

HOKA HIGHLAND FLING REPORT 26th APRIL 2014 - A.GRANT

This was my fifth time consecutively on this annual pilgrimage from Glasgow to Tyndrum and duly turned up for the 6am start from Milngavie railway station. The day before had been stressful having spent most of the day travelling home from Sweden and then plunging into packing food, sorting gear etc. As usual I obsessed about what foods to put in drop bags and what to carry. I have observed that each year that passes I take less food. It seems to be a confidence thing. You need food and drink but it's critical not too much of either. If I have too much food on offer in my drop bag I notice I have tended to try and eat. Then end up with stomach problems. Experience helps but there are many variables esp the temperature. Each race the issues you face are different which you can learn from but has to be applied in different ways. For the past few weeks I was mentally envisaging the painful bits from previous experience and how I would go through that.

This time a South African friend Don who has been my support runner on the full West Highland



Don and I at start about 0550

Way was also taking part.

This time I felt I was more effectively putting into practice what I'd learnt previously. Each of these events the wheels seem to come off in different ways and it's so important to maintain presence of mind and not to panic. Easier said than done!

Each year the Fling numbers get bigger and this time there was also a good bit of international input. Over 30 Norwegians were taking part, one third of their ultra running association. I was able to have some rather zany conversations with a few of them on route, my speaking Swedish and they speaking Norwegian. If you have ever read a book with every fourth word blanked out that was what it was like. You understood the gist of things but not the nuances. They were overwhelmingly positive and got the feeling that coming from a land of many mountains they were in their element. Indeed it was one of their number that won the race.



Top of Conic Hill

Don and I ran more or less together till the top of Conic hill. It was great to see Graeme Hewitson there on the top enthusiastically taking photos of runners as they went by. I noticed Don did not look so good when he came in a few mins behind me in Balmaha at the foot of Conic (31.5km). Sadly he had to drop out at Rowardennan (44km). His heart rate had soared to 190 and had been unable to ingest food or drink.

The run along Loch Lomond, although tough did not bring any surprises as feel I know the path well. However north of Inversnaid is always hard and v difficult to make any speed. I always underestimate how long I take to do the section to Bein Glas farm. At last I made it there and on my way out got a call from Elisabeth to say she was at the farm and had just missed me by minutes. I find at these events that there are always quite extraordinary people you meet. This time was no exception. One

man I noticed was running with an extremely odd and tortuous gait which looked v painful to sustain. I wondered how he could think of sustaining that for what looked a 12 hour plus pace. How

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looks can deceive and when I caught up with him discovered he was a veteran of 50(!) ultras in the last 5 years. Almost 1 a month over that time. Another 65 year old blithely told me he had run 600 miles last month on grass and said his joints never felt better. I reflected that our car had probably not clocked up that mileage in March! He did say he had an excuse in that he was retired and had the time to run.

My first ultra was all about finishing and my heart tells me that is what always should be about. However the head once more motivated me (stubbornly for the 3rd year in a row!) to attempt a sub 12 hour time. Once again it was not to be. However each year is a personal best and this time I beat last year by a sliver of time in 12:36:39, a mere 1 min. 57 secs so am well pleased with progress, even if marginal! 370th out of 566 finishers. The day was immensely enjoyable as probably for the first time I did not have nausea or extreme pain. The



Don and I at pitstop Balmaha



Forest above Crianlarich

weather was good, not too cold and not too hot so didn't have to vary my fluid intake from training levels. There were cramps which I try to stave off with putting salt on the tongue. Seems to help and probably need to plan an earlier intake in future. Event was superbly well organised with marshalls of all ages and lots of families helping out with a cheer and a smile. The finish line was the longest red carpet I've ever seen.



Approaching red carpet

After eating sugary stuff much of the past 12 hours it was a special treat to anticipate the finishing beer which did not disappoint. The scariest thing about all this is that I've set myself up for carrying on for another 43 miles longer this June. I thank God for the moment and the wonderful creation we were all privileged to move through on that day.



Finished