

Craig Liddle

Midsummer's Nite, Day, Nite Murder 2004!

You're a B****y nutter!

Your Aff yir heid

I always knew you weren't the sharpest chisel in the box.

I had only mentioned to workmates I was running in a race.
Albeit the West Highland Way Race.

Where do you sleep overnight?
You don't it's a non stop race.

When do you stop for lunch and dinner?
You don't!

Who carries your water and food?
I do.

You're 39, you are too old.

And so it went on.

Told you he was a b****y nutter!

It all began in October 2003, I had just completed my first ever race, the Loch Ness Marathon. And I was wondering what to do next when I came across the West Highland Way Race Org website.

After reading the race tales I thought I could maybe do this .What a challenge!

The application was away before I could change my mind.

Then the phone call came from Dario.
"Hello Craig I was just checking on the calibre of loony whose application I have just received".
"Anyone who wishes to run in this race can't be of sane mind".

It didn't help when I had put on the application that I was a fun runner.
I think Dario thought I was going to turn up in a Chicken costume.

But I was accepted and the training began in earnest.

Milngavie 18/06/04- Time 23.20

Arrived at Milngavie station with my dad Eddie and my father-in law Jim.

We parked in a corner of the car park which was already becoming a hive of activity sporting some very impressive looking runners.

I met my friend Richard and his back up team, Geraldine, Denise, Linda and Kirstin at registration, signed death disclaimer, picked up goodie bag (running t-shirt, midgie net and bottle of beer.)

I also picked up my backup team t-shirts and fleeces for the dads, which was the least I could do for depriving them of two days sleep.

I met Dario and introduced myself. And also met Bob Allison and Derek Jablonski., two fellow runners from Fife who also encouraged and introduced me to the joys of the WHW.

In fact it was Bob's race tales which got me interested in the WHW race to begin with.

Although mid summer it was very cold and I was supposed to be running in shorts but changed to dry fit leggings which incidentally stayed on all through the race due to it being so cool.

Last check of camel back ,two bladders ,1with sis energy drink and 1with water ,WHW map,compeed ,loo paper, energy bar ,chocolate, gel and Mobile phone.

At 00.40 the back up teams and runners got their race brief from Dario.

1.00and we're off .torches on, lights oot as Richard and I headed into the darkness with 86 other runners.

We were just getting into a nice jog when up went a shout ahead of us, some of the front runners had went the wrong way, thankfully quickly corrected. Shortly after we came to a small climb through woods and suddenly everybody starts walking. I knew we had to walk all hills but didn't expect it to happen as early in race as this. Walk the hills right from the start was the advice, thankfully Richard and I stuck to that cunning plan...

We seemed to be attached to same set of runners through the woods and out onto moor. At this point I had a stumble on my right ankle, slight niggle but nothing more.

The field started to spread out slightly but still had runners in vision behind and in front

First stop Drymen- 12 miles

Bit peckish as I arrived but the dads soon had me fed and watered and on my way. Fill up of camelback 750ml water and 500ml energy drink, quick banana on pitta bread and left walking still nibbling on some digestives. We were soon back into jog as we headed through the woods towards Balmaha.

Balmaha-20miles

Coming over Conic Hill it was starting to get light and we got a fantastic view over Balmaha. Running down to check point, and I mean running, Richard goes at some speed on the downhill's and hey!! You have got to keep up. Again I was met by the Dads who were looking very awake for it being so early in the morning. Dad in law was in charge of the camelback and my dad was in charge of grub. This time I had a rice pudding, tuna sanny and bit of 'cloodie dumpling' from Richard's daughter Denise, superb. Left carrying energy bar and banana.

On this stretch we were passed by Bob Allison and Derek.Jablonski. Exchanged greetings as we jogged.

Rowerdennan - 27 miles,

Changed my socks at the car park and Vaselined the feet. While the midgies ate me, I ate mair grub. Richard can't believe how much I'm throwing down throat. Reckons he wouldn't like to keep me for a week. Plenty of water sis and again banana in pouch...

This is a long stretch to Derry Darroch before we will meet support again.

There were some cracking views running along the Loch side and en-route we bump into Jim Drummond and his friend ,makes my attempt seem futile compared to his 12 completions. Some character and still so enthusiastic. Headed off before Jim made me too nervous and after completing part of the Loch assault course arrived at Inversnaid to be told Wim was already 2 hours ahead. We'll catch him yet! Spoke to marshals for short while and thanked them for being there. Filled bladder with water. Also picked up parcel with boiled potatoes rolled in salt, tip from Derek and another energy bar and gel along with ½ litre of sis, thanked TSART and headed off. Although Richard had slagged me for eating too much he did try and enjoy the potatoes.

We also shared energy bar, and succumbed to rule on WHW t-shirt about eating food off ground as we had just dropped the energy bar.

Richard and I had both had our ups and down on this next stretch but we managed to get each other through with the banter.

As we approached Derry Darroch, 3 of Richards friends appeared Jock, Eric and Brian.

This brought a spring back into the step as Jock was nominated to be the first back up to run with us. I was now starting to look forward to meeting my wife Karin who was to be my first back up at Auchtertyre farm, 2 miles from Tyndrum. My friend and work colleague Bob had kindly agreed to take his caravan to the farm and then move it on up Fort William.

Met my friends Johnnie and Stuart and also my Brother in law John about half a mile from caravan. Plenty of abuse from them and carried on to meet Karin, Caroline, the dads and Bob. Richard and I parted company here and wished each other all the best, we were over half way, I was sure we were both going to make it. Running with somebody definately makes it easier through the rough times. At the caravan I did a full change apart from Nike leggings. I think they were actually stuck to me by now. Cup a soup consumed and soon on my way with Karin. The two dads were sneakily stuffing their faces with bacon rolls from the farm shop. If only I had known.

Tyndrum-53miles

A non stop log in and out as we passed through the Tyndrum checkpoint and headed towards Bridge of Orchy.

Karin knew exactly what to say as we headed towards Bridge of Orchy, held my hand at the right times and yattered away also. She was absolute fab .Karin had also put in training time for this race and I was extremely proud of her especially as she says and I quote " running wasn't really her thing".

Bridge Of Orchy-60miles

I arrived in at Bridge of Orchy feeling really good and was now looking forward to the trip over the moor with Caroline and Stuart.

Our friend Caroline is one of the fitness instructors at the Millennium gym and she has turned me from an unfit chap into a lean mean running machine!!!!All within a year and a half.

Shows what you can achieve even at 39, with little or no running experience and a bit of hard work.

The trip over Rannoch was very busy with the Caledonian challenge heading towards us.

But there was a bit of laugh and good feeling between both although we all tried to fight for the small patch of grass that keeps you off the cobbled stones .anything to give the legs some respite.

At this stage there were a few lows, and I was starting to get a bit of pain at my right ankle.

I think the hard surface was starting to take its toll.

Caroline and Stuart were like two mother hens at this point, have you ate something have you drunk something ...nag, nag, nag.

Only kidding, they were fantastic and making sure I was fed and watered as concentration sometimes lapsed and remembering to keep up the liquid intake was very important.

I really enjoyed the trip over the moor and the last downhill into Kingshouse we were really motoring and also over took two WHW runners which gave me a boost. Although that was to be short-lived.

Kingshouse-72miles

The parking was a bit strained and my back up team ended up on the main road. A quick snack and a farewell to Karin, Stuart and Caroline, I headed off with John and Johnnie.

At this stage we didn't seem to have many runners in front or behind, although after climbing the devils staircase. I'm sure I spotted Richard and his crew at the far end of the hill. As we climbed the staircase we had a bit of a laugh remembering when John, my dad and Stuart had walked the way 7 years previous and my dads quote 'there are no hills on the WHW. At this point my mate Tony had my dad by the lapels and I quote`'Eddie what the F***s this thing called the Devils staircase then' as we looked towards the sky.

No hills, tell my legs that.

On the way down off of the staircase we bumped into Kim Masson who had passed me on the way up as though I was standing still.

Her toe had exploded .Not only do back up teams help their runner they also help other runners as John promptly went to her rescue and applied care and attention to her toes , although he made the mistake of asking what 'one' and promptly pressed it and Kim hit the roof "oops I suppose it was that one". I carried on as I was in a bit of pain with my ankle but John and Kim soon caught up and Kim promptly over took and headed into the sunset.

'I was feeling cack 'should have got John to tie her feet together, instead of helping, the competitive edge came out. Joking...

Kinlochleven-81 miles

Down hill section was horrendous and I was really feeling it when I arrived in Kinlochleven.

Although the Marshal said I looked fresh, my leg was really hurting.

I then bumped into Richards back up team again who had just come out the chippie, perfect! After grabbing a handful of chips I headed off to meet the dads.

A last change of shoes and socks, some grub and we quickly moved on.

Up the hill and onto the section of the Mamores .We were heading onto last stretch before Fort William.

At this point we got up a bit of speed and a reasonable jog.

Although at the time John and Johnnie were pushing away from me.

I noticed John kept checking his watch and didn't twig till later the b****rs were pushing me for 24 hrs as it was still within our grasp.

Mind you all I could think of was the sh**ts are away ahead with my food.

Dangling a bar of chocolate in front of you a few yards away is cruel.

We made Lundavra road end quite quickly with only 6 ½ miles to go.

The Way was in my grasp.

Darkness had started to creep in and as I exchange greetings with the dads I kept going as stopping now would surely be the end.

Then it happened, somebody turned the lights out, not only outside but in my body.

If this was the wall it was a big one!!

I had had my torch light on and before long my eyes were crossing, I was staggering as though I was drunk, and to make matters worse `somebody had built deer fences to climb over that must have been 50 feet high, well that's what it felt like.

John had me by the loop at the back of my rucksack to make sure I didn't fall over the fence and both Johnny and John kept me going through this last section. Johnnie finding the way, rock here, step there, toad there, giant pink elephant here.

It was murder!

We suddenly came across steep steps with a sheer drop into a waterfall on one side, how I am I going get down this, sandwich was the order of the day, the boys were amazing there was no way I could move between them never mind fall!!.

During that last section I had taken a gel, dates, dried fruit and a tuna sanny and I think eventually it took hold as I seemed to kick out of the drunken stage as quickly as I got into it. We arrived on the path into Fort William with 1 ½ miles to go although still walking.

Just before 2 o'clock in the morning we passed fellow supports who clapped us as we passed, a total surreal feeling at that time in the morning.

We hit the streetlights and decided to jog the rest.

At that point my wife Karin, both dads , Bob my mate from work and Storm the dog jogged with me as we reached the leisure centre ,I was absolutely done , my wife reckoned I looked spaced out as I jogged into the centre.

"Number 60 mate" fantastic it was done, you are 26th and have completed it in at time of 24 hrs and 51 mins.

Words cannot express my feelings; it is very difficult to comprehend what I had undertaken, along with all my support without which it wouldn't have been possible.

Congratulations all round .What a team! Also £1500 in the bank for two local schools. We had done it!

A team photo was taken outside just as another runner came in 3 mins behind me. Well done!!

After the shower we headed to the caravan park. It took me ½ an hour to reach the caravan. From the parked car. Cruelty locking the site gates when you have just run 95 miles.

At the presentation the next day I caught up with the other runners I had met and knew.

I also spoke to Wim and his wife and I am amazed at how everybody gets treated the same first or last, and how friendly everybody is, there are no prema-donna's in this place.

My wife Karin turned to me at the presentation and said" you are going to do this again".

How do women know what men are thinking." too right I am, 24hrs is still to be had".

I would like to thank all the organisers of the race, which made it a fantastic event.

Also the "two dads" who were absolutely brilliant, every time I met them they cheered me up and they had an absolute ball. They also said that they were available for hire next year now they are an experienced back up team.

Thanks to Bob, John, Johnnie, Stuart, Caroline and especially my wife Karin and my two children Erin and Kyle who had to put up with my training schedule." I'm just going out for a 6 hour run".

Also thanks to Richard Shaw who made the run so bearable and also to Derek Jablonski and Bob Allison who without their advice and encouragement it would not have been possible.

Great times the three of you.

And finally

Although it took me a week to walk again as tendons in my right foot were damaged during the last part of the race.

I will do it again! Maybe not next year but soon.

Craig Liddle