

RACE REPORTS UK 2011 (M to Z)

LIVERBIRD MARATHON December 31st 2011

This was the first of a 2 part marathon double run over the New Year weekend organised in aid of charity by Kaja Kosla, the “Liverbird” in the title. It raised over £2000 I believe. Best described as “a marathon between drinking sessions,” there were approximately 50 to 60 runners in each day’s event with several hardy souls, (David Cremins of the NEMC among them,) who managed to run on both days.

I did the first marathon on New Year’s Eve, starting with the early group at 10am in order to finish in time to get home before New Year. A much larger bunch, the main field of runners, started at noon. As early birds we met our first problem in discovering that the designated start was inaccessible behind locked gates and impenetrable high metal fences. No one had remembered that, being a public holiday, the section of promenade we were supposed to start on, was closed to the public, (understandably so given that it fronted some expensive looking apartments and a major Business Park.) After some confusion a few of us took it upon ourselves to make an improvised start through the Business Park and try to reach the prom further south. Bad mistake – the gates at the southern end of the park were closed too. We finally found a small turnstile to squeeze through and made it to the prom. Unfortunately, that meant us returning back along the wrong side of the iron fence to where the drinks were waiting. By the beginning of the 3rd lap the main field had started, the gate problem had been sorted, (a hacksaw was mentioned!) and the drinks were in the right place.

The course involved 4 out-and-back laps along the banks of the Mersey. Fortunately, after the cold and wet of the previous day, the weather was quite mild if a little windy. The whole event had an end-of-season, low-key, festive air about it with runners catching up with old friends, high-fiving and wishing one another a Happy New Year as they passed several times along the route. No one, except perhaps a few guys at the sharp end of the field seemed to be taking it too seriously! Totally unexpectedly, I managed to find 3 new recruits, keen to join the NEMC among my fellow runners, so it turned out to be quite a productive day for the Club.

Kaja intends to repeat the Double over one of the May Bank Holiday weekends. It’s worth doing, the route is scenic and perfectly flat. Somehow though I don’t think a May date will produce quite the same atmosphere as the New Year event.

Jim Manford 4th January 2012

Essentials for the Liverbird Marathon!



Luton Marathon 2011

Ah the delights of Luton in the winter were on offer recently, hard to resist I know. Once again my skill in selecting a "flat one" was questioned by Richard and Jim. Having entered Bungay (albeit the half marathon only) on the assumption that Norfolk is flat, surely I wouldn't fall for that one again!

Alas I did, Luton isn't flat, it's lumpy with some good long drags uphill in it, with three laps to do, you quickly work out what's coming next though. Mainly on tarmac roads or paths, I found this course strangely quite enjoyable, part of it is through a small wooded area, part in the country side, the rest is along busy main roads through Luton. As you pass the back of the Texaco garage for the third time you do start to question your sanity!. There are quite a few tight turns onto paths and to change direction which do knock you off your stride. At the 2 mile point on the first lap for example, we were herded through a small opening onto a country road, having to physically restart your running isn't the best though. On the other laps with the field thinning out, this wasn't a problem.

The marshals and spectators were very encouraging; with it being a lapped course there were plenty of marshals at all junctions and turns. Water was plentiful, although it was in cups and something I have never come across "a sponge station" was in use! (Bit chilly in Luton though!).

Speaking of weather, it was a glorious day for the middle of November, little wind and good sunshine, I had my shades on and peaked cap. Short sleeves were the order of the day.

Upon arrival you were directed to parking, and then you could change in the leisure centre and drop your bag off for collection later. All this seemed to go smoothly but only once you had found everything, due to a lack of clear signage. The male showers were not working but we were warned of this well in advance. As I had stopped in a nearby hotel that wasn't a huge problem.

For friendliness and marshals being keen and consciences, this was a great one, but for the entrance fee of £ 25, you only got a banana, medal, face cloth, biscuit and energy drink at the end.

The hotel my wife and I stayed in was a bargain though £ 152 dinner, B & B for three nights for the two of us, in a recently refurbished hotel was great value.

There were about 600 completed the marathon, with a good few doing the team relay. I had some excellent company en route from fellow runners, once I got into a pace, I managed to keep going with them, chatting along the way really took my mind off running, I ended up doing the second half quicker than the first instead of my usual and dubious tactic of going way too fast for me over the first 15 miles then hanging on for as long as possible!

So there you go overall I'd say marshals and hotel 10 out of 10, course 6 out of 10, race value for money 4 out of 10.

It is a one I may do again, as overall we both had a good long weekend away.
Iain Singer

Newcastle Town Moor Marathon

30 October 2011

Funny things, laps. Part of me doesn't like the idea and yet I think I've enjoyed all the ones that I have done.

5 laps always sounds like a lot but is really successful in this event, in my view. It is easier for the organisers to lay on, for drinks stations, for medical support, and for spectators. For runners, ie me, it meant that I could leave

drinks bottles at the start/finish drinks station and pick them up as I needed during the race.

This year saw near perfect conditions for the time of year, compared to last year's near monsoon. Pleasantly warm with a stiffish SW wind which only really affected a small part of the course.

Something like 150 competitors set off at 9.30 from the café in Exhibition Park, to go around part of the boating lake, past the Military Vehicle Museum and then onto the Moor proper.

The cows had flown south for the winter so it was runners and few spectators plus some amazingly enthusiastic marshals.

I was still recovering from cracked or bruised ribs which had inhibited my training more than a bit, so had set myself a target of 3:45, which meant approximately 8:30 minutes per mile pace.

The nature of this sort of event is such that it is easy to fall in with others of a similar pace and swap stories whilst the miles drift by. The lap nature and openness of the Moor meant that you could always see others and on the out and back parts, such as Grandstand Road, you could see how far ahead or behind you were of individuals and use that as a challenge to keep going or speed up.

I made it to halfway in 1:50 which was encouraging, but the lack of training miles showed and I slowed in the second half to finish in 3:44:42, spot on for my target, which was very pleasing.

Finishing saw everyone provided with water, energy drink, Mars bar and a memento of the event. We also all received a voucher for a drink and a snack in the café, which I felt was a very nice touch.

The generous award to the first three in each five year category meant that a good proportion of the field were going home with a trophy, another nice and thoughtful touch.

This was the third running of this event and seems to gain praise from all who take part. I must also give special mention to the Fetchies at the bandstand. Each year they are there to give unflagging support to all of us as we passed them.

This is also the only marathon that I can walk to from my house, which adds to its special attraction, and next year it will form part of the North East Marathon Club's Tour of Northumbria. Even more reason to do it.

Ian Richardson

November 2011

NORTHUMBERLAND COASTAL CHALLENGE 2/5/2011

This event, organised by Jon Monks of Shepherds Walks, was advertised as open to both walkers and runners but appeared to attract very few of the latter. I had previously had issues with the Organiser over the promotion of his Kielder Water Challenge as marathon distance when it was almost a mile short! (Pleased to say he now advertises the true distance for this event.) This time though Jon got it spot on at 26.2 miles for the run/walk along the Coastal Path from Budle Bay to Alnmouth Cricket Club. I had also been critical of the £25 entry fee for such an event along a public path, when very little is provided in the way of refreshments, prizes or mementoes, apart from a cotton T Shirt. On this occasion I would imagine a sizeable chunk of this fee went on the buses that took us from Alnmouth to the start. Whatever the cost, I certainly wasn't going to pass up the opportunity of running a marathon virtually on my own doorstep.

Having travelled on the 2nd of what may have been 3 buses I hit the ground running as soon as we reached Budle Bay, managing to catch up with a few runners from the first bus before reaching Bamburgh. After that I never saw a soul, apart from those manning the 4 Checkpoints and the whole day had the feel of a glorified training run. After a while I got fed up of looking over my shoulder waiting for other runners to come past and just kept my head down and ran on the route with which I am so familiar. I allowed myself one final look back near Foxton and seeing no other runners charging up the beach behind, I knew then I'd be first one back - a marathon winner at 65! (albeit in a marathon that was strangely uncompetitive and for which no results were published.) So, even as I write this I know no one's going to believe me!

I hung around at the finish for over an hour but still no one else turned up. Going back later for the post-event BBQ I did manage to meet up with a few others who'd ran, rather than walked, the distance but still can't put an exact figure on how many runners were in the 200+ finishers. Not more than 20, I suspect.

This was one of those cloudless, sunny, early summer days designed to show the beautiful Northumberland coastline at it's very best. The views north over Budle Bay and south along the coast to Bamburgh Castle were particularly stunning. From Bamburgh to Seahouses the route went inland through fields and quiet country roads allowing, for me, previously unseen vistas of the Farne Islands. The post race BBQ provided excellent value for money for an extra £3 and put the seal on a great day out. I know that the event will be on again next year, hopefully with more runners taking part.

Jim Manford

6/5/2011

NORTHUMBERLAND COAST MARATHON August 20th

We get there with 15 mins to spare. I 'register'. low key isn't the word. Fab though. Totally loved the race director's email on Friday with a run down of the course and advice re shoes. That is excellent. Excellent I say!

The first few miles were on the beach, the sun shining and waves crashing. Everyone said this race was stunning but OH MY GOD, it really was beautiful.

My approach to this was always going to be the 'ultra' mindset.. I hadn't trained for this (my log shows my longest run in July was 15M, followed by a 12M and a few 10 milers) so I reckoned the only way to get round was walk the hills - even though they weren't big. Anyway, up a big set of concrete steps, through fairly overgrown bushes (ooya, jaggy nettles) and then coastal paths. Realised that Lisrun wasn't far behind me after a few miles and waited at a gate for him. We chatted away and I was very grateful for company and for being kept right. I'd have got lost otherwise. We chatted a bit and ran in silence for bits, admired the view and just dootered away.

The water stops were great, ladies and their kids with huge bottles of strong squash and glasses of water.. jelly babies and at times flapjacks. They were so friendly and it was a real lift coming in to see them.

from, say 10M - 13M I felt a bit blurgh. I had a niggle in my knee and wasn't sure what would come of it. Told myself that I was nothing, took ibuprofen and once we turned I felt much better.

The scenery was never less than stunning, mile upon mile of beautiful beaches, beach huts and holiday homes, kids boogie boarding, dogs being walked and BBQ smells wafting up our nostrils. The middle bit of a marathon

is always a bit meh, you're not quite there but you're feeling it. I suppose for me I

wasn't sure how I'd be given my training - 30 miles a week but mostly shorter runs. Anyway once we got into the big miles I felt much better, was saying hi to passersby and just kinda knew I'd finish without incident.

So on we went, running, walking up a hill, a stile, lots of gates and a few wee bridges. lovely.

For the last bit I was thirsty as hell, drank too much at the last station but I felt I needed it. I'll be interested to check my bag and see how many gels I had.

Lisrun and I parted company as he wanted to walk and I was feeling strong so I went on, Judas that I am. I started reeling people in and before I knew it I was back at the concrete steps (with more jaggy nettle stings). Onto the beach and all was well. The last wee bit was a mare. The sand was dry and fine and me and a lovely 100 marathon club lady couldn't see where we had to go. It was a mare and we wasted a lot of time trying to find it. Suddenly it became clear and we knew we'd sub 5. YAY.

So.. you've stuck with me this long... conclusions?

* NEMC marathons are awesome. £15 and a great race guaranteed. Enter them, you'll not be sorry.

* The weather was perfect, sunny and hot but a breeze made it bearable

* I ran within myself today and that was totally the right thing to do, had I not run with Lisrun I bet I'd have shot off and paid for it later

* My first trail marathon and very, very little road

* I'm so pleased that I managed this on the back of consistent mileage but not really doing LSR's, it's now how it should be done but it shows I have a good base and bodes well for when I ramp up the LSR's and quality sessions next year

* I need to get my LSR's in before Kielder, it won't be as forgiving

So, GO ME and thank you to the people who helped make it happen

Kate Ramsey August 21st 2011

PORTSMOUTH COASTAL MARATHON 18/12/2011

This proved, both literally and figuratively, a marathon too far. I'd arranged to meet up with Treasurer Ian Richardson at the Travelodge there on the Saturday night. Ian, as befits a man of his wealth and stature had flown down earlier. I took the slow train. Ironically our chosen methods of transport came to be reflected in our respective performances on the day. Ian winged his way around like the Steve Miller Band's "big old jet airliner" while I chugged behind "like some old engine that had lost it's driving wheel" (Tom Rush) The initial plan to stick together at 9 minute pace came off the rails as early as 5 miles when, for some inexplicable reason, I started to run out of steam. There was simply no fire in the boiler and for the subsequent 20+ miles I felt like a train wreck.

Obviously, when you have a bad run it tends to colour your opinion of an event but it was certainly no fault of the organisers. The sell-out event of 922 runners,(only 618 finishers!) was, in the main, very well organised with the Pyramids Centre on the Southsea Promenade proving an excellent venue and escape from the freezing cold conditions and biting wind off the Solent.

This was an out and back marathon starting near Southsea Pier that, after a couple of miles along the promenade, followed as close as possible to the shoreline of Langstone Harbour all the way around the bay and on to the turn on Hayling Island before returning by the same route. It was basically a case of keeping the sea on your right going out and on your left coming back. In that sense it was a bit like our own Northumberland Coastal Marathon but without any of the changes in scenery and the novelty of different vistas after each turn. In fact there weren't any turns! It was somehow dispiriting to see what lay ahead of you over the top of the marshes, knowing that you had to reach some long distant spot on the horizon, turn around and then aim for some other long distant spot on the opposite horizon!

It was, however, a multi terrain marathon in the truest sense of the word. We started on pavement, moved onto a muddy stretch of shoreline, came up on to grass, transferred to tarmac, negotiated a difficult stretch of shingle before ending up on a bridleway which was once the trackbed of the old "Puffing Billy" line running out to hit the buffers at Hayling Island. How appropriate given the way I was feeling! At the finish we got a decent medal, a tee-shirt I'll never wear, a bowl of soup and a bun. Would I do it again? Probably not, but who knows. I feel as if I've got some unfinished business there, it's a flat course and I'd be looking to do myself justice next time. Perhaps I'll fly down, (and around.) Anyway where else in the UK can you find a marathon to run the week before Christmas?

Jim Manford 19th December 2011



Ian taxis along the runway to a flying finish!

SHAKESPEARE MARATHON 8/5/2011

Not sure why I don't particularly like this marathon. Have done it a few times now, getting quicker each time. Stratford-on-Avon is a beautiful place with a magnificent river setting, the town centre start is good, the finish along the river scenic and the event is very well organised with a unique medal at the end. It's the middle section I find uninspiring, running along a busy road, climbing out of Welford on quite a steep hill and then having to negotiate several miles on the Greenway – a long, monotonous stretch of old railway line. And, of course, you have to do each of this twice.

This year George and I travelled down early on the Saturday with the intention of having a good look around, only to find our plans thwarted and ourselves marooned under the shelter of a giant Morton Bay Fig tree as a torrential thunderstorm flooded the area. Fortunately we'd already bought our fish and chips to while away the time till the rains let up. As expected, the next day was hot and humid making running unpleasant. I managed to keep going at just over 9 min. pace to finish behind the 100 Club's legendary Danny Kay as 2nd Vet 65. George too was pleased with his time in the conditions.

A nice touch for me was to see my son Ross, he of the oft stated opinion that all marathon

runners are certifiably insane, unexpectedly cheering me home at the finish.

Adjourning to the comfort of a nice riverside pub before the long journey home we were joined for a chat by NEMC member Dave Robson who'd run the event fresh from running one of the Lakeland Trails Series races the day before. Impressive, Dave!

Jim Manford
May 2011

SMUGGLERS TROD MARATHON 27/08/2011

The last time I did this 2 years ago I ended up driving home with my left arm immobilised, changing gears with my right hand and steering with my knees after one of my more spectacular falls! It's a tough event with lots of potential for self harm on a hard and demanding course over the North York Moors. This year conditions were made even more difficult after a week of heavy rain left large sections of the route waterlogged with waist deep bogs and strength-sapping mud that could suck the shoes off your feet!

It was, then, with some trepidation that I set off from Robin Hoods Bay at 8 am on Saturday morning in the company of Dave Robson and David Cremins from the NEMC. The overnight rain had finally stopped and the day remained largely dry but, the damage to the course had already been done by then.

The route involved a large anti-clockwise circle over the heather clad moors back to the coast at Ravenscar radio mast and then finally along the track of the old Scarborough to Whitby line back to the start at Fylingthorpe Village Hall. The initial steep climb out of the village moderated somewhat as we crossed the main Whitby road for a long boggy section over the moor. We then dropped down again to a tricky woodland path following the stream from Maybeck to Littleback and a wade over the flooded ford. After that conditions improved somewhat until we hit the unmarked path through overgrown heather leading to Grouse Hill. Here, my 100 Club friend Mike Newbitt, with whom I was running at the time suddenly disappeared waist deep into one of the many boggy tracts. It was that sort of course! We really didn't get the chance to do what I would call "proper running" until starting the long, steady ascent up to the Ravenscar mast. After that the final few miles along the track bed to Robin Hoods Bay were a doddle to what had come before. I was pleased to be able to record 9 minute miles for this section. The course still had a final sting in the tail though with the near vertical climb out of Robin Hoods Bay to contend with.

The hot meal at the finish of pie & mushy peas, peaches with rice pudding plus as many hot drinks as you could manage soon aided recovery. Despite what I've said about the conditions I came away from this year's event with a real feeling of satisfaction and achievement. There are no marshals, mile markers or signs to follow en route and, unlike other times I've run this, I managed to successfully navigate my way between checkpoints and retain the strength to cope with the mud. Couldn't help thinking to myself driving home, (with both hands on the wheel!) how some of those people who moaned about the toughness of our Northumberland Coast Marathon last weekend would have felt about this one!

Jim Manford August 28th 2011