

## West Highland Way Race June 24<sup>th</sup> 2006



**Ready for the start?**

I entered this race back in January. Its fearsome reputation gave me many sleepless nights, but training went well and Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2006 saw me and over 100 other runners and their support teams gather at Milngavie railway station for the 95 mile West Highland Way race. Normally, a quiet suburb of Glasgow with the last train departed; tonight the car park was a seething mass of lycra, head torches and nervous banter. One o'clock in the morning and the race is off, through the pedestrian precinct and then out into the country. The pack slowly spreads out and after 5 miles I find myself alone. I was not at the front or back; have I gone the wrong way? The first refuelling stop at 6 miles confirms the right route – along the old railway line. The next 5 miles is also alone – where is everyone? Occasionally I hear the sound of gates bashing shut a few minutes behind or ahead, other than that a quiet, calm night. As it begins to get light for the climb over Conic hill, I am overtaken by several very fast runners – part of the lead pack that unfortunately took a wrong turning near Drymen and lost 25 minutes. One of them is clearly very annoyed with herself! The rough descent to Balmaha is busy, but goes without incident. I have a quick bowl of rice pudding and a flapjack and am away again – once gain alone.

I struggle somewhat in the constant up and down alongside Loch Lomond and the sight of the checkpoint at Inversnaid and some runners comes as a welcome relief. I perk up and enjoy the rough footpath North of Inversnaid and a bit of a chat. I arrive at Derrydarroch in good shape and now in 20<sup>th</sup> place. A typical pit stop involves

replenishing energy bars, flapjacks, gels, and juice from the rucsac, a bite to eat and sometimes changes of socks, shoes and vest. My team for the first half of the race is my wife Helen and father in-law and after Tyndrum it is my parents and brother and sister in-law – a whole

family and superb teams. After stopping still even for a few minutes it is tough to get

back into a rhythm, so my longest stop of the day is 4 minutes. Whilst I sit down to eat, the shoes and socks are replaced, and the rucsac replenished. An F1 pitstop couldn't be smoother. As I leave I shout back the requests for the next stop.

The next few stages all go very well and I'm beginning to enjoy myself. With one exception I see no other runners in the next 35 miles and the run over Rannoch Moor is lonely but exhilarating. Bizarrely on the descent down from the moor I see a familiar couple ahead. It is my uncle and his wife walking the West Highland Way. Both parties are as completely surprised as each other, but 30 seconds later I leave them shaking their heads. At Kingshouse (26 miles to go) I have moved up to 11<sup>th</sup> place – do I



**Near DerryDarroch – 43 miles completed**



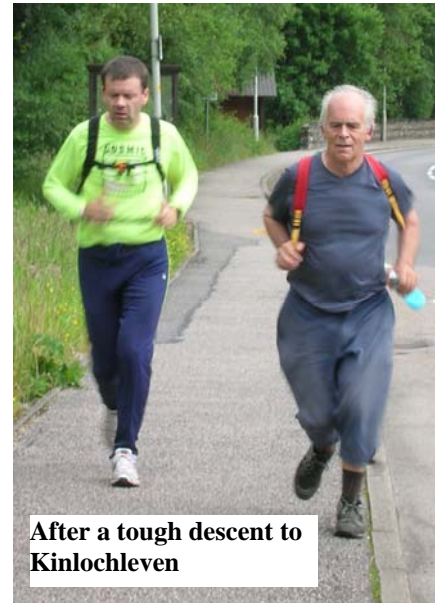
**I eat, mum and wife change the shoes (and socks!)**



**Head down in concentraion at about half way**

run with my eyes shut, that I can miss 7 runners? Not being in the top 10 means I can take advantage of a support runner and my dad joins me for the section to Kinlochleven. The descent down from the Devil's staircase is very tough on the quads and slow, but there is hot soup waiting and that goes down well. My support runner changes to my brother for the slow climb out of Kinlochleven (15 miles to go). Unfortunately we meet my fellow clubmate Carl Pryce just retiring near the top of the climb. Shortly after, it then

occurs to me that I am in the top ten and thus technically I'm not allowed a support runner! We briefly discuss the morals of this case and as the rules aren't clear on this point and I can't just abandon my brother in the middle of nowhere, we continue together. The next few miles are very tough – rough, undulating, bleak. My slow speed makes me paranoid about being overtaken and dropping back to 11<sup>th</sup>. I constantly look back until this risks a trip – I ask my brother to do it instead!



**After a tough descent to Kinlochleven**

A pizza takeaway awaits in Lundavra (7 miles to go). It's cold and a bit midgy, but absolutely superb and I wolf down 4 slices of Hawaiian with extra topping of jelly babies. Beyond Lundavra however the terrain is still rough, the stiles huge, and progress slow. With about 4 miles to go, we are climbing a very gloomy path in the woods when we hear voices behind –are we about to be overtaken? Instantly the pain, soreness, and blisters disappear (adrenalin or delayed pizza effect?). I start to run up hills. I get faster and faster, I shout; I am a new man. The descent to Fort William begins and the speed increases; my support runner

can't keep up, I race along the road, across the roundabout, past my rather startled wife - "I'm being chased" I shout, and sprint across the finish in 21 hours, 34 minutes, and 17 seconds – 10<sup>th</sup> place. I break down in tears and a babble. Unbelievable! The chasing runner arrives 7 minutes later and my brother shortly behind. What an amazing day.



After the crying had stopped at the finish. Support runners Dad, and brother, sister-in-law, mum, and wife

**A huge thank you goes to my brilliant support team and to all of you who sponsored me. Over £2,000 has been raised so far for HOPE for children and the incentive of the sponsorship made a big difference especially in the later stages. Many thanks.**