

A WHW race training plan

I ran the WHW race in June 2011. Before the race, I had ran four ultramarathons - the High Peak 40 mile challenge in September 2008, the Highland Fling (53 miles) in April 2009 and 2011, and the Catevan Trail Ultra (55 miles) in May 2010. I usually ran regularly for three or four months before each ultra, but then didn't do much regular running in between. I didn't really have a training plan for these ultras, other than try and do a fair amount of running.

I had a loose training plan for the 2011 WHW race. I started running regularly in November 2010 and through December 2010, just trying to get out regularly and do a few long runs.

The things I wanted to focus on in my training were to improve my running efficiency, improve my strength and stamina, and to get better at eating on the run.

From January I had a weekly plan to do certain core types of run each week:

1. I would try and do either one long run (over 4 hours), or alternatively two long-ish runs (over 2 hours each) on consecutive days, each week.
2. I would try and do one hilly run each week – my definition of “hilly” was a run that had more than 400m of ascent in it.
3. I would try and do one interval session each week – nothing too fast, the types of session I would do would be something like 6 x 800m, 5 x 1km, or 4 x 1 mile, or some hilly fartlek 5 minutes quick, 3 minute easy.
4. I would try and do some cross training each week – usually this was a bike ride for an hour or so, or a long walk.

That was my core plan for each week, with a few recovery runs during the week if I felt like it. More often than not I didn't manage to do all 4 of these sessions in a week, but I would aim to do at least 3 of them. I tried to do most of my runs off road, and roughly once a month I would try and make a 4 hour plus run into a 30 mile plus run. I didn't have planned easy and hard weeks – I would just play it by ear and if I felt really tired when running I would take the next week pretty easy. There were some times when I was doing the 2 hour runs on consecutive days that I felt pretty tired on the second day, but I think it was good practice for getting used to running with tired legs.

I know there are plenty people who don't do any speed work for ultramarathon training since their race pace will be much slower than the interval training pace. I believe that the benefit of doing some interval training is that it improves running efficiency at all paces, so running at ultramarathon pace should get more efficient and therefore easier. I would aim for an interval pace that made the last two intervals hard work, but more importantly (I think) was I would try and run during the recoveries between intervals at at least my ultramarathon race pace. I think the other benefit of doing this was that I got used to ultramarathon pace feeling like a very easy pace since it was the speed I would run at between intervals to recover.

On some of the long runs, I would make a point of walking long parts of the run (anything uphill) since that would be what I would do on the WHW race – I wanted to practice mixing up running and walking. For any run I was doing over 1 hour long, I would either eat just

before the run or at some point during the run – this was to get myself used to running and digesting food at the same time.

I ran the Fling in April 2011 and took it pretty easy for the first 40 miles, then tried to finish strongly feeling like I could keep on going.

Between January and the end of May, I averaged around 40 miles a week following the loose weekly plan outlined above. I tried to include some hills on all of my runs, and made sure on my longest (30 miles plus) runs there was at least one big climb late on in the run. On WHW race day, I felt really strong on the big climbs in the second half of the race which was a massive boost so I would strongly recommend doing lots of hill running training.