Northumberland Castles Marathon – 25 October 2015.

Although this event, with its associated half, has run for a couple of years, this was to be my first crack at it.

The course used to be from Alnwick, finishing in Bamburgh, but is now a two lap route starting and finishing in Bamburgh.

I picked up Stevie and we made our way north in what were very good running conditions for the time of year. Quite cool (for me), light breeze, but dry and pleasant.

We met Davina in the car park, Susie on the way up to register at the stables, then Julie who was marshalling.

Registration was slightly less straightforward than it could have been a s a number of us did not appear on the lists that the people handing out numbers had. This was soon sorted and gave an opportunity to talk to Keith and Gary and also to David Parry, the man in black.

Met Chris Sumsion out by the start too, so it was quite a club gathering.

For a starting contingent of 49, having chip timing seemed unnecessary, but was still a nice touch. It did seem to cause some issues and we were just over 15 minutes late setting off, instead of the advertised 9:30 start.

The half started about 20 minutes later.

We wound our way down and out of the castle to do a lap of the cricket field next door. We had been told that we would be doing a lap of this at the end before finishing on the field.

Then it was off through Bamburgh, being shepherded by marshals to keep us away from the traffic.

After that it was pleasant, slightly undulating running through the countryside on very quiet lanes with little traffic.

Junctions were well marshalled and there were drinks stations every three miles with bottled water.

There were no particular landmarks on the route, although I do recall going through North Sunderland and the very edge of Seahouses, before we headed back towards the imposing structure of the castle.

On entering Bamburgh, the half runners were turned right towards their finish and the full runners were turned left for our second lap. By this point I think I had been passed by six half runners.

I had intended taking this one easy, but reaching half way in 1:53 made me reconsider and keep pushing on, trying to keep each mile below 9 minutes.

The last four miles saw my legs getting rather wobbly, but I kept picking off other runners as I realised that my first sub 3:50 for a few years was very much on the cards.

Entering Bamburgh for the second time, I was directed to the cricket field and as expected, that last lap seemed very hard work, as you had to pass the finish line and then don another quarter of a mile to come back to it.

Nevertheless, I finished in 3:47, for my fifth sub four finish in five weeks.

I was then presented with my generic medal, and a nice t shirt to find that Gary and Susie were third male and female.

After changing, I returned to see all of the NEMC contingent finish, mostly having had very good runs.

This is an unbeatable location and a very pleasant course through the countryside, well marshalled and could do with more entrants.

It does cost twice what one of our events cost, but that seems to be the way of things.

All in all, a very good day and I will certainly be back.

Ian Richardson

28 October 2015.