

West Highland Way Race 2006

Having just read Dave Waterman's tale in which I feature heavily, I thought I had better try and write my own version. Apologies in advance for any clichés and flowery over the top prose (Dave take note please). Here goes...

My support crew and I arrived at about 7pm (way too early). Waiting is always the worst time for me and I'm sure I'm not alone in this, I just want to get on with things. I really dread the possible failure that hangs heavy over me as a black cloak of darkness descends. (Sorry had to be done). I feel like a spare prick at a wedding and that's because I am. I am attempting to join a select group of individuals who have completed the West Highland Way Race.

I speak with Dave and Jamie about our race tactics. Our plan is to run the race as a team. Ten minutes into the race, I stop for a piss and Dave disappears into the night. We lost Jamie about 9 minutes ago. We see each other next at the presentation ceremony. So much for that plan.

Having read Dave's race tale, it appears we are racing each other. Nothing could be further from my mind as I contemplate the small task of finishing 95 miles in the Highlands. This is totally unknown territory for me as far as running is concerned; I have leisurely walked it before. My longest training run has been about 42 miles. I feel very strong for the first 20 miles, the only dodgy bit being the descent into Balmaha. My knees strongly object to going down steep hills.

It's difficult to find my support crew at the first check-point as everyone looks the same in a midge net. I am greeted by my wife Samantha, my best mate Mick (Adj) Nelson and my training buddies Pickle (Staffy Bull Terrier) and Flash (Mad Collie). Having read previous race tales about support crews being worried sick about the mental and physical well-being of their runner, I am determined to always finish strongly at each check-point with a smile on my face. I save all the sobbing and self loathing for in between.

I get an update from Dave Waterman's crew that my "Arch rival" is 15-20 minutes behind me. I contemplate painting a false tunnel on the side of Conic Hill in the true Wyle E. Coyote style, but then receive the joyous news that Waterman has hurt his knee. A cruel smile passes across my face which quickly develops into James Bond Baddie style laughter as I imagine Waterman's face etched with pain as he takes painful step after painful step for the next 75 miles.

Ok, back to the serious stuff. The conditions are absolutely perfect as I make my way along Loch Lomond where upon I meet a bunch of old friends who are having a couple of beers. I tell them about Waterman and promise them all the Thunderbird wine they can drink if they manage to slow him up.

I am surprised to be met by my support team at the Inversnaid Hotel. They pass this off as an incredible feat that no other support crew has managed. I later find that it was the 'fault' of a local shopkeeper giving them wrong directions. They have their own dramas as they accrue

penalty points on their licenses making their way to Derrydaroch farm and nearly running out of petrol. I really think the runners have the easier job sometimes.

I have my first crisis just after Derrydaroch farm. It is now quite hot and I feel very weak and giddy. I realise that I need electrolytes which I don't have. A kindly fellow runner offers me some of his which saves my race as I instantly feel better and manage to come into the check-point at Tyndrum feeling good. I have the best ham sandwich of all time and move on. Tyndrum to the Bridge of Orchy is relatively straightforward and I believe a favourite stretch with many competitors.

Bridge of Orchy to Kingshouse is pretty long and bleak. I team up with a fellow runner and chat about all sorts. This is a great help and makes the time fly. We arrive quicker than expected at Kingshouse. I can't find my support crew and assume that they're in the pub (that's where I'd be). A mass of coats comes to life in my support vehicle. I have caught them asleep, but they kick it into gear and make food, coffee etc. I am still feeling very strong but having walked the WHW before, I know that the hardest stretch is coming. I pair up with Bryan Sheard and Simon Pols. I am a natural chatter box, but Bryan and Simon seem to prefer to keep quiet and press on, it's probably because I am boring the arse off them. The descent into Kinlochleven seems to take forever and I arrive at the Medical centre sing a Chumba Wumba song. Although I don't yet realise it, the sleep deprivation is clearly starting to take its toll.

I know what's coming next and am really feeling it climbing the hill from Kinlochleven to Glen Nevis. Bryan and Simon have become more introvert so I treat them to my own unique version of The Camptown Ladies over and over again. To my surprise they don't join in. It's light by the time we hit Lundavra. I feel not too bad at this point. The problem is that psychologically I've already finished. I've made this mistake before, but just can't seem to stop myself. My support crew and Dave's crew are also here as well as Fred who Dave has already mentioned.

The next 5 miles seem like fifty. The woods feel very claustrophobic and I'm not sure if I'm going the right way. I finally make it out of the woods and start the tortuous meandering descent to the road.

At the bottom I turn right and start heading in the wrong direction which I realise after about 10 minutes. Even though I have been to this area before, I am totally Disorientated and call my support crew. Adj comes to my rescue and finishes the last mile with me. Adj later tells me that when he saw me at that point, I looked like a lost little boy, brilliant.

I see Dave at the presentation as I am enjoying a pint of Guinness while he sips somewhat effeminately on his usual lemonade. He reels of a list of excuses about finishing 1 hr and 14 min and 50 seconds behind me. Something about drunks, faulty signposts, a dodgy knee and very short legs, but I've stopped listening.

I speak to a fellow runner and am adamant that I will never do this again. He tells me that in a week's time, I will be wondering how I can get my time down next year. I laugh out loud.

I collect my crystal goblet and personalised ale and can't help thinking that a pair of goblets would look just great. See you on the 23rd Waterman.

Dom!

