

West Highland Way Race 2005 A Different Perspective

The year started as normal, schedule written, training and focusing on the race began, all was going well until the morning of Speyside Way 50k, while still at home getting ready, I had a brain haemorrhage which, to say the least, messed up my training. As I slowly recovered, I knew I wouldn't be running but not to be part of this race was unthinkable, I would be Pauline's head chef and foot man.

At 1.00 am, Pauline and 87 runners were set off with a quiet "Go" from Dario, I had a very large lump in my throat as I watched them leave Milngavie. Right, deep breathe, and get on with job of looking after Pauline. Russell and I headed straight to Drymen (12 miles). Other back up teams were there, hanging about, chatting waiting on the runners, Russell and I being professionals at support put our heads back, closed our eyes and dozed until it was nearly time for Pauline to arrive, just a change of juice bottles with the slick speed of a baton hand over in a relay and she was off to Balmaha (20 miles). Another slick change over of bottles, the only tricky part was making sure her coffee was at the correct temperature for when she arrived. A slight hic-cup in the pro support at Rowerdennan (27 miles), Pauline arrived about 45 minutes ahead of schedule and we were still dozing, but no slap round the ear, we had time to get organized as she nipped to the loo. Inverarnan (40 miles) and the tunnel A82 (45 miles) passed smoothly with just a grub pick up and a change of socks.

At Tyndrum, I changed into running gear; since Pauline kept me company last week during my first half marathon in my recovery I thought it only fair if I chummed her for part of the way, this weekend. But being mindful that this life enhancing experience goes under SAL permit rules and lead runners are not to be paced, checked her position and as she was sitting fifth lady I'd be ok to accompany her, Val and Gail arrived just in time for Val to throw the car door open, hit the ground running and come with us to Bridge of Orchy (60 miles). Now I know I've been taking it easy lately, but I didn't think I'd struggle to keep with a woman with 53 miles in her legs and forty odd still to go! It was a faster pace than last week! Fat chance of being called a pacer!

I thoroughly enjoyed the section to Bridge of Orchy, just happy being alive and running. A tender spot on the top of my right leg reminding me of the wee confidence boost I had on Thursday, I'd spent the whole day in hospital having a tube stuffed in my femoral artery and radio active dye pumped in, (I thought this might be handy for the night sections if I glowed in the dark.) I haven't had the official results of the x-rays yet but the Doctor carrying out the procedure said although not a specialist my brain looked ok to him. I asked him if I'd be able to run on Saturday, he gave a non-committal smile and said that if the wound doesn't bleed in the first 24 hours it probably won't, but to use common sense. So I took that as a yes! (I wonder if I'm the only person involved in this race that has had confirmation in possessing a brain and I've seen it! Quite fascinating looking in to your own mind.) Talking of mind altered moments, if it wasn't early afternoon and lacking only one night's sleep I would've thought we were hallucinating when we saw a posse of electric wheelchair buggies coming towards us along the rough track, it was another fund raising event along side the Caledonian Challenge, great to witness people not letting immobility hold them back but surreal to see these vehicles out of their normal habitat in the High Street. Arriving in Bridge of Orchy (60 miles) I hardly had time to catch my breath and I was back in foot doctor mode, just a compeed plaster on a blister under Pauline's big toe and she was good to go. Lynne and Simon have arrived and Gail and Lynne are keeping her company along to Kingshouse (72 miles), not that Pauline needed any bodyguards, heaven help any Caly Chally walkers that got in her determined way! At Kingshouse, Lynne came sprinting in, ahead of schedule with a message to get the coffee and pasta on she's coming in. In a stop of nine minutes Pauline was fed and watered, bum bag refueled, boots on and was off to the Devil's Staircase with Russell and Val. Gail and I enjoyed the drive round to Kinlochleven (81 miles) with Pauline running so well it was still daylight when she came in. I don't

know why it took so long for her to have a ham roll and drink a mug of oxo, thirteen minutes, her longest and last stop in the race. Pauline and Val set off on the last long haul into Fort William.

Now for the sneaky plan I had, Pauline just expected to see us at the finish, but we drove round to Lundavra and I got changed into running gear, I didn't tell her earlier in case I didn't feel up to it, so when they arrived they were pleased to see us but not even noticing I was ready to run Pauline shot off up the track, I had to shout "Wait for me, did you think I'd let you go into the spooky woods without an extra torch!" Just as well I was there as Val had planned a two minute coffee break but Pauline was having none of it, I had to jog beside Val raking in her back-pack for the flask of coffee which when retrieved Val sprinted ahead poured the coffee and handed it over to Pauline when she went past. Richie and his support Simon were with us through the dark woods with cruel ups, downs, twists and giant steps. I was having a happy attack, feeling absolutely brilliant, just being here, and skipping along, then I heard Richie's painful mutterings behind me "Oowwhh! This is torture" Oops! Sorry Richie, didn't mean to rub it in, I remember well how tough this part can be, probably another reason why I'm bouncing along. When we reached the wide forest track with the quad killing descent Pauline kept the pace strong and steady, passing other runners. Then out of the Braveheart car park and in the last mile. Emotion runs high along this final push, we were all fairly quiet, gathering our thoughts of this very special adventure, did it really take less than a day? I was bursting with pride watching Pauline leap into the Leisure Centre to finish in 23 hours 19 minutes. I also felt proud that I was there, able to be part of Pauline's achievement. I was very impressed that through out the race Pauline never uttered a moan or negative comment, we must have did a decent job as back up too because we were never sworn at!

This race has helped me immensely in my fight back to health; even stepping out the front door on my own for the first time was quite daunting but knowing that I've had the strength to run 95 miles, I can find the strength to face anything.

I've never DNF-d in a race and I ain't doing it in life either! At this moment I feel I have reached the summit of my own personal Everest but I've still got to get back to Base Camp safely. So get the champagne on ice. I'M COMING BACK!

Fiona Rennie