

West Highland Way Race 2008

Don't Stop Me Now I'm having Such a Good Time

This year's training went without a hitch, no injuries or colds even a PB at Draycote Water 35. I thoroughly enjoyed all my long training runs, most of them on the top half of the Way, always finishing feeling I could have gone further if necessary. The only problem was that with both Pauline and I running this year support was cut by half and runners doubled. Val was in dire need of assistance. A recruiting drive was in place, applicants vetted and after several meetings Val was happy. Ken and Sue will look after Pauline, Val will be in charge of me on her own until Jim and Christine join her at Balmaha, then Pete and Julie, who are my running support will turn up at Tyndrum bringing Lesley with them who will join Ken and Sue.

May galloped in to June, and I got myself organised and focussed. I had all my stuff sorted on Thursday and on Friday I just chilled, dozed, ate and did my race manicure, pinching some of my daughters nail varnishes to paint every nail a different colour to match my rainbow WHW race Buff. The day dragged on but eventually Val picked me up at around 9.45pm. Pete and Erin waved us off as we headed to Milngavie. It was very busy when we arrived, Pauline was there and had already signed in and had been weighed which is a new safety check for this year to help monitor over hydration, which can be far more serious than dehydration and may result in multi-organ failure and even death. I was soon weighed and picked up my race dog-tag which would identify my bones if the midges ate all my flesh off.

1.00am was approaching, we had the traditional team photo and wished each other all the best and made our way to the start. We're off; I had a big smile on my face, receiving the good vibes sent to me from Erin, she was staying up late to shout "Go Mum Go!" at 1.00am. The path through Mugdock was the busiest I've seen it, folk were fairly quiet concentrating on picking out a safe passage. It was a lovely clear, calm night and just a wee bit nippy, as we went past the wee loch just before the cottages at around 4 miles the guy in front turned and told us to look round. The moon was big and bright with a misty halo, shining on the low mist over the water, it was beautiful, it's a shame that all the sane people tucked up in bed didn't know what they were missing! The terrain eased, runners relaxed and started chatting, it was good to meet people I've only seen as names on the race forum. With it being a clear night, the sky lightened early, I tucked away my head torch on the long road before Drymen where Val was waiting for me on her own with just an easy hand over of rucksack for bumbag just remembering to take my phone out and keep it with me and headed off for Conic Hill, the view from the top was stunning this morning, pink sky, clouds below the hills and the loch as still as a mill pond. Val will soon have Jim and Christine to help her, but their arrival at Balmaha for 5.00am was not without a wee problem, they were on holiday in Fort William and had to speak nicely to the workmen on the road near Crianlarich as it was closed for road works until 6.00am, they were kindly let through. They were ready for me at Balmaha, I walked up the road with my rice pudding with Val at my side with my coffee. The run to Rowardennan is always a high point for me was no different this year, I was bouncing a long with the birds singing, I would have joined them for a chorus if I knew the words 'cause I can't whistle.

At Rowardennan, my team were brilliant, a slick sock and shoe change and I was off up the track, a few minutes later I heard Val shouting after me what I thought was "Control!" I panicked; did I have to go back? This checkpoint was originally one where we were to be weighed but was cancelled. Had they reinstated the weigh in? Val shouted again. "Your roll!" The dipsticks had left my jam roll on the roof of the car, panic over. Val was breathing hard as she handed me my roll. Good effort for some one recovering from injury and doesn't do sprints. Rowardennan and the track to Inversnaid were fierce with midges, the worst I think I've ever experienced, I was so glad I was lathered in Skin So Soft and had my sunglasses on, it wasn't that bright, my glasses just helped to keep the little fiends out my eyes. Thoroughly enjoyed the rough path, I think it gives your legs a rest, concentrating on keeping upright, hanging on to rocks and trees, my only thought of concern was "If I chip a nail!!" I smiled at my frivolity as I skipped along. When I was roughly just over an hour or so away from Beinn Glas I felt my right big toe jaggy, was it just a wee stone or the start of a blister? I stopped at a comfy looking log, sat down, removed my shoe and sock, there was nothing there, but I'll slap on some Body Glide, went into my rucksack, no Body Glide but I was still carrying head

torches!!! Another runner went past asking if I was ok, "Fine thanks! But my support's sacked!" I answered, he laughed as told him my tale of woe, time for a stroppy phone call to Val. "Where's my Body Glide? Why am I still carrying torches? And I want more honey in my rice pudding; I couldn't taste it last time!" Val soon put me in my place. "Don't be so picky!" Oh well, game over, time to take off my Miss Stroppy knickers and just get on with it. Bhein Glas arrived and I was in and out with loads of honey in my rice pudding and after speaking to Val I realised I'd used the Body Glide from my rucksack at the start and didn't put it back. Oops! Sorry!

Approaching Derrydarroch there was a large bunch of youngsters walking north, Oh dear, how will I get through that lot? I thought but as I got closer, someone shouted, "Runner coming!" and they separated leaving the path clear for me and I ran the gauntlet of cheers and applause. A quick sock change (with Body Glide) and I was off for the rollercoaster at Crianlarich, usual fun at the fair but no fortune teller or candyfloss! But I did speak to a bloke who was pointing his phone/camera at a wee tussock, his wife was feeding a wee mouse cashew nuts! Wildlife not so wild then!

Got to Auchertyre with Shirley and some more runners, I let them go on as we were to be weighed here, met my crew then headed for the weigh in, I had to stand in a queue of four! Come on! The bloke in charge was fann... faffing about. "Get a move on!! if I miss out on a PB!" I thought. I managed to keep my toys in my pram, as I grabbed my card with my weight record on it and stormed off, but not so fast as my back up couldn't catch me with my baked tattie, coffee and refuelled bum bag.

Heading towards Tyndrum was the only time I had a bit of a dip. I was close to last year's time but didn't feel as good. I repeated my mantra for this year, (in Erin's voice) "Go, Mum Go!" At Tyndrum I had a big boost, Julie joined me, her first year in support and she was so enthusiastic, I couldn't help but be buoyed up by bubbly personality, we blethered all the way to Bridge of Orchy, my last shoe change, I was also given a wet wipe. "Clean your face, it's covered in midges". Sean, in charge of the checkpoint told us there was bad weather forecast, that's ok I'm ready for it! As Pete and I left, Julie wished me luck with a big hug and kiss, Pete's look was "Where's mine!" He was told "Get on with it", well, he is just her husband!" We made good progress along Rannoch Moor with a fine steady pace, Pete was great at keeping a check on my food intake, even rummaging in my rucksack for me to get my grub out saving me doing the big bendy arm thing or taking my bag off. The rain had started to spit as we went past Blackrock cottage, I hoped it wouldn't get any heavier, as we were so near to Kingshouse where I wanted to pick up my favourite blue fleece before having to get my Gore-tex jacket out. We made it into the checkpoint without getting too wet; I got my fleece on and walked up the road eating my pasta, now with my super trooper, Val to see me over the Devil's Staircase. The jacket had to come out now and at Altnafeadh decided to put on my Gore-tex breeks, best to get them on while still warm and dry. Jim had the car parked right at the bottom of the Devil with the windows wide open and blaring out was The Proclaimer's "500 hundred miles" just for me, it certainly put a smile on my face and I just hope that Glencoe and the surrounding area also appreciated it. What a great bunch of troops I've got!

Up and over the Devil, Kinlochleven almost in sight, the wind picked up and took me with it, sidewise, off the path to the left, luckily I managed to keep on my feet and glad it didn't take me to the right or I might've ended up doing a big ouchy, roly polly down the steep hill side! At Kinlochleven I was happy to be weighed, there was no queue but quite a few bodies strewn around. Jim had a chair ready, Christine handed me my oxo, then they both did my last sock change and I was off on the last long haul with Pete doing his second and toughest tour of duty. I was quite pleased to be told I was just five minutes adrift of last year's time I wasn't buzzing like last year as I wasn't in the process of knocking a massive wedge off my PB but still moving well although my quads now felt a bit tight. Well, I have done 80 miles!

Lairig Mor got even longer now it was dark, the weather deteriorated with stotting, stinging rain, and huge gusts of gale force that made placing feet impossible as I was blown along at a stagger, at least it was on our backs! My feet were wet and I could now feel blisters on the balls of both my feet but I wasn't going to let it get me down. It was now time for a song, "Don't stop me now, I'm having such good time, I'm having a ball" I giggled to myself as I sang it in my head, only sang it out loud the once, I didn't want to scare Pete too much! I'd like to explain why I'm more crackers than a big box of Jacob's assorted. Three years ago I spent over a fortnight in the high dependence unit of Edinburgh's Western General after having a brain haemorrhage, now that was tough shit to deal with, this is definitely loads more fun! I'm just happy to be alive and kicking, well, staggering anyway! How much further to the shelter of the trees? I wanted to take the nippy wee stones out my shoes and to pee. But there's no way I'm exposing any flesh in this! At last, the trees. Oh relief! When I

took my shoes off, Pete got the bravery award, not only did he remove the stones he put his hand inside my shoes to make sure they were clear of grit. Yeeow! I wouldn't have done that.

Heading towards Lundavra I was concerned the race might be halted for safety but Pete and I agreed that the weather wasn't dangerous only miserable. Val had said she may come with us from Lundavra but didn't commit herself in case she was too tired, as we approached Lundavra, I jokingly said to Pete that if I was Val I would say "I'm too tired!" but on the contrary there was Val ready and waiting to go. It was because the weather was so atrocious she was coming, if I was struggling they could grab an ear'ole each and drag me in. My head was cold and wet, I was wearing my peaked race Buff with another one round my neck but pulled up over the back of head and chin, I wanted my Carnegie Harriers shower proof baseball cap and woolly hat, a dry Buff and dry gloves. Jim nipped back to the car for my requests as I stood close to Duncan's bonfire drinking my coffee, it was lovely, I was so close my eyeballs were melting, but I was watchful that the sparks didn't burn holes in my breeks. Then a strong gust picked me up and tried to throw me on the fire, but both Val and Pete were fast and grabbed an arm each and stopped me doing the Joan of Arc thing. Jim was soon back, although I did joke, "Where's Jim? Knitting my gloves!" Pete answered "No! It's your hat he's knitting." Well, you've got to have a laugh. So with dry gloves, Buff and two hats I was off. I wasn't giving it as much wellie as in the past, it wasn't going to be a PB so there was no point flogging a dead horse, survival and finish was the goal, time totally irrelevant, I was going to reach the Leisure Centre. Over the last stile and on to the forest track, I saw a guy cycling up the steep path, but so did Val and Pete, my fifth WHW and still no hallucinations! Maybe it's only the sane folk that see weird stuff! I looked at my own watch for the first time, 26 hours 30 odd minutes, well that was a pleasant surprise, I expected it to say at least 28 hours, Lairig Mor felt as if it took at least three life times. I knew it takes ages to get to the Braveheart car park so just pushed on with it. I must be a tough wee dudette these days; I impressed myself when the blister on the ball of my right foot burst. My face probably wasn't very pretty but I didn't utter a squeak and even better, I never altered my stride. When we got to Braveheart, Jim and Christine were there waiting, Val got in the car, she's seen me finish before. Hit the pavement, one mile to go, pride and tradition took over, picked up the pace, breathed like an asthmatic donkey and Pete and I pushed on hard to the Leisure Centre, Val had the door open and camera ready. A warming slurp of malt from the race Quaich, I was nearly an hour slower than last year finishing in 27.11.45 hours, but not in the least bit disappointed. A truly enjoyable, successful run, I finished.

Looking around at the prize giving, I thought. "Would you just look at the size of this family?" That was my only problem; I didn't get to speak to all the relatives I normally congratulated or to pass on my heart felt words for those that didn't make it.

Hang on while I swap my race buff for the headscarf with the dangly coins and stare into my crystal ball I can sense this family getting bigger, I see another Carnegie Harrier sipping from a crystal goblet. Peter Humphreys this is your destiny. (But not next year, I don't know what Pauline's doing and I might need you for Lairig Mor.)

Now for the huge thank you, Val my logistical genius, making sure everyone was in the right place at the right time and keeping me on track over the Devil and from Lundavara. Jim and Christine, for feeding me, doing my feet and keeping Val sane. Pete and Julie for your company and especially Pete for looking after me when we got extra weather. What a special bunch you all are.

Fiona Rennie
June 2008