

## West Highland Way Race Training

### A Personal View

Before I start, I would like to state that these are my own thoughts on training for this great race. There are no specific scientific principles behind the programme, it is purely based on my own experiences of 25 years of running, adapted to try a new discipline of ultra distance trail running. This is the programme I used in 2010, please feel free to disregard some of the principles, follow it to the letter, adapt it to meet your needs or ignore the lot!

### Underlying principles

I have 4 rules of thumb around which I base my training for the race;

- You have to prioritise the race – “All roads lead to Milngavie”
- You do not need to do mega miles week after week
- A long block of consistent training is better than short, hard blocks followed by periods of injury, lethargy, tiredness or demotivation
- You do not get fitter as you are actually training, you get fitter as you rest and recover

### Basic training rota

The rough plan is to work on a three week rota;

- Easy – 4 sessions, long weekend run 2 hours
- Medium – 5 sessions, long weekend run 3 hours
- Hard – 6 sessions, long weekend run 3.30 hours

All is done off road, though I realise this is not an option for everyone.

As the year progresses, I might add in extra medium weeks or even drop a hard week, though I would never do two hard weeks back to back.

In addition to this, I aim to run on the WHW once a month, usually between 5 and 7 hours. These are the key sessions of the whole programme, an idea I got from John Kynaston. Try out your clothing, shoes and all your nutrition on these long runs.

### Periodisation

Having taken November off as a recovery after the previous season, I start training at the beginning of December. December and January are the basic foundation months, following the rota, nice and easy and including two runs on the WHW. At no point during this period am I allowed to run faster than 8 mins/mile, even on totally flat paths. (This pace threshold would/could be different for everyone) Having trained off road, many of my runs have an average pace of 10 or even 12 mins/mile. This make everything easy, avoids injury and guarantees a steady start to the long build up. Runs on the WHW are done at the sort of pace I would hope to run the actual race at.

February and March are the important building months. I allow myself to run a bit faster when I feel like it, but remember you are training for an ultra marathon not a 10km race. I also add in more hilly runs, but this is only to condition my quadriceps for the downhill sections of the race. The WHW is not really a hilly race, you will walk up all the significant climbs, eating and drinking; it is the long descents that will trash your legs. Long runs on the WHW done at a pace slightly faster than race pace; psychologically, this improves your confidence as you know you can run slower/easier in the actual race.

April is built around the Highland Fling, with one major proviso. I do not "race" the Fling; it is part of the road the Milngavie. The final two weeks before the Fling, I follow exactly the same programme of training I will do before the WHW race; you do not want to try a new taper method for the first time prior to your big race. Try to run the Fling at around the same pace you will run the WHW race, a bit faster is acceptable, however, the most important thing is to finish thinking you could go on (for another 42 miles?!) and be training again within a week. This takes discipline, but you have to remember, it is usually only 7 or 8 weeks to the big one from here.

From this point to the big race, things are sort of dictated for you. There should be a week of recovery, just enough time to fit in a full rota of training, including one more run on the WHW, followed by a 2 or 3 week taper using the same plan as the Fling. Remember, no matter how you feel during the taper, you will not get any fitter during this time, only tired or injured. Trust the training you have done, be confident and enjoy the journey.

If you question 160 individuals on the start line in Milngavie about their training, you will get 160 different answers. This programme worked for me, got me to the start line in good shape for my first attempt at this wonderful event and I really enjoyed the Road to Milngavie!