

2018 HIGHLAND FLING – A. GRANT

At 0600 on Sat 28th April I once again toed the line for the 8th time to run the 85km (53 miles) from Milngavie, Glasgow to Tyndrum. With some 800 of us starting there was a real buzz of excitement. I left my 4 drop bags with food and drink in several cars destined for Balmaha, Rowardennan, Inversnaid and Bein Glas. I would pick them up at these places as I passed through. Also kit bag for Tyndrum in the truck.

We set off in 3 waves based on anticipated finish time: sub 10, 10-12 or over 12 hours. I chose to position myself at the tail end of the 10-12 hour group. I was still after several years chasing a sub 12 hour time. I knew this to be overly ambitious but keep the hope alive! Then it was goodbye to Elisabeth who had given up half a night's sleep to get me to the start line. She went to about 300m after the start and joined the rest of the well-wishers.



And so we were off about 0602. Many times in the early part of these long distance races my pace is influenced by those around and I suffer later from the effects of going faster than I should have. I decided to pace myself intuitively and not always look at the clock or be carried along by others. By this I mean that I try to sense to how my body feels about the pace in the knowledge I will be running for 12 -13 hours.

Really impressed by how all the marshalls were friendly and helpful throughout entire course. Bagpipers, accordionists, fiddlers and drummers at various stages coupled with many photographers who later freely shared their pics on Facebook afterward made for a thoroughly folk festival type of experience.

In the field at Drymen everyone was checked for the 2 pieces of mandatory kit; mobile phone and foil blanket. I just ran through the checkpoint at Drymen (20km). I was keen to get to Balmaha in good time.



Before that was Conic hill. I have spent quite a lot of time this past winter training by going up and down mountains in snow and ice so neither the ascent or descent was that onerous. I really



enjoyed the descent and passed many on the way down. I was very happy with my latest shoes, Hoka Speedgoat 2s, which seem to have great grip. Of course, it was not long before those I passed on the descent then overtook me as we returned to flatter ground on the banks of Loch Lomond.

Off Conic Hill and in to Balmaha car park (32km). Got my drop bag and refilled with Tailwind drink (basically a sucrose/ glucose mixture) and some egg sandwiches. So far my usual queasy stomach issues were not a problem. Aim to minimise time in checkpoints to just 2 – 3 mins; mainly just refill with fluids and basically just take food to eat 'on the run'. I was a few minutes behind my '12 hour' target' time at this point but was determined to not let this stress me. I was going to enjoy the moment and not stress myself by trying to push faster.

In many ways the race really starts as you proceed along the roller coaster of the east side of Loch Lomond with its constant undulations. However, this was no surprise so just settled in to try and enjoy the peaceful waterside backdrop. In to Rowardennan for first official checkpoint time (44km). We were now just over halfway but the toughest part was to come.

I had been chatting briefly with fellow runners but when you are still relatively fresh each other's pace varies a lot. After Rowardennan most of us run-of-the-mill runners start to show signs of fatigue and people bunch up more. Got into an interesting conversation with one young guy who was muttering away to himself (one strategy to forget the weariness). Turns out his passion was designing and building lifeboats in areas of the world where there are little or no lifeboats and had been involved in refugee rescues in Greece in recent years. It was not only interesting but served to make me forget where I was and how I was feeling for 30 mins which was nice.



Approaching Inversnaid

My stop in Inversnaid (55km) was very brief. By now nausea was kicking in and I was losing interest in any solid food. Best to press on and face the very technical 4km ahead at the head of Loch Lomond - very rocky with many exposed tree roots involving a lot of clambering and using muscles you'd rather not use. It takes most people an hour to do these 4km. Once through this there was the long steady gradual ascent in much more open country. I felt sorry for walkers who were

continually having to step aside to let us past. Vast majority were very good humoured about it and encouraging. At last arrived in Bein Glas (65km), the last official timed checkpoint. The last 20km I knew would take over 3 hours and so I knew my 12 hour dream was not to be but didn't worry me. I would still like to get a personal best (PB).

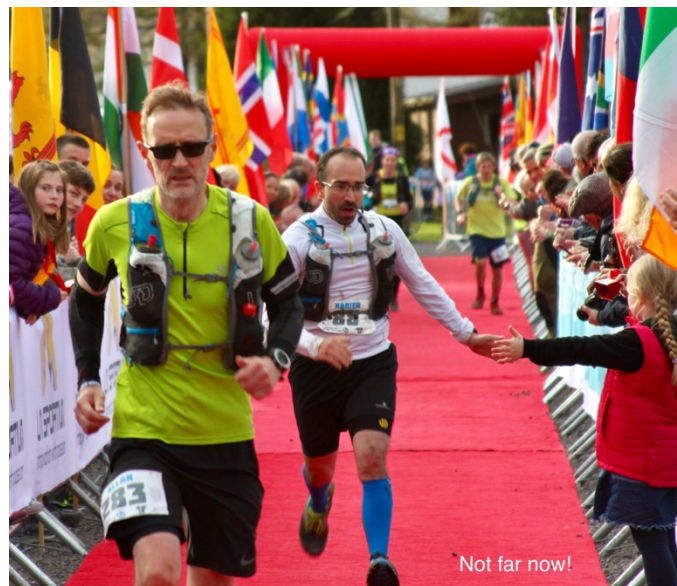
By now I had no appetite at all and was finding the Tailwind distasteful. I always seem to experience an aversion to anything sweet after 7-8 hours and it's quite a common experience. Even taking on water gets hard. Ah well, just get on with it and I've been in this situation a number of times. The 'consolation' is you know others were suffering too in their own ways.

At least I knew the route well and what was coming up. You can feel progress as you pass what is familiar and know what is coming next. Must be harder for those who only know the distance left but don't know the terrain.

Crossing the A82 at the 80km mark I texted Elisabeth. She was in Tyndrum and was waiting. About 2km from end I heard the bagpipes which stirs the heart for that last push. With about 2 km left a



couple of guys passed me. That got me picking up my pace and in the last 7-800 metres met Elisabeth who urged me to get a move on! And so it was to the longest of red carpets and a tremendous welcome.



My chip time of 12:35:01 represents a personal best from last year's PB of 11 seconds! Pleased also about my 4th place in the over 60s. 7 mins. faster I would have got a podium position! Some day... maybe.

Amazing how within 5 mins my nausea disappeared and I reverted to a carbohydrate consuming machine as I availed myself of the soup, rolls, beer and ice cream plentifully laid on!

Then it was on to a very welcome and needed shower!

A huge thanks to Johnny 'Fling' and his 200 volunteers for making this such a special and family day



CHIP TIME			
12:35:01			
Finished 53.2 Miles			
Speed 4.23 miles/h			
Pace 14:12 min/miles			
NAME	SPLITS MI.	PACE	TIME
Drymen	12.6 mi	10:16 min/mi	02:09:21
Rowardennan	27.2 mi	13:09 min/mi	05:21:15
Beinglas	40.9 mi	16:44 min/mi	09:10:30
Finish	53.19 mi	16:38 min/mi	12:35:01
Overall position			
418			
Out of 673			
Men			
334			
Out of 487			
M60			
4			
Out of 11			

for runners and their supporters. Everything seemed to run like clockwork and everyone so cheerful doing the most mundane of tasks. Grateful too to the many photographers along the route who freely shared their photos on Facebook for all the runners.

As always I have Elisabeth to thank for once again making it possible to do another ultra. She has faithfully been there for me at the start and finish of all these races. An endurance feat in itself.