

West Highland Way Race

The Support Team

Choosing the right crew is absolutely critical.

“Now let me confess that we were thrilled to have them but after decades of successfully running ultras without them, it was tempting for us to think that, other than transferring our gear and food from once checkpoint to the next, we didn’t actually need a crew. Laughably not so! Eric has finished the race three times and Wendy has hiked all of it and run the shorter races that build up to the WHW, so they knew the course like the back of their hands. Not only did they keep us well-fed and tended, they gave priceless advice along the way and briefed us each time we saw them on what was ahead. And it was simply reassuring and fun for us nervous newbies to see them as we arrived at a checkpoint.”

Susan Donnelly 2009

Before that, some important bits that you and the support crew need to know about.

- The main purpose of the support crew is to look after your safety, during and immediately after the race.
- Motorised support is mandatory. A member of the support crew must attend registration with you and collect their support vehicle permit. Two members of the support crew must meet you at Auchtertyre Farm, and at the checkpoints at Glencoe, Kinlochleven and at the finish. They are also allowed (but not obliged) to meet you at Balmaha and Bridge of Orchy. No support crew are allowed at the Beinglas Farm checkpoint, and travel to Inversnaid is not recommended because of the difficulties in reaching it. More details on the location of the checkpoints can be found on the website www.westhighlandwayrace.org/info/checkpoints.htm
- Up until Auchtertyre you need at least one support crew member, and from Auchtertyre onwards you need a crew of at least 2 people, one of whom must be capable of accompanying you during the last two stages if required. Even if you crew are not meeting you at some of the early checkpoints, they need to be available to come and collect you if you need to withdraw from the race for any reason.
- Runners can have more than one support crew sharing the load; in fact this is encouraged as it prevents a single support crew becoming over-tired, particularly if they have to go in to a second night without sleep. **Be aware of the risks of driving when tired, and make sure the support crew take breaks / change drivers as and when necessary.** If you are going to be changing support crews mid race, please do not do it at one of the places where space is tight, such as Auchtertyre Farm – choose a more suitable location.
- Beech Tree Inn, Rowardennan and Lundavra are support points where crews are welcome, but not official checkpoints.
- Runners can, if they wish, leave a drop bag for Balmaha, Rowardennan, Inversnaid Beinglas Farm and Bridge of Orchy.

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Runners are strongly recommended to use one back up car only at support/ checkpoints as the future of the race depends to a large degree on the goodwill of landowners and the support of the communities which we pass through. Please respect the residents' right to a night's sleep and stay as quiet as possible during the night(s).

Other points to note:

- Support crews cannot meet their runner anywhere in the area from the top of Loch Lomond to Crianlarich, and are not allowed to access Beinglas Farm. Under no circumstances should support crew park at the Derrydarroch Farm or Carmyle Cottage, or indeed anywhere else on the A82 between Inverarnan and Crianlarich. This will be strictly enforced, and any breach could lead to a time penalty being applied to the runner, or even to the runner's disqualification.
- A parking permit for support vehicles will be given out at registration. This must be displayed at all times. Only one support vehicle per runner will be allowed in to the Auchtertyre checkpoint because of restrictions on space, and the permit will need to be shown on entry. Please ensure support crews do not arrive at the Auchtertyre checkpoint too early as they will not be allowed access. We strongly recommend that support crews have a sleep in one of the car parks in Balloch, after leaving the east side of Loch Lomond.
- From Auchtertyre (but not before that) the runner may be accompanied by running support provided that he or she leaves the checkpoint after the times outlined below:

Auchtertyre – after 10hrs 30mins race time (i.e. after 11.30am)

Bridge of Orchy – after 12hrs 30mins (i.e. after 1.30pm)

Glencoe – after 14hrs 45mins (i.e. after 3.45pm)

Kinlochleven – after 17hrs 30mins (i.e. after 6.30pm)

Dogs are not allowed to run with the support crew when accompanying the runner.

Race marshals can insist that runners either have running support from Bridge of Orchy, or double up with another runner, for safety reasons.

- If your runner is faster than the times shown in the above paragraph in respect of running support, the support crew are only allowed to run with him / her in the area **one quarter of a mile before the checkpoint and one quarter of a mile after the checkpoint**, and are not allowed to run at any other times. Support crews are however allowed to meet their runner at any safe point in the route, except the section between the top of Loch Lomond and Crianlarich as outlined above.
- Running Support cannot *mule* for runners who must have the minimum level of safety kit on them at all times. The minimum kit will be dependent upon forecast weather conditions.

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- Large campervans / motorhomes are not suitable for many of the narrow roads on the route, and are not allowed on the road to Rowardennan, at Auchtertyre or at Lundavra. They will not be allowed on the narrow road down to the Bridge of Orchy checkpoint. It is strongly recommended you do not bring such a vehicle.
- **Note that the Race Director may withdraw from the race any runner whose back up crew behave in any way which could be considered prejudicial to the future of the race or is inconsiderate to other runners or Marshals.**

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Some more amusing reflections on crewing....



John Kynaston and crew – note the advisory midge headgear for support

What is the role of the support team? To be completely subservient to their runner's every whim for as long as it takes them to complete the route and for them to be forever ever grateful, buy you a load of beer, several dinners and whatever else they can extract; one supporter got a new Mini One.

A good start is to have a decent plan – where you will meet, what you think you will need – food, drink or clothes and a schedule, but be prepared to be very flexible on this. No-one knows how they will do on the day until they start, what the weather will be like or how they will feel. It is easy to be on schedule in the early stages. Consider coming up with some additional support points just in case they are required with everyone knowing where they are.

“As” first time crew” Ken and Sue were very professional and I was quite relaxed in their care. Sue was excellent with the foot procedure and Ken saw to my bag change and food requirements, however my only comment would be that it would be more tactful not to sizzle up the sausages whilst I was still there! Cooked breakfast for the crew – I’ll just make do with my rice cakes then!” Pauline Walker 2008

A good crew will anticipate the change of mind that runners have at every checkpoint. They will have the agreed food/drink ready but know that you will want something else. They will forgive the temper tantrums, occasional bad language and unreasonable demands (an ice cream at 1am in Kinlochleven, for ****s sake!). They will be cheerful and encouraging whatever that means for you. For some that could mean an appropriate kick up the backside – “you wanted to do this” or sing songs. (‘Reach for the Stars’ is a particular favourite of one support crew).

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How will your support team recognise you in the dark? Runners with head torches tend to look the same. Runners have known to miss their early support because of this and just run on. Phone or text on route (phone signal is fine in early part of race). Like last year when one crew wore tutus so that their runner could spot them?

The race starts at 01:00 hrs. When you are talking “time” there can be confusion between clock time and race time e.g. “I’ll be in Balmaha in about 6:30.” Does this mean 6:30 or 7:30? It is recommended that **everyone** refers to ‘race time’ i.e. the time since the race has started, rather than the actual time on the clock – that should help limit confusion.

Worth thinking about who does what at each support point as well; someone to fill water bladder/bottle whilst another sorts out food/feet. Are you going to stop and if so for how long? You will be horrified just how quickly 5 minutes passes so be sure and have someone to let you know when your time is up.

It happens most years-

- (a) A support crew will not know which direction to go when leaving the start- turn right out the car park and then left at the lights.
- (b) It is the WHW Race, not a grand prix; there is no need to burn rubber getting 19 miles up the road to meet a runner who will take a fair while to get there.

Early Pit stops for Support - In case of need!

Tesco, Milngavie is open late for those bananas you forgot to pack.

The coffee shop at the Oak Tree Inn in Balmaha will be open from around 2:00am for support crews, and will also be serving hot food and refreshments. MacDonalds, Balloch is open 24 hours at weekends according to their website. It is close to the A82 route on the drive north, at the southern end of Loch Lomond.

After this there are plenty of places on the road but we would recommend the cafe at White Corries which has arranged to stay open late for us. The Tailrace Inn in Kinlochleven will also serve food until late, both to sit in or take away. There is a fish and chip shop there too.

If there is anything that we have not covered but would like some info on then check the race website forum, or email ianbeattie@westhighlandwayrace.org.