Northumberland Coastal Marathon – 24 August 2014.

This was Melanie’s first time in putting on a marathon, and there were very high standards to live up to, given Jim’s excellent organisational skills at this event in previous years.

So, how did it go?

Given my 4 marathons in four days a week earlier, it seemed prudent to volunteer as the sweeper for this one, so I had a slightly different perspective to the usual one.

I was accompanied in my role by Stevie, who fancied a decent run out before our next trip, to Stavanger the following weekend.

Registration went smoothly at the Red Lion, with Iain, Susanne and I managing provision of numbers and a rather natty T shirt, which drew many favourable comments.

After that, it was dashing down to the beach and arriving in time to hear the end of the pre race briefing given by George, as which he informed the runners that if they were behind me, then they were outside the cut off time. No pressure, then.

The away we went. The weather was pretty much spot on for distance running, mild with a light breeze, giving the possibility of some good times.

Off up the beach to the steps at Seaton Point, where Steve and Jill directed us into the caravan park, where the route was marked with yellow tape.

Regular runners of this event will know that this part can be a bit of a Bermuda triangle, but the tape worked a treat.

Onwards to the first drinks station at Boulmer, cheerfully manned by Melanie’s family and the rest of the runners had already disappeared ahead of us as we maintained a five and a half hour pace.

A particular benefit of doing the sweeper role was that we were able to stop and explain to people out walking, just what we were doing. I am pleased to report that all were supportive of us.

Next to Craster, where Christine welcomed us warmly at the drinks station and then Mike to us through Craster itself.

Passing Dunstanburgh castle, and about to descend to Embleton beach, and we met the lead three runners on their way back. After a short gap, we then saw most of the other runners as we made our way up the beach to the last checkpoint, with Keith’s family in attendance.

It was from this point that the other part of my role as sweeper came into play. Picking up the route markers, to save anyone having to go out later.

We passed Gary, with Lisa and family at Long Nanny bridge and then it was the return journey.

By coincidence, Stevie met someone she knew on Embleton beach, and between the castle and Craster, I met my next door neighbours.

Dropping off the signs at Craster with Christine, we were joined by Mike for the last leg, enabling him to pick up the tape that he had so kindly put out earlier. We were also joined by Lisa, who had run from Long Nanny bridge and caught us up at Craster.

This made us a sweep of four, passing through Boulmer still on a five and half hour schedule, when we saw the lone, weary runner (walker by this stage), just before the caravan park. Time limit or not, there was no way we were leaving him, so we all jog/walked to the end.

This involved picking our way, somewhat gingerly, over rocks where the tide had covered the beach.

It also meant that for the end part, we had to come through the car park above the beach and finish via the road.

Most of the runners had gone by this time, but the enthusiastic volunteers were there to greet us and we were given our finisher’s medal by Melanie.

It was another excellent day out and a splendid job of work by Melanie and all the volunteers who make such events possible.

Passed with flying colours.

Ian Richardson

29 august 2014