

## HAMSTERLEY FOREST MARATHON July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012

This was the North East Marathon Club's first foray south of the river and into the county of Durham. It was also the first club marathon that someone in the club, other than myself, had taken on the responsibility of organising. This time Club Treasurer Ian Richardson was the man in charge and the club is indebted to him for all the hard work he put into it. I'm delighted for Ian that the event was such a big success.

86 runners entered in total, of which 30 were NEMC members. There were also 15 entrants from the 100 Marathon Club, many of them attracted by the opportunity to run their first marathon in Durham as part of the club's challenge for members to complete a marathon in every county in the UK, (George and I were already ahead of them on that score having taken part in the lovely, but sadly now defunct, Wear Valley Marathon in the late 1980's)

Many of the entrants, who hadn't been on our recce. run around the course some weeks ago, were surprised by the challenging nature of the course. It was by no means flat and, after the initial and final section of 2 miles of road, included a series of fairly steep inclines between the two drink stations on each of the 3 x 7.5 mile laps. Within the shelter of the forest trees, conditions were also fairly heavy and muggy making progress even more difficult up the hills. On each of these ascents quite a number of runners resorted to the Kielder-style "tactical walking" solution! Of course, when there's an up it's usually followed by a down and the return section, out in the open, down the other side of the hill provided the compensation of some fast miles aided the following wind. The wind was also a great asset in banishing the hordes of midges present earlier in the day.

The following post-race comments from competitors are typical of the type of feedback the club received about the event:-

"Another great marathon from the North East Marathon club. It was great to see so many different competitors at the start line, and as always, brilliant to see so many members of the marathon club. Well done to Ian for organising such a "challenging" route. After reaching the water station after the hill section, I thought I would be lucky to finish in under 4 hours, but the second half of the lap was fantastic, and I put in some really fast miles. Thank you to all of the marshalls. As always they were really supportive and encouraging, and gave up yet another Sunday to stand in the wind and the rain and be eaten by midgies. A brilliant race!" Melanie Horan NEMC

"Just wanted to say thanks for yesterday's event. It was superbly organised, the race venue was scenic and it allowed just the right level of challenge for me to really get a lot out of the day. It's also a part of the country that I wouldn't have thought of visiting before, though it's lovely and I'd like to come back with my family. The marshalls were fantastic and went beyond the call of duty assisting me as I made an adjustment to my footwear. They were friendly and chatty and supportive, despite being out for hours. I just had no idea that that hill would be there! Still, what goes up must come down and I've never run faster final miles of a marathon." Darren Stockdale Quakers R.C.

The general consensus seems to put the event in the "challenging but rewarding" category, something that most of those who ran yesterday would appear to have enjoyed. Many have already requested that we organise the race again next year. Watch this space (and keep up those hill rep. sessions!) NB. Full results, photos and link to videos of the event have been posted on our website.

Jim Manford July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012 [Jim congratulates Ian on a job well done!](#)



## OSMOTHERLEY PHOENIX 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012

The Osmotherley Phoenix is an annual challenge event, run in tandem with the village's Summer Games, on a large circular route/s incorporating sections of the Cleveland Way over the North Yorkshire Moors. There are 3 distances to choose from; 17 miles, 26 miles with 3,500 feet of climbing and 33 miles, with 4,000 feet of climbing. The route takes runners from the centre of the village North then East along the Cleveland Way for approx. 13 miles to Botton Head, across Urla Moor to Seave Green then over Arnsgill Ridge to Wheat Beck before returning back to the village. The 26 & 33 mile options are definitely not for the faint-hearted!

This was the 14<sup>th</sup> running of the event that nowadays always reaches it's 400 limit well in advance. This year there were 140 entrants in the 17 miler, 75 entrants in the 26 and 198 entrants in the 33 miler. The latter has for some years now been included in the UK Ultra Running Championship series and attracts some of the best ultra distance runners from throughout the UK. Over the 10 years or so I've been doing the Phoenix I've observed the composition of entrants change dramatically. It is now very much a running event that includes a large number of walkers instead of vice-versa. Though organised by the Summer Games Committee, most of the organisers, like my friends Paul & Sue Adams from the 100 Marathon Club, have a running pedigree.

The event very much espouses the NEMC philosophy towards marathon running with it's no frills--no fuss/ low-key, low-cost approach. There is no pandering to runners here: - no shiny direction signs or course marking of the route, no marshals standing at every juncture pointing the way to proceed, no handing out of drinks as you pass, (you stop and pour your own into a mug you must carry) You get, instead, a sheet of written instructions and a set of grid references for check points to which you've got to navigate your own way. All very basic, all very simple. My favourite type of event!

The big concern on the day this year was the weather with Wet Weather Alerts and Flood warnings being issued left right and centre. This no doubt contributed to what appeared to be a considerably lot less than 400 on the start line. I almost turned back myself, faced with dense fog on the long drive down. The fog persisted for much of the race and completely negated the gorgeous views normally found on the course. Worse than the fog, however, was the cloying, strength-sapping mud which made large sections of the course almost unrunnable. As I'd planned on a leisurely stroll round anyway, I was quite happy to simply fast walk most of it. It still didn't prevent the now almost obligatory fall at 20 mile, however. This time the limbs survived but the Garmin didn't!

This is a very tough course no matter which event you choose, with at least 5 seriously steep ascents on the 26 mile route. In the wet conditions, the descents were equally as harrowing. The ascent of Arnsgill Ridge, when fatigue has set in after the 17 mile check point, is perhaps the hardest hill I've ever encountered on a marathon course - more akin to what you find in a Category "A" Fell Race. It made last week's hill at Hamsterley seem more like Henman Hill at Wimbledon by comparison.

At £7 to enter, with food and drink at check points and a free tea and massage plus certificate and cloth badge at the finish, the Osmotherley represents excellent value for money. All proceeds go to the maintenance of the village hall with any surplus being donated to charity. The fact that the race sells out in advance each year provides a firm answer to the thinking that runners might be put-off by cheap entry fees. The Osmotherley has built up it's deserved reputation each year as word has spread among the running fraternity.

I appreciate that, as consumers, we are all allowed to express our freedom of choice in deciding which events to enter. I wonder though how many runners in choosing to stump up £50 or so for some corporately organised trail marathon realise what they are missing by ignoring such little gems as this one. There are others out there of equally good value. Ignore the hype and the high prices, ignore the razamatazz, the fancy website, the corporate sponsorship, the clever marketing ploys, the smiling celebrities and the size of the goody bags on offer. How does this sound?:- The Poppyline Marathon £7, The Cambridge Boundary Run £8, The Birmingham Canal Canter £7, Sandwell Six Towns Marathon £5, The Pathfinder Marathon £7, The Herts Hobble £7 and the Osmotherley £7. Seven excellent off-road marathons, plus change - all for the entry fee of, say, one of next year's Endurance Life Co.'s Coastal Trail Series at £50 a pop!

J Manford  
July 8<sup>th</sup> 2012

## FAIRLANDS VALLEY CHALLENGE July 15<sup>th</sup> 2012

The “challenge” in the title is to complete one of a series of events of either; 12, 18, 26.2 or 50km on a multi-terrain circular route around the Hertfordshire countryside, starting and finishing at Marriotts School in Stevenage. Navigation is by 4 pages of detailed route description and grid references to the 5 check points on the 26.2 mile route.

I’ve done this event 3 times previously and despite, (or perhaps, because of) the overly detailed route description have always managed to get lost at some stage – an experience that seems to have been shared by most who take part. It’s a convoluted route with far too many twists and turns that can be easily missed by anyone not running and reading at the same time – something that I find impossible to do. Nonetheless, it’s a popular event with up to 800 accepted over the 4 distances and one to which people return year after year.

I’m not sure how the organisers calculate accurate finishing times for runners though. It must be a bit of a nightmare for them. There are as many as 8 different start times including an 8am start for the 50k Walkers, a 8am to 9am start for 26.2 mile walkers, an 8.45am start for the 50k runners plus a 9.30am massed start for runners in the 26.2 mile trail race. In practice, a large number of runners simply ignore the latter, start with the walkers and then break into a run once out of sight of the start line. Unless I’m mistaken, in the past warnings were posted about runners reaching the check points before they opened and there were officials at each check point recording runners’ numbers. This year there was none of that and the check points checked nothing - merely serving as glorified drink stations. The explanation I was given was that the volume of runners had grown too large to record at each check point. It certainly seemed to leave the finishing-time system open to abuse. But there again, what runner with integrity would want to lie about their finishing time?

For what I’ve promised myself will be the final time, I took the overnight bus down to Stevenage for this event. (Changing buses at 5am at Milton Keynes Coach station when there has been a Music Festival in the vicinity is definitely not recommended as preparation for any type of marathon) As this got me to the Race HQ before 7am and I needed to be finished in time for the luxury of an early train home, I’d already decided that I’d start with the 8am walkers and try and fast-walk my way around the course to be finished by 2.30pm. The added worry of the uncertainty of wearing brand new, untested trail shoes, purchased in haste after my Innovates disintegrated last weekend, was also a factor in this decision. As things turned out, while still not preventing a long struggle with sore and skinless heels, this was the best thing I could have done on the day. Unlike Osmotherley last week, it’s not a particularly difficult course. The Hertfordshire countryside has neither the ascents and descents nor the rugged terrain of the N. York Moors. After 2 days of torrential rain in the South however, plus all that had gone before, the course was in the worst condition it’s ever been. Although the day itself was dry and warm, large sections of the course were more swim-able than run-able with cloying mud a feature throughout. At least by fast-walking instead of attempting to run these sections it was possible to read the instructions at the same time, attempt to minimise heel damage and finish without getting lost!

One of the best features of this event is it’s social aspect. The Fairlands Valley Spartans running club have an excellent BBQ at the finish where runners can get together afterwards, have a good natter and wait for friends to finish. This more than compensates for what must be the poorest marathon medal ever. Still, for only £12 to enter, I’d much rather have multiple cheeseburgers and a nice hot shower than a fancy medal any day.

Jim Manford  
July 15<sup>th</sup> 2012

### Out on the Course



## DUNDEE MARATHON July 29<sup>th</sup> 2012

Shouldn't really have done this one after having sat in the house for a fortnight, unable to wear socks and shoes, because of an infected heel from the Fairlands Challenge. However, couldn't afford to miss another marathon if I'm to reach 200 this year so went anyway - and suffered the consequences!

That's not to take anything away from the event itself. This was a low-key multi-terrain marathon around the 27 miles of Green Chain Cycleway that surrounds Dundee, very well organised by a company calling itself "Eventfull Management Ltd" Normally I'm a bit suspicious of such events as, often, the runners' needs come second to other considerations - not so in this case though. The event included a marathon for the first time in what, for the previous 3 years had been a half marathon only event, both starting at the same time from the beautiful and spacious 640 acre Camperdown Park to the north of the city. Both races followed a circular route from the park with the half finishing by the banks of the Tay near Broughty Ferry, from where competitors were bussed back to the start. The marathon continued for a further 9 miles along the north shore of the river before at 22 miles heading uphill back to the park. With 1000 entrants in the half marathon and only 115 or so in the full, the second half was always going to be a lonely slog back to the finish.

After on-site registration on what was a very warm morning we all headed off uphill through Templeton Woods for the first couple of miles before emerging onto a lovely downhill stretch to past the 4 mile mark. The route continued fairly flat through fields and on cycle paths alongside busy roads until mile 11. We then descended again down to the Tay foreshore for a final mile, (for the half marathoners) to a congested finish area in Broughty Ferry. I can see what the organisers were thinking here in trying to run the full marathoners through cheering crowds but in reality it didn't work - the area was far too crowded with newly finished half marathoners and their families, leaving little space for the rest of us to progress.

Within less than a mile the crowds had dispersed leaving those of us in the full well strung-out along the foreshore. The views of the river were rewarding initially but, at 16 miles, roadworks meant a detour along a coned off section of busy road and through a run-down area of dockland. Arriving back on the foreshore at 18 miles we continued along, what for me, was the best bit of the route; under the Tay Road Bridge, around the Olympia Leisure Centre, past Dundee Rail Station and to the Royal Research Ship "Discovery" which took Scott to the Antarctic all those years ago. Continuing along the newly refurbished Esplanade we passed under the Tay Rail Bridge and around the Airport before heading back to the park on a much less interesting section skirting Dundee Technology Park and the busy A90. There was still a mile to go within the park confines, with a sting in the tail being a final uphill section through woods before the finish at Camperdown House.

As mentioned earlier this was a well-organised event. There were marshals virtually everywhere or, where needed, pre-painted yellow route markers. The police were out in force too at every road crossing - this must have cost! All the helpers, (even the police) had obviously been pre-programmed to offer encouragement and support making a friendly atmosphere on the day. Not sure if they'll offer the marathon again next year with only 100+ taking it on when they can fill the event with half marathoners anyway. Maybe the disparity in entry costs contributed to this - £26.50 for the full as opposed to only £15 for the half, (and did we all get the same 99p medal at the end?) It would have been good too if there'd been somewhere indoors to change and leave clothing. Everything took place outdoors, including registration - great when it's a sunny day but not so good when the downpour arrived in the afternoon. Would I do it again? I think I would - mainly for the bit along the Tay.

Jim Manford  
July 30<sup>th</sup> 2012



Start/Finish at Camperdown House

## Northumberland Ultra - 62 mile/100k – 04/08/2012

For some reason now inexplicable, I entered this race at the start of this year thinking 'I'm training up for the 69 mile Carlisle to Newcastle Ultra in June – 62 miles a few weeks later will be no problem.....'

It was well organised by Adventure Hub, who arrange a few different Ultra's and adventure type races and events all over the world apparently, and quite a few in the UK. They put together a fairly comprehensive route guide and also sent out a power point presentation of the course with a voice over explaining the key points of the route and what to expect, which I thought was a really good touch.

As well as the Ultra there was a Marathon option, both of which started in Wooler at 8am and then set off into the Northumberland wilderness. I don't think these events have been all that well advertised as there were only about 25 entered for the Ultra and 5 doing the Marathon and this is the second year they have been going.

There were checkpoints every 10-13 miles or so, which were pretty well stocked and manned by friendly faces. At the finish you did get a tech T shirt (but I really want one that says '100k' on it somewhere! ) but no medal, which was a bit disappointing. The entry was £40, which isn't all that cheap, but it must be a lot of work for a relatively small field.

This was by far the toughest thing I have ever done! The route was, at least for me, really hard going. There were long stretches that I found unable to run at all, due to being boggy marsh and relentless hills. I had foolishly thought that I would be looking for a time of approximately 12 – 14 hours, but half way in I was averaging 15 minute miles, walking most of the way and managing to run for only about five or ten minutes out of each hour. If it hadn't been for the two other guys I was running with I think I would have had to pull out as soon as it got dark. The last checkpoint was 13 miles from the end, which we reached at 10pm and it took over four more hours to reach the finish, stumbling around in the dark trying to follow the vaguest of trails!

The winner did it in about 13 hours, so for someone with better legs it must be more run-able, but out of the 25 that started only 11 finished and most of them were after midnight. A few runners converted to the marathon distance at the first check point (7 miles) and the Marathon times ranged from 5:24 to 9:38. For me it wasn't an enjoyable outing, as I was wanting and expecting to run more than walk. It was a pretty impressive location for an adventure/ultra event, but not one in my opinion if you're wanting to 'run'. Towards the second half of the route there was more of a definite path, as you come on to the Pennine Way, however I didn't have the legs or the stomach to put much effort in at this point.

I don't know what the Marathon route was like, as it veered off from the Ultra after about 7 miles, but apparently one runner went into the marshes up to his waist at one point and had to be pulled out.

The scenery was stunning however, but then it is Northumberland National Park. From now on I'm going to stick to the marathons! I wouldn't personally recommend it as a run - but as a trek/endurance event it was impressive. It offers 3 points towards Ultra Trail Mont Blanc registration and includes over 3800 metres of hills. So if you fancy doing it next year don't say I didn't warn you!

Rich Cutter 07/08/2012

## ELSECAR 27 August 11<sup>th</sup> 2012

To give it its correct title, the Elsecar Skelter, this is an off-road event organised by the Vermuyden, South Yorkshire group of the LDWA from the Market Inn close to the Heritage Centre there. It advertises itself as, "Come and experience some of the goodies that South Yorkshire has to offer. Historic houses, amazing follies, landscaped parkland, wonderfully varied countryside with some terrific views and of course warm Yorkshire hospitality all included," and doesn't disappoint on any of these claims, particularly the latter. The route traverses, among other things, old coal mining areas that have been returned to nature as well as taking in Wentworth Woodhouse, Wentworth Village, Wharnccliffe Crag, Wortley Hall and Tankersley Old Hall, where scenes from the film Kes were shot. Runners and walkers are able to choose between distances of 15, 21 and 27 miles with the added benefit of being able to change between distances on the day. 94 competitors had pre-entered, though I'm not sure how many of these had turned up at the start of what was to be a very warm day.

I have to admit to going into this one not having done my homework properly and being totally unprepared as to the true format of the event. For some reason I mistakenly believed that the route was well signposted and easy to follow. At registration, however, I found that I'd somehow missed the rear 2 pages of the entry form recommending appropriate OS survey maps and advising entrants to carry waterproofs, compass, whistle and survival bag. On being handed 4 pages of detailed navigational instructions with the grid references of 10 different check points, (including 4 self-clip) to which we had to find our way, I knew that trouble lay ahead. This is an event on which previous route knowledge is almost essential if you're not to end up getting lost. Fortunately, at this point help arrived in the form of 100 Club colleagues Pauline & Bill Howes, Roger Biggs & Gina Little plus the NEMC's Tim Taylor and partner Lisa, (running her first marathon), who were all as equally confused by the pages of directions as I was. On the "there's safety in numbers/seven heads are better than one," basis we all agreed that the best way for us to have any chance of finding our way around the course was to stick together en route.

One of the problems of following detailed written instructions is that it requires total concentration unsuited to running at any speed. Continually having to refer to what's written down also makes it difficult to achieve any sort of running rhythm. There were also more twists and turns than a fairground ride, leaving us to wonder whether a more appropriate title for the event should have had "helter" in there too! Things went fine at first and we made good progress for the first 6 miles until, becoming lazy, we collectively misread the instructions and found ourselves in the dead – end of an industrial estate. I guess we should have learnt from that but worse was to follow around the 13 mile point. The instructions here were somewhat imprecise and ambiguous. They mentioned a broad grassy track and a mast – the problem was there were a number of what looked like broad grassy tracks and the only mast we could see was miles away to the north east, whereas the one we wanted was not yet visible over the brow of a hill behind us. We lost about an hour here! I don't blame anyone though and we were still in good spirits as we made our way, wisecracking about Duncan Bannatyne, up to the Dragon's Den self-clip checkpoint at Wharnccliffe Crag.

From then on it became more about having a good time than running a good time. The latter would have been difficult anyway given the jungle-like undergrowth in places, the long stretches through thick, unharvested rape seed oil and the unavailability of what appeared to be fully grown nettle plantations. Perhaps a machete needs to be added to the kit list. It was impossible too, not to linger at the 5 manned checkpoints stocked with food in abundance; plates and plates of every type of sandwich plus chocolate, lemon drizzle and cream cakes galore. All this for the princely sum of £8.50

I chatted to the organiser Frank Lawson at the finish, after our complimentary pie & peas and a couple of pints. He was curious as to why more and more runners are entering what he feels is an event designed for, and more suited to, walkers. I tried to explain that not all of us marathoners are road runners interested solely in fast times and that some of us actually preferred the ambiance of off-road events, in the company of friends, on warm summer days through the beautiful English countryside. (That seemed more polite than telling him that his was the only marathon-distance event on in the UK that day!)

Jim Manford  
August 12<sup>th</sup> 2012

## NORTHUMBERLAND COAST MARATHON August 19<sup>th</sup> 2012

This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> of our events in this year's 4 event series "Tour of Northumbria" It was also the 3<sup>rd</sup> running of the event itself which appears to be benefitting from positive word-of-mouth recommendation from previous participants. So much so that the event itself sold out it's entry limit of 100 months in advance this year and, if places had been available, there was approximately another 100 waiting to enter. I guess the moral is, enter this one early if it's on again next year.

As things turned out, as is common with marathon entries for some reason, there was the usual 25% plus of no-shows on the day. Those who failed to arrive missed a wonderful day out on the stunning Northumberland coast. Though thunderstorms were forecast for later in the day it was actually a beautiful sunny morning as the runners lined up on Alnmouth beach at 9.30am. Ahead of us lay 13 miles of beach, trail and coastal path north to the mid-point on Long Nanny Bridge at the southern end of Beadnell Bay. From there, a beach loop brought us back to the drinks station at Newton Steads and the journey home to the finish again at Alnmouth. The course remained close to the sea in both directions passing through Boulmer, Craster, Dunstanburgh Castle and Newton-by-the-Sea, taking in some magnificent coastal scenery en route.

Unfortunately for the runners, as the temperature increased so did the humidity, making uncomfortable conditions for running. It was only in the latter stages of the race that things cooled down and the predicted deluge arrived. By then though the faster runners had already finished allowing a dry presentation ceremony in the Red Lion beer garden. Despite the conditions some fast times were posted on the day. The NEMC's own Tim Bateson easily won the men's race in 3 hours 20:08, some 7 minutes ahead of his nearest competitor, Simon Green who was one of a number of entrants from the Porter Valley club in the top 10 in the field.

Perhaps the outstanding performance of the day, however, came from Alnwick Harriers Jo Gascoigne-Owens who ran a brilliant race to gradually overcome spirited opposition from Melanie Horan and Julia McLure to finish 6<sup>th</sup> overall, in a new female course record time of 3 hours 38:17, some 33 minutes faster than last year's winning time. As an Alnmouth resident, Jo was delighted to do so well on her home turf, (or should it be "beach")

Unfortunately, acting as "Sweeper" for the course in the absence of the 2 planned-for St John Ambulance cycle responders, meant that I missed not only the Presentation but also the chance to congratulate Tim, Jo and the other award winners on their performances. Speaking to other participants after the event and judging by written compliments already received it seems clear though that most people enjoyed their day on the coast despite the hot and humid conditions they'd had to overcome.

Jim Manford  
August 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

Glad that's another one over and done with. No more worries – until next year maybe?



## SANDWELL SIX TOWNS MARATHON August 26<sup>th</sup> 2012

The August Bank Holiday weekend is a busy time for marathon running. I had the choice of going with friends to either the Guernsey Marathon, (£55 entry), the Boston 6 Hour race, (£25), or enjoying the hospitality of Pauline & Bill Howes and accompanying them to their local Sandwell 6 Towns Marathon, (£5 to enter.) I chose the latter.

Organised by Sandwell Borough and the local Ramblers group the off-road marathon is an annual challenge event for runners and walkers held in conjunction with the Sandwell Community Show – believed to be the biggest free event of it's type in the UK. There are three distances to select from; 26, 18 & 14 mile – all with separate start times from Sandwell Country Park. The marathon race, with approx 50 of us in the field was first to go at 8am.

The idea of the event is to link up the 6 towns that make up the Borough of Sandwell by using country parks, open spaces, but mainly by making extensive use of the extensive canal system that was the life-blood of the Black Country during it's Industrial Revolution heyday. In many respects it reminded me very much of one of my favourite LDWA events, the Birmingham Canal Canter with, at times a sense of déjà-vu as we ran along some familiar canal towpaths.

The route description was another one of those 4 page affairs of the “go left/go right” variety explaining how to navigate to the grid references of the 4 checkpoints we needed to reach en route. This time though the description was both unambiguous and easy to follow, due mainly to the fact that so much of it was spent running along long, flat stretches of canal towpath. Apart from having to pass through a couple of housing estates linking one canal to another, this was a surprisingly scenic run in a part of the country not generally known for it's scenic beauty.

The event did, however, have a nasty sting-in-the-tail taking us through the 2.8 km long Netherton Tunnel – the widest, longest and last of the great Victorian canal tunnels, built at the cost of 9 lives,(said to haunt the tunnel), and many serious injuries. The organisers had warned us to beforehand that a torch was essential equipment for the route. Guess who forgot to bring one! It was quite unnerving attempting to grope your way through flooded walkways in pitch darkness with water dripping onto your head from above. I only managed by holding on to the railings with one hand and clinging on to Bill, (who'd remembered his torch), with the other. This has to be the most unusual experience I've encountered on any marathon!

The fresh start to the morning grew hotter and more humid as the day progressed but, fortunately, as is usual in events of this nature, there was plentiful food and refreshment en route as well as at the finish. When we'd set off at 8am the park was virtually deserted. We returned to side-shows, circus and stalls and could hardly reach the finish line for the thousands of visitors to the Show. This was an excellent day out for £5 and tremendous value for money. Can't help but wonder what extra the runners got for 11 times that amount at Guernsey!

Jim Manford

August 27<sup>th</sup> 2012

The Netherton Tunnel: 2.8 km of pitch darkness. Remember to bring a Torch next time!



## **Boston 6/12 Hour ultra event – 26 August 2012 by Ian Richardson**

This is an event that I only opted to do because a friend was running her 100<sup>th</sup> marathon there. I'm really pleased that she picked this event as it was excellent.

The day before had seen thunderstorms and flash floods, but Sunday dawned grey, mild and pleasant and the clouds lifted a little as the temperature rose during the morning to give very good conditions for running.

The start for both 6 and 12 hour events was at 7.30am and took place on a one mile lap in Witham way country park. The start/finish of the lap was a 200m grass loop, after which we went onto the tarmac shared use path and a fairly winding and flat course, with one long straight stretch by the river. This gave lovely views of the Boston "stump", a large church which dominates the flat landscape.

Around the grass loop there was plenty of space to put out your own food and drink to pick up as you passed by, and most participants had a helper with them. I shared one, called Graham, who was a great help in filling and handing me my water bottle as I passed.

The recorders were also on the edge of the grass loop, with each of them assigned to 2 or 3 runners.

This meant that each lap I heard my name called out and a cheer of encouragement, which was great.

At this point I should mention that this was not the largest event in which I have taken part. There appeared to be 7 entrants in the 6 hour event, and less in the 12 hour category.. I think that the organisers outnumbered us !

However, because of the nature of the lap, you would be passing or being passed on a frequent basis, which gave opportunity for conversation on the very pleasant and varied course.

As the morning wore on, the shared use path was getting more cluttered with people and a lot of dogs. All were friendly (people and dogs), but also prone to getting in the way at times (also people and dogs). That said, it wasn't an issue and gave some variety to the occasion.

My plan had just been to run a marathon's worth of distance at 9mins/mile pace and call it a day. It happened that Helen, whose 100<sup>th</sup> it was, lapped me at about 22 miles and we ran together for the next 4miles/laps. During this time she talked me into doing more, the justification being that I could eat more cake afterwards!

I reached the marathon distance in 3:55 and felt remarkably chipper, so decided to carry on to 30miles. My Garmin packed up just after the marathon distance and I lost the ability to count laps, so that when I thought that I had run 29 laps and asked my recorder, just to check, she told me that I had done 30. Hooray !

As the furthest that I have run previously was 31 miles, I decided on 32 and so did 2 more laps for a time of, I think, 4:39.

I still felt as if there were a fair bit left in me, which was a nice feeling. The field with the grass loop was immediately adjacent to the football club and we had use of their showers and changing facilities. After the 6 hours was up, with the last 10mins being entirely around the 200m loop, to give an accurate distance for everyone, there was a brief pause followed by individual presentations of a commemorative medal with an image of the "Stump" in the centre, and also trophies.

Pam Storey of the 100 marathon club then presented Helen with her well deserved 100marathon club medal and kit, and cake was consumed !

This really was a great day. The weather was spot on, the organisation faultless and incredibly supportive and friendly. The competitors were more like participants, creating a very welcoming atmosphere.

I can recommend this event to anyone, and look forward to having a proper go at the full 6 hours in the future.

Ian Richardson  
26 August 2012

## HIGHLAND PERTSHIRE MARATHON September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012

This was the NEMC's first club outing to an event with 13 of us making the journey to Aberfeldy. 11 took part in the marathon and 10 of us stayed as a group at the nearby Dunolly Adventure Centre where we were given sole use of a house on the complex. Though the accommodation was a bit spartan, it nevertheless suited our needs and was good value for money at only £14 per head.

The grandly named Perth Highland Marathon, (and Half Marathon), is the first venture into marathon organisation by the Rotary Club of Aberfeldy in partnership with local and national charities. Their advertising blurb claims it to be "one of the best value for money packages on the Scottish circuit," offering free camping and car park – a pasta party – post race refreshments – shower & swim – leg massage – ceilidh & BBQ – medals and prizes in each category. All for the sum of £36.

Registration in the Town Hall on Friday evening was an easy, if somewhat pedestrian affair. (The organiser's insistence that we complete medical details in front of the person issuing the numbers simply wouldn't have worked at busy periods) We were then given a goody bag, (but not the promised timing chip), containing a t-shirt, which in my case, turned out to be the wrong size. The pasta at the nearby pasta party was hot, tasty and plentiful – setting us up nicely for our visit to the pub. Next morning news somehow filtered through that the missing chips were being issued near the start area. I'm told that a number of runners missed this information and went directly to the start without a chip to record their finishing time!

Shortly before start time the approx. 150 runners in the marathon were then all lined up in the road and led by the obligatory piper to where the Lady Mayor waited to sound the official claxon and we were off. (The half marathon started 30 minutes later) The route consisted of 2 laps of the half marathon loop on minor roads not closed to traffic on either side of the River Tay. Though described as flat in the literature it was anything but in reality, with undulations for most of the way and a particularly severe hill to tackle at both 8 and 21 miles coming out of the Taymouth Estate. In addition, a stiff westerly breeze confronted us for the first few miles of each lap until we were able to cross the Tay near the picture-postcard village of Kenmore. As you would expect from a Highland event, the views throughout were quite special – none more so than near Kenmore with the magnificent Loch Tay stretching into the distance. This was shortly followed by a beautiful traffic-free section through the Taymouth Estate with the river on our left and golf course on the right heading past the castle before confronting the steep section mentioned earlier. Fortunately, once at the top of this we were compensated by a long, fast downhill section on the A827 returning to Aberfeldy. The finish for both events was in another imposing setting next to the Black Watch Monument by the banks of the Tay. There tea, coffee, cakes and tasty fresh doughnuts awaited in a large marquee. After that a shower, swim and massage were available to all in the nearby state-of-the-art academy cum leisure centre. It would have been nice too to have stayed afterwards for the BBQ and ceilidh!

The main complaint of most runners afterwards concerned the mile markers en route. These were measured at 3 mile intervals, (3, 6, 9, 12 and so on) but rarely coincided with what we had on our Garmin – appearing instead to have been scattered at random along the course. It was particularly disconcerting to find the 21 mile marker more than a mile incorrect with most of us having already recorded 22+ miles by this stage. The general consensus, however, was that for a first attempt the organisers generally got most things right. With a little bit of tweaking here and there, (registration, chips and mile markers, plus I certainly didn't appreciate being handed a medal with "Half Marathon" on the ribbon for my efforts!) this event could be a welcome addition to the marathon calendar. I really enjoyed the day – it was just nice to be doing a road marathon again after the last 7 off-roaders since July – and I'm pleased to hear that the Rotary Club is seriously considering making it an annual event.

J Manford September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012

In front for once!



## **The Ponton Plod – 27.5 miles – 16/9/12 – Ian Richardson**

It seemed to be a while since my last LDWA-type event, so I thought it was time for another. This one takes place from the village of Great Ponton, just off the A1, a few miles south of Grantham, in rural Lincs.

For walkers and runners there are 12, 17 and 27 mile events on offer at the usual low prices, and with proceeds going to support a children's hospital in India.

There were just over 70 in each event and most of the 27 mile entrants appeared to be runners. We set off from the village community centre at 8.30a.m. on a very pleasant, slightly blowy sort of day. Close to ideal really.

In about half a mile we had crossed over the A1 (by a footbridge ) and were into the event proper. It felt a bit odd running across a golf course, but no one seemed to mind and shortly after that the 17 milers split off to the right and the rest of us carried straight on.

It was a genuine multi-terrain event, with the early part being good paths and bits of tarmac.

We passed through the lovely looking villages of Stoke Rochford and Skillington, before reaching the first checkpoint after 6 miles. In true LDWA fashion, cakes and chocolatey things were available, as well as water and squash.

The route description was very comprehensive. In fact it was a bit scary looking at it, as it mentioned compass bearings. There was no real need for concern as it was quite well marked with little paper signs. In addition, I had the route on my Garmin and was able to follow the little arrow. I was also in and around people for almost all of the event, so as well as having company, we also had the Garmin, route descriptions and markers, so that there was no getting lost, just a few moments of indecision. Later in this part of the course, we started to encounter some awkward terrain in the form of fields where the soil had set into what were effectively balls of concrete, and the stalks remaining from the harvesting process conspired to poke into your feet and tear at the shins. I am more used to running around field edges, so running across ploughed fields seemed unusual, but they were the proper waymarked paths.

These fields were followed by about a half mile of appallingly rutted track, which seemed to have been used by motor bikes/quad bikes. This was a particularly difficult bit and we were all pleased to be out of it and into Croxton Kerrial village hall at 13.6 miles for the next checkpoint, where the array of food was even more extensive, taking in cheese and egg sandwiches and tea/coffee.

After a quick feed of the face, it was reluctantly onwards and over another couple of ankle breaking fields before the terrain improved.

Through another couple of pretty villages and past a reservoir, we were rejoined by the 17 mile route and arrived at the third checkpoint of Harlaxton village hall at 20 miles. The tuna sandwiches here had just the salty taste I needed as we carried on across the varied terrain to be joined by the 12 mile walkers who had set off an hour after us.

Checkpoint 4 at 23.5 miles at Wyville village hall was a quick stop for a water refill and then on the way, as we could smell the finish. What had been a relaxed group of between 5 and 9 at various times now became a bit competitive and broke into a few smaller groupings as people pushed on for the last four miles,

These were all on good surfaces, paths, roads and farm tracks and took us back over the A1 to the finish.

I managed 4:41 for 10<sup>th</sup> place and was greeted at the end by a choice of three soups and two puddings, as well as water, squash and tea and coffee.

Had a good chat with some of the runners that had been keeping me company and we departed in warm sunshine.

They even had some rather nice tech T-shirts on sale for £8. All this on the same day as the Great North Run and for only £10!

Where else can you get that sort of value? I have since had an email to say that the event raised almost £2,000, which is excellent news. This is a very friendly event and really was most enjoyable. I would thoroughly recommend it and hope to be back.

Ian Richardson

20 September 2012

## GREAT LANGDALE MARATHON September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012

I've been coming back to this event for over 20 years now. It's definitely one of my favourites, and though billed as "The UK's toughest road marathon," the testing and difficult terrain is more than compensated for by the sheer beauty of the mountain scenery. No more so than on a perfect, sunny autumnal day like Saturday's with views to die for at every turn. Surely this one really is "Britain's most beautiful marathon"

The race starts on the valley floor outside the New Dungeon Ghyll Hotel at the head of the valley and consists of two anti-clockwise loops climbing (and descending,) on both sides of the Langdale Valley. The larger group of half marathoners do one lap and the approx. 150 in the marathon go round twice. The route features two of the most severe climbs on any road marathon in the UK. Just after 1 mile we climb out of the valley on what is appropriately signposted on the day, "Rocket Rod's Pass," after eccentric race organiser Rod Berry who has singlehandedly kept this race going for over two decades. Not too many people actually manage to run all the way up this mile-long hill despite it coming early in the race! Of course, those of us doing the marathon get to meet it again 13 miles later. There's another great sign at the summit saying "Now look back and admire the view"

After the compensatory downhill section from the top into Little Langdale, the course then follows an undulating stretch on narrow, traffic-choked roads until climbing again up to the main A593 road, the only non-scenic part of the course. The road is then crossed at 6 miles into a very peaceful section around Skelwith Fold. We drop again to meet the main road at 8 miles at the Skelwith Bridge drinks station. Unfortunately the climbing then begins in earnest for a further two miles to the 10 mile mark near Close House Youth Hostel, before some sort of respite is given by a steep downhill section back to the main valley road. After that it's a case of keeping it together for yet another undulating 3 miles through Chapel Stile to the end of the first lap. Then, it's repeat the whole thing again for a 2<sup>nd</sup> lap. Sounds tiring, doesn't it. Believe me it is, especially if you're not well-prepared!

This year, for the first time here, I had a nightmare of a run, culminating in my first ever 5 hour plus road marathon. The ongoing repercussions from a recent family emergency, for which I had to return early from a holiday in Spain, meant that I was neither physically nor psychologically prepared for the race. It was one of those situations where, from the off, you know there's nothing in the tank, your legs won't do as they're told and that you're going to suffer if you continue. I did consider pulling out but then remembered Dave Major's mantra of "running marathons to have a good time, not to get a good time" Not that the latter was ever on, the way I was feeling – it took a supreme effort of willpower to continue past the half marathon finish at the end of the first lap! In the end though I was pleased I kept going. Walking the uphills at least allowed me to take in the magnificent views and give encouragement to a young runner doing her first marathon here in the mistaken belief that she'd entered something "just like a normal road marathon" There was a lot of satisfaction in just seeing her finish. Even more pleasing though was when, approaching the finish, the departing Steven Prentice stopped his car to show the trophy he'd received for winning the race for the second year in a row - this year in a sub 3 hour time! Great stuff Steven – and good publicity for the North East Marathon Club!

Rod was waiting at the finish too with the customary bottle of wine he gives to all of us finishers over 60 years of age. He also found the right words to say that didn't make me feel too bad about my finishing time. It's the personal touches like this, plus Rod's hand-written letter to all entrants and personalised numbers that make this such a special event. At £16 to enter it's also excellent value for money. This year we all got an engraved mini running shoe award, finisher's certificate and technical tee-shirt with the names of all marathon entrants on the rear. Hopefully I'll be back there in 2013.

Jim Manford  
September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012

"Rocket" Rod Berry – the cause of all our suffering!



## The JWUltra – 30 Mile – 22 September 2012 – Ian Richardson

After spending the previous Sunday trampling over 28 miles of the Lincolnshire countryside, I was really looking forward to a canal run.

As it turns out this was easily one of the most enjoyable events that I have ever done. Having got a late entry as I left it too late to do Great Langdale, I endured a near 5 hour drive down on the Friday.

Saturday dawned with bright blue skies, a temperature in single figures and almost no wind. Along with a number of others, I parked at the end in Bourneville, to the South of Birmingham, just by the Sea Cadet HQ. They looked after the cars, secured baggage and manned the water stations and also provided any first aid that was required.

A coach then took us to the Carriage café, on the Greenway, just outside of Stratford upon Avon.

After a mug of tea (only £1 ! ) in the café, I was ready for the low key start of about 70 runners, including relay runners, who were running about 10 miles each.

The first 2.5 miles were on the Greenway followed by some field edges and some steep up and down by the side of the Avon. I had been warned of this in advance, so wasn't concerned that it was all going to be like this.

Entering Stratford, past a food fair, with cruelly enticing smells, we were directed onto the canal where we remained until the end of the event at Bourneville Station.

The path in the early miles was just what I had hoped for. Well made, even under foot and generally a really good running surface. I was a little surprised that it was not all like this and there were sections where clumsy runners like me needed to take a bit more care. The paths were still well defined, but just beaten earth, sometimes a bit overgrown, narrow and with tree roots and rocks. No bother, just needed to have attention paid.

We also ran over the Bearley aquaduct, which is apparently the longest of its kind in the UK.

In what seemed to be no time at all, I reached the first of two checkpoints at about 10 miles in 82 minutes, so it must have been a short 10 miles. I knew that I had set off a bit quick, but that surprised me.

The checkpoints had bottled water, sweets and bananas, and there was an opportunity at the start to have your own food and drink taken to them.

After a banana and a refill of the bottle, I was away again, trying to hold myself back a bit. When the surface improved, I was to appreciate the lovely countryside and the wide variety of boats on the canal.

As we reached around the halfway point, we climbed alongside a flight of locks, up, flat, up, flat and so on. This gave me a chance to see how physically demanding it seemed to be, opening and closing the lock gates. Maybe those doing that thought the same about us runners. There was an overall friendly air though, with much waving and hailing back and forth.

I was having a bit of a tired spell and the 20ish mile checkpoint came at a good time in 2:56. After that, I knew it was a shortish 10 miles to the end and I even picked up the pace later on, as we left the more rural surroundings and came into a more urban environment.

We had all been issued with a laminated route map, principally to tell us which bridges to cross over, as the canal path moved from one side to the other, but it wasn't necessary. There was a point a couple of miles from the end where the canal went through a tunnel, and we had to leave it and cross a road and round a few houses, but this was well marked.

At the end (in 4:16) we were met with water, bananas and crisps and handed out goody bag. This was amazing. It had a Buff (and I am an inveterate Buff wearer) featuring the names of all the entrants.

Well, not me, as I entered late, but everyone else. There was also a hand painted mug, in the traditional narrow boat decorative style, which was lovely and most appropriate. Short walk back to the Sea Cadet HQ and we had showers and a chance to sit outside in the warm sun, eating very reasonably priced food, and tea at 50p !

All in all this was a marvellous event that I cannot recommend highly enough. Despite the distance from the North East, I am sure that I will be back, and I'll enter earlier next time.

Ian Richardson

24 September 2012

## LOCH NESS MARATHON September 30<sup>th</sup> 2012

I suppose the big question is: Was it worth the £48 entry fee? I would imagine a chunk of that went towards the huge fleet of buses needed to convey approx 4,000 entrants to the start near Fort Augustus – though even at say, £5 per head that still leaves £43 to account for. So, what did we get for it?

Have to admit I'm not a big fan of the idea of being bussed to the start of a marathon. Connemara, the White Peak and Kielder are 3 other marathons that are spoilt by doing this. Sitting on a damp, overcrowded bus for 2 hours with condensation streaming down windows while some fruitcake treats everyone to his entire collection of Lady Gaga on his "personal" stereo is not my idea of marathon foreplay. The 2 hours on Sunday consisted of a 30 minute wait for the bus to leave, plus a further 1 hour 34 minutes in convoy on narrow, Highland roads. (I timed it – the organisers advertise it as a 50 minute drive!)

At the start we were all tipped out in the middle of nowhere to fight for a space to change in the open, either on a wet piece of tarmac or in the equally sodden surrounding heather. I hate to think what it would have been like if it had been pouring down.

After a deceptively easy, largely downhill section for the first 4+ miles we were then treated to some tasty undulations for the remainder of the route as we passed through the villages of Foyers, Inverparigaig and Dores. Shortly after the latter there was a humdinger of a 2 mile climb from 18 to 20 miles up from the Loch along the B862 towards Inverness. It was there, at the 19 mile mark, that my energy levels finally wilted and I paid the price for setting off at a pace I used to be capable of sustaining throughout. The final 2 miles downhill to the River Ness and along a flat stretch by the river to the finish in Bught Park were, to me, the best bit of the route. Still, my run was a big improvement on last week's debacle at Langdale. Let's hope for a further improvement at Budapest next weekend.

Given that we didn't reach the Loch until after 6 miles, saw little of it for foliage for the next 10 before leaving it again after 16 I wonder if the organisers have ever considered doing away with the buses altogether, (I'm sure they have), and simply running us out to the Loch and back from Inverness. We'd still see enough of the Loch for them to continue calling it the Loch Ness Marathon, it would remove the nightmare of the bus to the start and we might even get to enter for less.

With it's 9,000 participants in the 10k, 5k and Fun Run plus the marathon this is certainly a nice little money earner for the economy of Inverness, as well as for the organisers, Caledonian Concepts Ltd.

So, is it value for money? The event certainly has some positive aspects:-

- Everyone connected with it was very helpful and supportive, as were the crowds in the villages en route.
- There was a plentiful supply of Shot Bloks, Gels and electrolyte drinks throughout.
- We got a presentable medal, a decent tech. tee-shirt and a full goody bag at the finish.
- Best of all was the free soup, (Baxters, of course), and a hot chicken curry awaiting at the end.

The negative aspects included:-

- The entry fee! This did not include the £10 extra for the pre-race Pasta Party.
- The long bus journey.
- The open, congested start area and the lack of cover generally.
- The fact that our bags were left out in the open at the finish. Imagine if it had rained.
- Asking us to register before 6pm on the Saturday when most had already made our travel arrangements.

Would I do it again? No.

Jim Manford  
October 1<sup>st</sup> 2012



And the Winner is... Caledonian Concepts Ltd!