

WHW Race Report 2019

Introduction

Apologies from the outset, this a long report, the focus of which is to act as a reflective log, I wanted to get down on paper my thoughts, feelings, reflections and ideas for future training and race plans should I want to undertake this great race again; what might I do differently now I have hindsight and experience as a guide. As well as my reflections, I also wanted this report to include my crews' thoughts, feelings, reflections and ideas should they want to crew again, but more importantly for me to appreciate them and their input and sacrifice and what goes into the whole-the team, it's not just about the runner. For anyone reading this please take from it what you will, it should not be considered a blueprint, what works for one person maybe a disaster for someone else, but there are some common themes that hopefully will be of use.

Pre-race training

Training had gone well, it had been consistent and uninterrupted over the previous six month, except for a rotator cuff issue (who would have thought a shoulder problem would stop you running!) and some really bad Quad soreness, which was the culmination of bedding in a new pair of shoes and an overzealous gym session, both which needed a week to settle before normal service was resumed, but the key months of April & May went as planned.

The training plan

What was I trying to achieve? The objective for the race was to maintain around 5 MPH on undulating off road terrain for 20-24 hours. So that is what I did, either 3-4 hour back to back runs or 5-8 hour runs in the peak district; Stannage Edge, Higger Tor, Winn and loose hill, Mam Tor, Hollins cross, the terminator and the devil's elbow are places I could now run

blindfold-averaging around 5mph (there was one 10 hour+ effort-6 weeks out). This became my new normal (my Pavlovian response), operating at the required intensity (about 70-5% Max HR) and being comfortable with the feeling; getting to know which muscles protested over which type of terrain, inclines (Gluts), declines (quads) and the flat (hamstrings), and that when the terrain changed they swapped; over time I learned that the feeling didn't get worse, it was the same-internal voice *'this is how they feel when operating at this intensity over a long time-this is normal'*.

Ditto with the head (depending on which theory you believe, be it the Central Governor (CG) or the Monkey Brain (MB); learning its tactics, what moves it made to try and disrupt, but also how fuelling affected this, low fuel= low mood. This was a big change for me in my training; previously when training for ultra's up to 50 miles I would train low i.e. minimal fuel & fluid in training and race high-lots of fuel when racing (still low on the fluid-I've always run to thirst), but I knew from the start that I couldn't go 20 hours+ on just gels, I needed proper food. I also needed to be able to digest it, I needed to know what food I could digest whilst operating at around 75% max heart rate; who knew I could munch down a bacon butty and coffee during a run and continue at 75% Max HR with no stomach issues or reduction in pace, this is what I learned from my training, that I could do that.

Four weeks out I travelled up for a training weekend (Way outside) and ran from Milngavie to Beinglas farm, setting off at 1AM to simulate race conditions; run that part of the course in the dark and simulate being awake and running at that time of night. That was made more pleasurable because of the company of Tam Graham (to Balmaha) and Martin Egan (to Rowadennan), both of whom went on to successfully complete the race-it was great to see them pick up their goblets.

You need a race plan

Start off steady- I think it was Damian Hall who coined the phrase *'don't be a fool the first 50 and don't be a whimp the second'*. So, working to heart rate (HR), the plan was to keep it

around 130 until Auchtettyre (70%) and then progress from there-that was the plan. If you look at the splits you may be fooled into thinking that all went to plan; as the following will illustrate that couldn't be further from the truth-things didn't play out as I imaged, but if there is one thing I've learned from doing endurance events for the last 30 odd years-it never does.



Who was running and who was crewing?

Trying to smile and look happy but having just registered the reality was kicking in-I really was going to run 95 miles-shit this was it!



Last minute kit prep-occasionally I do smile, I'd just learnt my first lesson-don't stand right next to the speakers for the race briefing, you could perforate an ear drum.



And they're off!

Early doors

The plan was to keep the HR around 130, but I couldn't keep it down, and it was more like 135, but it felt easy and was within the intensities I had trained. But, lots of people were going past me, this was a little disconcerting, the internal dialogue went something like this; negative voice, 'well that's rubbish, you're obviously not as fit as you thought you were, ooh this is going to be a very looong day'. Positive voice 'no it's not-read the %\$££ing words you wrote on your map (as the day progressed my language would become more and more swear-y and my support runner would get the brunt of it). 'Confidence, patience and faith'.

These were the words written on my map, which in part comes from a speech that Andy Jones-Wilkins gave at the Western states 100 veterans panel 2016 (if you want something to give you that last little bit of motivation in the days running up to the race then this is worth a watch, this and chariots of fire. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9sy8uiTA1g>), it's the last ten minutes where he talks about going into the race with confidence; have confidence in that you have done the training and you are ready, he talks about resilience, that too is spot on, but that's written on later maps, at this stage I replaced it with patience-and I added a

quote ‘*How poor are they that have not patience; what wound did ever heal but by degrees*’ (Othello). Faith have faith in your training it will pay dividends, it will deliver (if you stick to the plan). So, I let people go and got into my rhythm. Internal voice- ‘it’s going to be a long day, but you know that, it’s what you’ve trained for, keep the faith-you muppet’.

The confidence and faith was needed again in the early hours; something I had learned from my numerous early morning runs (from 1-4am) is that my pace for a certain heart rate is a little slower than what it is during the day, so again in the early miles when my pace was relatively slow for that heart rate, I had the confidence and faith to know that this was normal for me and that it would change as the day progressed (which it did). Again, I had a little quote written on my map to remind me. It’s obviously a biological thing, at that time of the night some genes/body systems are switched off, I’ve had a quick look at the literature to see if there are any studies on running speeds at the same intensity at different times of the day, but found nothing. I certainly didn’t find anything on if this can be manipulated by a certain type of training. For the twelve weeks prior to the race I did early Saturday morning runs, it was always the same-there was no adaption, well not for me.

Milngavie to Balmaha

Just trying to keep relaxed, calm and the HR down, oh and not get lost; along the way I got chatting to few fellow runners; ‘where are you from and have you done this before’ kind of chat. Ascending conic hill, I was passed for the first time by Yan Horsburgh, we would yo-yo for the rest of the race, I’d usually pass him when he had stopped to drink in the surroundings, and as I passed he’d make a comment about how lucky we were to be in a position to undertake such an endeavour in such a place- I couldn’t agree more, and if I didn’t see him his crew’s van at the checkpoints was unmissable.



Balmaha

Time: 3:21:02 (77th)

As planned, I met by my crew who were waiting with agreed bacon buttie. As agreed this was a rolling pit stop-walking through the car park has I ate and drank and we juggled with a partial kit change- ditching the head torch, buff and glasses to be replaced with cap and sunglasses (Prescription), fresh bottles of tailwind, duo Mars bar and a liberal squirting of eau de smidge.

In the six-months building up to the race I experimented/practiced with my fuelling, apart from the bacon butty, everything else was for the most part liquid; soup, Mueller rice, mars bars (which would melt and be a liquid slurry by the time I swallowed. I'm surprised I've got any teeth left and not developed diabetes given the quantity I have consumed over the last six-months. I also drank a lot of tailwind, which made up the bulk of my calories, 200-300 calories per hour was the target.

Practical, but not environmentally friendly; rather than carry the powder and fill my bottles at each check point, which would waste time, I decided on binning the empties and replacing them with prefilled plastic (500ml) bottles of Tailwind (rather than using soft flask bottles-at £15 per bottle that would be far too an expensive strategy, I am from Yorkshire after all). Overall this strategy worked, apart from Beinglas farm where I had a Mueller rice and

couldn't help stopping to use one of the available spoons to wolf it down, I was in and out the check points swiftly-as intended.

Balmaha to Rowadennan

It was still early, I was running, but not has expected, a little disappointed by my pace, the intensity /HR was where I wanted it, but the pace was slow; this was the first time that expectation would meet reality and take a hit-this was an early negative I had to process and deal with.

Rowadennan

Time: 4:58:22 (69th) section split 1:37:53 (64th fastest split)

In and out swiftly-the checkpoint volunteers were great; efficient and encouraging.

Rowadennan to Inversnaid

This section was stunning, when I ran it in May the bluebells were out; if pixies and elves exist, then this is where they live-it's a magical path. Today, there were no bluebells, but the sun was out, so too the birds-who needs an iPod when you have birdsong on tap, and the loch was as like a mirror it was that still, majestic. I knew this section was going to be slow, so I just went with it-not pushing it, keeping my heart rate within my target zone. However, runners were passing me and not gradually, but quickly, this was another negative I had to deal with-but again I kept re-directing to the positive; this is the plan, the intensity level as indicated by heart rate was right on point.

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm

Again, I knew what was coming, same mantra-'just keep moving' and don't try to push it, looking at my HR it did drop in this section, so I didn't keep the intensity has high as I should

have, and this showed in my split times. Having said that it was still hard work; quad and glut sapping, without the rhythmic repetition and energy return one gets from on the flat running. If there is another time, then some adjustment to the training plan will be required, be running lots on this type of terrain, and/or circuit training including; step ups (lots), various types of bear crawls (lots), various types of jumping-static and plyometric (again-lots).

Beinglas Farm

Time: 8:35 (65th) section split 3:36:50 (71st fastest split)

At Beinglas Farm, the check point was busy, runners were having longer stops, and the banter between runners and volunteers was upbeat and encouraging which was a tonic after the relative solitude of the Loch side section.

Looking back at the splits, comparing it to other runners and the pacing calculator Robert Osfield had written and kindly made available on the Facebook page, I had dropped a considerable amount of time; from an even split 19 hours to 20-hour pace between Rowadennan to Beinglas Farm.

Beinglas Farm to Auchtetyre

Buoyed by a Mueller rice and the energy from the check point I finally got into a bit of a rhythm, I also noticed that my pace to HR had improved-well it was mid-morning, so all my genes relating to aerobic function should be on-line and working optimally. My mood was in the positive-why?

CONFIDENCE, remember; have confidence in your training, you've put the work in and this is what the training was all about, learning to operate at this intensity for very long periods of time; look, this was exactly what was happening-the body is a machine. The swing-o-meter of 'where's my head' was very much pointing to the positive.



Just before ½ way I met up with and got chatting to a runner from Orkney, this turned out to be Norman McLennan who told me he had run this race several times and done well (3rd one year-he didn't tell me that bit). The comment and subsequent advice he gave saved my race (well-it felt like that at the time and the changes I made certainly had an impact-if you go by the splits). He suggested that I stop running through the puddles on the path, 'you'll get trench foot and your feet will get really sore if you keep doing that'. My reply was; 'I've run plenty of ultra's and long fell races and had never had a problem', to which he replied ' yes, you can get away with it over a 50, but you won't over 95-trust me'. He then let me go-remember my mood was on the up, but he warned me about the rollercoasters, they're the nasty kind of downhill; do you let them take you and let it pound your quads, or do you try and brake a little, but again that still works them over. Again Norman wasn't wrong, the downhills beat me up, my feet by now were really sore, a combination of the hard surface, old shoes-probably past their best so not as cushioning as they could have been and added to the fact when EVA (the midsole material of a running shoe) gets wet it temporarily loses some of its shock absorbency; this soreness was exacerbated by me stubbing my left 2nd toe, which then lead me to roll my right ankle on the next step, which lead to me losing my balance and landing in a small trench at the side of the path on a downhill and banging my chuffing toe again. The soreness didn't stop there-it was spreading- what was happening to my quads they too were feeling sore.

Whether it was a combination of not having any real food for a while, not seeing my crew for nigh on 7 hours, of having 50 miles in my legs which were now feeling like they were on the wrong side of tender, I was spiralling downward, someone had greased that swing-o-meter and it was going rapidly back to the negative- this would be my first visit of the day to the depths of despair and emotional wobbliness, which was triggered by the sight of a JCB in a field just before the Auchtettyre checkpoint. One of my mantra's for when the going starts to get tough and it's time to dig deep is ' its JCB time' this is a nod to my dad and my childhood- he used to own several , and as a child I spent many an hour in the cockpit whilst he worked (health & Safety was not the same in the 1970's).

However, it was still early days, so the higher functioning part of my brain was still in control, I'd spent six months training for this, I've experienced low's and had assembled a locker full of mantra's and motivations to deal with what today would throw at me. What buoyed me at this stage was my response; I knew I needed to change something, which I did, I was also listening to advice (Norman) and acting on it.

Auchtettyre

Time: 10:57:30 (70th) section split 2:21:45 (80th fastest split)

My support runner (Chris) came out to meet me equipped with walkie talkie (as planned) to convey my requirements to the rest of my crew. 'There's been a change of plan' was my opening response on seeing him. Rather than the quick stop I had envisioned, I requested a full kit change, I had planned a shoe change, but acting on Norman's advice I decided on a full foot make-over. I had given strict instructions that under no circumstances was I allowed to sit down, but that went out the window. Next thing my running tights were off, and I was sat in the chair with legs akimbo, one crew member on each leg; shoes and socks off, a thorough clean and dry, new socks and new shoes. Meanwhile whilst this happening my eldest daughter (Hannah) and crew chief was feeding me soup, relaying messages from family and friends, as well as spraying me with smidge and sunscreen. Then it was on with a

new shirt and shorts. Fortunately, the van was parked right next to the toilet, so another quick sit down and a further weight was lifted, the swing-o-meter was dialling back to the positive side of the board. I could now have a support runner, so Chris joined me, and we walked to the check point dibbed in and got weighed-I'd lost 1kg to which I replied, 'I've just deposited that in the toilet'.

Overall this had been a long stop and may in part explain why my split was long from Beinglas Farm to Auchtettyre, I think I was in the checkpoint for at least 15 minutes and again on the pacing chart I had drifted, this time from 20 hours to 21 hours. It was a long stop but it changed my race, I think it overall saved me time over the 2nd half (well that's what I perceived and believed at the time-which is what counts, on reflection was this just the nature of the beast and the 'Central Governor'(CG) or the 'monkey brain'(MB) sniffing an opportunity; this was the furthest I'd run this year, or any year for that matter, though I had done lots of long 5-6+ hours runs, as well as long back to back days, and recovered well-this was uncharted water, CB/MB had seen an opportunity to take control, it made its first major play of the day, and it wasn't messing around. Yes, it did make a small dent, but I think my recognition, processing and actions dealt with it pretty well-the swing-o-meter was back in the positive. Version 1.51 appeared from the checkpoint.



Auchetetyre to Bridge of Orcy

This section suited me, it's basically flat so most of it is runnable, which is what we did. From Auchetetyre we moved well, I was right in the HR zone I wanted and the feeling was right too- this was what my training had focused on; moving at this intensity for many hours- 'this is normal'- this was the statement I kept repeating to myself!! I got into a rhythm, both my legs and head- this is the state I like to be in- that groove/trance, in the moment call it what you will, it's a happy place for me-my addiction.

One of the challenges and difficulties of the WHW course is the varied terrain, but that helped- they say a change is as good as a rest. After the rollercoasters I thought that was it for my legs, my quads especially, and it was only going to get worse from there, but I should have had more faith in my training, by the time we got to the BOO my sore quads were a distant memory, what soreness? After 9-10 miles of flat it was my hamstrings that were groaning and looking forward to the climb out of BOO, so my quads and gluts could take another shift. So, for me the varied terrain was a good thing, it mixed it up and shared out the load between muscle groups. I was able to use this new knowledge/experience/response from this point onward, every time a muscle started to moan I could rationalise why and knew that the terrain would change and the muscle moaning would abate, which it kept doing right until the end of the race; at the end it was my quads that felt the least battered.

Bridge of Orcy

Time: 12:47 (55th) section split 1:49:47 (23rd fastest split)



Bridge of Orcy to Glen Coe



Receiving cherished Jelly belly-I choose yellow to go with my lemon flavoured Tailwind, to have chosen any other flavour would have been madness, it would have sent my taste buds and stomach into a right old spin...

No solids at the BOO, possibly an over sight because the climb up and over BOO was hard and I did struggle on the other side to Victoria bridge, but we had hooked up with another runner and his support-we had a good chat/moan, they pushed on. In this low patch I focused on moving 'keep moving' was the mantra, I got some food down and sure enough on the way to and over the Rannoch moor I picked up- the belly was full and consequently my head was in a better place and I was hitting my desired HR and intensity-all was good. What also helped was the tail wind (yes the stuff you drink), but also the wind it was pushing us along to Glen Coe, I remember pointing out the head wind to Chris, we started to run, it would have been rude to kick a gift horse in the mouth and not make use of it.

Glen Coe

Time 15:09:38 (49th) section split 2:22:21 (28TH fastest split)

Into Glen Coe and we were in good spirits, we met up with our crew and said hi to Stacey Holloway who was on checkpoint duty, she said I was looking good and was making good time through the checkpoint. Chris had walkie-talkied my order in, it was going to be a liquid afternoon tea; chicken soup and coffee. I over did the re-fuelling, on the way out down the slope my support runner was encouraging me to run, but I over-ruled, my stomach was akin to a washing machine on a spin cycle, I could feel coffee and soup sloshing around, so I decided I needed a little time to let it settle.

Glen Coe to Kinlochleven

Once at the kingshouse hotel normal service was resumed, a bit of flat, so I could run and get into a rhythm.

Then we hit the staircase and I could feel my mood shifting, in response I started shovelling down mars bars and guzzling coke, as usually a low mood coincides with low fuel, but it wasn't having the desired effect, we got up and over, on the decent the legs were good but my mood was low and I felt knackered, the mantra was the same 'just keep moving', which we did. Having had a week or two to reflect, there could have been a fuel issue, but reading what I have already written and listening to other people's recollections, I was just really tired, again a new experience, which the CG/MB was taking full advantage of-everything becomes magnified.



The devil's staircase



Kinlochleven

Time: 17:37:18 (41st) section split 2:27:40 (32nd fastest split)

Into kinlochleven and I felt well and truly knackered, and nothing was right; the check point was off the course by a few meters and when I had to walk another 200 yards down the car park to the van and further away from the route, then that was it I was not happy-I apologise for anyone in ear shot-the language was not pleasant-a melt-down was in full swing-in my head at least.

Fortunately, I can give a couple of perspectives as to what happened in the checkpoint:

Hannah's witness statement (perspective) will follow, which will include a summary of a phone call she had with her mum (my better half), Hannah got upset by what had entered and then exited Kinlochleven, she could see I was struggling, plus she'd had a long tiring day too-so emotions were heightened; a chat with mum who listened, asked if I'd been fed; once that had been confirmed in the affirmative, she reassured Hannah that everything was ok ('the daft sod choose to do this, and he knows what to expect), concluding that I was just Hangary and tired (a chuffing understatement, but as usual her assessment was right on the nose).

When I got to the van, I didn't sit down-not allowed, but I remember standing with my hands on my knees; complaining that I was exhausted, there may have been a fleeting moment of wanting to stop, but it was more the feeling of despair that was the over-riding emotion. I downed my soup and flat coke. The memory that clearly sticks out, was the look on Matt's face (Hannah's fiancé and crew driver and mister fix it)-he looked concerned (very). That was a jolt, it wasn't that bad-was it? I then decided I better get my arse in gear, so loaded up with two bottles of coke (I was not going to run out of fuel) and started walking 'just keep moving'. It was at this point having just left the van that I had another emotional wobble, mantra time 'just keep moving- you will feel better'. Then another boost, as I was leaving the

carpark the support runner who we'd been talking to between BOO and Glen Coe came up to me shook my hand and wished me the best of luck (can't remember his name, just that he came from Perth and will be running the devil in August-we had another chat at the awards ceremony), this was a great pick me up and summed up the whole experience, everyone is in it together and everyone wants everyone to do well. As we hit the road a group of around 10-12 (a mix of runners and their support) were leaving the check point, they were all walking, I attached myself to the back and said to myself 'just keep moving-you will feel better', let them pull you along, whilst you get your head back in order'. There was lots of encouragement, but I could tell by some of the looks, I wasn't the only one having an internal battle-no one was having it easy and this stage in the proceedings.

On reflection, it wasn't pain I was feeling, it was despair. Pain I can cope with (to a point, especially in a running context)-you grit your teeth, you can fight it, but despair that sucks the life force out of you, it drains away your fight if you let it. There was video from last year's race that followed a runner called Christian Stewart, and there's a bit where he is kneeling on the floor toward the end of the race having a total meltdown, I couldn't get my head round it at the time 'just walk' was what I was thinking, it can't be bad. Now I have been exposed to that same head state and experience, oh it can be that bad, now I get it. Respect to anyone who digs themselves out like he did.

Kinlochleven to Lundarva

At the top of the climb, the view back down to the loch was stunning-pity I didn't take a picture, by this time the despair had lifted and we were moving well, on to Larig Mor we ran when the gradient was flat and power hiked everything else-the scenery was stunning, but that path goes on and on and on.... The mountain rescue stop was a welcome respite to take a drink and then push on.



Not looking the spriteliest

LundavraTime: 19:37 (37th) section split 2:00:38 (30th fastest split)

The runner that arrived at Lundavra was the polar opposite of the one at kinlochleven, I was feeling good and I could sniff the finish and this knowledge was enough to loosen the CG/MB grip, my legs were still in good shape, so I knew I could push them down the fire road, which we did.

Lundarva to Fort William



There was a little confusion over the content of a text my crew sent my support runner shortly after we left Lundavra, Chris read ' there is a group 5 mins back and they are moving

really well', so his response was to use this as encouragement to push me, he was only trying to help, but this image of being chased down by the hounds of hell (the image that had formed in my head) was having a negative effect, this was further compounded by his attempts to further encourage me to run quicker. I told him in no uncertain terms to stop-by all accounts my language was foul and the phrase 'he tore the shit out me' was used to describe his take on the exchange to my daughter later that evening. It turns out what the text actually said was 'the next group is 5 mins back and your running really well'. As it turned out we weren't chased down by the hounds of hell, no one caught us, over the last mile we clocked around 8:20 min/miles, which was my fastest mile split of the race-this last section too was my fastest split compared to the rest of the field.

Fort William

Time: 20:59:27 (33rd) 4th MV50 section split 1:21:31 (10th fastest split)



A picture is worth a thousand words



Lessons learned

Within ten minutes of the finish I started to shiver uncontrollably, the race medic came over and instructed that I get wrapped up and walk around-you need to keep moving to stop the blood pooling in your legs you can't just stop-so I was walked around the centre by Hannah for some time (which I wasn't happy about-but complied with none the less) until he was happy that I'd got my colour back and was in a position to handle having a shower, for the next six hours my body's thermostat would swing from feeling really cold and shivering to feeling really hot and sweating profusely, it took a round 24-36 hours before equilibrium returned. So my future strategy for when finishing such a race, is immediately wrap up and just keep walking around whilst sipping sweet tea and eat whatever you fancy (the race

medic said to get some real food like vegetables-but where are you going to get those at midnight in Fort William 😊)

Bad patches, for me came in waves, the lows were the rollercoasters, after BOO to Victoria bridge, the devil to Kinlochleven. At the time I equated them to being low on fuel, generally after I re-fuelled especially with chicken soup this gave me a boost. However, over the Devil I was force feeding myself Mars bars and it was having no effect. On reflection, I think it was mental fatigue (exhaustion), which was the additional variable that had now been added to the equation - I was knackered-who wouldn't be at 17 hours in. I had never been on my feet this long and never felt this tired-I'm used to long days (12-hours) at work and running at either end of that, but this was +50%, so it was easy pickings for the CG/MB. Future thoughts on how to address this deficit 1) improve cruising speed and shorten the day and/or 2) Long days trekking with some sleep deprivation to familiarise myself with the state as well as develop the strategies to cope with being overly tired.

My body was strong, it coped better at the end than my head; if that had been has conditioned, I think I could have gone quicker. Over the last 35 miles my heart rate (average) was eight beats lower (129 versus 121) so my intensity from a physiological perspective had dropped, though the perceived effort felt harder. Another explanation for the drop off was my game plan; to keep the heart rate around 130-5, however the terrain was tricky, there was a lot on an incline, which bordered on being runnable. On the day if I'd have ran those sections then my HR threshold would have gone above target, so the decision was made to power hike ('just keep it moving'), as a consequence my HR was lower-this was uncharted waters for me but a decision that kept the CG/MB at bay.

From this experience, I now know that I can maintain a higher intensity; future training will have to take this into account i.e. can I still digest food without developing stomach issues, how much will my recovery be affected, but my CG/MB no longer has that barrel to hang me over. I now know the course a lot better, so maybe a one pace intensity is not the optimal

approach, maybe work a bit more on those almost runnable sections, run them to keep the overall average pace higher, whilst be less pushy on the downhills, but again training would have to be tailored to this approach.

From this year's training approach and race experience I focused on long runs on the same type of terrain and at the intensity I wanted to run the race, this conditioned me Pavlov dog style, which in the second half of the race held me in good stead, comparatively I didn't drop off the pace (Milngavie to Auchtetyre 10:57:30 versus Auchtetyre to Fort William 10:01:57). However, in adopting this Pavlovian approach to training I sacrificed speed work, which on reflection reduced my cruising speed at my desired intensity, however this made my long runs more pleasurable and less impactful on my recovery-plenty of food for thought.

To finish, I owe a great debt of gratitude and thanks to my support crew Hannah (eldest and No.1 daughter, crew chief and general organiser), Matt (future son-in-law, driver and mister fix it) & Chris (top support runner and driver) they sacrificed and endured a lot in allowing me to run this race, again many thanks.



Support Crew Report

This was a new experience for all of us. My dad having never run this distance, we'd never crewed and Chris had little experience of support running. This was going to be a steep learning curve for us all. There were so many unknowns, which was frustrating, but we kept saying it was going to be an adventure and it definitely was.

I was excited, nervous and so proud already when we turned up for registration. I could sense my dad's nerves, but tried to not show mine. It was important we all stayed chilled out and positive for him, that was the aim. I stood ready with my camera to get a photo of the runners pass through the tunnel, seeing the head torches pass through and start this epic journey was an amazing sight. I spotted my dad through the crowd and shouted him. Seeing him run away I realised just how much this meant and the journey we were about to go on...

We'd fitted a Garmin tracker onto his bag, this wasn't picking up signal in the valley early on so we were relying on his predicted timings. (Later on this tracker worked perfectly, but if you were planning on using one, don't expect it to work for this first part of the race.) I'd read on a crew's blog that they had used glow sticks for the Drymen checkpoint to flag down their runner, I thought this was a great idea so that's what we did, it worked well for us as he spotted us straight away and we wasted no time there. He was moving well and on time, but seemed quiet. I put this down to it being early on and that he'd not settled into his rhythm yet.

We hurried to the next checkpoint, Balmaha. It was packed! We hadn't visited this in our recce run. I'd promised Dad I'd get him coffee and a bacon buttie. Not wanting them to go cold and have a diva runner on our hands I waited as long as I could before ordering – they're quick at making them thank goodness. Our walkie-talkies were great, Chris went and met him up the course, then came down relaying back he didn't want to stop and we'd keep walking. Dad seemed quiet again, focussed but ate and drank everything I passed him – a good sign!

Feeling the effects of little sleep and a busy few hours we headed back to camp until we'd next see him. The boys managed to get some sleep but I was feeling anxious, wanting to see how my dad was getting on. I wonder how many times I refreshed his tracker?

Seeing him come in was a great moment, I could see he'd settled into his rhythm and was pleased to see us. The walkie-talkies again were fantastic here, we'd got everything ready for him by the time he came in, including heating up some soup. Allowing him a quick sit down for us as a crew made the difference as I felt better for chatting to him, getting a kit change sorted and getting more fuel in him. Weighing card done he set off again, we'd nip to Tyndrum up the road to meet again and check if he needed anything changing, I'm glad we did as he needed more tape for strapping his shin. At each stop we'd got messages from family and friends on a whiteboard, music playing and we'd try our best to smile and be positive and bouncy!

At Bridge of Orcy we got a great parking spot, the midges weren't as bad as we'd been expecting so we got everything out of the van and set up ready for him and support runner, Chris. Here I started noticing we'd picked up some time, the support crews we had been seeing weren't there and we left as they arrived. As support crew this was a great feeling – realising we were in a race too!



At Glen Coe I'd got a coffee ready for my dad and had a quick chat with the lovely Stacey we'd met before. We were parked way up on the hill, and knowing my dad would go full diva if I'd even consider him running up there, I brought a bag down for him. I spotted a crew with a shopping basket for this – a brilliant idea as you can quickly see what you need, I logged that one for future.

We saw him again at Kings House Hotel, a quick drink and they were off again heading to Devil's Staircase. We got parked but it was a fair walk away from the Devil's Staircase. Forgetting something Matt ran back to the van – what a hero! We spotted them coming in, walking bits then running when they saw us. A couple of Mars bars and a quick caffeine drink they were soon off. My dad seemed very focussed and determined, here he knew what was coming as he'd run this before.

We moved on to our next point, we knew the roads around here and knew they could be busy. A real concern for us now. We made it to Kinlochleven – eventually! Matt was getting tired now, and firmly in that hungry-but-not sort of state, made worse by the smell of chips! It wasn't long at all before they arrived. My dad had a real grumble here, we'd not parked close enough to the entrance, perhaps we should have taken a bag to the entrance, but as we needed to make soup we'd stayed with the van. Here I could really see the toll it was taking on him, he was fed up and 'hangry'. He took soup, pretzels and flat Coke – that's when I knew it was serious. We left and felt really low, we were tired now and I could see he was too. I had a cry on the drive to Lundavra, texting my mum asking what to do or say to my dad! Chris text me asking for messages or stories to tell to my dad as he was slowing. It felt like we just needed to give him a push to get to Lundavra. Once we were there I knew we were on the home straight. I relayed messages from my mum and talked things through with Matt, we knew they'd make it.

Lundavra is an interesting spot. We got parked up and watched many cars struggle to get up the slope, and one van nearly topple down the steep side. Aside from all that it's a great checkpoint, music, balloons and a fire. This really helped mine and Matt's moods and we felt

positive when my dad and Chris came in. I was so relieved to see them, but they weren't hanging around. A quick drink and they were off again. I knew we were tight on time now, our target time was within reach.

There was a young family waiting for their runner at the finish line, I'd say the little girl was around 3 years old. She was loudly asking where her dad was, I was agreeing with her. They were with another mum and young child, "we're waiting to cheer on Hannah's dad!" I overheard. "Yes you are!" I thought.

Sat there waiting I read through my dad's notes. There were no instructions for the finish, I realised. We'd not planned that bit! Just planned on getting there. I wish we had got coats and blankets ready, a lesson learned. It may have saved us pacing around the hall for good while. Seeing him come through the finish was brilliant, I wanted the photo of him running in so badly, I knew I couldn't ask him to run in again because I'd missed it...

I was so proud and relieved when he'd finished. I gave Chris a big hug and thanked him, he did such a brilliant job of looking after my dad, even when he wasn't very pleasant to him at times. While they were in the shower I called my mum, we were all buzzing and the feeling of getting him over the line in a brilliant time was amazing. Support crewing isn't easy, I'd been warned of that! It's hard work, but inspiring and rewarding to see your runner be so strong, determined and really push themselves, especially when it's your dad.