



GRAN CANARIA MARATHON 22nd January 2012

The Gran Canaria Marathon coming in the middle of January provides an excellent opportunity to escape some of our worst winter weather and run with a bit of sun on your back. The 3rd edition of the event this year firmly established it on the overseas running calendar and attracted runners from all over Europe including some 500 marathoners, 1300 half marathoners and a further 500 in a 10k, (which started 20 minutes after the two main events)

Registration took place on the Friday and Saturday in Las Palmas' main Sports Centre which also acted as race HQ on the day with baggage, showers and changing facilities on hand at the finish. The start itself was at 9am behind the Centre and the route followed the east coast road northwards past the Marina, Port and Naval dockyards. After approx. 6 miles it crossed the narrow strip of land on which Las Palmas is built to reach the promenade at the beautiful Playa de las Canteras. It then followed the promenade southwards all the way to its finish for approx. 3 miles before turning inland through city streets to the finish of the half marathon. Most of the field seemed to disappear here and the 2nd lap was a lonely, strung out in single file affair with things hotting up as temperatures reached the low 20's.

The organisation of the event was faultless throughout with regular pre-race emails to keep us informed, a very well-marshalled course and copious amounts of isotonic drink, fruit, water and encouragement en route. At 30 euros it was, in the tradition of Spanish marathons, also very good value for money with a pre race pasta party, tee-shirt, cap, raincoat and other goodies at registration then a 2nd tee-shirt and medal on finishing. There was then an area at the finish where you could sit in the sun with as many glasses of alcohol free beer as you fancied. The 8 of us from the 100 Club did just that to round off an enjoyable afternoon! This is definitely one for the diary again next year.

Jim Manford
February 2nd 2012



Playa de las Canteras



Start of the Marathon

MARRAKECH MARATHON January 29th 2012



They say Marrakech is a bit like Marmite, you either like it or loath it. I travelled there directly from the Gran Canaria marathon for a 5 day stay and the cultural differences were immediately apparent on leaving the airport, with taxi drivers hustling to offer the cheapest deals into town. Most of the negatives seem to centre on this continual harassment of northern Europeans perceived to be “rich” by the local community. In certain parts of the city you are continually accosted by people wanting to; be your guide, sell you their wares, their grandmothers, pose with their pet monkey, pay to watch them make snakes dance out of a basket ,or simply just hand them dirhams because you look as if you could afford to! Most of this activity takes place around Jemaa El Fna, the central square, and the nearby Souks. Away from there, however, there are sections of the city that are both affluent and cosmopolitan and a match for any area of your average European city. I liked the place.

Registration for the marathon was about as low-key as you can get – in a tent near a busy roundabout – where you were simply given a number and a tee-shirt. No written instructions, no explanations, no route maps – just turn up and run. So that’s what I did. The start was elsewhere in the wide Ave de la Menara on the southern edge of town. There were few portaloos and, as far as I could see, nowhere secure to leave baggage. This year they’d decided to start the approx. 2500 half marathon runners at 8.30am, half an hour before the 500 of us in the marathon. This at least gave us the course to ourselves for the full distance.

It was a perfect cloudless, crisp, sunny morning as we set off but we all knew that meant a hot, sticky final few miles for anyone still running after 4 hours. After a small detour up to the Gare de Marrakech the route then took us on a huge anti-clockwise circle around the perimeter of the city. For the first few miles, heading south through olive groves, we were treated to some quite breathtaking views of a wall of the snow covered Atlas Mountains in the near distance. Returning back to the city we then followed the ancient city walls along the aptly named Rue des Remparts. This was the only part open to traffic, leading to some interesting encounters with men on donkeys, angry motorists and whistle-mad policeman.

We were then taken north east on a beautiful traffic-free stretch through La Palmerie, a literal forest of palm trees, before heading past manicured and well-watered golf courses to hit the main Casablanca road back towards town and the finish. By then the digital roadside thermometers were showing 26 degrees and the day was warming up. At the finish there was quite a nice medal and a friendly hug from the NEMC’s David Parry who’d managed to get round in under 4 hours.

At 60 euros this marathon was twice the cost and half the value of the week before in Gran Canaria. There was no pasta party, no isotonic drinks, no goody bags, in fact no extras at all. It was a totally different experience though and one I’ll long remember. It’s also one I’d definitely like to repeat.

Jim Manford
1st February 2012



The Main Square



The Route



The Start

Battle of Northampton Challenge – 28 January 2012 – by Ian Richardson

Apparently there was once a battle in Northampton, who knew?

This was a fund raiser for the Cynthia Spencer hospice and the 70 finishers, plus DNFs and DNSs raised £2,200, or so we were told as we gathered outside the gym HQ, before we were set on our way by the local MP.

As befits an event, rather than a race, those with road marathon time of 5+ hours set off at 9am and the rest of us at 10am.

This was a five lap event, with a half mile out and back to the lap.

Amazingly, it seemed that most of us, still in a group, missed the first turn under a railway bridge after half a mile. By the time we heard shouting and turned back, it had added .3 of a mile to the 26.5M course. The front runner, who still finished first, ran 28 miles in the end, but didn't seem bothered. It was that sort of event.

The lap went along the river Nene on a tarmac cycle/footpath, then onto a grass path over the river and around a reservoir before passing a canoe centre, and then an out and back on another tarmac path to the Battle ground itself, where the drinks station was. I'd guess it was about two thirds tarmac and one third grass overall. The grass was mostly firm and a little uneven, but fine for road shoes.

Marshalling was excellent and very supportive and the weather was very kind for the time of year, particularly when the sun broke through the clouds.

The finish was back at the gym, passing the British Pepper and Spice building on the way, lovely smells !

A splendidly low key finish involved taking your shoes off at the gym entrance, going into the room set aside for our use and letting the officials know that you had finished and telling them what time you had done. Showers were available and hot soup and rolls provided, with cakes for a small amount.

There was a raffle afterwards where every runner had an entry and you could buy additional tickets I believe. I had a long journey home, so missed that bit, but I was assured that my entry did not win me flights, entry to see Northampton rugby or football, lager, cakes and seemingly much more.

In addition to a certificate and medal, the goody bag had a lovely personalised desk calendar, with the photo on each month having your name or initials on it. That was a really nice touch and unique in my career of collecting goody bags.

So then, in summary, a lovely low key event and a great way to start the marathon year.

Ian Richardson



That's me in the fetching blue polkadot headgear!



Belvoir Challenge

February 25th 2012

The disappointment at unexpectedly missing out on last weekend's Cotswold Marathon made me all the more determined to get to this one this time. I'd first entered it about a decade ago but was prevented from driving to the event by snow blizzards sweeping the country that weekend and had never been back since. It prides itself on going ahead regardless of the weather and some horrendous stories have emerged over the years of battling frozen ice, freezing fog, knee deep mud and 8 hour completions from marathoners who would normally breeze round an off-road marathon in well under 5 hours.

This year, however, there were no weather related problems to worry about after the recent dry spell and the course was said to be in the best condition in it's 20+ year history. Founded in 1990 to raise funds for the local Harby Primary School, the event has gone from small beginnings to a regular sell-out 1100 limit. It incorporates a 15 and a 26 mile challenge for both runners and walkers with approx. 300 in the marathon and 800 in the 15 miler. Both events follow a circular route around the Vale of Belvoir and the Belvoir Escarpment in north-east Leicestershire.

Everyone started together outside the Village Hall at 9 am on a fine, sunny but windy morning. The deep ruts we encountered in the first mile were an early indication of how tough the course would be in inclement conditions. It was then simply a matter of following the crowd around the extremely well way-marked course until the 15 milers disappeared in the opposite direction below the grounds of Belvoir Castle. At this point I was still running with Tim Taylor of the NEMC but as Tim obviously had much more in his legs than me he was encouraged to head off at his own pace – the course was so brilliantly marked out with signs and ribbons at every possible turn, I had no need for a map nor any worries about going astray. The organisers are to be congratulated on the huge effort they must have put into this – I've never been on an off-road marathon with the course so well set out.

This is not to say that it's by any means an easy course. While the early part was fairly flat, there were some tough inclines on the second half. Worse still was the innumerable numbers of energy-sapping stiles, (and gates) that had to be climbed over. Up till yesterday I always thought the Charnwood Marathon held the world record for the largest number of stiles en route. I was wrong! What is it with Leicestershire and stiles? Is it a local obsession? Fortunately the last couple of miles gave some respite as we dropped back down from the escarpment to the finish in Harby. Awaiting us there were all the usual delicacies you find on a run of this nature – cakes, sandwiches, hot drinks, hot soup, desserts etc, etc. to round off a nice little event on a beautiful Spring day.

Jim Manford February 26th 2012



The course must hold the World record for these things! Don't forget to practise beforehand.



MEADOWS MARATHON 4th March 2012

This was the 6th running of this student-organised event started in 2007 by two students from Edinburgh University with the aim of raising money for a variety of charities. Last year 800 runners raised nearly £40,000 for a number of Edinburgh based charities while, for this year, the organisers were hoping to attract over 2000 runners to the event, (they didn't!) This year they introduced a full marathon into the schedule for the first time with the aim of boosting numbers still further. The fact that only 50 or so marathoners turned up for it had, I think, much to do with the fact that a strict 4 hour time limit was in place for the marathon. We were informed that anyone still on the course after 4 hours would have to surrender their timing chip but would be allowed to finish at their own risk. With a nagging and persistent hip problem I knew I hadn't a snowball's chance in hell of getting around in sub 4 but thought I'd still give it a go. After all it was only "up the road" in Edinburgh and with a 12.15 pm start was one of the few marathons you can get to and from on the same day.

As the name suggests, the 26+ mile route stayed as close to the Meadows Park as possible with marathoners required to complete 15 laps of the park after the initial run from Bristo Square to Chalmers Street. Strangely, the Half Marathon, which included by far the largest number of entrants, only consisted of 7 identical laps! The half-marathoners were definitely short changed, being allowed to run only 12.5 miles for their money. We on the other hand, with an extra 1.8 mile loop on top of the 2 x7 ended up getting almost 27 miles for our £25 entry fee! There was also an earlier 5km Fun Run, but I haven't a clue how long that was.

The Full and Half started together after a delayed start and what was immediately apparent was the enthusiasm of a very young field of mostly University students on a very narrow footpath. Many were in fancy dress, with tigers seeming to be the theme of the day. Fortunately, the snow blizzard we'd driven through on our way north had stopped by now and it was actually quite good running conditions throughout. Apart from the monotony of running round and round the same loop I was actually enjoying things until 17 miles when the hip started to slow me down. At precisely 4 hours on the dot the organisers were true to their word and began taking down banners, pulling up chip mats and generally started dismantling the course. Other club members, Iain Singer, Suzie Hunter, Cris Atwell, Ian Richardson and David Parry had all managed to beat the limit but, with a lap still to do, I had the indignity of having to hand in my timing chip. It didn't matter, I finished the final lap in splendid isolation knowing that I'd managed yet another marathon, (plus!)

Was it value for money? Not really. There was only water en route and at the end only a goody bag that seemed to be full of waste paper. (We'd already been given a certificate saying we'd completed the marathon before we even started). Suzie was 2nd female, her prize – a voucher for a Sunday lunchtime meal in some Edinburgh restaurant. Very useful when you live in Cramlington.

Jim Manford 5TH March 2012



Running round,(and round, and round) the Meadows

BLACKPOOL MARATHON March 11th 2012



I've got a certain affinity with this race having done it numerous times over the years. This is probably down to the fact that I achieved my marathon PB there on a red hot day in June 1988. Sadly, 24 years later, I couldn't manage to get within an hour and a quarter of it. The joys of getting old!

For some reason the event has always seemed to be shrouded in one controversy or another - sometimes of the organiser's own making, sometimes not. Over the years we've had late starts, missing water, a wrongly measured course and worst of all, a couple of years ago, a bitter and distasteful internet spat between a disgruntled participant and the race organiser. Both should have known better! Before long we had the usual cyber suspects joining in. You know who I mean - those sad, serial bloggers who've got nothing better to do with themselves than stir things up online under the safe anonymity of some infantile pseudonym. None of this helped to enhance the event's reputation among marathon runners. Many of us thought at the time that the organiser wouldn't want to subject himself to such continued grief just to put on a marathon for others to run. It came as no surprise, therefore, when we were informed that the 2010 event was to be Blackpool Marathon's last hurrah. The real surprise was to see its reincarnation again on the marathon calendar.

This year, however, there didn't appear to be any such problems. I'm not sure if some other body has taken it over, but everything about it seemed to be more professional. It still used the Hilton Hotel on the seafront as its race headquarters and followed the familiar course south along the prom to Star Gate, back to the North Pier then down onto the middle promenade, (horrible concrete surface!) for 3 miles towards Fleetwood before returning on the upper pathway back to the finish of the Half Marathon. The marathon then repeated the same loop. Apart from the two return legs from the Fleetwood direction the course is perfectly flat along the seafront, passing all of Blackpool's iconic sites: the Tower, piers, Golden Mile, Roller Coaster and amusement park. Probably with it being a March start this year there were few crowds and none of the usual boisterousness from the weekend revellers along the course.

The weather forecasters had promised us a warm spring weekend but they must have meant elsewhere as it was quite cold and grey as approx. 450 marathoners together with about another 650 in the Half Marathon set off from outside the Hilton at 9.30am. The conditions, in fact, were pretty good for marathon running - not too cold with very little wind. Certainly most of those I spoke to afterwards were, unlike me, reasonably happy with their time.

Was it value for money? The organisers did promise awards to the first 3 in every age group category so perhaps I should wait to see what, if anything, I get for finishing as 3rd placed Vet 65. (I'm not holding my breath here) To be honest, I'd expect more for the £31 entry fee than only water at the 4 drink stations, (no gels, no isotonic drinks) and I would have expected a tee-shirt as well as the medal for that amount. Nonetheless, it was quite a distinctive medal, there were goodies in the goody bag this time and, we were offered a swim and a shower in the hotel afterwards for only £1 with the proceeds going to the Hilton's chosen charity. So, all in all, not too many complaints from me.

Jim Manford March 13th 2012

Ultra Race Grantham 10/11 March 2012 by Ian Richardson

I don't think that I have ever run a marathon and woken the following morning to think that I could do it all again, and yet that is what this was all about.

29 miles (hence the ultra name) on each of 2 days. Day one started in Cotgrave, just outside Nottingham and followed the canal to the Ramada hotel in Grantham. Day 2 was the same in reverse. It was quite small event, with 72 finishers on day 1 and 49 on day 2. Most people seemed to be doing both days and of those, quite a few were using it in preparation for the marathon des Sables. This meant that there was a range of packs being carried from nothing at all to very full looking affairs with add-on accessories. One chap I saw even ran with sand gaiters on his shoes. Not that necessary in the flat lands of Notts/Lincs, but probably good training.

The weather was very pleasant when we set off at 9am from the leisure centre and after 1.5 miles we were off the road and onto very good running surface on the canal side. There were only three checkpoints, at approximately 8, 16 and 21 miles, so carrying water and food was fairly essential, particularly as the drinks stations had only very basic provisions, although very enthusiastic people at them.

Road building meant a diversion of a mile or so off the canal and onto a road. I felt that this was not overly safe and should have had a marshals and/or "caution/runners" signs, but none were present. Back onto the canal and by half way the hard packed surface had given way to a grass path which was a little more awkward to run on, particularly the part where a large tracked dredging vehicle had left ridges in it. At this point I should say that I had been looking forward to running along a canal and admiring narrow boats and the aspects of life that go with this. This was not to be the case as it is a non-navigable canal, being full of reeds and even bone dry in places, but with the most swans I have ever seen. This gave opportunity for the discussion as to how many people anyone knew who had had their arms broken by a swan. Still none, so far

Day one finished for me in 4:47 and 29th out of the 72 finishers.

Then it was straight into the hotel and a bath.

After a good feed and a sleep, the following day was groundhog day. I felt much better than I expected to, so the compression tights do seem to be helping keep muscle fatigue at bay. One blister on my left foot promised problems to come, but otherwise I was ready to go. Not raring to go, but ready all the same.

So off we went, to see what it looked like the other way around. Having run out of water with 5 miles to go the previous day, I took a bottle to supplement my camelback and also made sure that I had a bottle at each drinks station. The Sunday was warmer again than the Saturday, with blue skies and sunshine all the way around. I now have a two tone head from where I had been wearing a hat. It was definitely a day for running more slowly, at least for me, and I was quite enjoying it, until the second half where fatigue started to kick in. Running on your own under these conditions was testing, and on the occasions that I was passed, I managed to pick up the pace a bit, which was helpful.

Day 2 finished in 5:14 for 24th out of 49. Then it was the long drive home, with Stevie Matthews of the NEMC, who looked fresh as a daisy at the end of day 2. I, on the other hand must have looked rather shabby, and very salty !

At the finish, there was water and coke, but no food at all, unless you count a bowl of Haribo.

The event was £75 for the 2 days. I enjoyed it and really appreciate the type of terrain, but cannot say that it was good or even reasonable value for money, with no food at the end, not that much on the checkpoints, and not even a T-shirt, just a medal for each day.

Did I enjoy it? Yes, very much and it is the first time that I have done anything like this.

Would I do it again? Given the entry cost, and the need for 2 nights accommodation and travel to and from Newcastle, probably not, but it is worth doing.

Ian Richardson
12 March 2012

Paris Eco Trail 80K – 24 March 2012 – by Ian Richardson

I had been intending to have a go at this event for 18 months and had entered it in 2011. An 8 month layoff at that time meant that I could not participate, but the organisers kindly allowed me to transfer my entry to 2012. I shall declare now that I have almost no ultra running experience, although I did do the Grantham 2 x 29 mile weekend, 2 weeks before Paris. This turns out not to have been a good thing.

Registration is in a big marquee by the banks of the Seine, next to the Eiffel tower and at 9pm on Friday it was very warm, not a good sign for the following day.

The organisation was extremely good and on Saturday morning I used my rail ticket provided as part of the entry fee to get to the station nearest the start, where a fleet of busses took us the final few kilometres.

As midday approached, we assembled on a large field behind an inflatable starting point. After a two minute silence for those recently killed by the gunman in Toulouse, we were off.

There were over 2000 of us. Our numbers bore our first name and a flag of our country, so we could spot various nationalities, although most were French. They seem to be keeping this as their little secret.

The race is semi self-supporting, with refreshment stations at 22k, 45k, 55k, and 67k and you had 13 hours to complete the event.

It was a relaxed start and I had set myself a target of 12 minute miles, which seemed perfectly achievable, early on, and would have given a 10 hour finish.

Bottlenecks on the trails kept down the urge to rush ahead and ensured opportunities to take on food and fluid. I had 1.5 L of water to see me through to 22K and it wasn't nearly enough in the considerable heat. This made some of the required kit, such as a waterproof and survival blanket a trifle redundant.

Almost entirely off road, the trails undulated and had some hills in the first 22k, but nothing excessive. I reached the refuelling point in 2:40, almost spot on my target, and without having looked at my watch. As there were no distance markers, this probably wouldn't have helped anyway.

Having had nothing to drink for what I would guess was the better part of an hour, I made sure that my drinks bladder and bottle were both full for the next 23k, which an American informed me were much harder than the section we had just completed. This wasn't cheering news, as I already felt like it had taken a lot more out of me than it should.

He was also not wrong. A gentle start led to some hills of monumental proportions. It was made worse by them often being arrow straight, so that, on looking up, all I could see would be a line of weary bodies, bent double by their kit, the heat, and the gradient.

Occasionally people would just collapse at the side of the trail, looking as if they would never move again.

It was also these hills that caused my fairly chronic Achilles problem to bite with some ferocity. After a while even the flat bits were hurting and the uphill sections were desperately painful.

I struggled on, aware that I wasn't going to get much further, passing more collapsed runners, and one chap with his head in his hands, who appeared to be sobbing. It was that sort of day for some.

Eventually I reached the 45k checkpoint in 6:20, and decided that enough was enough. A combination of heel pain and lack of energy (see earlier comment about Grantham) meant that I was getting slower and likely to miss the cutoff times at later checkpoints and I didn't particularly want to end up wanking the last 25k as I had entered an event to run it, not just to walk around and hopefully finish. Walking marathons may suit some people, but I like to think of myself as a runner, although a fairly broken one by this point.

Quite a few of us had made pretty much the same decision, although perhaps for different reasons, and we made our way down to the nearby railway station in Meudon and got the train back, and had a good feed back at the finishing tent.

Leaving the tent, I watched some runners coming in (it was about 8pm by now).. The end is magnificent. Having spent most of the time out in the parks and forests, you finish along the banks of the Seine, finally crossing it and running up the first section of the Eiffel Tower. Where else has a finish to compete with that !?Overall, it was disappointing to have to quit, but it seemed a sensible decision, and sill seems that way, after a couple of days to let it sink in. I did at least manage a marathon's worth of distance, and wouldn't be at all surprised if I go back and have another go at it.

There is also a 50k version, so no excuse for marathon collectors not to add it to their list and increase the numbers of non French taking part

Ian Richardson 26th March 2012

LAKESIDE WAY MARATHON March 25th 2012

This was the 3rd members' only marathon I'd organised around the Lakeside Way footpath, Kielder, (the first was for the 100 Club, the others for the NEMC) Unlike the previous 2 where the danger of hypothermia was the main consideration for the runners, this time most of us were worrying about the possibilities of sunburn and taking on board enough water to see us safely around the course. In short, it was a glorious sunny day, certainly the hottest of the year and the views around the Lake and surrounding hillside were spectacular. "Britain's most beautiful Marathon!?" – on a day like this it was almost possible to believe the hype!

This year the North East Marathon Club decided to do things a little differently and organise the event on a handicap basis with runners starting off at 15 minute intervals with the idea that we'd all finish outside the Anglers Arms together at approx 3pm. Things, of course, never go quite exactly to plan but we got close to our objective and it was a happy bunch of 30 runners plus family and friends sitting enjoying a well-deserved rest in the sunshine outside the pub for the post-race presentation.

The deadly combination of unexpected heat and unrelenting inclines on the roller-coaster of a course no doubt contributed to some slower than expected times being posted this year. Sadly the anticipated battle for first place between the fastest 3 males ended in something of an anticlimax when Phil Smith failed to show up and Will Horsley recorded a DNF, leaving the field clear for Steven Prentice to romp home an easy winner in 3 hours 18 minutes. In the women's race Susanne Hunter turned the tables on Melanie Horan this time with her fastest ever run around the course of 3 hours 37:52, as opposed to Melanie's 3 hours 44:10.

As organiser the biggest disappointment was the number of club members who, for whatever reason, failed to take their place on the start line. 11 out of 41 entrants is quite a drop out rate – over 25%. All I can say is that they missed a brilliant day! The following unsolicited comments from Elisabeth Stoddart would appear to summarise the feelings of those who took part:-

Thank you once again for a fabulous day out.

Great organisation. I thought it was an excellent idea having staggered starts. It was lovely having the cheers at the end.

Thank you also for the fantastic weather and all the kind helpers, especially your wife.

The views are unbeatable and I feel privileged to be alive and be able to run in such stunning scenery.

Elisabeth

Jim Manford March 26th 2012



Elisabeth with Jim at the Finish

HULL MARATHON April 8th 2012

There was definitely something fishy about the Hull Marathon – for me it was merely the unmistakable aroma from the fish processing factory at the 18 mile mark. Others, with their own fish to fry, expressed more serious concerns about the event. Not sure what Captain Haddock would have made of it if he'd been there! On the day though we were all swimming in the same pool and any urban stretch of 26.2 miles was bound to present its pleasant and not-so-pleasant areas. Hull certainly wasn't any exception to that rule. It was obvious that the race organiser's remit was to attempt to show us the best that Hull had to offer. On balance, they almost got it right.

Approximately 900 of us started off at 8am in light drizzle with a short loop of the city centre past the City Hall, Queen Victoria Square and through a deathly quiet shopping area before heading out through less impressive surroundings on a long, straight stretch in the direction of the Humber Bridge. As promised in the pre-race literature we were then treated to "some of the most iconic buildings in Hull and the surrounding area" which, as well as the Bridge, included the KC Stadium, Marina, The Deep, Humber Quays and through a mix of modern and historic areas such as the Victoria Dock, Hessle and the Old Town and Museum Quarter.

Running over the Bridge between the 10 and 12 mile mark brought back memories of the long extinct Humber Bridge Marathon of the 80's and early 90's, an event I last ran over 22 years ago. Being a linear course that started in Hull and finished in Grimsby we only got to run one-way on the Bridge itself in those days. Yesterday we had the pleasure of running across it, turning in a big loop underneath the bridge and then re-crossing it on the opposite side. There then followed several miles of forgettable scenery until reaching the Marina and old Pier area at approx 19 miles. Here we crossed the Millenium Bridge at The Deep before tackling a long, twisty, out and back stretch on a narrow riverside path. At this stage you were able to meet and greet club mates and friends running in the opposite direction. The last mile was yet another loop of the city centre before the finish near the City Hall.

The course was quite flat throughout and, given fairly good running conditions of light drizzle and little wind, most of those I talked to afterwards were happy with their race times. At least, the 5 of us from the North East Marathon Club, (the 3 Davids:- Cremins, Parry and Robson plus Tim Taylor and myself) weren't complaining. Congratulations go to Tim for achieving his first sub 4 hour marathon!

The main bone of contention for most of us was the lack of any visible mile markers around the route. Not everyone has Garmin's and to omit mile markers at an expensive to enter event with pretensions to being a Big City marathon is totally inexcusable. Post race criticism was also voiced about the accuracy of the course with it coming in under 26.2 miles on some Garmin's – (mine made it minimally short.) Some thought there were too many cobbles, others complained about the number of twists and turns. Some even blamed a lack of marshals for them getting themselves lost! More worryingly though, it seems the leading Female results were incorrect! While some of this can be put down to teething problems, other aspects should be taken on board and rectified. Perhaps I'm not as fussy as some fellow runners as my overall impression of the event was positive - the organisers kept everyone fully updated by email prior to the event, it was well-marshalled with enough water stations and unlimited gels. In addition the spacious Victorian City Hall proved an excellent race HQ and there was a decent bespoke medal and technical tee-shirt on completion. Was it value for money? At £38 it is a bit steep, even for what you get back. Would I get caught in the net again next year? Probably, yes.

Jim Manford April 9th 2012

Running through Hull Marina



CAYTHORPE CANTER (OR) MARATHON April 14th 2012

Ian Richardson and I made our way down to this low-key off road marathon in Lincolnshire on Saturday with no real expectations of what lay ahead of us. Although I'd run this twice before both times were a fair few years ago and my understanding was that the event had grown considerably since then. I was wrong. As things turned out there were only 35 of us in the marathon – nearly all runners and very few walkers, and not too many more in the half marathon that set off half an hour later.

Though the weather forecast for the day had been horrendous we actually started in the main street of the little village of Caythorpe in crisp sunshine, before heading out into the countryside on wide farm tracks to the first check point at Stubton. Whereas on previous occasions route finding had been by way of written instructions and grid references, this year for the first time, the organisers had decided to supplement this with arrows and tape around the course. This made route-finding easy for the most part. The problem with this though, is that the runner's mind soon becomes psychologically dependent on following these signs so if any are missing, (as happened here) runners can easily take the wrong turn (as also happened here!) To be effective signage has to be consistent and placed at every possible deviation en-route. I suppose, with a combination of both written instructions and waymarkers, the organisers could justifiably argue that none of us had any excuses for going astray!

None of this is to distract from the fact that it was a beautiful course through the Lincolnshire countryside, seen at it's best on such a beautiful day. The route itself was a largely flat, anti-clockwise circle through farmland joining the villages of Caythorpe, Stubton, Marston, Barkston and Ancaster. With only two hills of note and a fair bit of road running through the villages, the course was far less demanding than many other off-road marathons on the calendar. My only minor criticism was the 8 mile distance between drinks at the 1st and 2nd checkpoints.

Being very much a local affair, intended to raise money for the village playing fields, most of the villagers seem to be enthusiastically involved in some capacity. Checkpoints were well marshalled and stocked with plenty to eat and drink. At the finish in the sports pavilion there was a very friendly atmosphere, hot showers, a bar and a limitless amount of food and drink. This time we even got a finisher's medal to go with the usual certificate of completion – real value for money for an event costing only £15 to enter.

Jim Manford
15th April 2012

Part of the Caythorpe Canter Route



LINZ MARATHON April 22nd 2012



When London, with its UK marathon monopoly of an April weekend no longer appeals, it's necessary to look farther afield for somewhere new to run. Last year it was Madrid. This time, having never run in Austria and wanting to reach my 200 marathons in 20 different countries target by the end of the year, I decided to give Linz a try.

An early morning flight from Gatwick had us in Salzburg by 9am with plenty of time to look around before catching the midday train one hour along the valley to Linz. Once there registration in the new Brucknerhaus Concert Hall was easily achieved and the afternoon spent sitting in glorious sunshine by the banks of the Danube watching a succession of childrens' races and fun runs – all part of the marathon weekend. After looking in on the Pasta Party we decided to give it a miss. At an extra 6 euros for a tiny plate of spaghetti plus another 2 euros for bottled water, it appeared very poor value for money.

Marathon day started much cooler with a continual threat of rain that didn't materialise. I was surprised at how big this event is with over 15,000 of us lining up together on the Voest Bridge some 2km out of town for a massed start in a variety of races, (full, half, quarter and inline skating marathons) It seems approx. 1,000 of these were actual marathon runners.

As pacemakers were provided my intention was to attempt to follow the green 4hr 15 minute balloons initially and then to see how I felt from there. Shan't do this again! This strategy lasted only a couple of miles before the balloons disappeared skywards in the strong wind and the pacemaker himself became invisible in the seething throng - next to be spotted as I was making my way back from the finish.

The course took us on a variety of loops around the City with the first 10km going through the northern suburbs before re-crossing the Danube for a further 10km loop to the west. The half marathon then left us in the main square as we were treated to a much larger zig zag loop of the southern suburbs, including a pleasant section through a scenic park. Finally, just after 40k we returned to the city centre for the long straight stretch up the Landstrasse – the cobbled, tram-lined, main street, encouraged by cheering crowds all the way into the finish in the main square.

The crowds were, in fact, a constant in a well-supported race organised with typical Tuetonic efficiency throughout. Drink stations were numerous and well stocked with copious amounts of Powerade, cola, bananas, water and other consumables that I didn't have the courage to try. There were live bands, dancing cheerleaders, flags and bunting all round the route giving it the feel of a big city marathon on the day. There was even a posse of Kenyans, presumably too slow to get into London, running for big bucks at the head of the field. At the finish we received an excellent medal, technical tee shirt plus loads of free food and real alcoholic beer. Not a bad day out - even if it is a bit of a long way to go, it's still a nice change from running around the streets of London for the umpteenth time.

Jim Manford April 24th 2012

Finishing in the Main Square, Linz

