

**Pat Burns 2000**  
**"The Way We Were"**

I first got involved in the WHW Race back in 1993 when a good friend of mine, running and work colleague Jim Robertson asked me to help with his back up. On our training runs together he would tell me all about the various sections and describe in great detail their difficulty and terrain. I thought he must be a space cadet or something. No sane person did this kind of thing. Anyway after the race, I thought yes I could also be a space cadet. I started training for the 1994 event.

1994 came very quickly after a hard years training. I couldn't believe it as we headed to Milngavie Railway Station in the middle of the night. I will never forget the rain as we drove there from Alexandria.

What a sight at the railway station, all those bodies gathered there making preparations for the start. We headed in and registered and Jim informed me it was custom to buy Tee Shirts for your back up team as well as yourself. Jimmy Stewart gave the brief and I wondered what had I really got my self roped into.

The race started and away we went, it was Jim and I's intention to run together although we said if we had to we would split. It was still pelting down with rain and I thought what a wonderful summer. I was only on the track about five miles or so when my right foot disappeared down a rabbit hole. A wee bit sore I carried on and the pain went away. The rain continued to downpour and the only consolation was that it kept the midges away. The race was pretty uneventful during the early stages and having passed Drymen headed over the Conic Hill. e were running up the hill and came to a sharp hairpin bend, my legs decide it was time to walk. Jim was just behind me and I remarked we were due a walk as we had run up a fair old bit. He agreed. I asked him where he normally walked from, to which he replied the bottom.

I then realised the trick was to walk the hills and run the rest if you could. The rain continued to down pour and I just couldn't believe it. I should have been in my bed having a lay in. Anyway further on we went and as we trudged through Loch Lomondside my foot began to get sore.(The one that went down the hole) When we reached Inverarnan I was in quite a bit of pain. I've never pulled out a race and had no intention now although the weather coupled with the pain had me thinking. Jim did his usual change of clothes at Inverarnan which I thought was a waste of time because as soon as you got them on you were soaked again. I decided hat a few pain killers on top of something to eat may be more appropriate. We plodded on through the rain and came to the Falloch Waters. We looked for somewhere to cross as the water was really high and fast flowing. Then all of a sudden Jim was on the other side. Cross here he said it's not so deep. I waded through at waist height questioning our sanity again. I said I thought t wasn't deep, to which he replied well it isn't if you don't suffer from ducks disease.(short legs) Anyway the cooling effect was good for the foot. We finally arrived at Tyndrum and a friend of Jim's from Dunoon had turned up with his van to give our back up's assistance. We clambered into the van and finally I dried of and went for a change of clothes as well as some more pain killers. It was time for some food and the smell of fried eggs was irresistible so we pigged out. It took us a wee while to get from walk to run due to the extra calorie intake. We headed for Bridge of Orchy and my foot felt even more painful. I said to Jim that I was going to pull out at the checkpoint as I didn't really want to do any more damage than was necessary. We headed down to Bridge of Orchy and I felt sore and quite sad that I was having to pull out. We then arrived there and someone told us that the race was being abandoned at Kingshouse due to the weather. A little hope came over and I asked Jim how far. Being a friend he told me a porky pie saying about 8-9 miles. I thought about this and decided to continue. I could run, walk and even hobble that far. We came into Inveroran and then made the long ascent into the Rannoch Moor. The rain was still falling heavily and for once I had to agree with my English

colleagues, it always rains in Scotland. They even name it The Wet Highland Way. Anyway half way over the rain went off, well not exactly it was sleet, hailstones and snow. I had to pinch myself, yes it was June. The pain in my foot was excruciating and about half way over the moor I told Jim to carry on. I was going to walk in. It took a bit of persuasion however off he went and in no time I lost sight of him. Now I knew why I had all these extra waterproofs in my rucksack. I pulled on a pair of waterproof trousers to keep some heat in, had a mars bar and started walking. After about ten minutes I started shivering, this had me thinking and I decided that if I didn't run I would end up with hypothermia. Each step on my right foot felt as if someone was sticking a knife up through the sole however I managed to plod on down to the finish at Kingshouse.

On arrival at the finish my back up asked if I needed anything and I asked for some frozen peas for my foot. He managed to obtain them from the hotel and what a relief. After a while resting and eating, we decided to head to Fort William for accommodation. You'll never believe it, we had to push start the car. Well that said it all about that year.

Jim Robertson was not letting me off. On return to work his comments were "Well you've still not done it yet."

Therefore a year later I had to go through the challenge again. Overall we had an excellent run and we finished joint seventh with a time of 23hours and 31minutes.

The highlights of this race occurred pretty early after we left Inverarnan. Jim was struggling as a result of mixing his drinks and we approached the low clearance bridge you go under. Jim shouted watch you head, but suffering from duck's disease and sizing it up I thought I can run right through. All went well until I met the cross beam which was harder than my head. There I was getting up onto my knees and seeing stars when up comes Jim with his usual good sympathy vote. He

said "I wouldn't start praying yet we're not even half way there yet." I thought revenge would be sweet as I staggered to my feet and managed to start running again. Well it came later as we were making our way to Tyndrum and Jim decided to show me how break falls are done at the Judo. Down he went and he stuck out his hand to stop himself, in doing so he dislocated his finger. Well as the saying goes "He who laughs last laughs the loudest" and with a wry smile I pulled his finger back into place. As I said we had a great run and managed to break the magic 24hour barrier. I decided I needed a rest after this and waited until 1998 before I gave it another go.

Although starting with Jim we broke up after Inverarnan and I spent a long time on my own. The Saturday was a scorcher that year and made it a real test for endurance running. Running on my own was also a test in its although I did get a lot of distance training runs in this way. On the stretch over the Rannoch Moor I alternated places with two females running together several times. About half way over this guy came sprinting past me and seeing this I wondered if it was time

to throw the towel in. Then the two girls passed me again. Anyway it turns out the guy had been a back up for someone who had then pulled out. He started running with me and after a short conversation I realised it was someone whom I had met in the last couple of miles during the Lochaber Marathon earlier in the year. I helped him break the three and a half hour mark. He said he fancied running right over the rest of the course and asked if he could go with me. I should apologise here as I am not always good at remembering names and it has slipped me. Anyway his company was great and I was more than thankful as Irene who was one of my back up hadn't been keeping to well and Dougie my other back up was more of a cyclist than a runner. When we left Kingshouse there was a slight drizzle which then went off. We caught up with the girls again and decided to go run the last stretches as a group. As we got talking I found out the girls name was Pauline Walker. She told me she ran it the year before, just finished it in time and in the last few positions. Well I said your doing really well and 24 hours is in sight. All was going well until we climbed out of Kinlochleven. We reached the top of the hill and it was pitch black by now. All of a sudden there was flashes everywhere like someone taking pictures. It was lightening and then the monsoon started. The very heavy rain restricted us to a walking

pace for most of the remaining miles. We passed my other mates Jimmy Drummond with his back up Jimmy Boyd. Well we managed to pick it up again down the long descent onto the main road and ran in with a time of 26hours and 22minutes. Pauline had smashed her time significantly and also finished 2nd female.

1999 saw me out with injury until about May. I decided that my training target would be the WHW Race 2000. I started serious training at the end of November. As usual a lot of my runs were with Jim (nine in a row) Robertson. Jim's message was Celtic or Rangers couldn't get 10 in a row but he would. Training was going really well, however I was having great difficulty in getting the mandatory back up team. Due to other commitments volunteers had to drop out.

Things were

looking pretty shaky, however my Jim Smith and Ross Allan who I previously worked with, volunteered their services. The race was on again. Then it was off Jimmy Stewart had pulled out of the organising. Jim told me this had happened in previous years and hopefully it would get sorted. Well as we all know Dario stepped in to save the day. Helped by other runners including Jim the checkpoints were manned. (nothing was going to stop his ten in a row) The race went off

and Jim and I trekked it out together as normal. Everything went perfect during the race, no mishaps, no problems and making great time, that was until we climbed out of Kinlochleven. On reaching the top of the hill we started running as normal. Ross my back-up had run the last leg over the Devils Staircase and I asked him not to run the last leg, however, he decided he was going with us. Unfortunately this gave me a problem and only runners who have competed in this race would probably understand this. I went through a bad spell and despite previously agreeing to separate should this occur Jim stuck it out with me. I think he was feeling just as bad as me but kept up the brave face. Anyway we plodded on at a walking pace mentally disillusioned. Lindavrad seemed to take forever to come and a couple of miles past there I was tuned back in to the running. We eventually got onto the forestry commission path and made the descent down the hill. We finally got onto the road and Ross was none to pleased when we told him there was about two miles to go. I wanted to run it in but Jim said we would walk it. I think Ross was pleased Jim made this decision s was way out from our predicted time however, Jim had done it "10 IN A ROW" He had achieved what no other person has achieved to date and at a young 59 years of age, and in a reasonably good time. Maybe he would retire from running it now and be my back-up when I try it in 2001. The presentation was a bit special as Jim was given a prize of a Decanter with the WAY engraved on it. I can still remember him saying after 5 times, "Well I have to do it again to get a set of six goblets." Please don't ask why he carried on after this. I hope to add in the future to these stories of the years I have ran the race, and no doubt Jim will be there with me in someway or another. He has recently moved to Dumbarton, however we still meet at the club and a Sunday for one of our adventurous runs off road. He is now telling me he has entered an ultra distance in Colorado which is a couple of weeks after the West Highland Way. Yes you've guessed it, I need to look for a back up again as he going to run the race in 2001 as a warm up.

These stories are dedicated to my wife Karen and three children who have to suffer the inconvenience of being woken at 0430 hours, keep me in stock of clean running clothes and put up with my grumpiness when tired. Included in this dedication is all the people who have assisted me over the years in running the races: Kate Jamieson, John & Tina Watt, Peter Melvin, Irene and Dougie, Jim Smith and Ross Allan, John and Jeanette from Dunoan, anyone who has helped me or sponsored me and especially Ten in a Row Jim who introduced me to the Wet Highland Way.

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