by now I was over 4hrs.

I wasn't sure whether it only worked from the checkpoints so said I'd rather not just in case. I'd hate to get disqualified!

So I set off up the hill. It felt a long walk and gave me time to really think about the task ahead. I still had just over 30miles to go and I was still running a bit I knew it was going to be short bursts rather than anything prolonged.

I reasoned that if I could do 3miles an hour of walking and running it would take me another 11hrs to go. I'd been on the move for 14 and half hours by now. So it was going to take me at least 26hrs.

I can honestly say I never even considered not finishing. I knew I could as long as I kept putting one foot in front of the other. I know it wasn't going to be much fun but I could get there.

So head down, walk up the hill, run for as long as I could, walk again, another run, another walk, greet follow runners as they pass, another shuffle run, walk again. Keep eating and drinking.

One of other things that helps me is to break it all down. If I started thinking about how far it is to go it could get overwhelming. So I focused on my next mini-split. Time was irrelevant. But it's only 1.7miles to the bridge.

You can do that. Get there and it's only 3.36miles to Glencoe. Tick off that section and head for the next one.

I'd taken with me my full waterproofs as I didn't want to get caught on the Rannoch Mor if it cold even colder and wetter. At the bottom of the long hill I stopped to put on my running tights and my thicker jacket.

Just as I did Sandra and her support runner came past. Sandra was running well and was loving the challenge. They even ran half way up the hill which I thought was impressive.

Then I saw Katrina running down the hill. It was great to see her and we chatted as we walked up that final hill. We then ran all the way down the hill catching up with Sandra again.

As we chatted I suggested to Katrina that she takes over from David who had to be back in Paisley for 6am on Sunday for work.

Initially when I was hoping to finish by 11pm at the latest he could have got home. But now it was looking like a 4am finish at best it would be better if headed home from Glencoe and Katrina helped Stevie.

I came into the check point and stopped for 8mins to get some more food on board for the trip to Kinlochleven.

Richard came over and explained that he was stopping. His ankle was getting worse and he didn't want to make it even worse. A wise decision.

I thanked David for his helped before he headed back Paisley.



With David and Stevie at Glencoe

*Bridge of Orchy to Glencoe Ski Lodge (10.86miles) in 3hrs 08mins 02secs (17.19pace)
Overall: 70.28miles in 16:34:31 (14.09pace)*

Glencoe Ski Lodge to Kinlochleven

Just as we were leaving the check point Andy Cole arrived. 'Not you again!' was his greeting. We met at this point last year. He too was having a harder time but was keeping it going.

Stevie was now going to run with me to Kinlochleven while Katrina drove to the check point. Then the plan was for Katrina to run or more likely walk with me to Fort William while Stevie went on ahead to the finish, put up the tent and then head back up the track so we could all finish together.

Stevie I ran down the hill, crossed the A82, ran some more along the road past the Kingshouse Hotel and then climbed up the hill on the rough track. Two runners and their support teams went past us including Tony Thistlewaite who has completed the race 8 times now.

It was good to have Stevie as company. I know Stevie well from Kilbarchan and he has been with me for all five of my whw races. We chat for a bit if needed but he also senses when I need to get my head down and grind it out.

In the two years when I broke 20hrs I was fairly easy to support. I turned up on time, took my stuff

and was off again. I didn't need anyone to run with me and it was all very positive.

Last year and this year has been a different story. My support have had to do a lot more running with me and being to change plans mid race. When we met a couple of weeks ago I was hoping not to need a support runner.

Now I was very grateful for Stevie and then Katrina to run with me and keep me going.

We ran and walked to Altnafeadh where I stopped to take off my thick jacket as I was feeling too warm.

I sensed that the climb up to the top of the Devil's staircase was going to be tough and it was. I didn't have any energy in my legs, my feet were sore and I had to push myself to keep on putting one foot in front of the other.

I tried hard not to look up but just counting 1,2,3,4 over and over until eventually I made it to the top. Another land mark to tick off.

Stevie suggested I eat something I took an energy bar I'd been given at the Dechmont Law race last Sunday - a 9-bar original. I thought I might manage a bit or two but to my surprise I wolfed it all.

Within minutes I felt so much stronger and was able to run down the hill. It wasn't a miracle cure but it did give me some energy to get going again.

So we ran and walked and made our way down to Kinlochleven. It was good to see the Trossachs mountain rescue team. They did such a brilliant job all weekend.

Another couple of runners went by but once again slowly but surely we arrived at Kinlochleven and another section was ticked off.

On the way down I said to Stevie that I was going to ask Dr Chris to have a look at my feet and see if he could do anything as they were pretty sore by now.

Stevie also suggested we buy some chips and have something more substantial to fuel me for the final 14miles.

So I knew it was going to be a longer stop but that was fine. Time didn't really matter by now.

Julie was one of the marshals. It was nice to see her having read her blog about supporting ultra runners.

I went and lay down so Dr Chris could sort out my feet. Sandra was lying on the treatment table with two big bags of ice on her ankles. They were swollen and looked very sore but it was obvious that she was finishing this race which is what she did it a very credible 25.57.50.

I'm sure she would have been well under 24hrs if she hadn't had to stop to bring the swelling down.

Dr Chris did a great job on my feet but once I put my shoes back on I knew the next 14miles was

going to take a long time!

While I was being treated and eating Andy Cole with daughter Julia came and went. Andy finished in 26.00.05 - not his best but not his worse either. That was Andy's 5th finish.

Glencoe Ski Lodge to Kinlochleven (10.63miles) in 3hrs 13mins 02secs (18.10pace)
Overall: 80.92miles in 19hrs 55mins 46secs (14.47pace)

Kinlochleven to Fort William

I made sure Katrina had enough warm clothes on as I knew this would take a while! I did reflect on the fact that two years ago I'd have finished by now!

I had been recharging my garmin on the go using the portable pack but it ran out again at the checkpoint. I decided not to bother with it for this last section. I didn't really want to see how slowly I was moving anyway and I knew how far it was to each of my mini-sections.

As I started walking my feet were really sore. The tape was helping but I knew it would be a while before the soreness wore off.

In some ways this feels like the last leg and it is. I've run almost 81miles and there is 'just' 14miles to go. But it is 14miles and that is a long way when you're tired and your feet are sore!

But I had no intention of not getting to the end and collecting my 5th goblet. The thought of quitting and having to look friends in the eye and say I bailed out was not worth contemplating.

I wasn't injured so had no excuse. I've done it before and I knew I could do it again.

It was great having Katrina with me to help me along. Katrina has supported me over the past 26years of being married and specifically over the last 5 years of running ultras but this was the first race she has been with me on the route.

Katrina led the way and I duly followed ... a bit like our relationship really!

It was 9pm at this point and we probably had another 2 hours of light so it would be good to get as far as could before switching on the head torches.

Fuelled by the chips I made it to the top and onto the Lairigmor and the old military road. I explained to Katrina that it is a rocky uneven path.

When I'm going well I don't mind this section too much. Yes it's long and had three false horizons but if I'm still running I can get to Lundavra in under 1hr 50mins.

But walking is another story. It took ages. Every step was sore on my feet. Every stone seemed to jar my blisters. I kept telling myself that I will get there if I keep putting one front in front of the other.

We chatted about various things and just kept going. There were three sets of Trossachs Mountain Rescue Teams along the way. I took the excuse to stop at each and every one to have a chat and rest.

One gave me some coke, another a bag of crisps and lemonade. Katrina wasn't impressed when I sat down as she knew it would take me a bit of time to get going again!

After what seemed ages and probably was we saw Stevie running towards us. He had pitched the tent at the leisure centre and then Chris, Neal and Caroline had given him a lift to Lundavra.

Sadly Caroline had stopped at Beinglas Farm with a badly swollen knee. She had been going well until Inversnaid but had struggled from there and made the only decision open to her. I had spoken on the phone earlier and she seemed positive and was already planning on coming back next year.

The three of them were going to wait at Lundavra to see me through before heading home. It was a real boost to have their support and friendship and it was really appreciated. Neal & Caroline have been here before when they supported me on the Hardmoors two years ago.

It seemed to take forever for the sheep pen to arrive and then the last mile to Lundavra. I think a few more runners and their support went past.

Eventually we saw the bonfire at the check point and the encouraging smiles and support of Chris, Neal & Caroline. I sat down for a few minutes. It would have been rude not to chat to them!

I could see the concern on their faces but they said all the right things and sent me off with their support and encouragement to finish it off.

As I set off up the hill I tried not to think about how far I still had to go but when you've run the route so many times in training and races it's hard not to.

Even though it was 'only' 7 miles to go I knew it was going to take me another two and half hours at least.

I decided to just get my head down and walk. I had been convincing myself that the path was easier after Lundavra but it didn't feel that way with my feet as sore as they were.

After about 15mins things went even worse. My vision went all blurry. It was as if I was cross eyed and couldn't focus properly. I had to walk most of the rest of the way with one eye closed to try and see the ground.

Stevie and Katrina were superb guiding me over the ground. The closer it got to the end the tougher it was to keep going.

I kept wanting to stop and have a rest. Stevie and Katrina were wanting to keep me moving. We compromised and I was allowed a stop every now and then. But they drew the line when I said I wanted to lie down for a few minutes!

I think they realised I might never get up again!!

With about 5miles to go I hit rock bottom. I stopped in the middle of the path and sat down feeling completely exhausted. After a couple of minutes Katrina and Stevie got me up. I held on to Katrina and was on the verge of tears. I felt so sorry for myself!

I knew I could make it but I also knew it was going to be so hard. I felt so tired and sore. Somehow with their help I got going again and I was determined to finish this off.

We trudged on past all the landmarks I'd remembered in my mind hours earlier. Going down the steep wooden steps was particularly difficult!

Then when I thought it was still a while away the open area where the trees used to be opened out in front of us. It was light by now and the combination of realising we had less than 4miles to go and mostly downhill and the light of a new day gave me enough energy to stride on.

As we hit the wide forest path Ellen and her team arrived. I think Ellen was surprised to see me. She said are you only just finishing? Sadly yes was the answer!

They ran off down the hill for Ellen's 6th finish. I wondered whether she would be the last to pass me but there was still one more to go.

So almost there. I knew it was 2.69 miles to Braveheart Car Park and then another 1.10miles to the finish. If I could increase my pace to 20min miles it would take us another 1hr 15mins.

With Katrina and Stevie leading the way we set off down the hill. My feet are killing me on the steep descent and I'm still having to close one eye so I can focus on the ground! I was aware that I was wandering all over the place. I must have looked like I was drunk!

Down and down we went. The lights of Fort William getting closer by the step. Past the little rise and then the longer downhill until meeting the path at the bottom. In my mind that wasn't far and I suppose when I'm running it isn't but it took ages to get there this time.

I was allowed one stop when I got to the bottom but only because there was a nice tree trunk to sit on that they could get me back up.

I walked as fast as I could along the road knowing that the car park can't be too far now. It was further than I would have liked but by putting one foot in front of the other it did eventually come.

I asked whether there was any chance of a rest before the final mile but was told I had no chance.

So off to the finish we went. Again I knew the landmarks to look out for and tick off. The little cut-off through the trees, then the 30 sign, the final little hill, the official sign post and then the leisure centre.

I got my head down and counted 50 paces over and over until each one landmark was reached and passed.

As I went past the roundabout I thanked Katrina and Stevie for their support and help. I couldn't have done it without them and I wanted them to know how much I appreciated all they had done for me.

It can't have been easy for Katrina seeing me in such a state but I did remind her that when she married me it was 'for better and for worse.' I don't think she had this in mind though!!

Then joy of joys - there was the leisure centre and the finish. Finally I could sit down and stop!

Ian and Adrian were there to welcome me in. My official time was recorded as 27hrs 36mins 00secs.

There is a lot of reflecting to do but I'll leave that for another time.

If you're read all this then you to deserve a prize!



Katrina & I at the end



Receiving my 5th goblet from Sean with Ian in the background

Finally the winner of my 'Guess My Time' was Murdo McEwan who even though he was four and a half hours out was the closest!! Well done Murdo. His prize was a whw t-shirt ...

