

Buchlyvie 10k

I was looking for a Saturday race early in the year to give me a goal to train for in the winter. I found the Buchlyvie 10k, a small (300 limit) community-organised event in Stirlingshire at the end of January. "We are a small community and this is our big day," said the website. A lunchtime start meant the 90 minute drive in each direction could be done in daylight, mostly. Chip timed, achievable course limit. Last year's results suggested I might finish in the last ten or so places but hum, I'm only competing with myself, it was only an intermediate goal to keep me going anyway and somebody has to be at the back. It seemed ideal.

The web presence wasn't entirely up to date and kept changing its mind whether it was 2019 or 2020 so that gave me a slight concern that it might not be the most efficient event. When I got there I found that the contrary was true: it was one of the better organised races I've been to. There was even a mobile marshal on a motorbike going back and forth checking we were all OK.

The course itself was unremarkable - nothing wrong with it though, a simple out and back with the first kilometre or so on a main road then a right turn onto a fire track which was followed to the end, someone giving out snacks at that point then back the same way. In fairness, I'm sure the view to the hills on the outbound section would have been spectacular on a clearer day but as it was, I was grateful the earlier downpour had faded to the merest of drizzles. It ended up dry overhead for most though not all of the race.

The start was on a small green and therefore crowded despite the small number: I hung back but it still took a while to get going properly even after I crossed the timing mat. That could cost me a PB, I thought to myself. On the main road there was a short steep downhill section which was fun but everyone was laughing and saying, we've got that to get back up near the end when we're tired. After the delay at the start my watch now indicated a good pace by my standards: I could maybe get in under 65' which would be a five minute PB, although to be fair this was only my second official 10k.

But then we turned on to the fire track. It was wide enough, and flat, but tiring to run on compared with tarmac. My pace slowed a little but I was still doing well until the turnaround. And there were people behind me. I didn't know how many but I didn't care as long as there were some!

The course is described as mostly flat and that's really true but there's a very slight descent going out and a very slight ascent coming back. My eyes couldn't tell the difference but my legs knew - although maybe they were just tired because of the surface. Whatever the reason, my pace was much, much slower on the way back. I thought to myself that I was far enough ahead of PB pace at the turnaround that I might still make it even though I'd slowed down so much, and that idea kept me going till I got back to the road. It was a real slog though and a few people around me had started run/walking.

Once back on the road, running became easier again and despite the uphill section I was able to speed up significantly and pass some people. Small community event or not, they had all the trimmings with my name announced over the PA as I crossed the line. I went to the timing van and was handed a printout with a chip time of 66'53". That meant I wasn't in the last ten after all - last twenty, maybe! It was nearly three minutes faster than my PB set in much easier circumstances at Crombie in the summer. The slog from 5 to 9 k was quickly forgotten and I enjoyed some of the home baking that was on sale in the village hall. A nice touch was that the goodie bag included a tea/coffee mug and if you presented that for filling at the refreshment counter your hot drink was free.

A nice, friendly, small scale but very well organised event. We were told next year's event is scheduled for 30 January. I'll be back, because it definitely meets a need at that time of year.

Having started to run exactly 10 years ago at the age of 57 I had my most successful year in 2018 and thought I was the bee's knees. That came to an abrupt end in Dec. of that year and in the next 3 months I spent about 2 of them in hospital, intensive care and all the rest, at times not knowing if I was coming or going. One of the times I came out of my trance like state a voice in the back of my mind (maybe it was mine) said, "Why on earth did you never do that Ultra March you wanted to?" About a month later I started running 20 steps (no joke-I counted them) by summer I was back up to 5 k slowly and walking far further in pretty quick times. As soon as registration started in Sept I was in there sharpish (we were in Oban at the time and it took my mind off our suitcase which had gone missing!) In Scotland i walked 50k, did it twice when we got home and in between 20-40 k several times. In November I even did the Marathon world record course- ran half and walked half. Just over 6 hours which I thought was pretty good considering I didn't have world class pacemakers and masses cheering me on! So at the end of January we set off for Burgenland. It's the most easterly Province in Austria, bordering on Hungary, a very flat wine growing area. This started 8 years ago with 400 people, there are now 8000 in 4 distances, 30k, 55k (mine-halfway round Lake Neusiedl) 80k and 112k. The most famous year was 7 years ago when from the 1000 Starters 89 finished- they had gale force wind, sleet , hale..... That had been a worry of mine but none of that at all. My start was at 8a.m. in the very small town of Apetlon- the day before nothing happening then 2000 people lining up and the usual start of event atmosphere. Off we went, chatting at first, getting positioned etc but as soon as we were out of the town I wanted to get going and, apart from the runners soon found myself up front. Got a bit of a surprise About 10 k on when I spotted a lot of people then realised they were the back of the 80k lot who had started 4 hours before. This eastern side of the lake is quite boring, with the bare vineyards of this time of year and despite being "round the lake" it's a fair distance away and can't be seen. Every distraction was a bit of excitement, hares, red berries on a bush in the garden of one of the few houses A popular town sign for photos was at "Hölle" - German for Hell! I was going at a good pace and earlier than I thought I arrived at the first stop. There was soup going in the restaurant but I just had a toilet stop and got a warm drink at one of the stands outside. Also took some sweet "milk bread" to eat along the way. At about 20k the first runner on the long route (right round the lake and they'd also started 4 hours before us) passed and I worked out he was on a time of 10 1/2 hours , excellent although the record is 9 1/2. On this stretch I walked 3 k with a lady from south of Vienna, and enjoyed chatting to her, comparing experiences, we'd taken part in quite a few of the same races. We stuck together as far as Neusiedl am See where the 2nd stop at about 27 k was. Although we'd enjoyed each other's company I'm sure we both realised the other was a loner and we parted amicably. This stop was amazing, in the wine grower's college. People were sitting down to soup (a choice of 5 kinds) salad, sandwiches, sweets etc. Alas, I didn't want to! So another toilet stop, a warm drink, I took an apple, some celebrations chocolates and a cheese roll and was on my way again! From here we curved on the the west side of the lake, going south and what a difference. Here are lots of the pretty, little wine villages, the houses are really quaint and at the selling places huge wine glasses and bottles made out of different material. The variety was very welcoming- a part ran parallel to the railway line so a few waves, towns with people in them (didn't seem particularly interested in us but did get a few nods) and- did I say this Province was flat?- A HILL!! Came as a surprise and I think I've blocked out how long it was but got up ok and found myself in the village of Jois, what a lovely place. Next stop was at about 42k and I missed it! It was becoming dusky, at that point nobody ahead of me and I just kept going through this endlessy long town . From there it was a lot of countryside, fields etc and I was soon overtaking the 30k lot who had started later in Neusiedl. Unfortunately I couldn't nip behind bushes as my fingers had become numb and a bit swollen, couldn't have got my leggings down, let alone back up. And even worse I couldn't get my water bottle out of the side net of my rucksack - couldn't even get my rucksack off as my fingers wouldn't open the belts! So I stopped the next runner who passed me and what a gentleman. Got my bottle , opened it, waited for me me to have a good drink and put it back. Soon after another runner trotted alongside and chatted for about 500m. He was on a 12 1/2 hour time so I told him not to let himself be held up but he said I was going at the right pace for him to have little break. And then came the surprise. I'd decided I had about 5 k to go and when I

saw a lit up church on a hill thought it must be the town before Oggau where we were headed for. However I turned the corner and almost walked in to the sign "Oggau 2K" . I got so excited, I upped my pace and phoned Peter at the same time. This was also slightly uphill and the poor chap thought I was having a heart attack! These 2 k flew past (they belonged to my quickest) and I'll never forget the voice that said, "You're nearly there, straight ahead and round the corner." And there it was, the finishing arch with lights, and a "Relaxing Sofa" to get photos taken on. The final spread was in the community centre and I'd told myself I was going to get stuck in. Wrong! I managed 1 sausage, half a slice of bread and a warm drink! Success was going to the toilet . Took me ages so thank goodness there were enough and I now know where the saying "Getting your knickers in a twist" comes from. The next shuttle bus was waiting so I got on and enjoyed the journey back though I've never heard so many moans and growns as when we all got up to get off. And back in our room, that's where I was able to enjoy something to eat while giving Peter a run down of events. Felt my legs during the night but no problem by breakfast time. A bit of pride to finish off. There was the young man who got quite a shock when I said I'd done it in 8 Hours 50 minutes-he'd needed 11 Hours. Then my friends, Karin and Elisabeth , also a lot younger who, despite running half, were only 20 minutes quicker. Will I do it again? No! I thought about it but everything went so well, even the weather, I can't imagine having that luck again. However there ARE other Ultra Marches!

T24 January 2020

You thought West Highland Way one was long!! Think again! Good job country is in lockdown...lol

Late 2019 I decided that 2020 would be a year of firsts and some celebration thrown in for my 50th!! So plans were made of various events to enter one of which was T24 a 24 hour looped race in Tyndrum in winter, mainly in the dark!!

I have always wanted to do a 24hr, as it was on my unofficial bucket list along with completing the Major marathons and Comrades in South Africa, amongst others. So I enquired who else was mad enough to join me (knowing there were plenty slightly strange Footers who were of similar persuasion!!)

Alan agreed and entries were duly sent in and forgotten about...haha, Tina also threw her hat in later after getting a deferred place nearer the time.

So as part of our very minimal prep (more on that later) myself and Alan decided a wee recce of route and some off-road miles wouldn't go amiss. We decided on basing ourselves in Tyndrum in late November for a couple of days on WHW. Saturday dawned approx. -4 deg but beautiful clear skies so we set off with map in hand to do the 5 mile loop being used for T24 race itself....pity we ran it in reverse though...lol... We didn't know!! During this much discussion followed about the long steep climb up access road and the gradual climb through trees in forestry, not to mention the rough river wash out and the river crossing!! So plenty to ponder later in the pub, but we continued south on WHW to show Alan the infamous rollercoaster part of route!! He was after all planning the race in 2021! Nae pressure Alan! (Race since cancelled this year so unlikely 2021 attempt!)

So we had a good day but only 15 odd miles, after me planning...well nagging really that we should do 2 x 20 milers lol. We did bump into an old work colleague of mine also who was just off the hills with his dog and also met some other runners on the run.

Sunday was going to be north towards Bridge of Orchy and 20 miles!! Again Baltic but clear conditions greeted us but perhaps we had slightly overdone the liquid carbo loading the previous night in Tyndrum Inn...haha what's new!! Great run, great scenery and all to plan until Jelly baby hill!! (Another place of note during WHW where you are greeted by a rather fine gentleman handing out jelly babies from his tent, a welcome sight after approx. 60 miles!) Anyway on the climb we spot a stag...a rather large stag to be fair...it sees us too! We keep walking...it keeps looking. It isn't moving!! So McDonald sees an ideal opportunity to suggest turning back...haha any excuse! However the closer we got the more I tended to agree! They are big antlers! How fast can a stag run? Was it protecting some young!!...ok let's turn round. Retraced our steps and back to Tyndrum for 17 miles. Great weekend with beer too!! And something I would definitely repeat. Alan took some photos including some of the race route which we shared with Tina, think that it was of benefit!! Was it Tina or was it sleepless nights lol?

As I work offshore the treadmill, or dreadmill as I call it is my necessary companion for 2 weeks at a time! Not really ideal for ultra-training, especially when gym can be like a sauna due to the amount of protein shake drinking, weight lifting mirror watchers....grr!

Unlike Tina who seems to knock out Ultras every other week with no issues, mine consisted of hard and fast reps....when I could be bothered....Alan was out with some long runs with Gav/Ian etc.

As it got nearer race time it was gear check time!! I had my supply list from WHW 2017 previously, so myself and Alan met up to discuss fuelling, kit etc etc. As it was winter and going to be dark for at least 15-16 hours we had a few things to discuss, enough gear for sub-zero temperatures, goggles for weather (mandatory kit!!) balaclavas, headtorch life!! and enough high sugar products to keep us going for 24 hours!! Top tips Yazoo strawberry milk, flat coke, rolo yoghurts...haha

So training was sporadic but included some XC races for my other club (shh!!) January was basically 2 weeks of nightshift, home Thursday, race 3K Friday lunchtime! Why?? Because my other club...shhh!! Run a 3k series at lunchtime 1pm every first Friday of month. This had been delayed from early January so was perfect tune up the week before a 24 hour race.....haha! A horrendous distance but great to find your fitness level...not many smiling at end of this...lol

Anyway onto excuses now!! My heel had been playing up since Christmas with a pain particularly after races and early mornings, so warm up was sore, 3k race ok, night ouch!! Added to that had been coughing up gunk earlier in week and discussions were had about race, I was slightly torn as Tokyo marathon was 5 weeks later and didn't want to be injured for that, plus it was my final of the six majors and fancy medal was waiting!! (Geez that was just the start of the Covid chaos too!)....you cannot pull out was reply!! From my training partner, we have B&B booked, race entry, all the supplies bought etc

Finally you'll be glad its race weekend. The forecast all week was looking hellish and have to admit the thought of the route in snow, wet, wind and rain etc was not very appealing. A river to cross every loop....would it be ankle deep, calf deep? Thankfully as a lot of us well know the West Highlands has its own mini climate and we were greeted with pretty much dry conditions with little of the forecasted high winds earlier in the week!

So we travelled up Friday stopping off in Comrie for a coffee and amazing Stornoway black pudding and bacon roll....highly recommended...in fact had they been open on the Sunday we'd have been back!

Booked into our B&B and headed to Tyndrum inn for carbs!! Met a few familiar faces in the bar and enjoyed our meal along with one or two libations!! (Well ultra didn't start to 12pm, good carbs etc etc)

On run up to race we were given big list of rules/regulations, one of which was size of bag for storage!! This proved contentious as we were going to be self sufficient for 24 hours, clothes required for all weathers, not to mention food requirements!! So we had a cunning plan! A tub each split the food and it could sit under our clothes bags. So we drive up to deposit kit and head back to B&B for breakfast, one of stewards says oh you're not allowed that etc etc. So we leave in baggage tent with a view of moving them to my cousins tent later!! Didn't know at this point he had pulled out of race on Thursday night. Back to B&B and what a breakfast!! Full cooked, porridge, fresh fruit you name it....geez. Tip!! Pork and herb sausages are off the menu for all future events!! Spent the first couple of hours trying to digest them, the next few with chronic heartburn!! Thank god for Gaviscon lol.

So we duly changed into race kit and the car was left at Green Welly for race duration(if car was at Hostel trapped for 24 hour plus and only for residents) We get back to start area to be told there would be 3 mile penalty for boxes....aye right!!! Just imagine getting 102 miles run then penalty....nae happening haha. So I approach some random guys with a campervan on race route and ask if we can leave our tubs beside his van....no problem at all he says....our new best friends!! And a coincidence meeting too.

I should have said that although it was T24 there was a 6 and 12 hour version too!! So the main objective at start was not to get caught up with all these folk, thankfully as it turned out they started us 15 minutes before these events. During morning we had a heavy hail/snow shower and thoughts turned to the misery this could cause if weather turned bad! However at race start weather was fine and we set off on the anti clockwise route and take it nice and easy, picking up food or drink at our new best pals van over next few hours, debating round the lap what we fancied eating, which gets harder as race goes on!! Not too much sugar, need some salt, some carbs!! Nice to mix it up. So we had half ham rolls, strawberry and choc milk, coffee, choc raisins, porridge, jelly babies, flat coke, water, and a few other things!! Think Tina thought we were away for a week camping...lol.

So the race ambles on with us walking the steep bits, jogging the rest, however it is still hard to hold back and McDonald was told off more than once, as was I, for getting carried away, 7 min miling on the forestry not wise 2-3 hours into race, lol. Over the next few hours we are offered various things from our new inherited back up crew, hot water, coffee, even spag bol! Great of them to offer. It was a father and son team doing back up for another son and pal. Who do you run for they ask...Arbroath Footers we say...I know someone who used to run for them says son....Ryan Ramsay!!! It's a small world and it turns out he was Ryan's boss in Rothesay PE department! By the time I got up on Sunday morning there was a message from said Ramsay asking about the two crazy dudes from Arbroath...I take it that was us then!! Fantastic job they done for us and I done the shake hand leave a note trick for their troubles.

Race trundled along over next few hours with us having to pick up our headtorches from 4.30pm as it started to get gloomy, this is when it gets more interesting and the route is transformed, thankfully the organisers had lit up a couple of dodgy spots with generators... a nice touch I thought. Not too much moaning from either of us either as we met Tina on route a couple of times and also joined different folk at different stages of lap, particularly when walking the steep bits...nice bunch the ultra fraternity. Tina was going well and she didn't have the luxury we had of new best pals back up...lol

My heel was starting to play up probably after 6-7 hours so at about 9 hours stopped for a bit of a look, paracetamol and ibuprofen gel applied! It was also starting to get bit cooler so decided on adding tights and ski gloves(was in shorts for starting few hours), another tip! Ski mittens were great when weather starts going sub zero...completely hopeless at food stops but required for rest of the time! During our laps we had various topics to discuss including plans for rest of year. I had Tokyo, both of us had Manchester, Comrades and Devil!! All sadly now either postponed or cancelled. Mr McDonald had been discussing how far he would go, what distance was acceptable...I always had 100 mile in mind...as that is what most folk aim for as a target. Each lap you dibbed in at timing tent and we paid no attention to positions for first few hours. We were then informed at some point, possibly 40 miles, that we were 2nd an 3rd after maybe 7-8 hours....how!!! geez nae pressure then...Alan 1st over 50, team prize blah blah!! It was all discussed enroute.

So after my wee impromptu stop Alan had waited at timing tent where he promptly dibbed in and announced he was in 1st place haha! So that meant I dibbed in for 2nd, there was much hilarity and I think it amused the marshalls and guys who had sold Alan shit loads of kit earlier(well a decent headtorch, decent jacket...and a mappit hat, lol) that we had no idea of our placing. Now it was real heid doon elbows out stuff!! There was after all a Stornoway black pudding and bottle of malt to aim for as first through 100 miles (a worthy prize I am sure you'll agree!) as said previous Alan decided Comrades distance was enough for him at 54 miles and duly stopped after 10pm, so I then continued solo aiming for the black pudding, adding laps. I think when Alan left I was 5 mins in lead, then 9mins, then 15 mins but heel was starting to hurt again and when I started what was 13th lap it was bloody sore, walking more than running, sorer on downhills.

I met Tina again and walked for a bit with her when I was feeling rather sorry for myself. Getting the lap complete, visit medic tent was my plan but deep down I knew it wasn't going to get better and Tokyo was only 5 weeks away etc. So I hobbled in to transition and straight to the medical tent. A wee prod from the medic and just about hit roof!! Shit that's it then. He did say he could try strapping and paracetamol but unlikely to achieve much other than further trauma! (Trauma geez that sounds severe haha!) the thought of hobbling 35 miles for a black bloody pudding was too much!! 10-15 miles I might have been stupid enough to try haha! So I hobbled out of tent and got timing dibber cut off before I changed my mind. Of course various suggestions were made from fellow marshalls and a couple of non running helpers of resting up for a few hours, sleep etc, come back in 4-5 hours. I had done 65 mile in 12 hours so 100 mile was there for the taking...in theory!! No bugger it I'm in the huff. So hot drinks it was and a change of clothes. I hadn't stopped that long and was shaking like a shitting dog!! Didn't feel cold etc strange but funny....could barely hold my hot chocolate steady!!

Alan had headed to my car earlier for a kip at Green Welly car park so he got a fair fleg when I tapped on the window after 1am haha! So I jumped into a sleeping bag too and thought we would get some kip...But between heel throbbing away and it being Baltic there was no way I was sleeping. Decision made we are heading home!! So I dropped Alan in Arbroath and back in my own bed for 5am brow!! I had to get kip though as workmate was coming to stay and we had drinking to do later!!

Meanwhile the trooper that Tina is was carrying on and finishing the WHOLE RACE!! Unlike us with a brilliant 78 miles. The WHW will be a breeze to this one tough and determined lady...great to see her at various times on route and always cheery...mind you we never seen her at 4am that could have changed!

So to sum up would I do it again? Maybe! Will I do another 24 hour? Definitely, just maybe not in winter, in the dark, when it's cold! So the year has turned into a bit of a disaster as it has for all of us. No Tokyo, Manchester or Devil! Comrades in South Africa still on at present but how I have no idea!! Our Edinburgh to Dubai already cancelled and Dubai to Durban suspended lol. So we are all in this together to tick along, battling apathy to train! Just make sessions count is my advice. Treat every run as a privilege and work hard!!

Well done if you made it to the end and remember elbows out!!

Ruairidh