

West Highland Way Race Saturday 22nd June 2013

This was my 6th West Highland Way race and my 23rd ultra since I discovered this slightly crazy sport of ultra running in 2006. I was looking forward to this one in 2013 as much if not more than any of the others. Over the last two years I'd had some real battles particularly in the long ones.

In 2011's whw race and last year's Lakeland 100 race I had a real struggle over the last 14 miles with sore feet and basically had to walk in. One of my aims for this year was to be able to run strongly from Kinlochleven and hopefully enjoy that last section rather than endure it.

With that in mind I prepared as well as I could. I changed my training plan to include back to back long runs at the weekend and probably most importantly decided I needed to lose some weight. I was concerned when I weighed myself after Christmas to discover I was 12st 10lbs. Over the next six months I've got that down to the 11st 2lbs I was at the start line on Saturday.

I knew deep down that trying to repeat my sub 20hr times was impossible but I did feel that sub 22hrs was a very realistic and challenging target. So over the past few weeks that has been the aim. My Fling and two days runs in April and May filled me with a lot of confidence that it was possible. I couldn't wait to get going and see if I could do it!

On Thursday night Ryan, Becki and Jo came to stay with us from Inverness. Ryan was running the race for the third time and was in great shape after finishing the Fling in 8hrs 56mins. I always take Friday off work so I can prepare and try and rest as much as I can. Some years it's felt like a long day waiting for the evening but not this year.

In the morning we chatted and I prepared my drop bags. From experience I knew exactly what I wanted so didn't waste time and money on more than I knew I was going to eat. Everything was in boxes this year for easy access.



While Becki, Jo and Katrina went for a run Ryan and I enjoyed homemade soup for lunch and some more whw chat! At 2pm I went back to bed for a few hours. I listened to Radio 2 and dozed a bit but the important thing was that I was off my feet and resting.

Katrina cooked us a superb meal and then we sat down together and watched 'Closing Distance' the dvd of the 2005 whw race. I must admit the biggest talking point was the size of Ian's bumbag!

As the race went on we were speculating just what was in it! We reckoned he had the proverbial kitchen sink!

At 10.30pm David MacIntosh arrived to take me to Milngavie. Katrina had normally supported me through the night but this year we decided to swap things round. So David was on duty from the start to Balmaha. I would use drop bags at Rowardennan and Inversnaid and then Katrina and friend Lesley McKerral would take over from Beinglas Farm.

David had run the Black Rock 5 on Friday so it was good to hear all about that. In the car I also did a quick update for the whw podcast that I was planning to do through the race. David is an ideal support crew. Keen runner (sub 3hrs in London this year) but very calm which helped me prepare.

We arrived at Milngavie just after 11.30pm, took my drop bags to the car park then headed over to registration. As always it was very efficient and within a few minutes I'd collected my goody bag and timing card and been weighed. To see the scales on 72.3kg rather than 83kg that I was at Lakeland 100 last year was another confidence boost!

I saw a few friends but I was keen to get to the car and make sure everything was ready and I could sit down for the final few minutes before Ian's race briefing at 12.30am.



I chatted with Dave Troman in the few minutes before we started. Dave and I ran a lot together last year in preparing for the Lakeland 100 and I knew he was in great shape and was looking forward to seeing what he would do this year.

At 1am the hooter sounded and we were off to the leisure centre in Fort William.

Milngavie to Drymen (12.13miles)

As we ran through the tunnel and onto the high street we were met with a wall of noise and people with lights flashing from cameras. It was a great start full of anticipation. I was about half way down the field and keen to get into my stride as easily as possible.

Within a mile or so I just felt really comfortable and had a feeling that this was going to be a good day. The new rucksack I was using was comfortable and everything felt just as it should be. I was wearing a long sleeved top and had my jacket in my bag if it got too cold or wet.

I soon caught up with Sandra and we ran together pretty well into Drymen. Sandra had trained well and I knew was aiming for around 23hrs so I felt it would help both of us to run together. The first few miles are often strange as it all feels far too easy.

Running at 10min mile pace is very relaxing but all the time you know you are saving yourself the battles ahead. It was quite warm and those who started with jackets were soon taking them off. I chatted with a few folk over the next hour or so but most of the time staying near the back of each group I was in.

One of the things that struck me was how much stuff some folk were carrying. It is a supported race so you can see your crew every couple of hours so best to carry as little as possible. I didn't really want to carry my jacket but thought it best that I did!

When we arrived at Beech Tree I noted that I was about 8mins up on my sub 22hr plan. I was really happy with that as my plan had been to have a realistic target and try and get just ahead of it. There was a big crowd at the Beech Tree and I joked to Sandra that she won 3-1 on the 'Come on Sandra/John' shouts.

Suddenly we were now part of a long line of runners. I reckon there must have been at least 30 runners in a long line. I was near the back and quite content to let others set the pace. Once we arrived at Gartness the group split and spread out a bit more.

I ate my apple pastry and did the first of my podcast updates. I did wonder whether folk around thought I might be losing the plot as I talked to myself!

As we ran into Drymen Sandra said that she had a hot spot on her feet so was going to stop and change shoes. I didn't see her again but was really pleased to find out she finished in 23:11:21.

Milngavie to Drymen		2013 - sub 22hr plan				2013 - Actual			
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
start	end of wood	2.18	26:00	26:00	11:56	2.17	21:31	21:31	9:55
end of wood	wall	2.20	24:00	50:00	10:55	2.20	21:34	43:05	9:48
wall	beech tree	2.72	27:00	1:17:00	9:56	2.71	26:20	1:09:24	9:43
beech tree	gate	2.60	27:00	1:44:00	10:23	2.60	26:44	1:36:08	10:17
gate	drymen	2.43	26:00	2:10:00	10:42	2.43	26:49	2:02:57	11:02
	Leg Total	12.13	2:10:00		10:43	12.11	2:02:57		10:09
	Rest		0:00	2:10:00			0:00	2:02:57	

Drymen to Balmaha (6.82miles)

I didn't stop at Drymen because I'd arranged with David to see him at the car park before the Garadhban Forest. Suddenly there were very few runners around me. I assume quite a few must have stopped at Drymen. After a few minutes I caught up with Gary Scott and we chatted for a bit. Gary was being crewed by Jon Steele and Shirley and was interviewed on the same episode of the British Trail Running Podcast that I was.

I met David as arranged and decided that even though it was still dark enough to need a head torch I could leave it with him as it was getting lighter by the minute. It was a good move as it meant one less thing to carry for the next hour.

I also took my peanut butter and jam sandwich which I enjoyed over the next 30mins or so. I had drunk about 500ml of water over the first 2 hours and that felt about right. So all was good as I made my way along the new path towards Conic Hill.

I was catching up with a few runners and having a quick chat with them. It was raining a bit harder now and as I went past one runner with his hood up and round his face he said 'Things aren't going to plan.' I realised it was Ryan!

I hadn't expected to see him until the end and was really concerned for him. He said that things were not going well and he felt generally tired and lacking energy. I encouraged him to dig in and he would get through it. He stayed ahead until we started climbing the hill when I went past.

The view as we climbed was non-existent as the rain clouds were very low. The new path certainly made the climb easier. I was really happy with how easy I found the climb and noted that my heart rate was well under 140 which was a good sign.

As we made our way down suddenly the view opened up and it was great to see Loch Lomond appearing out of the mist. Gary stopped for a minute to take in the view.

I made sure I took it steady on the way down as I didn't want to do anything silly this early in the race. It's important to keep the quads in good condition for the steep descents later in the day. Ryan caught up with me and we ran in together. I hoped that his blip was over and he would be able to push on.

I ran into Balmaha in good spirits knowing I was running well 10mins under my sub 22hr splits and ready for the lochside.

Drymen to Balmaha		2013 - sub 22hr plan				2013 - Actual			
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
drymen	path junction	2.22	26:00	2:36:00	11:43	2.24	24:29	2:27:25	10:56
path junction	bridge	2.37	26:00	3:02:00	10:58	2.36	26:28	2:53:53	11:13
bridge	balmaha	2.23	33:00	3:35:00	14:48	2.26	32:19	3:26:12	14:18
	Leg Total	6.82	1:25:00		12:28	6.86	1:23:15		12:08
	Total	18.95	3:35:00		11:21	18.97	3:26:12		10:52
	Rest		3:00	3:38:00			3:09	3:29:21	

This year we were using the SPORTident chip timing so I bleeped in and was met by David who directed me to his car. I didn't know at the time but seeing the results now I see that I was 61st at Balmaha.

I ate my mashed sweet potato and changed my soaking wet top and buff. It still wasn't cold but changing tops always gives me a spring to my step. I thanked David for his help as he was heading off to meet Katrina to hand over the support baton!

Balmaha to Rowardennan (7.78miles)

As I came out of the car park I saw Alan Young with his camera. He encouraged me to smile! I soon settled into a comfortable rhythm and once again I was encouraged with how well I was going. On my 2 day run in May I spent the first day reminding myself that it was all about the second day and saving myself to finish strong.

So now I was doing the same, imagining that the second day was from Bridge of Orchy. The only difference was that I wasn't going to get a sleep before doing it!

I could see a runner just ahead as we approached the section when the path takes you to the 'beach'. I was interested to see whether he would take the first and correct turn left at the sign just after the second wooden bridge. He didn't but I assumed he would take the next turn left.

When I got onto the beach I couldn't see him and realised that he had gone onto the road. When I caught him after 5mins or so I asked him whether he had done the course before thinking that it is

an easy mistake if you don't know it. He said he'd done the Fling so I asked him why he ran on the road. He didn't reply so I left him to it.

I really have a hard time with runners who miss sections. I really don't see the point. I hope it was a genuine mistake but it is important to know the route and make sure you run it all!

I was running all the bits I should and still feeling comfortable. A good sign for me is when I don't have to think about starting running I just do it. There are times when I know I should be running and have to give myself a countdown but at this point it was easy to get going again and I with over 4 hrs gone that was a good sign.

The weather now was excellent. It was dry and warm and perfect for running. I couldn't have asked for better conditions to tackle the stretch up the lochside.

I caught up with a few more runners, having a quick chat on the way. Most seemed to be going well and happy with their progress. I did wonder how Ryan was doing and I was hoping that he would soon catch up again.

At some point Karl Zienner passed me. I knew Karl was capable of sub 20hrs and had been surprised when I saw him before Drymen. He said he wanted to start conservatively and seemed to be going well so that was good.

Some of the runners I passed asked how my sub 22hrs plan was going. They had been reading the blog and knew what I was going for! I caught Tony Thistlethwaite who was on his way to his 10th completion. Very impressive!

I ran into Rowardennan a few minutes under my plan for the leg and was now 13mins under my sub 22hr plan.

Balmaha to Rowardennan		distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
from	to								
balmaha	road bridge	2.16	27:00	4:05:00	12:30	2.07	23:42	3:53:03	11:27
road bridge	salloch	2.91	33:00	4:38:00	11:20	2.88	32:52	4:25:55	11:25
salloch	rowardennan	2.71	35:00	5:13:00	12:55	2.70	34:30	5:00:25	12:47
	Leg Total	7.78	1:35:00		12:13	7.65	1:31:04		11:54
	Total	26.73	5:13:00		11:43	26.62	5:00:25		11:17
	Rest		3:00	5:16:00			3:05	5:03:30	

I found my drop bag and saw my friends Jonny and Francis who had climbed Ben Lomond to see the sun rise (except it was cloudy and they couldn't see anything!!). It was good to have a quick chat and they encouraged me to push on and I was looking good!

Jonny Fling kindly refilled my water bottle and I ate about half of my tub of baked beans. I was now in 35th place and I was 27th quickest for that leg. I can't remember going past 26 runners so I assume a lot of them just ahead of me into Balmaha stopped for longer than I did.

Rowardennan to Inversnaid (7.25miles)

Jonny and Francis walked with me through the car park then sent me on my way. There was a runner just ahead but he soon disappeared so I was on my own. It's surprising sometimes how in a race of 181 you can spend a lot of time on your own as the race gets so spread out.

I was on my own for the majority of the run to Inversnaid. The weather was good, I was going well and this is what I'd been preparing and training for so all was good. I walked up the up hills and ran strongly on the flats and downhills. My quads felt fine so I was encouraged that my training runs down Ben Lomond had paid off.

I did another podcast update and kept moving on. I was chipping away at my sub 22hr plan and when I reached my mini-split where the path goes into a single track I noted that I was now 17mins up. My optimistic aim was that if I could get over 30mins up by Auchtertyre I would switch to my sub 21hr plan.

Things were going well but I didn't want to think about that just yet as there was still a long way to go. I ticked off the various landmarks on the way to Inversnaid. I always enjoy the bit where we run past the bluebells. They were full bloom on our May run but now they were gone and replaced by fern.

I arrived at Inversnaid a couple of minutes under my plan and so I was now 24mins up and happy!

Rowardennan to Inversnaid									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
rowardennan	waterfall	2.11	27:00	5:43:00	12:48	2.04	24:42	5:28:12	12:06
waterfall	single track	2.35	28:00	6:11:00	11:55	2.43	26:04	5:54:16	10:44
single track	hotel	2.79	36:00	6:47:00	12:54	2.78	39:00	6:33:16	14:02
Leg Total		7.25	1:31:00		12:33	7.25	1:29:46		12:23
Total		33.98	6:47:00		11:59	33.87	6:33:16		11:37
Rest			3:00	6:50:00			1:40	6:34:56	

The team at Inversnaid was very efficient finding my drop bag and refilling my water bottle. They offered me a seat in the tent away from the midges but I didn't want to stop long so was quickly away.

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm (6.71miles)

Karl arrived just as I was leaving the checkpoint so we ran together for awhile. He asked about the podcasts and I explained that I was doing some clips along the way. He agreed to do a quick update so that was fun. We ran together for the next few miles.

I was very impressed with Karl's running style. He is so efficient and has such an easy style over the ground. I felt quite cumbersome in comparison. My legs were starting to feel the effects of running for 7hrs by now and the tougher technical sections of this leg always makes it feel harder.

I was also having to concentrate on staying in the moment. It's a real temptation to starting thinking about how far there is to go and it can be a bit overwhelming. You have run over 35miles and starting to feel the effects of that but still have 60miles to go!

So I tried as best as I could to focus on my next mini-split and let the overall distance take care of itself. I was also really looking forward to seeing Katrina and Lesley at Beinglas.

Just before I came to the open bit of ground which signals the end of the tougher technical terrain Steven Morrison then Ryan caught up with me. It was good to see him going better but he still didn't seem himself. He asked whether he could run with me for a bit which was fine but he was soon off ahead and I was pleased for him.

I caught up with Karl again and we ran into Beinglas Farm together. I was 4 mins under my split for the leg and now 20mins up on my sub 22hr. My official overall time was 8hrs 14mins 00secs. There are some differences mainly because I didn't stop my watch at the dibber but where my support team were.

Inversnaid to Beinglas Farm									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
inversnaid	gate	2.50	40:00	7:30:00	16:00	2.54	37:57	7:12:53	14:56
gate	post	2.00	33:00	8:03:00	16:30	1.97	31:09	7:44:03	15:49
post	beinglas	2.21	32:00	8:35:00	14:29	2.15	31:45	8:15:47	14:46
	Leg Total	6.71	1:45:00		15:39	6.66	1:40:51		15:09
	Total	40.69	8:35:00		12:39	40.53	8:15:47		12:14
	Rest		4:00	8:39:00			3:26	8:19:13	

Noanie was the marshal at the checkpoint so it was encouraging to see her smiling and enthusiastic face. It was also great to see Katrina and Lesley waiting for me with my food and gear! Our arrangements were going to plan!



I changed my top to a short sleeved one and had a quick towel down. I ate one of my greek style yoghurts and was quickly off again. The only slight hiccup we had was I'd been using my 500ml bottle and wanted the 800ml one for this leg as it longer. It was still in the car but I figured as it wasn't too warm I'd be fine.

I decided to leave my rain jacket with my team as I hadn't worn it all day so far. I was now in 34th place and I was 32nd fastest for the leg from Rowardennan to Beinglas Farm.

Beinglas Farm to Auchtertyre (9.45miles)

I left Beinglas with a spring in my step. There was still a long way to go but I always feel passing Beinglas is a big milestone. I was ahead of my splits and even though my legs were tired I was still running strongly. Well strongly is a relative term! If you saw me at this point it's probably a shuffle but I felt as though I was still running strongly!

I was on my own again but I did see someone not too far away so used them as a target to catch. At this stage I'm not at all bothered about position and catching people but it's more about making sure you are not losing your place and staying positive.

Before I caught him Karl caught me again and once again went past running smoothly. Karl had a different strategy to me. He was running faster but stopped at checkpoints a lot longer. So he would be ahead, I would pass him at a checkpoint and then he would spend most of the next leg catching me again! I must have gone past him again at some point though as I got to Auchtertyre just ahead of him again.

I went through Derrydarouch right on time which meant I was still 20mins up. I was thinking if I can maintain that 20mins I'd be finishing in 21.40 which would do me!

I caught up with the runner who had been ahead. I did ask his name but I can't remember so apologies to him. We stayed together for the next few miles and chatted about how it was going and generally really helped each other on this section.

It is one of the things I love about ultra running. There will be countless occasions like this in the race where total strangers meet up and offer mutual support at just the right time.

As we made our way to the forest above Crianlarich it started to rain really heavily! I regretted leaving my rain jacket with Katrina and Lesley but thankfully it didn't last too long and it wasn't too cold. Plus once it stopped I quickly dried off.

There were a few people waiting at the large gate. I was doing my latest podcast update and tried to get a cheer from them but I don't think they were too impressed!

I'd pulled away from my new friend and was on my own again. I went one runner who looked as though he was starting to struggle on the first hill.

I wanted to see how my quads were on the roller coaster hills. In the Fling they were starting to really hurt at this point and I really hoped they would be better today. Thankfully they were and I was running downhill with no pain at all.

I was also really pleased with how my feet were coping. The combination of Drymax socks and Hokas were superb. I could feel one or two slightly sore points but in comparison to other ultras so, so much better.

I walked up and ran down all the hills and soon enough the A82 appeared. It didn't take too long to get across and head over to the checkpoint at Auchtertyre. Karl's partner was coming out to meet him and kindly held one of the gates open for me.

Once again we ran into the checkpoint together but hadn't really run any of it together! I was 5mins faster than my planned split for that leg and now 25mins up overall. My official time for Auchtertyre was 10.27.42 so not quite sure where I messed up on my watch!

Beinglas Farm to Auchtertyre									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
beinglas	derrydaroch	3.08	42:00	9:21:00	13:38	3.14	41:41	9:00:54	13:16
derrydaroch	big gate	2.75	40:00	10:01:00	14:33	2.86	38:36	9:39:30	13:30
big gate	auchtertyre	3.62	56:00	10:57:00	15:28	3.62	53:25	10:32:55	14:45
	Leg Total	9.45	2:18:00		14:36	9.62	2:13:42		13:54
	Total	50.14	10:57:00		13:06	50.15	10:32:55		12:37
	Rest		5:00	11:02:00			9:30	10:42:25	

At Auchtertyre runners were weighed and I think I'd lost 1kg which was fine.



At the Lakeland 100 last year I'd really enjoyed having soup so Katrina had made some of her superb butternut squash soup and brought it in a flask. It was so tasty and hit the spot! A couple of slices of brown bread to dip as well. What more can a man ask!

Katrina told me we had an extra member in our support team. Lesley's daughter Jenny was also with us as Callum, her husband had to work and couldn't look after her as planned.

I think I stopped for about 6mins here changing my top and putting on my rain jacket as it was raining again and it felt colder.

I was now in 28th place. I think Katrina told me my position because I remember thinking it would be a bonus to finish in the top 30.

Auchtertyre to Bridge of Orchy (9.21miles)

I took my battery charger at Auchtertyre so I could recharge my Suunto Ambit. It took a bit of fiddling to make sure it was working but once on it was fine. So I ran with a wire from my watch to the pack on my rucksack for the next couple of hours to Bridge of Orchy.

After about 10mins of running towards Tyndrum the rain stopped and I felt too hot so I took off my Jacket again. I knew that this section to Bridge of Orchy is very runnable and I was keen to see how much of it I could run.

I soon realised that I had left my head cam that I'd been doing my podcast updates so there will be no update until after Bridge of Orchy!

I was on my own and enjoying the fact that I was going well and I was starting to tick off the main sections. I was still trying to concentrate on reaching the next marker. As I approached Tyndrum I wondered whether I'd see Kirsty who owns the By the Way Hostel.

Sure enough she was there cheering on the runners but she apologised for not having her banana cake! It was great to see a familiar face. Kirsty said how good I looked. It's amazing how a positive comment can really help and encourage you.

As I crossed the road at Brodie's store Peter and Cara Sloss were waiting for me. Cara has helped me a lot with nutrition for running ultras and she said that she was planning to come up with her Dad (who works for the BBC weather and is on the telly!) to see the race.



Photo thanks to Fiona Rennie

Cara walked for a couple of minutes up the hill with me. She knows Paul Giblin and was excitedly telling me he was leading and on target for setting a new course record. We chatted about my food intake and she encouraged me to keep it going. She also reckoned the runners in front didn't look as strong as me!

I walked most of the hill and one runner went past me. Once over the railway bridge I decided to see how much I could run to the stile. There were 3 runners ahead of me including Karl who had gone past me again. I ran the whole section going past Karl as he paused to eat and felt fairly comfortable. I was counting 50 breathes again and again and was happy to feel I was still going well.

I walked up the hill on the rougher path and then ran down to the tunnel under the railway. If I'm going well then I know I can run from there to the stile before the bridge over the river. I could see a runner ahead and wondered whether I could catch him.

I ran the whole way down passing the runner on the way. I was still 25mins or so ahead of my sub 22hrs and miles were ticking away. I caught up with a Robbie and chatted for a bit.

I had another 3miles to Bridge of Orchy. David Gow and Steven Morrison caught me and we ran together for a bit. They were going stronger than me and pushed into the checkpoint just ahead.

I came into Bridge of Orchy on 12hrs 29mins 58secs. My splits have got a bit messed up somehow but here they are. I may try and work out where I've gone wrong sometime! My split was 1.55.26 which would include my stop at Auchtertyre so probably nearer 1.45.

It was great to see Tim and Muriel manning the checkpoint. They made sure I had wet weather gear for the Rannoch Mor journey.

Auchtertyre to Bridge of Orchy									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
auchtertyre	tyndrum	2.65	36:00	11:38:00	13:35	2.51	34:39	11:17:04	13:48
tyndrum	bridge	3.34	40:00	12:18:00	11:59	3.34	38:30	11:55:34	11:32
bridge	bridge of orchy	3.22	39:00	12:57:00	12:07	3.33	43:53	12:39:28	13:11
	Leg Total	9.21	1:55:00		12:29	9.18	1:57:02		12:45
	Total	59.35	12:57:00		13:06	59.33	12:39:28		12:48
	Rest		4:00	13:01:00			6:20	12:45:48	

I was now in 26th place and I was 26th fastest for that leg! Another Greek Yoghurt and ready to go again. We had a slight mix up as I wanted a flat coke and it was in the car still. Plus I was hoping to pick up my head cam. So we arranged for Katrina and Lesley to meet me at Inveroran Hotel on the other side of the hill. I apologise for being so crabbit!

Bridge of Orchy to Glencoe (10.81miles)

I set off up with hill with Robbie just in front. We climbed up to the top of the hill where Murdo was waiting with his jelly babies. It was good to see him. I think he was disappointed I didn't have my camera but I explained I'd left it and was picking it up at the bottom of the hill.

As I ran down strongly to Inveroran Hotel I thought back to my first whw race in 2007 when by now my quads were really, really sore. I remember my friends Donald and Stevie being really concerned as I took ages to make my way down! But not today ... I was flying down.



I love this picture that Katrina took as it has the sign on as well! I had a quick stop here to drink my coke and take my head cam. I also put on my jacket again as it was getting colder and it has started raining again.

Katrina and Lesley sent me off again and made their way to the next checkpoint at Glencoe. I had a steady run along the road. I could see Robbie ahead who seemed to be going well. Once I reached the gate and the climb up to the Rannoch Mor I took off my jacket again as it had stopped raining and was warmer.

I was walking up the hill strongly and slowly catching Robbie. We reached the top together and got running when we could. After another mile or so David Gow caught us. He was running with Phil Humphries now I think. Anyway whoever it was with David they were going really well. They slowly moved ahead.

I was going a little stronger than Robbie so once again I was on my own. I had to keep reminding myself that's it's okay to feel tired after running for 14 and a half hours! The important thing is I was still running and knew I could keep it going.

I could see Phil and David ahead which helped as it gave me something to focus on as I looked ahead. When they finally disappeared from view then I knew the top was in sight. There was a guy taking photos sitting on a rock to the right of the path. He wore a bright orange jacket which also helped as it gave an idea of where I was.

Once over the top I ran the majority of the path down to the turn off left to the check point. The Hokas were really coming into their own now as it made that rocky path so much easier to run on. Looking back I maybe pushed a little too hard here but at the time it felt right.

I walked and ran the path cutting across to the checkpoint at Glencoe Ski Lodge. Just before car park I saw Jon and Shirley who were waiting for Gary Scott. I think they were surprised to see me ahead of him!

Katrina and Lesley were once again waiting for me with a clean top and buff and my milk shake which tasted great. Alan Kay was in charge of the checkpoint and let me sit on the step of the rescue vehicle.



The section took me 2:27.49 (15:02.12 overall time) which meant that I was now 23mins up on my sub 22hr plan with just (?!?) 25miles to go! Again my splits don't quite match up with the official ones.

Bridge of Orchy to Glencoe									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
bridge of orchy	gate	3.24	49:00	13:50:00	15:07	3.16	43:00	13:28:48	13:36
gate	bridge	4.23	55:00	14:45:00	13:00	4.24	58:37	14:27:24	13:49
bridge	glencoe	3.34	49:00	15:34:00	14:40	3.34	44:32	15:11:56	13:20
	Leg Total	10.81	2:33:00		14:09	10.74	2:26:08		13:36
	Total	70.16	15:34:00		13:19	70.07	15:11:56		13:01
	Rest		3:00	15:37:00			4:55	15:16:51	

I was now in 27th place and I was 31st fastest for that leg.

Glencoe to Kinlochleven (10.53miles)

As I set off down the hill from the checkpoint I felt different and knew I was in a bit of trouble. Katrina walked with me and we discussed whether I wanted her to run with me from Kinlochleven. Before the race we had left it open depending on how I was going.

I knew I would really appreciate some company for that final 14mile push. Katrina headed back and I tried to get going. A runner and his support went past running so easily whilst I struggled to get going. Lots of cars were going up and down the road which didn't help but I just felt I'd lost all my mojo and energy.

Katrina and Lesley went past in the car and I tried to run to show them I was okay but I don't think I convinced them. I crossed the road and struggled down to Kingshouse trying to get going again. I think it was Phil who went past me before the hotel and I tried to stay with him.

Once I got past the hotel I gave myself a real talking to. Basically I told myself I'd worked really hard all year for this, I'd done the training and I was NOT giving up my goal of sub 22hrs now. I imagined lying in bed later tonight and regretting that I given up. Would I be happy with that? No I wouldn't.... so get going!

Somehow I started running again and was able to keep up with Phil. When I turned off the road and up the hill I was still finding it hard but kept telling myself I can get through this and it can come back. Just don't lose too much time.

I walked as best I could up and tried to run as much as possible down but it wasn't easy. I eventually reached Altnfaedh but I had lost 10mins on that 4.4mile leg. So my buffer was now down to 11mins. I couldn't afford to keep losing 10mins per mini-leg.

I struggled up the Devil's Staircase. A couple of runners went past me including Gary Scott. I thought of the dvd we watched on Friday night and Paddy struggling over the top and I knew how he felt! But by taking one step after another you do eventually make it and I did.

I found it really hard running down and I couldn't keep running for longer than 25-30 breathes before having to walk again. I could see the runners who had gone past disappearing into the distance. I was trying to keep the negative thoughts away but I keep wondering whether I was going to have another death march to Fort William.

I knew I could finish but I really wanted a good finish and not have to take 5hrs or more for those final sections. I went past the mountain rescue guys by the bridge. They told me that Paul Giblin had finished in 14hrs something. Incredible performance. Paul actually finished in 15.07.29. Absolutely superb.

The bridge is my next mini-split and I was now only 6mins ahead of my sub 22hr plan. It was slipping away unless I could get going again. I decided to get to Kinlochleven as best I could and see how I felt.

Another runner went past me and I glanced back and saw a female runner catching as well. But once I got onto the wider track I somehow got going again. A combination of my quads feeling good and the Holas making the ground easier to run on helped to get me going.

I went past the runner and his support and ran strongly into Kinlochleven which gave me lots of hope that I was through my bad patch.

My official time into Kinlochleven was 17.58.35. Again my splits are slightly out. But this meant I was now 15mins ahead of my plan so I had clawed back a few minutes and my sub 22hrs was back on!

Glencoe to Kinlochleven									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
glencoe	altnfaedh	4.40	56:00	16:33:00	12:44	4.42	1:06:09	16:22:59	14:58
altnfaedh	bridge	2.72	53:00	17:26:00	19:29	2.70	57:22	17:20:21	21:15
bridge	kinlochleven	3.41	48:00	18:14:00	14:05	3.34	44:32	18:04:53	13:20
	Leg Total	10.53	2:37:00		14:55	10.46	2:48:02		16:04
	Total	80.69	18:14:00		13:33	80.53	18:04:53		13:28
	Rest		5:00	18:19:00			5:00	18:09:53	

I was now 28th so I hadn't lost too many places but I was 53rd fastest for that leg so it was by far my worst in relation to the field.

It was good to see Julie manning the checkpoint and she said it was good to see me this early! At the weigh in I had lost another 0.5kg or so.

Katrina had made me a cup of green tea which was just what I needed. I had another greek yoghurt and coke and I was ready to go. I had a quick chat with Dr Chris and I was ready for the final push.

As I was about to leave Andy Cole arrived. I'd been wondering where he was and now I knew. I wondered to myself whether I'd see him again before Fort William. He said he was feeling very tired so I thought maybe not!

Kinlochleven to Lundavra (7.56miles)

Katrina was really up for this and was determined to help me break the 22hrs. She knew how much I'd worked for this and what it meant to me and wanted to help. What a star.

Plus she wanted a run rather than the 7hr death march we had 2 years ago. We left with 18.10 on the watch so I figured if we could run to Lundavra in 2hrs we'd have 1.50 to reach Fort William. I really thought that was possible if we kept moving.

We ran along the road and I realised that even though I had a few sore spots on my feet they were fine. I also realised that my quads were feeling great. Almost like new so bring it on.

As we climbed up the hill we chatted about our trip to Indonesia and all we were looking forward to with Emma and Yonas's wedding. It was great to have Katrina to chat to and the hill didn't seem to hard.

Once we reached the road I said to Katrina I'm not running any hill but want to run everything else and that is what we did. We could see 3 runners way ahead and slowly as the path went on we realised we were catching them.

Katrina was so good at keeping the pace up yet slowing down if I was struggling. We made a great team which is not surprising since we've been married for almost 28yrs!! Whenever we had to walk she told me to do a 'Silke!' Last year when Katrina supported Silke she said that Silke had this walking style where she swung her arms and covered so much ground.

So that became our catch word ... 'Do a Silke!' Just before we reached Jeff Smith of the Wilderness Response Team we caught John Moffat. He looked as though he was going through a tougher patch and stopped for a drink of coke.

Jeff took this great photo of Katrina and I



Photo taken by Jeff Smith

We continued to run on and John soon caught up and then went off into the distance again. The coke certainly gave him a new lease of energy!

We were slowly catching the 3 of them again and about a mile before Lundavra we caught and went past them. I think it was Phil and Paul who we caught with John.

We were looking forward to the Lundavra checkpoint as our good friends Neal and Caroline were in charge with Caroline's parents Peter and Shelley. I'd said to Caroline I hope to be there at 8.30pm (optimistically hoping I might have a chance of sub 21hrs!)

Kinlochleven to Lundavra									
from	to	distance	time	total	pace	distance	time	total	pace
kinlochleven	bridge	2.98	56:00	19:15:00	18:48	2.98	53:30	19:03:23	17:57
bridge	sheep pen	3.48	55:00	20:10:00	15:48	3.48	46:15	19:49:38	13:17
sheep pen	lundavra	1.10	15:00	20:25:00	13:38	1.10	13:30	20:03:08	12:16
	Leg Total	7.56	2:06:00		16:40	7.56	1:53:15		14:59
	Total	88.25	20:25:00		13:53	88.09	20:03:08		13:39
	Rest		2:00	20:27:00			2:00	20:05:08	

It was just 8.50pm so not too far off. It meant we had run the that section in 1hr 52mins well inside the 2hrs I'd given us. A quick stop for a coke and we were off.



Photo taken by Shelley Marsh

It now meant we had just under 2hrs to run to Fort William. I knew that sub 22hrs was, barring accident, in the bag. So now the goal could be sub 21.30!

Lundavra to Fort William (6.97miles)

The other 3 hadn't stopped so the first goal was to get past them again. We were moving well so it didn't take long to catch them. I got the impression they were content to finish but I was a man on a mission. It suddenly became really important to me to be nearer 21hrs than 22hrs!

I had run this final section in 1.13 on my two day run and I remembered how much I'd run and I honestly felt I could run it under 1.30 which would give me an outside chance. I wanted to give it my very best shot. I'm not planning to run this race for the next few years as I want another crack at the Hardmoors in 2014 and the Lakeland 100 in 2015 so it was now or never.

I think the coke kicked in as I was running so strongly. I couldn't believe this was the same person who was labouring to climb the Devil's Staircase a few hours ago. The transformation was amazing but I was loving it.

We put a distance between us and the 3 guys and hoped that was last we would see of them!! Two years ago on our death march the various landmarks took ages to come but now we were ticking them very quickly and before we knew it we were in the opening and heading to the fireroad and the final downhill to the finish.

We arrived at my mini-split where the path joins the wider fire road in around 20.50 so 40mins to reach the leisure centre which was now less than 4miles away and mostly downhill!

I was loving the fact that my quads were so strong and I could run downhill and not just jog. I was running, pushing as hard as I could. Katrina kept saying how proud she was of how I was running and encouraging me to keep it going right to the end.

Near the bottom of the hill we went past David Gow and his support runner. I think they were surprised to see us! When they went past me going up the Devil's Staircase I'm sure they thought they wouldn't see me again!!

Then we had a really nice surprise! My friend Steven Hill from Kilbarchan was running up the hill to see us! It seems he was working in Skye on Thursday and Friday and decided to stay over on Saturday and watch the end of the race with his wife Kirsty.

He started asking some questions about how it was going but I couldn't really answer as I was trying doing all I could to run! Once we got to the bottom of the hill we walked for a short while and we chatted then!

I ran as much as I could to the braveheart car park which was most of the way. Steven had run on to get his camera and took this photo of us going past ...



Photo taken by Steven Hill

It was so good to be finishing in the light. Just a mile to go and plenty of time to do it! I walked a little bit when we reached the road but then ran the rest of the way except for one short walking break.

With about half a mile to go Katrina pushed on as she wanted to be at the finish so see me come in. I thanked her again for helping me throughout the day but especially over the last 14miles.

Just then I was caught by John Moffat. I couldn't believe he went past me as when I last saw him it looked like he was really struggling up the short hill. He must have really run hard all the way down as we weren't going slowly.

At the time I didn't realise that he is also M50 so we were first and second separated by 44secs over 95miles!!

At the roundabout by the official finish Matt and Iain cheered me on and I pushed one final time to the Leisure centre and the end of this epic race.

I finished 24th in 21hrs 26mins 57secs. To say I was pleased would be an understatement! I've not seen any photos of me finishing but Thomas took this one just after I finished.



Photo taken by Thomas Loehndorf

Hugs all round and lots of congratulations and thank you to those who helped me achieve my goal for this year.

My support team of David, Katrina, Lesley and Jenny were superb and it really was a team effort.



Here are my overall splits for the race. I ran the last 14 miles from Kinlochleven in 3.18 which was faster than my sub 20hr runs! It felt so good to be able to finish strongly after the last couple of years.

whw 2013			sub 22hr plan				actual times				
Milingavie	Miles		Time		Pace		Time		Pace		
	leg	overall	leg	overall	leg	overall	leg	overall	leg	overall	
Drymen	12.13	12.13	2:10:00 0:00	2:10:00	10:43	10:43	2:02:58 0:00	2:02:58	10:08	10:08	
Balmaha	6.82	18.95	1:25:00 3:00	3:35:00 3:38:00	12:28	11:21	1:22:34 1:23	3:25:32 3:26:55	12:06	10:51	
Rowardennan	7.78	26.73	1:35:00 3:00	5:13:00 5:16:00	12:13	11:43	1:33:29 5:03	5:00:24 5:05:27	12:01	11:14	
Inversnaid	7.25	33.98	1:31:00 3:00	6:47:00 6:50:00	12:33	11:59	1:27:51 1:40	6:33:18 6:34:58	12:07	11:34	
Beinglas Farm	6.71	40.69	1:45:00 4:00	8:35:00 8:39:00	15:39	12:39	1:39:02 5:28	8:14:00 8:19:28	14:46	12:08	
Auchtertyre	9.45	50.14	2:18:00 5:00	10:57:00 11:02:00	14:36	13:06	2:08:14 6:50	10:27:42 10:34:32	13:34	12:31	
Bridge of Orchy	9.21	59.35	1:55:00 4:00	12:57:00 13:01:00	12:29	13:06	1:55:26 4:25	12:29:58 12:34:23	12:32	12:38	
Glencoe	10.81	70.16	2:33:00 3:00	15:34:00 15:37:00	14:09	13:19	2:27:49 4:56	15:02:12 15:07:08	13:40	12:52	
Kinlochleven	10.53	80.69	2:37:00 5:00	18:14:00 18:19:00	14:55	13:33	2:51:27 9:59	17:58:35 18:08:34	16:17	13:22	
Lundavra	7.56	88.25	2:06:00 2:00	20:25:00 20:27:00	16:40	13:53	1:52:55 1:55	20:01:29 20:03:24	14:56	13:37	
Fort William	6.97	95.22	1:28:00	21:55:00	12:38	13:49	1:23:33	21:26:57	11:59	13:31	
total rest =							40:16				

I had a chat with Marco who had a brilliant run finishing 2nd in 16.03.48. I always knew he had a sub 17hr time in him but that was even better!

Just minutes after I finished Steven and Kirsty gave me a cake ... which had my time on it! Thank you so much!



After a shower and massage from Amanda Hamilton it was time for a well deserved sleep and not just for me!



The prize giving was as special as always and I was very happy to receive my 6th goblet from Adrian.



My Guess My Time competition was won by Diane Strang. A limited edition key ring will be on the way to her when they arrive.

Once again a massive thank you to all those involved in this race. It is a privilege to be on the committee and involved with making it happen.

Congratulations to all who ran. I'm looking forward to reading lots of race reports and finding out some of the stories behind the times.