

BUDAPEST MARATHON October 7th 2012

Completing the Budapest Marathon achieved the first of the twin targets that I'd set myself for this year – to have run a marathon in 20 different countries. Never having run in Hungary before, this was my 20th country. Ironically I had entered this event 6 year's earlier but the race was cancelled at the last minute due to civil unrest in the capital.

This year's was the 27th edition of the event and included over 19,000 runners in a variety of races including the marathon, a 30km race, a mini marathon, fun run and marathon relay. Apparently over 2,600 of the entrants were from outside Hungary. Having arrived late on the Saturday evening due to travel delays, it meant an early start on the Sunday morning to first locate and then register at the iconic Heroes' Square, the venue for both the start and finish.

The Marathon set off at 9.30am on an unseasonably hot and humid day for October. (We didn't know it at the time, but the oppressive conditions were the precursor to the mother and father of a thunder and lightning storm later that evening – bad enough to cause the abandonment of the local Ferencvaros match late in the 2nd half!)

A 60 hectare section of Budapest spanning the bridges either side of the Danube has recently been justifiably declared a World Heritage site. This area contains the impressive architecture of Government buildings, museums, markets, Palaces, Baroque churches plus the bridges themselves. It seemed to be the aim of the organisers to include each and every one of these buildings en route. The marathon was basically a 26+ mile sightseeing journey along the Danube encompassing first the Pest and then the Buda sides of the river. After 7km through city streets via the famous Opera House, we hit the river on the Pest side, running alongside luxury river boats until crossing the famous Chain Bridge into Buda. There then followed what seemed to be a series of interminably long straight, airless stretches back and forth along the river bank under the former Royal Palace and by Gelert Hill. One such stretch went from 18 to 28km, proving somewhat dispiriting for us slower runners as the faster guys headed in the opposite direction. Then it was back across the Elizabeth Bridge, past the imposing Houses of Parliament, the Zoo and finally to the finish in Heroes' Square.

After 26 previous editions the organisers had got things virtually spot on. There was entertainment all along the route with rock, choral or orchestral music at regular intervals. The 16 drink stations, sporting a variety of food and drink meant that, even in the high humidity sustenance was never too far away. The course had also been deliberately designed to allow spectators to follow the runners by easily changing viewing positions, so crowd support was constant throughout.

To me, the only negative aspects were the inclusion of the relay runners in the main event, (don't you just hate it when someone fit and fresh pushes you out of the way after 20 miles!) plus the insistence of Spar, the major sponsors, to plaster their corporate logo all over an otherwise excellent medal and tee-shirt. Also, though it didn't affect me as I had my own chip, I know a number of runners were reluctant to join the long queues after finishing, way back at registration to redeem the 1,000 HUF, (about £3) they'd had to put down as a deposit on their chip.

Would I do it again? I'd love to. Budapest is such a beautiful and impressive city. The sight of all those iconic buildings lit up at night along the Danube is well worth a second visit.

Jim Manford
October 7th 2012



Kielder Marathon - 7 October 2012 – Ian Richardson

Having run around Kielder a couple of times before on club events, I thought I'd see what it was like running the other way around and in the company of a couple of thousand others. On the way there with Stevie Matthews, the outside temperature measured -1C. That'll be gloves and longsleeves then, I thought.

By the time we arrived at the car parking at Falstone, the mist had burnt off and there was real warmth in the sun. The bus transport was extremely efficient, considering the numbers to be transported and the access available. We waited less than 5 minutes before being bounced along to Leaplish. Bumped into Iain and Suzanne before the start and were informed that a broken down bus meant that the start would be delayed by 15 minutes. No big deal as the weather was now looking perfect.

Trying to get to the start was a bit challenging as it was a narrow road which in places seemed to have as many supporters as runners. That said, it was easy enough to work my way to an appropriate position and then fail to get a gps signal. The Garmin picked up a signal after half a mile and had the beneficial effect of meaning that I didn't look at it, except for occasionally to check on my pace.

The early crowds had thinned enough by the start of the Lakeside Way proper, to enable easy running and I settled into a pace that seemed a bit quick, but comfortable. The first half passed by with what seemed to be more hills than I remember and the second half only slightly less so. I reached the half way point in 1:45 by their clock, which was both pleasing and startling as I felt that there was no way I'd keep that up.

The drink stations were excellent and frequent, with water in 330ml bottles, ideal to my mind, and a few of them offering cartons of isotonic drink too. The water stations were about every three miles, but became closer in the last 7 or 8 miles, which was very well thought out and helped quite a bit as I tried to keep up my pace. I must have been doing better than a lot though, as no one passed me from before the dam at 18 miles and I was picking people off quite frequently. I was convinced that the south side of the dam to the end was pretty flat and was quickly disabused of this notion as the switchback continued.

The general consensus at the end was that this was harder than Hamsterley, so I may have to find some bigger hills for next year !
Nevertheless, I kept going to a finish time of 3:35 and 98th position out of 1487 finishers. That was my 16th marathon so far this year, on the hardest course and my best time by 10 minutes. Roll on Leicester next week !

After the finish, you could immediately pick up a slip of paper with your time and position after receiving a very nice medal. After that it was into the big marquee to get a well designed technical T-shirt, one of those odd cycle courier type bags from start fitness, a pair of salomon socks and bananas. There was also a good selection of well priced food and drink on offer.

After Stevie had finished in 4:37 to win her age group, we got straight on a bus to the car park with no waiting or queuing and had an easy drive back in the glorious sunny weather. I have heard some negative comments about previous editions of this event. In my experience, it was extremely well organised throughout and I would fully recommend it to anyone looking for a different challenge to the traditional road marathon. There were into double figures of members of the NEMC there and that appeared to be the view of those I canvassed too.

Ian Richardson 8 October 2012

Liverpool Marathon 14.10.2012

After entering this race last year and having to start at the start line for over half an hour longer than expected waiting for police clearance on the roads, I was impressed with the prompt start! Although you were able to choose your own place to start, it seemed that everyone had opted to pick a sensible position, and the race got off at a good pace.

As I grew up on the Wirral I had a good laugh to myself as the first half of the marathon took us around some "interesting" streets I would never have dreamed visiting. However we were soon on the promenade at New Brighton, and had great views of the Mersey and the Liverpool skyline. There was a good amount of enthusiastic support from the residents of the Wirral around the course.

I was really looking forward to the tunnel section of the marathon as I always loved travelling through it as a child. The first half was an excellent down hill slope, but my Garmin obviously stopped receiving a signal, the tunnel became hot and claustrophobic and the uphill section towards Liverpool was not much fun. Luckily, coming out of the tunnel at the other end we were met by huge crowds and a drumming band, with the fresh air feeling fantastic.

The course had changed from last year, and we spent less time running around and around and around Sefton Park, and more time in the centre of Liverpool. The crowds were amazing, and it was easy to keep motivated. There was a difficult hill at mile 18...although not in the Hamsterley league, and I really had to put in some effort to get up that. Once at the top we were running through some lovely park land, with great support and plenty of sports drinks and gels.

The best part of the course was at 24 miles running back down that awful hill to the finish! I managed to cross the line with a PB, but was still beaten by Batman and Robin. The medal was sufficiently large, and the t-shirt was a nice technical one, but we only got a biscuit and banana and no goodie bag. Overall, a great improvement on last year.

Melanie Horan

SPIRES & STEEPLES CHALLENGE Oct 14th 2012

This is a 26 or 13 mile challenge event for both runners and walkers following the Spires & Steeples Heritage Trail from Lincoln to Sleaford on roads, bridleways and footpaths. I last did it 2 years ago with Mick Sherriff when there appeared to be at least twice as many participants. The abiding memory of the event is of attempting to navigate our way between checkpoints on a very complicated route using copious written instructions.

Sadly, in these times of multi-mega marathon weekends, the event seems to be suffering the decline in numbers of other smaller marathons of this nature. I estimated approx. 30 to 40 runners and about the same number of walkers on the 26 mile route. The 13 mile race set off later, half way down the trail. There were, however, no problems with route finding on this occasion. Backed by a veritable army of volunteers, the organisers had covered every questionable turn with marshals or bright yellow directional signs, rendering the accompanying written directions redundant and demonstrating what can be achieved with enthusiastic support.

Like me, most of the runners had opted to be bussed to the start at Lincoln Castle from the finish in Sleaford. No problems with the buses either – they were clean, quiet and punctual getting us there in plenty of time for the, on-time, 9.30am start. Leaving an hour after the walkers, we followed the cobbled streets of the old part of the city a mile downhill to a canal. After a further 2 miles along it's towpath the route headed into the countryside for the usual mixture of hedgerows, ploughed fields, riverside paths and back roads, reaching checkpoints at the deathly quiet villages of Branston, Metheringham, Digby, Ruskington and Leasingham Moor. As befits the Lincolnshire countryside, the route was consistently flat throughout. Fortunately, the beautiful sunny weather meant that mud and saturated fields were kept to a minimum. With the faster runners disappearing into the distance up front and the slower ones behind me, for a lot of the course I was running on my own enjoying the tranquillity and the scenery and reflecting on how glad I was to have I'd opted out of the concrete of Liverpool and chosen this one instead.

This is an excellent little event that deserves more entrants. Our £12 entry fee, (+ £3 for the buses) got us a comfortable bus ride, medal, technical tee shirt, certificate, hot drinks at the finish plus more than adequate support staff around the course. As all proceeds and sponsor monies raised go to something called the Wheel Appeal Charity it would appear that the organisers rely heavily on financial support from the likes of Tesco, Spar and the Co-Op. I hope they don't get too disheartened by the low turn out this time and decide against holding it again next year.

Jim Manford
October 15th 2012

Running through the cobbles at the start



Leicester Marathon – 14 October 2012 – Ian Richardson

This was a fairly late choice for me, based upon ease of access by public transport, a Premier Inn sale and an empty weekend in an otherwise very hectic schedule.

Race morning was one of those bright blue, calm cold days, ideal for running as I ambled the 10 minutes from my hotel adjacent to the station along to Victoria Park where the race started.

Bag drop was very efficient although I cannot say the same for Portaloos provision for the 2,500 entrants and I had to leave the queue to make the start, vaulting the barriers just as the hooter went off.

This was a combined full and half, with 525 finishers in the full.

As might be expected, it was a fairly congested start, but the downhill first mile through parts of Leicester's centre soon opened up and there was plenty of room to move as we ran through some of the rather less interesting suburbs.

We parted company with the half marathon at 6 miles and returned to the same point later to have the same last 7 miles as them.

Drinks stations were every 3 miles with water and High 5 in cups and also High 5 gels at all drinks stations from 9 miles onwards, which was a very good idea.

The course was really quite good and very varied. It seemed that you would be happily running along a tarmac track and then suddenly you would be on a coned off section of a dual carriageway, with cars flying by.

The marshalling was very efficient and encouraging and there was never any sense of concern with the traffic.

Heading north in the first half we passed through Birstall on our way towards Syston, with a lot of lakes on our right, before working our way back through Queniborough and Barkby to see some of the same lakes on the left.

We returned along the river, past the National Space Centre and through Abbey park, before the last couple of miles.

This started unpromisingly through underpasses and a bus station, but then we were led along the coned off centre of Leicester's pedestrianised centre and the support from the shoppers was quite uplifting as we approached the final, uphill mile back to Victoria Park.

There was loud support at the end, after which we received a good quality technical T-shirt and an OK medal, plus water and bananas.

The weather was lovely and warm by this point, which made getting changed outdoors in the park rather better than it might have been.

After my efforts at Kielder last week, my secretly hoped for sub 3:30 was never really on, but I did get 3:31, my best for over two years, and on an occasionally undulating course.

Another tick in the box for the organisers, for an unusual and interesting course and very good organisation. I may well come back for this one in the future.

Ian Richardson

15 October 2012-10-15

GREAT YARMOUTH MARATHON October 21st 2012

To give its correct title of the “Great Yarmouth East Coast Marathon”, this was a one-off event organised by Great Yarmouth Road Runners in celebration of their 25th Anniversary year. It largely adopted the route of their annual 10k race that started later in the day with 400 competitors, but was elongated at its southern end to give us 3 laps instead of 4.

Approximately 200 of us, including a number of 100 Club colleagues practising the club’s philosophy of supporting first time marathons, set off from St George’s Park at 9am in cold, wet and windy weather to run 3 laps of Marine Parade to both the north and south of the town. Sadly, there are few places more depressing than an out-dated, out-of-season, British seaside town on a wet and miserable Sunday morning. I’m sure the route would have been more pleasant if the sun had shone, but it didn’t and it wasn’t. I couldn’t help feel sorry for all the marshals standing there for hours in the pouring rain while we scurried back and forth along the prom. The whole club seemed to be out there offering encouragement – another example of what can be achieved when everyone mucks in and supports their club’s endeavours.

There’s really not a great deal to say about the race itself. It was basically just lots of long, straight stretches along the promenade and adjacent coned-off sections of road, with other runners going in the opposite direction. There was only water to drink, (lots of unused sponges!) somewhere to change and we got a rather unique medal at the finish. Tee-shirts were extra. It cost £22 to enter and the winners in each 5 year age group category received cash prizes.

There was a great feeling of relief to know that my 199th marathon was finally done and dusted. I’m now left with the unexpected luxury of being able to choose between Friday’s 100 Club commemorative Woolwich Tunnel Marathon or our own Town Moor next Sunday for the 200th. I’d like to do both, for personal reasons. However, the cumulative effects of running 30 marathons since last year’s Town Moor mean that recovery is becoming more and more difficult and my times are suffering as a consequence. In short, my legs have gone, (and I don’t think they’ll be coming back any time soon!). It seems a L O N G break is needed.

Jim Manford
October 22nd 2012

The Start of the Great Yarmouth Marathon 2012



NEWCASTLE TOWN MOOR MARATHON October 28th 2012

This was the day I'd been building up to all year. From the moment I completed my 176th marathon in Gran Canaria in January my whole focus has been on attempting to reach my 200th at the Town Moor. (Why? I just like to set myself a target to aim for!) For the past 9 months most of my thoughts and actions have been concentrated on entering marathons, planning itineraries, booking transport and accommodation, travelling to and from and, of course, the easy bit, running a seemingly endless succession of 26.2 miles both in the UK and abroad. Somehow or other, despite pitfalls en route, like being told 7 miles into the Shakespeare Marathon that the event had been cancelled, I'd achieved my goal and finally made it to the start line as planned.

Even then there was a snag. As the person responsible for the NEMC's Tour of Northumbria I'd booked the upstairs room of the North Terrace pub in Claremont Road for the presentation of trophies to those who'd completed all 4 events in the Tour. (So far 16 of us had finished the previous 3) I had to meet the manager at 1.15pm to pick up the keys and prepare the room for the 2pm Presentation. To allow time for changing that would have entailed me running a sub 3 hour 30 marathon – sadly, something I can no longer do these days. Having discussed this with George, we agreed that I'd set off earlier than the scheduled start with George hand-timing me while my Garmin provided a record of the distance covered.

Only one more lap to go, thank heavens!



Last year we moved the event forward 3 weeks from our traditional late November date and were rewarded with beautiful weather. No such luck this time. Though yesterday's snow had disappeared it was still grey, damp and freezing cold with a bitterly cold westerly blasting across the Moor. Additionally, the non-tarmac paths near the start of each lap had been badly affected by the recent heavy rains and were uncomfortably muddy underfoot. It was a strange sensation running the first couple of laps entirely on my own and I was glad to finally feel part of the race when claxon sounded for the official start. It wasn't long before the faster runners came steaming past with the NEMC's Steven Prentice going like the proverbial train at the front. He appeared so comfortable he even had time for a chat. One of the good points about the Town Moor course is that you can watch the race unfold as the race progresses and every time I saw Steven he seemed to be increasing his lead. Unfortunately he cramped badly in the last couple of miles, eventually finishing 3rd in a time slower than that in which he won the much more difficult Great Langdale Marathon 6 weeks ago.

The race was won in the end by Steve Middleton from Thirsk & Sowerby Harriers who'd doggedly pursued Steven throughout the race, seizing his chance when the latter had to pull up. Steve finished in 2:54:34 with Richard Parker from Tynedale Harriers 2nd in 2:55:08. UK Netrunner Ann Hood was the first lady home in 3:14:51. The cold conditions obviously had an effect on the field with a large number of drop-outs on the day and an even larger number not even bothering to turn up. Out of 160 entrants we had only 94 finishers. If my arithmetic is correct that's an unprecedented 41.25% dropout rate! Where do all these people go to on race day? For the first time too, on any event that George and I have organised we had casualties serious enough to require hospitalisation with 3 incidents necessitating St John Ambulance attention. It's what we pay our medical fees for and why we ensure we have insurance in place for all of our events.

The drop-out/ no show factor also had a knock-on effect on the Tour of Northumbria presentation. 3 of the 16 eligible runners failed to make the start line for this, the final event, and sadly, Susanne Hunter who'd so far been an ever present at all of our races, was forced to pull out of this one after running the first 14 miles. So, it was a depleted number of us who gathered afterwards in the North Terrace for the awarding of trophies and Start Fitness gift vouchers. Only 12 of us completed all 4 in the end. We're organising the event again next year incorporating the same 4 marathons – Druridge Bay, Hamsterley, Northumberland Coast and the Town Moor. It will be interesting to see how many turn up for the presentation a year from now.

Ian Richardon, David Parry & myself at the Presentation



All that remained now was to carry out the promise to myself to get very, very drunk as soon as my 200th was over and done with. I set off with that in mind but was overtaken by a strange feeling of anticlimax that kept me sober. They say that it takes a while for something you've achieved after occupying your thoughts for so long, to finally sink in. By the time George arrived at the pub after overseeing that everything was cleared away on the course I was as sober as a teetotal judge. The 6 pack of Guinness George brought with him soon altered that!

200th Award with George and his 6-pack



Jim Manford
October 29th 2012

Enigma Staffs marathon – 31 October 2012 – Ian Richardson

This was actually meant to be a double, but injury reduced me to just the one day. Taking place near Cannock and starting and finishing by a pub (always a good sign), this was 4 out and backs on a canal.

I am getting to like running along canals although I had expected them all to have beautifully manicured cinder type towpaths, whereas they are often narrow, rutted mud paths.

About 20 of us gathered in the Boat pub for the handout of race numbers and then walked down onto the canal where we were set on our way.

It had always been my intention to run this very slowly as part of training for an ultra next year, and I carried my pack and water bladder as part of that.

It was a very pleasant run, although the canal anglers about a mile into the lap seemed less than pleased to be disturbed by people actually using the path, which made it harder for them to leave their vast amounts of kit strewn across it. Happily they mostly seemed to settle down and both groups just got on with their thing.

The turnaround point at about 3.3 miles had bottled water and the start/finish of the lap also had extremely tasty biscuits and pumpkin bread, both of which I sampled each lap !

By the second lap my injury started to kick in. I had come away from the Town Moor marathon 3 days earlier with what I now know to be a hip flexor problem, both sides. I didn't even know where hip flexors were before then. Into the third lap and I was having to walk stretches because it was the only way to relieve the pain enough to manage forward motion.

At the turnaround point of the last lap, the marshal (a nurse) supplied me with ibuprofen and paracetamol and when they kicked in, the pain was relieved to the point where I could run to the end.

Conditions underfoot were a lot better than I was expecting, with pretty firm ground almost throughout. It did rain prodigiously later on and through the night and into the next day which apparently made day 2 much harder.

My decision not to even start day 2 has proven to be very sensible and I do have a very nice and very unusual medal from day 1.

A very pleasant low key event and I would like to go back and do both days.

Ian Richardson
2 November 2012

RUTLAND WATER MARATHON November 4th 2012

So much for having a well-earned rest after the 200th marathon. I hadn't planned on doing this one but found Tim Taylor's invitation to join him hard to refuse. I decided to follow the age-old runner's adage of listening to my body – so, feeling no ill-effects from the previous 6 marathons on successive weekends, when the body said, "Go", I went.

After the novelty of scraping ice off the windshield for the first time this winter, Tim and I set off on a freezing morning from his home in York for the 2 hour drive to Rutland. I'd last done this Fat Feet event two years ago and the overriding memory was of another freezing cold day made worse by the fact that the Start was a ridiculously long 30 minute walk along the lakeshore path from the car park finish. This year the organisers had advertised that they'd "tweaked the course very slightly" to make the start a few hundred yards nearer to where we parked. They'd also thoughtfully arranged a drop-off facility for warm-up tops next to the start line. Even so, it was still an unacceptable 20 minutes walk away in the cold.

The weather, in fact, got rapidly worse as the day progressed. Consider the cold wind at the Town Moor, fast forward a week and factor freezing rain into the equation to give some idea of conditions for the race. As a trail marathon, the route was predominantly on clay-surfaced cycle paths that cut up badly in the incessant rain. Some of the puddles had to be seen to be believed, taking up the entire path – too wide to run around and leaving no alternative but to plough straight through.

About 300 of us set off at 9am with a generous 7 hour time limit to circumnavigate the anti-clockwise circuit of the reservoir. The first 4 miles over the head of the dam were mostly on undulating cycle paths. Then followed a further 4 miles on good footpaths alongside minor roads before, at 8 miles, we started the first of the two 5 mile laps of the Hambleton Penninsula, jutting out into the lake. This involved a number of short but steep climbs up to the head of the peninsula each lap on wet and muddy footpaths. The following section between the villages of Eggleton and Manton, (20 to 22 miles), was particularly hard going underfoot. After climbing out of the latter, the route finally took us along the opposite, southern, shore of the reservoir and back to the finish at Normanton car park.

On finishing, my £35 on-the-day entry got me a goody bag containing a running vest sporting the Fat Feet logo, (no mention of the Rutland Water Marathon!), a certificate and a couple of gels. In addition awards in age group categories were for a derisory Vet 40 and Vet 50 only. (Contrast that with what we give at NEMC events). You can make your own decision as to whether or not you consider that value for money.

Tim and I ran together throughout and it was good to have company all the way around – not that I minded the wind and rain too much. I prefer running in colder conditions. I do think though that the organisers need to reconsider the location of the race's start. This seemed to be the focus of most of the post-race complaints. Given that our Garmin recorded 26.6 miles, there's almost half a mile they could move the start closer to the car park finish. There's also quite a lot of open ground by the lakeshore at Normanton that could accommodate a looped finish should they want to build in extra distance. I'm sure though that Fat Feet will have already considered that!

Jim Manford
November 5th 2012

Running around in the rain

