



## RACE REPORT 2018

There were 120 entries for the 2018 race, with 110 starting, of these 70 finished. The average age of the 53 finishers was 46.

### REGISTRATION:

Opened at 18:00hr. Registration went well with tea, coffee, juice and biscuits, hot dogs, etc., being provided free of charge to give some extra light sustenance before starting the race. Many early entrants to Registration who had travelled from the Continent and England took advantage of a secondary 'quiet room' the race had provided to have a couple of hours rest, before the start and to chill out.

At one point there were about 30 lying out on the carpets. Others just sat outside and enjoyed the sunny, warm, pleasant evening. The various 3 drop bags, emergency bag and finish bag for the race were deposited by the entrants in various vans and trailers going to their respective locations.

### START:

Three entrants took the opportunity to have an early start with Debs and Charlotte going 1 hour 8 min early. Deb's husband Scott although a good runner, decided to keep them company and also went early. Due to a road closure John Vernon started 23 minutes late, but as it was his 15th consecutive race up the WHW with 14 consecutive completions, so we had no reservations in him getting lost. John is aged 67 and one of the most experienced ultra competitors in the UK and a very steady walker who always completes, regarding the race, for him sweeping up the rear was a bonus to tail enders.

The race started on time at midnight and conditions were dry, cool and dry underfoot. Extra signage had been put up to keep the competitors on the WHW route during the first legs. The race field had spread out by Water Point 1 (W.P.) at Drumgoyne (7.5 miles) with the lead runner Craig Dinnett going through at 54min followed closely by Liam Johnston (last year's race runner up). The final person through was John Vernon at 2hr 17 min due to his late start. John was still well within the cut-off of time of 2hr 45 min. At that stage the competitors were mainly running in groups.

### CHECK POINT 1:

At this time it was still dark and cool at Check Point 1 (C.P.) at Drymen (12.6 miles). With Craig still leading at 1:37hr but 3 others were within a 2-minute of him at the CP 1. At this stage competitors were mainly taking on fluids, sweets and bananas due to it being 12miles into the race. John V. was still bringing up the rear in 3hr 58 min with Alexa Hartwell and Andrew Anderson at 3hr 04. Still well within the cut-off of 4hr 30min. One of the later runners into CP1, was Collin Milligan in 2 hr. 16 min, yet Colin was a sub 24 hour completer in the race, so it goes to show pacing at the early stages of the race is important.

The next leg entailed crossing over Conic Hill to WP2 at Balmaha (19.6 miles). During this leg to Balmaha, Craig was still leading in 02:49hr with Tony Holt 02:50hr and Liam Johnston and

Chris Collins in 02:51hr, for the early runners the crossing is in the dark. While John V was bringing up the rear with a steady pace that got him to Balmaha at 06:10hr, with Alexa and Andrew in front of him at 5:17hr, all still well within the race cut-off time of 7:30hr Daylight was at 4:00a.m. so most of the competitors could see the beauty of Loch Lomond, with the rear competitors seeing it from above, on Conic Hill. Again this year due to the mild winter, the dreaded 'midge' appeared at the Balmaha Water Point.

## CHECK POINT 2:

The leg from Balmaha to Rowardennan CP 2 (27.2 miles). By Rowardennan the leader was Craig Dinnett in 04:19hr closely followed by Tony Holt in 04:21hr; Liam and Andrew had fallen back slightly to 04:34hr in this leg.

**Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park organisation, very kindly allowed the opening of their Rowardennan Information Centre, thus with the use of the toilets and a respite from the midges, this gesture on their part was very much appreciated by the competitors and marshals.** Rowardennan is where competitors collect their 1st Drop Bag along with tea, coffee, juice, Coca-Cola, sandwiches, noodles, cereals, etc. and a welcome seat to rest their legs which to most, the stop was welcomed. Fifteen of the competitors came in between 7 and 8 hours with John still bringing up the rear with a steady walk, at 8hr 50min. (cut-off 10 hours). At Rowardennan the usual few 'skint knees', etc., from falls, as by then the rough trail and tiredness takes it toll. Sadly we lost our first 4 competitors at Rowardennan.

The next stop was Water Point 3 at Inversnaid (34.3 miles). This is a beautiful location to have a stop, as it is outside the Inversnaid Hotel and has some stunning views of Loch Lomond and the surrounding mountains. Davy who has covered this stop for several years missed the times of the leaders as he took the opportunity to have a quick kip so the leaders who are all experienced just helped themselves to the food and drinks on the tables and went on their way without disturbing him. Although it is a Water Point, Davy also provides a variety of drinks and snacks to competitors. Due to the heat this year conditions were by the later stages getting challenging and by this stage especially for the rear competitors and the heat was taking its toll.

## CHECK POINT 3:

By CP3 Beinglas Camp Site (41 miles) the leadership had changed to Tony Holt 07:28hr with Craig slightly behind in second place in 07:34hr. At the rear was John in 13:55hr and Alexa and Andrew in front of him in 12:56hr and Henrik Frank Nielsen from Denmark in 13:09hr. This was Henrik's second WHW Challenge Race, so he knew the score regarding pacing. Having again entered the 2019 race we are glad to welcome Henrik back in 2019, for a third time.

All the competitors were well within the cut-off time of 15:15hr.

The leg to CP3 at Beinglas Camp Site (41 miles) is rugged with requires clambering over rocks and tree roots and is very stony underfoot, this along with the heat, took it's toll on especially the later competitors who arrived there at noon and just after.

It was not what a lot of competitors expected of Scotland '**premier trail**' and took its toll on many of them, especially Troels Larsen from Denmark who fell and gave his forehead a nasty bash. This is a bad section for Troels, who had bashed his forehead on the same section the previous year after a fall. Again Troels like last year was patched up at Beinglas by the same nurse. When asked why he kept falling in this section, he responded that the "he was making a tradition of it." Again Troels and his partner Vibeke continued on their way and finished the race, like they both did last year.

For the slower competitors the cut-off times are critical, as some races over the WHW only allow a 12:00hr cut-off's to Beinglas, so as to get rid of competitors out of their races, which is a sad reflection on ultra trail running. To highlight the point THREE of our sub-35 hour finishers were over the 12-hour time, at this point and would have been disqualified in other races, but as seen in the split results table, the three still made it within the 35-hour limit. One with 2 hours to spare and the other two with 1hr 50min to spare.

In the main most competitors moved through CP3 quickly, heading for CP4 at Auchtertyre. There were 7 withdrawals at the Beinglas CP, mainly due to the heat taking its toll, where there was only one the previous year.

#### **CHECK POINT 4:**

After CP3 Beinglas to Auchtertyre is 10miles, with a long (1,000ft climb) trudge up Glen Falloch with the River Falloch tumbling down the glen in the opposite direction. It culminates with steep climb into the woods above Crainlarich and then down to the flat ground of Glen Dochart to C.P.4 at the Auchtertyre Camp Site (51 miles). For the rear runners this was a brutal section with the relentless sun on the back of the neck and searing heat and no wind. Due to the extreme heat the race lost 12 competitors at the Auchtertyre C.P. Many competitors were suffering heat exhaustion with nausea and tiredness thrown in for good measure.

Tony was still leading in 09:28hr with Martin Wilson and Graham Thomas in equal second place in 09:43hr. At the rear John came in in 17:28hr with Alexa and Andrew a close by in 17:33hr.

Between Auchtertyre and B of O the trail greatly improves and is much more open with stunning views of the surrounding mountain peaks. There is very little climbing in this section and much of the trail is vehicle track.

#### **CHECK POINT 5:**

Is Bridge of Orchy Village Hall (60 miles). Sadly Tyndrum Hall which had been previously been used by the race had closed down. Again the hot dogs went down a treat this year. The competitors are provided with their second 'drop bag' at B of O along with their Emergency Rucksacks, any redundant bum bags used in the first 60 miles are taken by the race on to Fort William. Due to the hot conditions that were taking their toll and the dry hard underfoot conditions, by this stage blisters were a common problem. This is when competitors have to dig deep to keep going. Bride of Orchy Hall is a welcome stop to patch up the feet and replenish the fluids. The tinned peaches also went down as well. Bridge of Orchy Hall had just received a major refurbishment which included a new shower, so several of the competitors took the opportunity to have a refreshing cool/cold shower at this 60 mile point, to cool down and get rid of the sweat before going out on to Rannoch Moor section.

Tony still lead at B of O with a time of 11:14hr and in equal second place were Martin and Graham, coming in 20 minutes later, at 11:34hr. At the rear of the field, in 21:06hr were Alexa, Andrew and John who had grouped by this stage. They were still going strong and continued on to Kingshouse, they were well within the cut-off at B of O which was 22:15hr.

The leg from B of O to Kingshouse for the early competitors was 'hard' due to the heat and they consumed many fluids. For the rear competitors it was brutal, for when the sun went down the temperature plummeted this combined with a bitter 'East Wind', created hypothermic conditions. When competitors stopped they were shivering within a few minutes. This is where experience and preparation is important in having the right clothes for the speed you are going at, and speed can be variable depending on the race you are having that day. For example:- in two of the Race Directors races, in two consecutive years the time taken varied by over 10 hours. Accordingly a competitor requires to factor in contingences of your fastest and slowest speed to that location, then consider what you want in the various drop bags e.g. extra clothing, torches, etc. and putting them into the drop bags.

From Bridge of Orchy it is a short sharp climb and descent over the hill to Inveroran Hotel, before going out on to Rannoch Moor and well away from the main road. For the rear competitors this is where the torches come out. All competitors for safety, carry an 'Information Sheet' with all the marshals mobile numbers and the CP's and WP's have a copy of all the competitors mobile numbers to ensure communications where possible.

Bridge of Orchy is where the competitors pick up their 'safety rucksack' containing their 'sleeping bag' and 'emergency bag'. If they have been running with a bum bag to BofO, then they can leave it at BofO for transportation to Fort William.

The B of O to Kingshouse leg is 12 miles over desolate, picturesque Rannoch Moor. Seven miles of the leg is rough 4x4 vehicle track so travel under foot is relatively good. At this stage you are away from the road and there are no buildings. Last year one of the rear competitors was going through a bad patch one mile from 'Black Rock' cottage (2 miles from the Kingshouse C.P.) and quite rightly decided it was time to have a rest, before he possibly tripped and hurt himself, so he phoned the Kingshouse CP and informed the marshals that he was going into his sleeping bag and emergency bag to have a few hours kip. This was okay as we knew where he was and that he was okay. This also, shows why we ensure competitors carry the 'Safety Kit'. It's there if you have to stop and if not, it gives the reassurance to the competitor that they can stop at any time and be safe. For those not used to walking at night, it can be daunting to be walking by yourself, through a desolate isolated moor in darkness and for the inexperienced this is where the 'mind games' can start. Many prefer to stay in a group for company as the time passes quicker.

### **KINGS HOUSE HOTEL CP6:**

The CP6 at Kingshouse is 100m after the old bridge and is a lovely location looking on to Buachaille Etive Mor and the surrounding mountains, also the 'midges' of Loch Lomond were a thing of the past, due to the light hot breeze that had developed in the afternoon. With 23 miles to go most early competitors pushed on, but at Kingshouse C.P. they took on a lot of Coca Cola and soup, due to the heat of the afternoon and loss of salt. Tony was still leading at 14:04hr with Martin and Graham 36minutes behind at 14:40hr. The last competitors were John, Alexa and Andrew, they went through at 26:30hr. This was 10minutes before the scheduled cut-off, but due to the adverse weather conditions the race had been extended by that time.

It was pointed out to them that there are new and very clean public toilets and showers at the end of the Kingshouse 'bunk house' with a heated tiled floor, so the three took advantage of this and in their sleeping bags had a 'power nap' for 30 minutes until 3:00am, before pushing on. The race had hired a 5 bed heated cabin at the nearby Glen Coe Ski Centre, so several people that pulled out at Kingshouse were temporarily 'bunked' there, before being taken on to Fort William. Another 2 competitors got into the tent at the Check Point and had a couple of hours sleep, before going on to Kinlochleven. At the back of the race it's all about keeping going through a second night, especially in very cold conditions.

Clearly the rear competitors still on the move from Kingshouse were getting their monies worth and enjoying the full ambience of the race, by enjoying walking in a clear, dry, cold night with the surrounding 3,000' mountains over-shadowing them and a lovely 'full moon' silhouetting the surrounding mountain peaks. At the top of the Devil's Staircase the WHW peaks at nearly 2,000' above sea level and the village of Kinlochleven is below at sea level. It is a steep walk down to the village and can be very painful for certain injuries, to which some of the competitors can testify. The race leaders missed this, as they did this stage in daylight and were in their beds by this time (it an unfair world).

### **KINLOCHLEVEN CP7:**

The next rest point, was CP 7 at Kinlochleven ( 81 miles). Tony was still in the lead at 16:42hr with Martin and Graham 25 minutes behind in 17:07hr. It is Kinlochleven where competitors get their third drop bag. Many took the opportunity to have a sleep in the building where the Check Point is located. Many just want to lie down and have a power nap until daylight at 4:00am, this giving them 7 hours left to walk 14 miles. The resting sums the way they most feel at this stage of the event, when they have been on their feet for up to 28 hours continuous and 2 nights without sleep, they just want to finish. After a 'power nap' we woke them, fed them, and sent them on their way to Water Point 4 at Lundavra (88miles) and then on to Finish at Fort William.

At the rear over to Kinlochleven, Andrew had decided to push on and try and make it in 35 hours, he came into the CP at 30:28hr with John and Alexa coming in 10minutes later at 30:38hr. John and Alexa looked very refreshed after there sleep at Kingshouse and only stayed at the CP for a short while. Alexa to her credit then proceeded to run Andrew down in the next stage in the best traditions of competitiveness and bet him to the Finish by 5 minutes. In the end we adjusted John's time to take account of the late start that was not his fault.

### **THE FINISH:**

At the Finish at Claggan Park home to Fort William Football Club (95.5 miles). The overall joint winners were Graham Thomas and Martin Wilson in a time of 20:39 with Tony Holt just behind in 20:40hr. The first lady was Geraldine Muller in 25:56hr, with Fiona Marley Paterson as Second Lady in 26:28hr and Third Lady was Laura Jones in 28:54hr. The finished competitors have a shower and are fed with chilli and other foods as well as a variety of drinks. Over 30 competitors put up small tents, which were in their 'finish bag' and pitched them on the grass next to the football pitch. This is sensible as you can't start knocking on B&B and hotel doors at 03:00am in the middle of the night wanting a bed, or access to your pre-booked room.

The presentation was at 10:30am at the Finish and the coaches left at 12:00hr and 12:10hr. 14 competitors were under 24 hours and those who were new members, were presented with a 'key ring' engraved with their name on one side and on the other side is the inscription 'THE WHW IN A DAY CLUB'. The remainder's 'named' key rings await them for another day. ALL THE FINISHERS ARE PRESENTED WITH A TROPHY of a boxed Skye crystal fluted wine goblet with the WHW route engraved on the glass and the surrounding route mountains.

**THE WEST HIGHLAND WAY AND BEN NEVIS CHALLENGE RACE: Only one competitor 'Colin Anderson' took up the challenge and completed it. His time to Claggan Park was 29 hours 40 minutes and including the Ben Nevis was 34 hours 10 minutes. A great achievement and congratulations to Colin, to be the first to complete both in a Formal Race.**

### **WAS THE RACE A SUCCESS?**

Again all the MARSHALS enjoyed the weekend and offered to return next year. The main point they enjoy the camaraderie and banter that ones gets from a small race and we thank all the competitors and their families and supporters for making this so worthwhile.

From the 'ENTRANTS' point we received thanks from everyone and e-mails, which was appreciated especially as to most of entrants it was a shock having never done the WHW, or even 95miles and they appreciated we were trying our best to get them to the end and this was done with a 64% success rate 5% lower than last year This was good especially, as the weather made this year's race so challenging. The competitor's thanks was appreciated and passed on to the marshals.

From the 'RACE' perspective the camaraderie we aimed for was more than achieved. This is not surprising as the committee are some of the most experienced ultra competitors in the UK and are in their 60's & 70's and this was their objective in setting up the race. Many of the earlier races over the WHW had only 30 taking part, thus everyone knew each other and it was like old friends meeting, sadly this spirit is lost when the race numbers get too large and into several hundred competitors and several hundred more support teams. The number of starters in the 2018 race helped. The atmosphere is lost when the numbers get to high, also in this years race it was a good mix of people from the Continent, England and Scotland and from experienced to inexperienced competitors. The race's aim is to cater for all types the fast

competitive runners, the jog/walkers and just plain steady walkers. This can be seen in the closeness of the 3 leaders coming in less than one minute apart.

'CUT-OFF TIMES' Are important in getting as many to the finish line within 35 hours, and this is achieved by applying average speed cut-off times. This takes a lot of pressure of the competitor. Unfortunately most races now are **NOT** 'Point to Point Races', but are 'Section Races,' where legs of the races have to be completed at varying speeds. In these 'section races' competitors are additionally put under unneeded stress to meet unfair cut-off times and are pressured to run faster and over their limit to ensure they achieve the race's cut-off times for that leg and this is shown in the resulting withdrawals. Competing in a 95 miles race is hard enough, without being subjected the added pressure of needless cut-off times. Clearly these section races want to **'ditch'** the slower competitors, as there is no other reason for the unneeded cut-off times. In the 2018 WHW Challenge Race by taking account of the adverse weather the committee correctly extending the race, this resulted in 5 achieved their aim of an official race finish.

From the Marshals we thank you all for taking part and we hope your injuries clear up quickly and we see you in the 2019 race along with your families.