

COSMIC BULLSHEET

The Bulletin News-Sheet
of Cosmic Hillbashers

ISSUE No 40
QUARTER 4 - 2004

Editorial

Phil Thompson

A bumper edition of Cosmic holiday tales this edition, although some tales are continuations from the last edition. One of Ewen's recent e-articles discussed the phenomenon of "runners high" and the articles certainly reflect the pleasure we all get from days in the hills.

For me the intense "runners high" is something I find difficult to reach too often in the hills and it usually occurs, of all places, on flat trails or roads. Running and training in the hills is superb and engenders a peacefulness and calmness, usually enough to overcome the distress caused by those nasty climbs. This is different from the high I sometimes receive when I am tired and running fast. I remember first experiencing this 20 odd years ago as I was 17 miles into a 20 mile road run. As I hit a long gradual down hill I found that despite my tiredness I was flying and getting gradually faster and faster. I was euphoric, and my energy was boundless as I covered the last three miles at 6min per mile pace.

Although that is not say I haven't experienced this feeling in the hills. I was recently in the Galloway hills with a friend and we had walked and jogged and chatted for about three hours when I pushed on ahead a wee bit at a faster pace. Which got faster and faster as I sped along little paths, up and over tops, faster down hill, pushing hard up hill, a glorious feeling. The scientific explanation seems to be that a release of endorphins is the cause, substances produced naturally by the body that are similar to morphine in having pain relieving properties.

Well, what ever it is it works – occasionally but only when I'm tired and running fast! May your runs be full of highs, endorphin induced or not!

Cheers

Phil

Conquering the Jungfrau — by Eugenie Verney

I'd never heard of the Jungfrau Marathon until I was ski-ing in Switzerland in March 2002. In fact, despite running for around 20 years, I'd never felt any burning urge to run a marathon — the furthest I'd ever run in one go was around 20 miles and that had felt quite far enough, thanks.

But there we were, staying in Wengen, in the shadow of the awesome trio of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau, and there in the tourism office was this entry form. "Jungfrau Marathon — the most beautiful marathon in the world", it said. And so the seed was sown: I'd skied down large chunks of the route, I knew where it went, it was impossibly vertical... and yet...

I took the form home and kept returning to it, and reading the bumf over and over. It became clear that this was one race that had to be run — that it was a marathon was actually incidental: if it had been a half or 50k, I'd still have had to have done it. But there was obviously no way I could run that year's race so I instead targeted 2003 and won a place in the ballot.

And so fast forward to June 2003 and the Edinburgh Marathon, my first. I finished in just under 4:30 and felt fine — but I also realised I was neither fit enough nor confident enough to do the Jungfrau that summer, so reluctantly I pulled out. Then I did Loch Ness last September (a bit faster) and London this year (faster still). I'd meanwhile again got a place in the Jungfrau 2004 ballot and this time I was going for it...

That's when I emailed Ewen and asked for some advice. "Come along and join us," he says. So I did. And so I spent the summer playing back marker on Tuesdays and some Saturdays and got my legs and lungs used to the idea of going uphill A Lot. I may still be the slowest of you all, but I'm a hell of a lot quicker than I was in April — and a hell of a lot stronger!

Just as well, really. The Jungfrau Marathon is, without any question, the toughest race I've ever run — and also the most rewarding. It's a race of two halves — the first 25k is pleasantly undulating, starting in the lovely town of Interlaken (566m) and following the river Lutschine through chocolate box villages along the Lauterbrunnen valley. It's about 30:70 off-road to tarmac for this section, with the half-marathon point in the village of Lauterbrunnen (795m) itself. I'd been warned (and warned and warned) about the second half so I took the first 21k really slowly, never getting much out of neutral, and went through at just under 2:30 (I did the Moray half two weeks earlier in 1:51, so I really was cruising). At just beyond the 25k-mark, everything changed: suddenly the route went off-road and sharply uphill, zig-

zagging up through pretty woodland for more than 480m over 5k to Wengen (1284m). The wheels fell off for many here, those who'd hammered the first 21k, and this bit of the route is apparently nicknamed The Wall. I felt fine, though, and just walked and jogged my way to the 30k point in Wengen. Plenty of support here, as there had been in the valley, with lots of Swiss clichés — monster cowbells, flugelhorns and spectators shouting "Hopp! Hopp!"

Then it was out of the village and into the part of the route I'd only ever seen in winter, covered in snow. It was just gorgeous — it had been raining on the start line at 8:45am, but by now the clouds had burned off, and I was glad I'd got my shades and Camelbak and slapped on the Factor 15 all those hours ago. We climbed and we climbed and for much of it I walked, breaking into a run on the flat bits and then slowing down again as the gradient picked up. I wasn't alone — only the elite ran the whole route and even much better runners than me walked substantial chunks of it. I still felt pretty good, though — pottering along, picking off folk here and there and just soaking it all in. And then came the sting in the tail: at 39k the path narrowed and went truly vertical, with a drop at either side, as we crossed the moraine below Eigergletscher (2205m). No room to overtake, all I could do was follow the runner in front for undoubtedly the toughest 1.5k of my life! Everything now hurt, and it was only knowing I was nearly there that kept me going. The last kilometre and a bit to the finish at Kleine Scheidegg (2100m) is gloriously downhill and I was able to run across the finish line feeling really strong again.

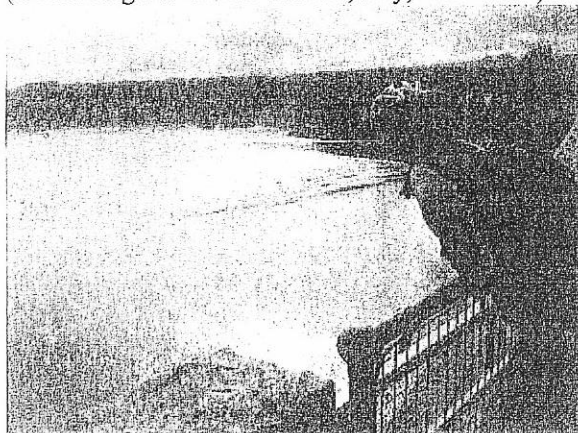
And I have never felt so high crossing the line — it was amazing, fantastic, just the best. I was slow, very slow — at 6:14:34 slower than I'd hoped and only 30 minutes within the cut-off time — but I'd done it. Got the medal (very classy silver job) and the t-shirt — a proper Mizuno sports job with "FINISHER Jungfrau Marathon September 11 2004" on it. It's a brilliantly well-organised race, with ample fuelling stops and first-aid and massage posts every few kilometres — towards the end, I could see why! Will I do it again? I'd love to, but if I did, I'd give it more wellie in the valley — do the first half in around 2:10 — and aim to run more of the second half.

But I couldn't possibly have finished at all without those Cosmic runs, so a huge thanks to everyone — especially Ewen — for welcoming me aboard. The Jungfrau may not be a classic hill race (there's no down bit, for a start), but there are large chunks of it which only hill runners could tackle with any degree of success. I'd like to think I've now got my novice colours!

If anyone else fancies a shot, details are here: www.jungfrau-marathon.ch.

What We Did In Our Holidays by Peter Ferguson *Day Three*

(Continuing adventures of Peter, Katy, Ian & Jane)



Back on the mainland and some clear weather to start the day. Straight into a serious climb (again) out of the town on a pretty back road which quickly takes you past the golf course and into the hinterland.

Once over this initial effort it's a pleasant few miles to Connel Bridge from where we watch an impressive tidal flow up the estuary. The sun is out now and there's only a breath of wind, a glorious morning to sample the



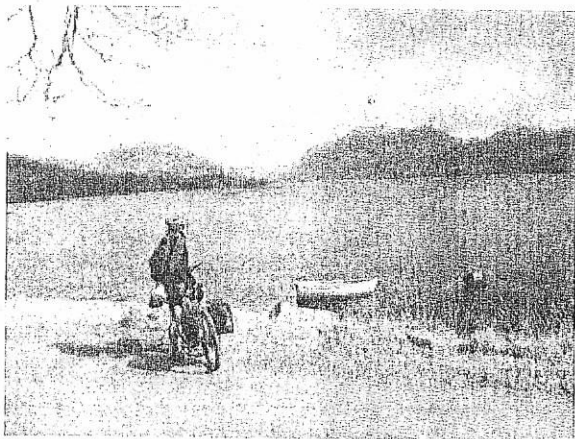
unexpected jewel that is the little road east to Bonawe. This winds along the north coast of Loch Etive and is an idyllic spot (no doubt with house prices to match). It brings joy to the heart as we roll along, sometimes through lamb filled fields on the shoreline, then thrown up into light woodlands bathed with dappled sunlight. We don't have time to stop at the priory but catch a glimpse of some luscious gardens over the perimeter wall. There's every indication that this area has a very mild micro-climate.

We stop at the old
ferry pier at
Bonawe for a
snack and gaze
over towards
Taynult.



In a couple of
months we'll be
heading up the

loch in a kayak as part of the '70 Wild Miles' triathlon. Hope the weather is just as calm! We also realise that we've overshot the track up the loch and head back a mile or so to the quarry where it leaves the road. We pass awesome stacks of granite blasted from the face behind. Rocks as big as houses loom over us and I'm wondering how stable they are. It may be a 'hard hat area' but our helmets would be little use if several tons came crashing down!



However, we soon come out on to a well surfaced 'landy' track and good progress is made

for the next few miles. Things get a bit more serious as the gradients steepen through the woods where a quad track begins. This roller-coaster varies between the fun and the unridable (at least with heavy panniers) but the surface is generally good and the views over to Glen Kinglass and up to Ben Starav are outstanding. Katy regales us with tales of daring-do from the 'Adrenalin Rush' when a trek up the other shore resulted in a competitor's bike being swept into the loch by a flash flood of one of the streams on the Ben's flanks. The rider nearly went in too until he wisely let it go. (Diary note - never enter a non-stop adventure race in Scotland)

We are enjoying this track with its many swoops and drainage channels but just as we get to the last deer gate, I hear a squeal a thump and a dreadful screaming from behind. Ian and I run back and find Jane lying in one of the channels. She has fallen off and done some obvious damage to her arm. She is in shock with the pain but we slowly and carefully get her into an upright position and manoeuvre her to a rock where she can sit and we can assess the damage. It does not look good, something is broken or dislocated. Amazingly, we have remembered a decent first aid kit and we soon have her arm in a sling. This and pain-killers relieve some of her discomfort but it doesn't look as if she's going anywhere fast.

I am sent off to get help towards the head of the loch where I know there are some houses and a telephone. The track soon peters out and soon I am dragging my bike along an ill-defined path. This is painfully slow progress and I later discover that another quad track is just a few metres above me and would have offered a quicker route. Over an hour later and I've covered the 5k or so to the head of the loch, past some campers and into the first cottage where luckily, the old lady obliges by letting me use the phone. The police are contacted and from then on the well oiled machinery of the Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team takes over. Various other phone calls allow them to make appropriate plans and within another hour a land rover with a quad on a trailer arrives. I follow it down to the trail-head and just as he is setting off, Jane and Katy walk in. Ian is meantime 'ferrying' his and Jane's bike out in a kind of relay race. What a team!

The MR van arrives and Jane is soon under the influence of morphine and gas whilst the quad sets off to bring the last of the bikes in. All this achieved with efficiency and good humour by the lads in the team. Jane is taken off in the van to meet the ambulance on the Glencoe road for transfer to Belford



Hospital in Fort William. Meanwhile, we ponder our next move. Our target is Kinlochleven and time is getting short. It's 13 miles up-hill to the Glencoe road and we've lost a couple of hours or more. We look sweetly at the quad driver and ask if he's any room on his trailer for three bikes. 'No problem' and we're soon chugging up the road whilst being told of our near miss with the 'other' team who could have been called out (we were just on the border). There appears to be an element of competition here but we are just relieved that any such organisations exist!

We are soon team time-trialling down Glencoe into a disappointingly brisk headwind. No freewheeling as we had hoped. We take the opportunity for some refreshment with an obligatory diversion to the Clachaig for a much needed pint and some nachos. The temptation to stay for a session is strong but we drag ourselves back on the bikes and head down to the village and round the loch to Kinlochleven. We're getting concerned about the time and the availability of grub at the Tailrace Inn. The road climbs quite high above the loch and maybe that pint hasn't boosted my energy levels as I'd hoped. I start to grovel and am very grateful to freewheel down the last mile to the village and make straight for the pub. We're told that they will keep serving until we have had a chance for a shower and a change of clothes (we must stink!). So we quickly nip up to the hostel. It's pretty busy and we been placed in the old hostel up the hill. A lot of Germans around though I don't know if it was for something specific. Back down to the pub for some good nosh and some even better beer. It's the local brew of course made in the Atlas Brewery in the town. A WORD OF WARNING! This can be seriously strong stuff and it is advisable to check the strength of the particular brew before launching into an extended session.

DAY FOUR

Another fresh bright morning and another serious climb to start the day. Only a mile outside Kinlochleven we turn off up a very steep tarmac road towards the Kinlochmore Hotel where we join the West Highland Way going north to Fort William. I am soon feeling my breakfast in the back of my throat as I grind up in the little ring. However, you do gain height quite quickly and the worst is over by the time we hit dirt. It's still on the rivet though with the weight of panniers. This must be doing me good! We soon get a reward with fine views down beyond Ballachulish and up to Mam na Guilainn where only some weeks before, we had climbed in deep snow and under perfect blue skies.

I had obviously had a memory lapse of this part of the WHW from a previous trip, as I reckoned it was a pleasant of bland 'landy' track. Not so, as after the initial climb there are still quite a few interesting short sharp hills to keep you working. The track surface has plenty of loose rocks to catch the unwary should you settle in too comfortably.

One or two streams to cross along the way, the biggest of which had Katy worried as she looked into its depths. She then looked up and saw Ian and me crossing the big bloody bridge that she hadn't noticed. Oh, how we laughed! Stopping for a bite at the ruined



steading at Lairigmor, we met three bikers going light and fast the other way. They too had been on a four day bender, but further east. One of them was also doing the Transalp and was the racing snake I could never be. Damn you Moriarty! (tumbles over waterfall)



Then we met Angela Mudge on an old boneshaker, who was taking time out from winning every hill race on the planet to recover from an injury. It's a small world in the great outdoors. She was most put out that the Polaris had been cancelled after the first day, as she was quite content to carry

on. What is it about all these hard as hails women!

The track then narrows as it enters some woodland and becomes even more entertaining. Quite busy here with walkers but I feel that we attracted admiring glances as we negotiate some steep and rocky sections. Katy is particularly impressive on 'Queen of Extreme' her rigid tourer, complete with campag road triple. No, the only fly in the ointment is the number of deer fences with 2 metre high styles to negotiate. The continuous humping of heavily laden bikes is a pain but we soon develop

a system that improves upon our early attempts at gouging, large quantities of flesh from our limbs. We eschew the blandishments of the road that comes down from Lundavra and carry on to a tricky descent down some steps followed by a short push up an ever steeper track to the last ridge. Fort William now lies in our sights.

The descent to Glen Nevis is certainly quick on wide forest tracks but is something of an anti-climax. I suspect that this route is more satisfying done north to south as the ascent that we did on tarmac can be done as a descent on dirt by sticking to the WHY. Nevertheless, we were keen to speed on to Fort William and see Jane.

She had been operated on the previous night for a dislocated elbow and was ready for discharge. She was in surprisingly good spirits as she proudly displayed her x-ray of a joint so well dislocated that it needed a 'panorama' shot. The logistics of collecting three cars in three different locations and one bike back in Kinlochleven, took the rest of the afternoon and it was four tired but satisfied bunnies who headed back to Jane's house, near Grantown, for tea. There was an emotional reunion of the infirm as Piers had recently ripped his ankle ligaments in a bizarre survival bagging incident and was himself in plaster. One suspected that a visit to the Kama Sutra was not on the cards for some time.



Conclusion

A truly great trip combining road and off-road in good proportion through a variety of scenery. I thought the ferry trips added a real sense of journeying that otherwise would be missing in such a short trip. We did about 50 miles on each of the first three days with about 15 -20 on the fourth.

Cosmic Social Events – Quarter 4 Year 2004
Social Secretary – Elaine Stewart

Social Retrospective

July

Gary's 50th Birthday Party

Thanks to Gary for having us all round to his house to celebrate his 50th birthday, and not looking too bad for his age either.

Glamaig Hill Race Skye

This weekend always proves to be a success, it's a classic race with free beer, free food and bit of live entertainment thrown in as well, and lots of discussions on what's the best route down.

August

Peter Larkin's party postponed tills another date.

September

Congratulations to Derek for at last winning a prize, he took the trophy for the best overall performance at the Krunce, stunning effort. But watch out for Natalie next year...

Forthcoming Features

October

Sunday 10th

Day trip away for the Pentland Skyline hill race in Edinburgh, it's a Scottish Championship Race this year. The race starts at 11:00am from Hillend, its 16miles and 6200ft of ascent. The entry fee is £3, which you can just pay on the day.

Thursday 28th

Carmines

An early start 6:30 for some pasta and pizza. Bring your own drink of choice.

November

Friday 5th

Beer Festival

Probably one for the boys and the Cosmic Beer Monster
...meet inside McClymnot Hall for 7-30pm approx.

Saturday 6th

Scottish Hill Runners Annual Prize-giving.

This will consist of a dinner and disco somewhere in the central Highlands, venue still to be decided.

Further details nearer the time.

Peter Larkin's House Warming Party

Is it on or is it off?

Hopefully Peter will give us a date for sometime in November, his offshore trips at the moment are keeping him out of town and out of mischief.

December

Tuesday 21st

After the last training session at Kings you are all invited back to my house for food, drink and Ewen's party games. Any contributions greatly appreciated.

Address: 27 Grosvenor Place (back of the Grammer School) Tel: 641613

January

The Cosmic Xmas party will be held as usual sometime in January. Any ideas of what we should do, let me know?

DON'T FORGET..... TUESDAY NIGHT IS PUB NIGHT



SECRETARIAL SECRECTIONS

There were important jobs to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do them. Anybody could have done them but Nobody did. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's club. Every thought that Anybody could do them, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do them. Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

As intimated at last year's AGM this is my last year as Secretary (and I'll not stay on even in an interim capacity). I am also standing down as Clachnaben organiser. Just in case anyone thinks I'm not pulling my weight should realise that I will still be :-

- a) Setting Tuesday and Saturday morning sessions.
- b) Being available for individual coaching advice.
- c) Organise the Krunce Series
- d) Organise Beach Bum, El-Brim-Ick and Balmedie Bash.

The post of Social Secretary was left unfilled at last year's AGM as Elaine had completed her maximum five year term. We thus need volunteers for Social Secretary, Secretary and probably Treasurer and Membership Secretary. None of these should be particularly onerous if Everybody chips in. The Duties are:-

Secretary/Convenor

- Intra Club Communication (except Bullsheet)
- Contact other Clubs/SAF
- Correspondence
- Public Relations/Publicity

Membership Secretary

- Maintaining Yellow Pages
- Circulation of Bullsheet
- Greeting New Members
- Collection of Membership/Winter Training Fees

Social Secretary

- Accommodation (and travel) for Away Meets
- Social Events Calendar (Xmas Party etc)

Treasurer

- Keeping of Club's Financial Accounts
- Maintenance of Bank Account

THE AGM will be in November – start thinking NOW!

The CLACHNABEN Organizer needs to be identified in time to go into FRA Calendar.

Ewen

West Highland Way ~ 94 Miles Cosmic Challenge 2004, 23rd April to 26th April - 3 1/2 Marathons in 3 1/2 Days Gary Gutteridge

A critical review of our challenge.

Participants; Colin Lamour, whose crazy idea it was that we should run the WHW, I often wondered if Colin secretly thought that nobody would seriously pick up his challenge and go for it. Elaine who is always up for anything difficult; Keith Varney who is always looking for a new challenge to fill his four weeks off work; Roman because it would be 'a few days on the hills'; Jon Crowe who wanted to do it because it couldn't be done; Phil Thompson to prove that he's not too old for a challenge; Stuart Hunter because he's as mad as everyone else and me because I wanted to be as equally mad as everyone else and didn't have the face to say it can't be done by mere mortals like us. Beware of going to the pub after training ☺.

Maps: An excellent detailed and waterproof map of the entire route can be found on the Harvey 'West Highland Way' map for £10 from Ottakers or other good map shop. Its all you need. Sign posting is very good but Roman and I still managed to lose the track on the first day despite a map each! This cost us at least 20 minutes thrashing around in the wilderness trying to forge a 'short cut' back to the path. The terrain was awful underfoot, the whole place being a bog and littered with millions of felled tree branches that had got wet and very slippery. Alternatively the route is covered by about 3 or 4 1:50,000 OS Maps.

Splits; When Colin originally conceived the idea in the pub over a few beers, it was floated as something we could do over a long weekend, perhaps 3 or 4 days. When I sat and reflected the next day, without the aid of beer it, it seemed ambitious enough to do 3 1/2 Marathons in 3 1/2 days without shortening it to just 3 days which would have necessitated 3 legs in the order of 32 miles. The other alternative of 5 days (4 x 20 miles plus 14 last day) was simply never considered. It amazed me how easily so many seemed to rise to the challenge, many of whom had never run a marathon, let alone 3 and 1/2 marathons back to back. With the benefit of hindsight I am glad we chose the 3 1/2 marathons in 3 1/2 days because all those fit enough to run did manage to run the distance without major mishap. However I would have to say that those wanting a less onerous and more enjoyable experience, or for those less fit, the 4 x 20 miles plus 14 mile last day option is well worth consideration.

Training; I only managed three long runs at, or in excess of, 3 hrs in the weekends leading up to the WHW, and I thought I had cut it too thin. Very few of the rest of the team managed anywhere near that. As we set off for the weekend I couldn't help but feel that some were completely unprepared for the challenge. Still as they say, the proofs in the pudding, not the making thereof.

Time of Year; We had 'perfect' weather for running long distances; too early for midges and flies; but late enough that it wasn't cold on the overcast days. Day 1: Overcast, cool and occasional very very fine drizzle but no wind; Day 2: Overcast cool dry and no wind; Day 3: Clear, bright, sunny, warm, dry with gentle breeze; Day 4: Clear, dull, dry with no breeze

Conditions underfoot; Much of the route is on forest track, made path or stony military road. A short but significant length along the banks of Loch Lomond is wet, muddy, rocky and slippery underfoot.

The rest of the route was virtually completely dry despite plenty of rain in the lead up to the weekend. The whole route could be done in trail shoes. The only section where hill shoes were a benefit is between Inversnaid and Crianlarich.

Water; I carried 2 x 0.5L bottles of water but found that I didn't really need two as there was plenty of streams along the way and most looked very drinkable, especially beyond Tyndrum. The first two days were so cool that I didn't drink much so perhaps never really looked at the quality of the streams. Day 3 however, was really warm and I drank very regularly from streams, day 4 also.

Energy on the move; I typically got through a couple of cereal bars, a couple of 2 finger kit kats and maybe a dozen jelly babies each day. The longest day I also stopped for a snickers bar at the pub after 20 miles.

Support; Ron Pratt and Mandy Crowe very kindly volunteered / were coerced to support the team effort as support drivers, ferrying our gear from one B&B to the next. This worked out extremely well. There are companies that will do the same thing for a fee, but they wouldn't be anywhere near as convenient.

Blisters; I think most of us got blisters at some point, excepting perhaps Roman and Keith. Whatever Roman did seems to buck current wisdom and 'known knowledge'. He ran the whole way in as rough and old a pair of woolly socks as you could imagine, the sort your granddad wore in the war, and yet no blisters. I used a variation on moleskin called 'adhesive knit tape' and I highly recommend it for blisters. They never stopped me running, which is some statement given the distance.

Sun Cream; we all remember it if we're going to Spain or the even the Alps in winter, but who thinks of sun tan cream in the Scottish Highlands. Amazingly a few (Jon, Phil and Roman) got red legs and arms on the one warm day we had.

Rehydration; Once again Roman seems to buck current wisdom, hardly drank along the way, ate even less on the hoof and did all re-hydrating with fine ales in the pub. Given he posted the best times for the event who am I to argue. I just know I couldn't have finished if I'd have followed his regime. I think all those on the WHW would all agree that Alfie has now passed it as the Cosmic Beer Monster as this title has been soundly secured by Roman on this trip and Alfie's poor performance of late in the pub after training. He was even seen with soft drinks! Definitely not worthy of the title anymore.

Day Sac; I used my Karrimor AR 35 which is very light and comfortable yet still carries 35l. Not that I needed anywhere near that volume. Highly recommended!

The Challenge; I have to say the challenge went very well for me and despite injuring myself in the last hour of the last day, I did feel a tremendous sense of achievement upon finishing. I have to admit before we started I had serious concerns about my ability to run such a distance without serious injury. I had finished all my long training runs with niggly injuries, mainly to the knees. I thought its one thing running a marathon but getting up to do it again not once but twice seems to be pushing ones luck with injuries.

Day 0; Thursday: First pit stop on the way down to Glasgow was in Perth, a huge restaurant the like of which I have not seen in Aberdeen. Fine food and a few beers to quell the nerves ☺. The best 'Best Foot Forward' B&B in Milngavie that accommodated the 10 of us with ease.

Day 1, Friday: Navigationally it was a challenge from the start as we went round in circles looking for the B&B the night before, then missing each other in the car park in the morning. Mobile phones to the rescue, its just too easy these days! Plenty of photos around the stone obelisk marking the start of the WHW in the middle of Milngavie shopping centre was a little surreal. People doing everyday shopping whilst we posed before setting off to run 95 miles to Fort William. Get your head around that. This first day we all set off together and naturally split into groups as everyone settled down to their own pace. Stuart had decided to walk the first day as he was unfit and Ron volunteered to keep him company as he had not walked this section of the WHW before. Roman quickly took the lead and I tucked in beside him. We passed Drymen, 13 miles in 2 hrs. I ran all day one with Roman and discovered he has hidden talents you would never guess at from a Tuesday night training run in the hills. He is very similar to Elaine in a way, he may not be very fast but he has one speed that he keeps going through out. He hardly carried any water on day one and none on days thereafter, he rarely stops for drinks / pick up water and even less for food so towards the end of a leg the pace seems relentless. Conic hill is normally quite a challenge rising some 300m just before Balmaha. However for just 4 weeks of the year its shut for the lambing season and yes we were right in the middle of the season so we had a less onerous detour round the bottom with a couple of miles alongside the road into Balmaha, 20 miles in 3 hours, so far so good. What a lovely picturesque village with its water front on Loch Lomond, boats at anchor in the mirror surfaced Loch, lush green foreshore lawns and many ducks to great you. We stopped here briefly for a big drink, jelly babies and photos. I still felt fine as we passed the B&B at 21.5 miles (Cashell Farm) where we were to stay that night with only some 4 miles to go to our predetermined stopping point for the day. Thereafter Roman did the navigating and I did the 'hanging in there' bit. When we got 'lost' at the 25 mile mark with only a mile to go I was quickly losing my sense of humour. As I also had a map, and could equally check the navigation I didn't even have the luxury of blaming Roman! ☺ Keith who stated he was going to walk the first 1/2 hour and then run was expected to overtake us at some point, however he was already at the pub car park when we finally finished, having gone past us whilst we were floundering in some far off swamp. Elaine came in shortly after us in fine form, barely looking worn out at all. She is certainly made of stern stuff! Phil thereafter looked as though he'd run a marathon. Jon and Colin came in together with Stuart opting to walk the whole way due to lack of training and latent injuries.

The Rowardennan Lodge (pub) was open despite it being mid afternoon, thanks to the more liberal licensing laws up in Scotland, it was a wonderful feeling to order fresh coffee with a beer chaser to celebrate. The B&B was fine and we all went out for a meal in Balmaha where Roman showed us how the English Fell Runner prepares for the next day.

Day 2, Saturday: Full English breakfast the next morning and Roman was ready for 'another day on the hills'. Plasters over my blisters, padded socks, a change of running shoes from Trails to Swoops plus a couple of Ibufrulen and I was 'ready' for another day. It may seem hard to believe but within a few miles, running on forest tracks, I felt in good shape and yesterdays miles and blisters seem to fade into the past. The path beyond Inversnaid degenerates into a muddy boulder strewn path that is up and down all over the place, some say like the proverbial whores knickers but I've never had that 'pleasure'. Average speed plummets as you are forced to walk most of the way without undue risk of slipping and breaking a leg. It certainly impresses on you how the runners in the Midsummer's under 24 hr race must be motoring in other sections to keep up a high average speed with particularly slow 5 mile sections like this. At the 42 mile point (16 miles day 2) Roman began to pull away as my legs remembered the 26 miles t day before. Keith went flying past at this point having a good spell. I kept running, ever slower, to the Crianlarich turn off at the 47 mile mark (19 miles day 2) where my legs simply refused to run any further except down hill. It was a slow and hard run / walk the remaining 7 miles up and down into Tyndrum. This was to be my low point of the trip. Oh what bliss to sit down in the 'Green Wellies' café in Tyndrum and indulge in rich cream vegetable soup. Nothing ever tastes so fine as good food after a long days effort, even if one has been nibbling various cereal / fruesli bars and jelly babies. The others came in individually in various states of fatigue.

The Inverrac Hotel where we stayed the night was a tired old place that had obviously missed out on all of the refurbishment booms of the last 20 years. However it did the job, note, there are plenty of other places to try.

Day 3, Sunday: Who would believe that with even more blisters, more aching muscles and 52 miles under the belt, that you could get up and start running the longest section yet, 28 miles to Kinlochleven with a 1000 ft climb up the Devils Staircase to add a little variation. As it happens this was to be my best day. A beautiful day with sun and clear blue skies, although the temperature was still under 20°C. I set off with Jon, having decided that Romans slow but relentless pace was too fast for me. Within a few miles my legs were working well and I was tempted to move up a notch. As we hit the first major hill after Bridge of Orchy at 60 mile mark (8 mile day 3) Jon stopped for a breather and a spell of video recording of his life as a mad hatter doing the WHW. I le him and started running up the hill feeling good. As I as passed a couple of women making hard work walking the hill I felt really good as you greet them with 'morning' as you pass, all smiles, like your having the time of your life. They must obviously have thought I was mad. Its pure adrenaline buzz. As I crested the hill and the whole panorama of Rannoch Moor and Loch Tulla opens before you and I get this great feeling of being alive. Its at times like this that you know why you enjoy hill running. Its attraction is that it is different, very different from road running, it is mentally challenging, the views are generally spectacular, relatively few people do it, its almost a clique, the accomplishment is very rewarding, but most importantly, people think you are mad.

Before plummeting down the far side of the hill I stooped to tighten my laces to save a few black toe nails only to find Jon come over the hill in full flight obviously desperate

not to be left behind by this 'old geezer'. We run together for a few more miles, past the Inveroran Hotel till the next hill where I eventually left him. This is a 7 mile gradual rise over western edge of Rannoch Moor on one of Telfords military roads. The road is very hard and stony underfoot but was otherwise ok if you kept to the very narrow piece of short grass on the side of the road. Running up this hill I seemed to pass dozens of walkers, many of them Dutch, and all with huge rucksacks. The sun was well up by now and quite warm. Given my history of dehydration the moment the going gets warm I made a determined effort to consume 'huge' quantities of water, and what a difference it made. Whilst I obviously lost time when I stopped and forced myself to drink 250ml each 20 - 30 mins I did find that I was able to keep running at a fair pace despite the hill and warmth. Cresting the col it was a fine view down the hill to Kingshouse Hotel some 3 miles away and up the valley to the next hill to be climbed, the Devils Staircase. On the way down I passed the chairlift up to the Glencoe ski area, it was closed. No snow to be seen at the bottom of the lift but still some a long way above at the top. I stopped at the Kingshouse hotel (20 miles day 3) wondering if I might get something savoury like a sandwich but it was all made to order and I didn't want to wait so a snickers bar and off I went again. Its always a worry with stopping, whether you'll be able to get going again.

Next way point was Altnafeadh at the foot of the Devils Staircase. This hill rises fairly steeply for some 700 ft (225m) and is clearly not very runnable when you already have 74 miles under your belt (22 miles on day 3). It was still a lovely walk up the hill, the sun was shining, the views down the valley were stunning, the mountains round here are big and imposing, I was still in good shape and once at the top it was to be more or less all down hill into Kinlochleven. I initially took it easy downhill for the sake of my quads and blisters but once Keith caught me not long after the top all caution was thrown to the wind and we raced each other the last 4 miles to Kinlochleven, finishing the 28 miles and some 3000 ft of climb up and down in 5 hrs 39'. What a blast, what a high to finish on, all done on pure adrenaline.

We had all planned to meet up in the old aluminium smelting factory which has been transformed into a massive indoor climbing wall, refrigerated indoor ice climbing wall, the largest in Europe apparently, and a café! The soup of the day was curried parsnip, I remember it very well, it was so good I had to have two bowls. Roman had got there before us and gone off to the B&B to get changed. Next in was Jon in good time and good shape, a stunning performance. At this point we all beat a retreat to the B&B and waited there for Stuart who walked the whole 28 miles took 8 hrs exactly. Back at the B&B I inspected my feet and discovered a number of black nails and what felt like blisters on blisters. More plasters and a few Ibuprofen and I was up for the pub!

An evening spent in the pub supping ale with a hearty meal. We were all feeling good by then as we all knew we had broken the back of the challenge, and all were going to make it, just a mere 1/2 marathon to finish.

Day 4; Monday: Another run, but it sure beats working! Keith had suggested the night before that we should all calculate our departure time to try and arrange that we all arrived in Fort William at the same time. It sounded fine but not long after Stuart and

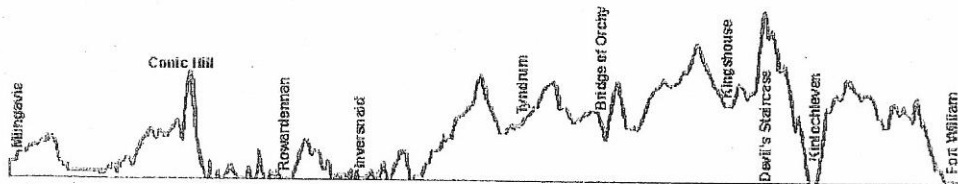
Colin had set off early, everyone's nerve started to go and they wanted to get going. The daily start time seemed to be getting earlier every day. So much for letting the breakfast go down for a while first. Keith and I were the last to leave at about 9:30. The day was shaping up to be glorious, bright and sunny, but not too warm.

The hill out of Kinlochleven is fairly modest albeit a 1000 ft climb over 3 miles, very runnable. Keith, as always, chose to walk for a while first to 'limber up'. My run was going very well over a fine dirt / stony track and I soon caught up with Jon and we then both passed Stuart and Colin together. It was about this time that I first felt some pain in my left shin. Still feeling good I pressed on trying to catch Elaine and Phil. I never did catch them as I began to slow down as my shin began to hurt more and more. Popping a few Ibuprofen I started running on my left toes to ease the pain. What a pain, so close to finishing and I get injured, but run to the finish I did. And what a great feeling to finish. It had seemed a long 14 miles in the end and took 2h 40' for some reason. It was comforting to know that Roman had only been 4 mins quicker on that leg despite my troubles.

My real time to run the whole 94 mile route was just over 19 hours total, I don't count the 20 mins Roman and I spent floundering in the bog just to get back onto the path again. The midsummers race record is 16h 26' 50" in one continuous run. Kate Jenkins has done it in 17h 37' 48". Having completed the same distance in 3 1/2 days just highlights what an awesome challenge it is to run the whole distance in one go.

Completing the event didn't turn out to be quite the major epic I had thought it would be. Very luckily I hadn't run myself into the ground until the last few miles on the last day. If the injury had come earlier in the event I would have had to retire, even walking to the finish would have been a non starter. It is two weeks later that I write this last part of the story and I still haven't been for another run yet due to the sore left shin. I marshalled at the Krunce hill race last Tuesday, a week after we finished, which involved a mile walk there and back. By the time I got back I was limping again. Such is life.

With the exception of perhaps Roman and Elaine none of the rest of us would have considered ourselves long distance or endurance runners before we started. So it goes to show what many of us can do if we put our minds to it. A fantastic challenge that I would recommend to anyone who likes long days in the hills.



Saturday Runs and Races

Friday 1st October – PROMS 3K

Saturday 2nd October – **Green Hill** from White Stone Car Park – meet Hazlehead 9-15am or 9-45pm at NJ654132

3rd October – BENNACHIE HILL RACE (2pm, nr. Oyne)

Saturday 9th October – **Carn Mon Earn** – NO768924
meet Duthie Park Boating Pond 9-15am or 9-45am there.

Saturday 16th October – **Bennachie** from Rowan Tree Car Park
NJ685245- meet Hazlehead 9-15am or 9-45am there.

Saturday 23rd October – **Kerloch** – NO699917
meet Duthie Park Boating Pond 9-15am or 9-45am there.

Saturday 30th October – **Hill of Fare** – NJ743039 – meet Hazlehead

Friday 5th November – Proms 3K then BEER FESTIVAL!

Saturday 6th November – **Mither Tap** from Visitor Centre – NJ698217
Meet Hazlehead at 9-15am or 9-45am out there.

Saturday 13th November – **Green Hill** – as above.

Saturday 20th November – **Bennachie** variations from Rowan Tree Car Park
NJ685245- meet Hazlehead 9-15am or 9-45am there.

Saturday 27th November – **Glentanar** – NO479964 – meet at Duthie Park
9-15am or 10am out there (Remember £1 for car park).

Friday 3rd December – Proms 3K

Saturday 4th December – **Back of Clachnaben** from Glen Dye –
NO649868 - meet at Duthie Park 9-15am or 9-45am out there.

Saturday 11th December – **Mither Tap** from Visitor Centre as above.

Saturday 18th December – **Fetteresso** – NO 830873– meet Duthie Park
meet Duthie Park 9-15am or 9-45am there.

COSMICS at KINGS

Training sessions at Kings Pavilion start on Tuesday 5th October.

Warm-up starts 6-15 pm

5th October "R"	3x(two minute out/back, 1min rec)
"H"	Seaton for continuous hills
12th October "R"	3x(400m,jog,1000m,jog)
"H"	Seaton for cathedral hill reps
19 th October "R"	300m,600m,900m,1200m,900m,600m,300m
"H"	Hilton for hill reps
26 th October "R"	3x(two minute out/back, 1min rec)
"H"	Seaton for continuous hills
2 nd November "R"	3x(600m,300jog,900m,300jog)
"H"	Seaton for cathedral hill reps
9th November "R"	10x400m jog recovery
"H"	Hilton for hill reps
16 th November "R"	300m,600m,900m,1200m,900m,600m,300m
"H"	Seaton for continuous hills
23 rd November "R"	3x(600m,300jog,900m,300jog)
"H"	Seaton for hill reps
30 th November "R"	3x(two minute out/back, 1min rec)
"H"	Hilton for hill reps
7th December "R"	300m,600m,900m,1200m,900m,600m,300m
"H"	Seaton for continuous hills
14th December	3x(400m,jog,1000m,jog)
"H"	Seaton for hill reps
21 st December	10x400m jog recovery
"H"	Hilton for hill reps.

Anyone is free to join either group on any night – reps group may split.