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Completely shattered after running 95 miles in just over 17 hours.....

and I still had to admit it wasn't as tough as the Everest Marathon. However try telling that to everyone who had just pushed themselves to the limit of endurance, both mentally and physically!

My training had begun after a fairly long lay off with a torn muscle in my foot in October and the following 3 months I'd lazed about taking it relatively easy. However I had entered a few events and the first signs for the year were ominous, poor form, a house move and internet crash all seemed to take a lot out of me. I just couldn't be bothered running much and felt lethargic. The Highland Mountain Marathon was the first wake up call, followed by a series of long runs including Blair Atholl via Glen Tilt and the Lairig Ghru to Aviemore. Excellent training and enjoyable long runs which I used to do more frequently 10 years ago. However the crux to all the training was a 26 mile route round Beinn A Ghlo with Lucy Colquhoun and Matt, followed 3 days later by an epic 45 mile run 17 days before the WHW. The 45 mile run from my friends house near Tomintoul passed through wonderful remote wild country seldom explored on foot, climbing gradually through ancient Caledonian pine forests with black grouse and buzzards crying from the tree tops. I chose a route through to Bynack stables and suffered the indignity of being swamped by deep heather and bog before gaining the track to Glenmore Lodge. I realised how easy it was for red deer to bound away in no time as I disturbed one grazing on the grassy lawns adjacent to the River Nethy. So after a brief stop at Reindeer House Allan Smith and Mark Shaw joined me to continue the run in the search of reindeer and up and around the 4000ers, Braereach, Cairn Toul, Ben Macdui and Cairngorm. An epic day in gorgeous weather with so much wildlife and the ever elusive dotterel patrolling the pools of Dee. One of the roughest descents I've done in a while down the face of Cairn Toul into the Lairig Ghru onto Ben Macdui took over 80 minutes. The sun was setting as we descended to Reindeer house from Cairngorm and as stunning a view as you will see anywhere, enjoyable training!!

And to the race. Preparation is everything for the WHW and my back up team of Derek Jablonski, Laurie Anderson and Kenny Leinster were imperative to success. Food preparation, drinks and running kit were meticulously planned as the weather looked decidedly changeable, so we went with everything just in case. The pre-race registration and atmosphere was electric but I was glad to get going as you could feel the nervous tension. However this race was unusual in more than one respect, it starts at 1am and it's not easy to see who and where everyone was in the dark. I felt decidedly sluggish at the start and felt the pace set

by a group of about 10 up ahead was too swift so I eased and ran with an old friend Carl Pryce for a few miles before the old stomach gave way and I had to dive in the bushes. It was the only time I heard the birds singing and saw bats flying although one almost hit me later. I was totally stuffed with food and water and was struggling with this. One particular section I remember seemed to have an endless sequence of gates and ahead of a small group I opened every one for them. 2 hours later after Drymen and approaching Conic Hill I felt a lot better and started to get into a comfortable rhythm with a runner from Suffolk. The heavens opened at the top of Conic hill and I passed Wim the pre-race favourite and former record holder on the treacherous, sodden, bouldery slopes down to Balmaha. Still it was warmish and Derek met me and directed me to the van where Kenny filled me with rice pudding and flapjack. After a short refill I departed for the lone run up to Rowardennan, it was about an hour but seemed longer. The midges were horrendous as I sat down to have my cereal and I was bitten alive so changed my shoes in a hurry (inov8 terrocs due to the wet conditions), and set off. The rock walls along the trail were vibrant boggy flushes and springs dripping in the rain and I drank from the bog moss regularly. I never saw another sole until the Inversnaid marshals and finally caught someone above Loch Lomond, (after all the tree routes and undulating ground along the loch) some 3 miles from Derrydarroch checkpoint. Soon I'd passed another 4 except Mark Walsh who ran in with me but stopped with his support. My support were excellent changing my shoes back to my Nike Pegasus with intent to fly the next half of the race but Mark passed me as I sat perched in a deck chair! Funnily enough I suffered in the next section with too much pasta and hot cross buns, a bit dry I think and Lucy passed me on the climb over to Tyndrum and gained the upper hand with a few minutes. However I'd passed Mark who was taking the climbs very steadily as Lucy ran them. I got going again and by Victoria Bridge Lucy was in sight again but she was going well. My biggest fear was to press too hard to early. It's a long haul over Rannoch Moor and the path was very stoney and hard on the feet but Lucy pressed on until she stopped at the whitehouse, prior to the control at Kingshouse, while I bashed on. This was my chance as I felt good so after a very brief stop I decided to make a decisive move, or so I thought. I took off over to the Devils staircase and ran hard down to Kinlochleven. Concentration is essential on this section because of the outcropping rocks, stoney path and relentless pounding that the legs had to cope with for over 70 miles. I was relieved to get to Kinlochleven in the belief that I had a comfortable lead and decided to stay a little longer to refuel and ice a now painful calf muscle. After 5 minutes, soup and flapjack I was off up to Lundavra at a steady pace running part of the climb where I could. I always disliked this section of the WHW because I wanted to be on the top of the Mamores climbing and running the ridges, but this wasn't the day! Down to Lundavra and I'd run so fast the support crew were not ready so had to wait a few minutes. Only to be greeted by the news that Lucy had not stopped at Kinlochleven and was now flying again some 5 minutes behind. Time to shift, so I set off as hard as I dared running every climb except the last steep one to the top of the Nevis Forest and then

descended wildly into Glen Nevis. Fortunately I felt greatly bouyed by the thought I was only a few miles from the finish and I cruised in to the recreation centre in Fort William in 17 hours 4 minutes. It was a great finish and Lucy finished some 12 minutes behind. Mark Walsh ran solidly to finish in 3rd.

For everyone doing this race, it's a challenge just to finish in one piece, but to all who endeavour to try it, be prepared mentally and physically for a fantastic challenge. Its within everyone!