

RACE REPORTS: UK 2011

CALDERDALE HIKE 27 MILE 9/4/2011

The least said about this one the better from my point of view. In a nutshell, I got hopelessly lost and spent over 9 hours wandering the Pennine hills like a little lost soul! The event, open to both runners and walkers, incorporated both 27 and 36 mile races, designed primarily as exercises in navigational skills. There were no set routes and competitors were required to navigate themselves between checkpoints with the giant Stoodley Pike Monument being the most recognisable among these

The runners all started together at 9am on what was already becoming an unusually hot day for April. All went well for the first 8.7 miles as I stayed with a group along the canal before climbing steadily to the first Check Point at Walshaw. It was here that all went pear-shaped! Still feeling fresh I continued on without stopping to eat like the others in the group. Big mistake! It was over a mile before I realised that the two races diverged at this point and that I was on the 36 mile course. Returning to the Check Point everyone else had disappeared. This was my first visit to this part of the world, nothing looked familiar and I'm afraid my navigational skills were simply not up to the challenge. Spotting Stoodley Pike miles away on the horizon, I headed off in that general direction until meeting up with a group of walkers who I stuck with like glue until I knew my way back to the finish at Sowerby Cricket Club.

The saddest thing was there was a huge meal and open bar waiting for us at the end and I'd planned my return train journey to Alnmouth to take full advantage of both. In the event, I managed neither, only managing to catch the train with minutes to spare. There's a moral in there somewhere. To my cost, I know now what it is!

Jim Manford

April 2011

Druridge Bay Marathon, 15th May

Angela Proctor

I was picked up early Sunday morning by a very keen Dave Robson and a smiling Anna Seeley. The weather was overcast but that didn't dampen our spirits. I was very nervous in the car as this was my first marathon and didn't know how I would cope with the distance. I knew I trained really hard but still it depended on how I managed on the day. This course consisted of 3 times around the full course and additional final lap of the two lakes.

We arrived at Druridge Bay Country Park with plenty of time for stretching and many toilet breaks.

After having a friendly chat with Jim Manford the race organiser we proceeded to the start.

We all gathered at the start line with a friendly bunch of chatty runners all keen to hear the whistle to go. Then we were off. We began down the designated path towards the beach, we then turned right down a ramp opposite Hadston Scaurs Boat club onto the beach. The weather was a little overcast with wind. Dave and I stayed as close to the dunes to shelter. It was very pleasant to run on compact sand for 2 miles toward Chevington Burn turning right onto a path towards the nature reserve. By this time Dave and I was into our stride. We carried on North on a cycle track passing a small pond. We ran up a small hill heading towards the main road. There was a very supportive marshal stationed near the main road to direct us right to Hadston Links. This was the beginning of the first lake we were to run around. By this time we managed approx 4 miles. We ran along the path for a few miles and soon came to the drinks station with a selection of orange squash and water and much welcomed jelly babies. The marshals were very encouraging and spurring us all on.

We then turned left onto a narrow footpath through a wooded area leading to the main car park. This was nice as people were having picnics and cheering us on. Unfortunately we could see the finish sign in front knowing we had another 20 miles to go. Not to worry my legs were totally warmed up and I felt comfortable. We ran passed the visitors centre towards the second smaller lake. After approx another mile we ran passed a beautiful statue seat of a swan which was very pretty. We ran along the lake on the footpaths running parallel to the lake. We had our first and possibly our only down hill towards the Chinese footbridge where we recognised a marshal from Striders, Steve, he happily cheered us on. We ran another mile or so and turned left into a nice wooded area. We ran on toward the drinks station then began lap 2.

The second lap was the same as the first I was very comfortable and glad of the company and pacing of Dave. Lap 3 came around swiftly. I was pleased that I was still running well and my legs were not too tired. For the fourth lap we did not run onto the beach we continued around the 2 lakes. We got to

approx 21 miles and Dave wasn't feeling too well he encouraged me to run on. I wasn't too happy at this as Dave stayed with me all the way and was my pace maker. However I did go on with tired legs heading towards the welcomed drinks station. Knowing I only had the last lake to run around I gave my all. I ran towards the finish and was cheered on by Anna Seeley and Steve with a big smile on my face knowing little me had achieved a marathon.

EDINBURGH MARATHON 22/5/2011

Had an entry for one of my favourite races, the White Peak Marathon, the day before this event and toyed for awhile with the idea of trying to do both. In the end common sense won out and I settled for Edinburgh. With no pre-race registration to bother about it was an easy early morning drive on the day.

Have done this a few times and am beginning to suspect that the Organisers are becoming too ambitious and trying to pack too many people into the day without any corresponding improvement in infrastructure. The last time I did it there was no water from the 19 mile mark onwards on one of the hottest days of the year. I never did believe the Organisers assertion that the drink had been stolen and even their offer of a £5000 reward for information failed to convince. (Was it ever claimed, by the way?) This year the bottleneck of traffic trying to get from Musselborough to the start had me thinking they'd got it wrong again. (Similarly, the huge bottleneck at the Finish as people struggled to reach the T-Shirt collection point en route to the exit, suggested a serious rethink needed to be made here.) However, we got away on time on a freezing cold and very windy day and this time there were no problems with the drinks. If anything they'd overcompensated, (not a bad thing,) and I've never seen such welcome quantities of Lucozade Sport on any marathon I've done before.

The extremely windy conditions worked in the runners' favour for much of the course.

Spotting someone running in a red & white football strip further down the road I gave chase only to find that Mick Sherriff is not the only one who runs around advertising Boyle Sports! It was only when turning into the teeth of the gale at 19 miles that its full effects were felt. My Garmin recorded the first congested mile at almost 10 minutes and then the next 18 at just under 9 min. pace. The final 7 into the wind were all over 10 minutes – so yet again my hopes of running a sub 4 hour marathon were not to be. It was good to meet up with NEMC member Rich Cutter after the event to discuss plans for the Club's new website which Rich is helping to construct.

Jim Manford
May 2011

Frozen FatAss50k – Colchester by Ian Richardson Nov. 2011

It's a long way from Newcastle to Colchester, a very long way indeed, and perhaps unsurprisingly, just as long to get back again. I'm pleased that I stayed over on the Saturday and Sunday nights and made a weekend of it.

This was classed as a group run, led by Matt Biggin a coach qualified in "leadership in running fitness" and is on the 100marathon club list of qualifying events, so I thought that I'd give it a go.

It is based upon a walk put together by Colchester Ramblers leading you in a rough circle around the outside of Colchester, and 11 of us set off on an unseasonably warm, if windy, late November at 9am.

I am completely unfamiliar with Essex, so it was all new territory to me as we made our way through very pleasant, very gently rolling countryside. It came as a bit of a surprise each time we went through a built-up area, such as the rather splendid looking Colchester United football stadium, a very new looking edifice, and then the occasional business park. Most of the group stayed fairly close together up to the 15 mile point at Rowhedge, by the river, where we stopped at a community association hut for a very welcome cup of tea.

This is a self-supporting event, no drinks stations, no marshals, no arrows to direct you, so carrying a map was essential if not sticking with the group. I had the foresight to download the course onto my Garmin, so was able to follow that, which was critical in the second 16 miles as I dropped off the back of the, by now, small group after about a mile or so. I linked up with a couple, Elsabet (Swedish, in case you think I can't spell) and Colin, who were in training for next year's Marathon des Sables. We ran and walked the rest of the course together, using my Garmin and their map as we wound our way in a circle around Colchester.

I was having one of those days where I seemed to have no energy and kept having to walk. When I looked in my pack afterwards, I saw that my 2L drinks bladder was still about a third full, so I was probably rather dehydrated, which may explain my performance, or lack of it. It took me about 2.5 hours for the first 15 miles and 4 hours for the next 16, which tells its own story. That said, it was a splendid day out, with great company, and for me, it was a very useful training exercise for next year's Eco Trail in Paris. For more info on the event, go fatassrunning.com And no, I have no idea why it is called that.

Great Langdale Marathon 2011 Race Report

This is one of my favourite marathons, I have run it several times before, it's main appeal is the stunning scenery, which rewards the runner for the work they put in to climb the many ascents. The Great Langdale Marathon has the tag line of "The Worlds Hardest Road Marathon", and is a challenging 2 lap course, there is a simultaneous half marathon that runs one lap.

The race is a very friendly race, the field are all runners who want to challenge themselves, not to win but just to get round, the race Director, Rod Berry, is a very much hands on director and can be seen dotting around the beer garden (the race starts and finishes at the pub) and field in his Union Flag shorts, to welcoming as many finishing runners home as he can, aided by who I guess is a very, very long suffering wife.

I'll start with a description of my race for the day.

I travelled to Kendal on the Friday night to stay in the Travel Lodge, in the morning a short drive to the New Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, stopping for a breakfast in the little chef – and my first glimpse of my opposition – another runner who had travelled up from Liverpool that morning with his family also stopping for a bite to eat.

I got to the start a bit early, meeting a few old Friends – a contingent from the Southport Waterloo club who I had run with a few years before, and of course being greeted by "That's a great top there" (the Club Vest) from Jim Manford from the North East Marathon Club, and David Cremins from the club. While I was waiting the drizzle turned into rain.

The race itself set off on time, with nearly 400 runners between the 2 races. My plan for this years run was to try to pace each mile as evenly as I could to give me a finishing time of about 3:10, an improvement on my 2010 time, I knew that I could manage the first lap at that pace, and was hoping that I could manage the second lap. I passed the half marathon runners from Southport Waterloo fairly quickly which worried me since a couple of them are very good at pacing races, before the start of 'Rocket Rods Pass' – a climb of about 300 feet in $\frac{3}{4}$ mile just at the first mile mark. I passed a runner from Halifax also running the marathon on the brow of the climb.

One of the features of Langdale is that with the half marathon runners alongside you, it is only on the second lap where you can actually judge how you are doing compared to the rest of the field, 13 miles before you know where your nearest marathon runners are, so I had no idea where the Halifax runner was in the marathon.

The next 7 miles are undulating but with an overall descent to loose the height gained on the first big hill, just in time for the next big hill – one of England's few 1:3 tarmac roads. I was chatting to a runner from Kendal at this point and running about 10th overall. This is a hill I know I have to walk up on both laps and at the top there was a slight change of route from the previous years – both of us started to follow the old route until the marshals corrected us. The route goes past a Youth Hostel before taking a steep descent to the 10 / 23 mile mark. As we ran the last 3 miles back to the start the Kendal runner picked up the pace a bit and I followed. At the half way point I found out I was first position, and set off on a lonely second lap. I had to walk up most of Rocket Rods pass and at the top saw the second placed runner start the hill – running up it which was not a good sight, that $\frac{3}{4}$ mile looks very short when you can see the runner behind you looking strong. My plan for the second lap was to hope I could keep the pace going and not loose too many places – thinking that 3rd place would be nice. I held off the runner from Edinburgh until the 16 mile mark when he passed, with a quick chat, asking where the Halifax runner I passed earlier was – he

didn't know. Getting back to the 1:3 hill I was running well, the rain had eased off and I started up the hill again. Just past the new route section I saw the Edinburgh runner, and would like to say that I caught him and passed him but in reality he waited and we ran down to the valley and the next mile and half together. In the last mile and a half I pulled away and won the race – a first win for me and also for the North East Marathon Club. Rod Berry came across and with congratulations, my time of just over 3:04 typical for the winner in this marathon. I sat in the beer garden and watched the other finishers with half a pint and a bowl of chips.

I enjoy watching the award ceremony in Langdale – Rod does the awards himself, with his family giving out the prizes, though this year I had to run off – I had offered the 2nd placed runner a lift to the station, a quick word with Jim before I left and that was my marathon.

This is a marathon that is low key but well organised. This year there were more marshals on the course than previous years which is a good thing. In previous years the few marshals on the course made it a tough mental marathon. The water stations are just that, water, though they are regularly spaced, 3 or 4 on each lap. The change in route I mentioned lengthened the course slightly, taking away one of the dips in the route and about 10m of climb – but the new route is a nicer route. The entry fee is reasonable (one of the cheapest and less than 50p a mile), and the facilities for the numbers of runners it attracts are just about right, with 2 local pubs and ample parking.

Would I be back? Well I have to now, this is going to be the only time I can turn up and race as a defending champion.... But I would have gone back anyway

Steven Prentice Sept 2011

GREEN CHAIN MARATHON SEPT. 18TH 2011

Richard Jones and I took the overnight bus to London for this one – perhaps not the ideal preparation for what turned out a difficult & demanding run, well in excess of the marathon distance.

We knew we were in for it when at Registration we were presented with a 4 page route description of the Turn Left/Turn Right variety containing no less than 25 abbreviations to memorise and 2 large maps to follow! These instructions were printed in small, light ink typescript, difficult to decipher while running. Our chances of getting around the course without getting lost appeared slim, particularly as it was an unfamiliar area with a convoluted, figure of eight route linking up various sections of the Green Chain footpaths around SE London via woods, footpaths, housing estates and overpasses.

With some apprehension we sent off from the home of New Eltham Joggers along with approx. another 60 runners on what was a beautiful sunny, autumn morning, carrying our rolled up maps and route instructions around with us like a couple of demented relay runners. As things turned out we didn't need to look at these at all, the Green Chain signs were so regularly spaced and the organisers had done an excellent job of way-marking those points where the path diverged. Mind you, there were so many twists and turns that total concentration was needed at each and every junction. Anyone running along chatting or with their head down could easily miss an important turning and get themselves hopelessly lost. (We met up with a few of these at the end! Apparently on a previous year one lady had to be picked up 9 miles from where she should have been.)

Highlights of the event were the sections through lovely autumnal woodland with squirrels and conkers galore. The long straight section in the sunshine along the Thames footpath was also interesting. We got a decent medal at the end where there was also shower facilities and a bar. All good value for money for such a small entry fee (£15). Negatives were the constant worry of taking the wrong turn and the large percentage of the course on footpaths beside busy roads or through housing estates.

Richard and I ran together throughout and were generally enjoying ourselves until being informed on reaching the 25 mile Checkpoint that we still had about another 3 miles to go! At first we thought the guy was joking until we continued plodding on seemingly getting no closer to the finish, finally touching base at 27.5 miles on our Garmins. That's surely an Ultra, not a mere marathon, distance by any definition of the word!

As a Race Organiser myself I was somewhat disappointed at the end to see a number of finishers regaling the Event Organiser about the fact that they'd got lost en route. At one point I heard him reply in frustration that he'd paint a blue line on the course especially for them next year! My sympathies are entirely with the Organiser. These people obviously hadn't concentrated enough on route finding. It was an ambitious project to put on a marathon of this nature in such a highly urbanised area and I thought that, distance aside, the organisers had generally handled things well. Unfortunately, no matter how hard you try there are some runners out there you'll never please! (I've just looked at the comments about the event on Runners World and found this gem, "Directions were terrible, we never made it to the start line, having come all the way from Bourenmouth" (sic.) By Louise Harper 5. Could that number be her age?)

Jim Manford September 19th 2011

KIELDER MARATHON October 9th 2011

Any event that promotes itself as "Britain's most beautiful marathon" certainly has a lot to live up to! More so when that same event last year made claims of being the first marathon around Kielder Water when a cursory glance at the 100 Marathon Club's Official Results section on www.100marathonclub.org.uk reveal that the Club held a marathon there on March 14th 2010, some seven months before this event!

As to being Britain's most beautiful? As much as I love Kielder Water as a venue, (it certainly is a very scenic spot,) there are too many places where the views are obscured by trees to rank it as the most beautiful place to run. Opinions are always subjective but I'm sure the organisers of Langdale, Snowdonia and Beachy Head, to name just three, would be perfectly justified in making similar claims. Personally, I think the NEMC's own Northumbria Coast Marathon is much more "beautiful."

I hadn't entered this event last year because of issues regarding the massive overhype and high cost of entry for something that simply followed an established footpath around a Lake. Sadly, the seemingly unstoppable escalation in marathon entry fees, where organisers now merely "think of a number and charge it" to see what they can get away with, meant that, unbelievably, Kielder was my cheapest option on the day, other than making the long journey to the Isle of Wight. Even new marathons like Chester, Liverpool, Hull, Milton Keynes & Manchester all want more for their event. This is fine those who only run one or two marathons a year but really hits the pockets hard of those of us who run on a regular basis. Where will it all end?

So what did we get for our £33 or £35? We got yet another delayed start I'm afraid, this year by 15 minutes. Not ideal for those who'd already changed and done their warm-ups in the torrential rain. Again, the blame was put on the difficulty of bussing all the runners to the start from the car park some 15 minutes away. Perhaps one day the penny will drop and the organisers will come to the realisation that you can't get a quart into a pint pot! Because of its isolated location and limited internal infrastructure, Kielder is simply not an ideal venue for a mass participation event that intends to push the boundaries of entry numbers each year.

Other than that you could see where a fair proportion of the entry fee goes;- on the fleet of buses required to transport the runners to and from the start line, on the huge marquee which proved so essential given the conditions on the day, on the plentiful supply of portaloos available and on the way-over-the-top signage all over the course informing everyone of inclines, declines, bends etc. all fairly obvious to the naked eye. There was also a veritable army of helpers all sporting new "Kielder Marathon" jackets. Disappointingly, other than cash prizes for the first 3 males & females, there appeared to be no tangible incentives for the wider field in the form of any age-category awards. Contrast this with, say the Newcastle Town Moor Marathon, where, for less than half the entry fee charged by Kielder, there are awards for the first 3 males & females in every 5 Year Age Category. The event did provide value at the finish though with towel, medal, t-shirt & full goody bag. You could even have a free massage before and after the event, (I had one beforehand, the queues were too large afterwards.)

I've ran around Kielder on several occasions but never before in such huge crowds. I may be mistaken here but I could find no signage for the advertised projected finishing time areas at the start. This led to some congestion with slower runners still in front of us when we hit the narrow Lakeside Way footpath after the road lap around Leaplish. Once this sorted itself out it was simply a clockwise continuation all the way up and down the undulating path around the Lake. Those who've ran around the path will know how tough this can be in places. A nice diversion this year followed a new section of the footpath over the old Kielder Viaduct to connect with the existing path on the northern shore. Felt a bit sorry for the poor mountain bikers standing at Hawkhope car park, unable to get on to the path, unaware that a newly written clause for "Exceptional Events" in the Kielder Conditions of Usage allowed the organisers to close the path to the general public on the day! Conditions were at times quite difficult for running with the virtual non-stop rain and strong wind and after crossing the dam at 18 miles the energy levels were beginning to sag. I decided here to employ some of this "tactical walking" advocated in the literature. However, this seemed no more beneficial than normal, everyday walking, so I changed instead to some very non-tactical plodding to see me home to the finish line.

I liked the way that at the finish runners were directed inside the marquee to collect their various goodies. Soon, however, the sheer volume of wet & bedraggled finishers, combined with everyone else sheltering from the rain, made the tent an uncomfortable place to be. It's a shame that conditions were so horrific this year. The organisers had obviously put a lot of thought and effort into trying to make this a "special" event. How much nicer it would have been for everyone if the sun had shone and we could have all taken advantage of Leaplish's beautiful waterside frontage.

Unfortunately for the organisers their marathon is going to be remembered for all the wrong reasons, as the one in which one of the prize winners took the bus back to the finish! What a fiasco! Ironic really, considering the problems the self-same buses had in getting entrants to the Start on time earlier in the day.

Jim Manford October 10th 2011

LAKELAND TRAILS MARATHON 3rd July 2011

Early Registration for this meant a 4am start for the 3 hour drive to Coniston on a glorious sunny morning. I arrived just in time to see the runners in the 7am Marathon Challenge, designed for those who didn't fancy the strict cut-off times of the main event, disappearing into the distance. Among these were Dave Robson, Angela Proctor and Chris Renton from the NEMC.

The sun was already hot as approx 400 of us lined up in the grounds of the John Ruskin School for the start of the Lakeland Trails Marathon at 9am and most of us knew we were in for a gruelling next few hours. We soon found out how hard it was to be as the route climbed steadily away from Coniston, undulating up and down until the first drinks station at 6+ miles. This pattern of ascent and descent continued for most of the race with, apart from 2 memorable laps around Tarn Hows, most of the ground being fairly uneven underfoot and not at all conducive,(in my case!) to maintaining a regular running pattern. If only all of the course had been like those nice photos of the wide, even trails on the event website. I know I'm not the only one who felt that the photos appeared more than a little misleading!

I'm not blaming anyone. With my deteriorating eyesight, I shouldn't have entered an event that required almost total concentration to avoid tripping on the rough terrain we encountered for so much of the course. All credit to those runners who skipped round effortlessly in just over 3 hours. When at about 18miles we had to take our shoes and socks off to wade across a river, I was beginning to feel that I'd had enough. To pull out, however, would have meant breaking the habit of a lifetime of marathon running so I plodded on, becoming increasingly dispirited, only to be knocked flat by the horizontal branch of a tree Iran into while busy looking where to put my feet along the wooded lakeshore! After that the final 4 miles were a hot and hazy stumble to the finish line.

Highlights of the event included the section around the Tarns, the views over the full length of Coniston Water from above when coming out of the Forest and the fact that it was well signposted all the way around. Negatives, apart from the difficult terrain, were the distances between drink stations,

particularly the 2nd and 3rd, on such a hot day as well as the fact that a number of us recorded the course as unacceptably short. (25.19 miles on my Garmin)

Apart from those mentioned above it was good to meet up with a number of colleagues from the 100 Club as well as fellow NEMC members Gary Wade, Cris Atwell, Anna Seeley and Phil Owen, who all took part in the main race, plus Michele Moran who switched through injury to the Mini Marathon.

Jim Manford

4/7/2011

LAKESIDE WAY MARATHON, KIELDER 20/3/2011

This was the first marathon organised on behalf of its members by the newly formed North East Marathon Club. 31 of the original field of 39 runners lined up outside the Youth Hostel in Kielder Village on what was unfortunately a cold, damp and rainy morning. Being under Doctor's orders not to run, I'd set off 2 hours earlier than the main field with Mick Sherriff, who'd kindly agreed to keep me company. The intention, as Club Secretary, was to get back in time to welcome all the runners home and hand them souvenirs of our inaugural event personally. I managed to do this for quite a few finishers until, shivering uncontrollably with the cold, I had to go and find somewhere to keep warm. Only the pub was open!

Unlike last year we decided this time to run the clockwise route around the Lakeside Way path on the assumption that this would get the most difficult North Shore of the Lake over with while people were still fresh. From comments received afterwards this seemed to work well. We are indebted here to Phil Owen who, after being up half the night at the Hardmoors event, still had the energy to cycle to the 6 mile point of the Northshore carrying enough drinks for all competitors. Other members, (or partners of members) chipped in to with Iain Singer & Andy Hunter manning the drinks at the Dam, Mo & Lorraine at Leaplish and Steve & Jill Dales, Matt Chase and Chairman George Routledge at the Finish. Ian Spencer provided the first aid, following the runners all the way around by bike with his First Aid Kit. Without their help the event couldn't have taken place. (Apologies if I've missed anyone here.) It was gratifying to see that almost 50 of our 65 club members turned up on the day, either as a runner or to help out.

Despite the inclement weather most of the runners appeared to have enjoyed their run around the Lake judging by the numbers who've asked me to put it on again next year. Phil Smith came in first person home in 3 hours 16 minutes followed by Derek Ivens and Steven Prentice. Susanne Hunter was first female in 3 hours 38.

A provisional date of March 25th next year has been agreed with the Kielder Authorities. Next time I'll try to find us somewhere warm as a base!

Jim Manford

March 2011

Lakeside Way 2011 Start



Liverpool Marathon Report 2011

2011 saw the re-emergence of a Liverpool Marathon, though in truth it would be more accurately described as a Merseyside or Birkenhead to Liverpool Marathon, starting in Birkenhead and finishing in Liverpool.

I used to work in the area and the marathon gave me an ideal excuse to have a weekend away visiting friends, and run a marathon round my old haunts along the river, with the added appeal that the marathon course had a 2 mile stretch through the Mersey tunnel.

Marathon morning was a bit grey and after checking that I could leave my bags in the hotel while I ran, I had a full English breakfast – surrounded by several other equally sleepy potential marathoners, and then made my way to the Mersey rail station (local light rail system) to meet up with a friend, his brother and a nervous first time marathoner stranger who they had just got chatting to. The marathon organisers had managed to get extra trains laid on and the journey under the river to the Birkenhead start was easy and well organised. Perhaps I was more sleepy than the other runners, my son decided that night he wasn't going to sleep (he was excited too!) and wanted to be in our bed kicking me every 20 minutes in his sleep.

The start area was pretty well organised for a race of 8,000 entrants, with marshalls to show us how to get there from the station, easy access to the baggage lorries but the usual queues for the toilets. I met up with a few more friends, David from the North East Marathon Club who I spotted a mile away with his arm guards and some more from the NEMC, plus a few old friends from when I lived in the area. Marathon running is a small world and half a dozen of the people I met had also run the Langdale marathon 2 weeks before. My race plan was to be paced by an Ultra marathon runner friend aiming for 2:50 and to use his judgement with speed and pace.

The start was delayed by 45 minutes while they were waiting for the police to give permission that the race could go ahead. There was very little information about what the delay was caused by, more details could have stopped the runners getting frustrated in the starting pens and an estimation of how long the delay would be would have helped. Strangely the wheelchair race was allowed to start on time. The delay did allow me to see the footballer dragged in to start the race looking more confused than his 5 minutes of good work for the community that week dragged on to be about an hour.

After the race got going the course was quite pleasant on the Birkenhead side of the water, 6 miles going past the docks, then up and over a hill through the houses to New Brighton beach with a big turning circle to double the runners back towards the start. The return leg here was along the fairly flat promenade, I passed the last placed wheel chair runner here. My pacer had had to stop after a mile or so for a toilet break – due no doubt to the delayed start and I was running with a couple of other runners in about 35th place. The run along the promenade gave a good view of the Liverpool side of the water. The route went back past the edge of the docks again, past the tram museum, and a climb into Birkenheads' Hamilton Square. Here there was a crowd of onlookers which was a change from the quiet dog walkers along the promenade, the noise giving me a bit of a boost to get to the tunnel entrance.

The Mersey Tunnel is just over 2 miles long, about 1/3 going down, 1/3 flat and 1/3 incline and is pretty unique in that it has a road junction part way along. The road is 4 lanes with no central reservation and has a slow 'S' bend in it allowing the runners to take the shortest line by crossing from one side to the other. At the start of the tunnel I had a 10m gap on the runner behind me and ran the tunnel on my own. It is a strange experience, with nothing to guide you on steepness of slopes, pace or distance, and was surreal – Garmin stopped working in the tunnel. The only real noises at the start were my feet and every so often a marshal on cycle passing – cycles make a strange amplified noise in the tunnel too. The course took the junction to double back up and outwards towards the river and at the junction you could hear the drums from a local band and as I went further along cheer from a (patient!) waiting crowd. It took me about 15 minutes to run through the tunnel. The crowd noise as I left the tunnel was something to hear, it appeared to me that I was running through a tunnel of people – they were standing on the bank either side of the tunnel looking down and along the road edge.

The contrast between the support on the Birkenhead side and Liverpool side was massive – the very noisy Liverpool side compared to Birkenhead that might just have noticed us passing. The route came out of the tunnel, a U turn and up into the town centre before heading out up quite a long hill which was quite tough – the crowds had given me a lift and I had run too fast, not easing up after the climb out of the tunnel, before hitting another long climb up Parliament Street. One of the runners that were behind me in the tunnel had caught me again and was struggling with a leg problem, I ran with him up the hill until he decided to stop and look after it.

The route then went out of the city centre along quite nice roads to Sefton Park at 20 miles before turning round to come home again. All city marathons have a section that is tacked on to make up the distance for no real gain to the quality of the route, and Sefton park is Liverpool tacked on bit, a quick lap of the park to turn round and head for home would have been good but the route went doubled back several times and I passed the same runner in the opposite direction twice (the friend I had met at the station earlier). At the entrance to Sefton Park I got a leg cramp, which was no doubt caused by running 2 marathons in 2 weeks, something I hadn't done before, and trying to be competitive in this one. I was still quite high up in the field at this point and a marshal doubled back on his bike to check that I was OK, he rode with me for a mile or so trying to encourage me to ignore the leg but it was no good, the last ¼ of my race was very slow. My Ultra-Marathoner friend passed me at the exit to Sefton park, running strongly to finish about 15 minutes ahead of me.

Once out of Sefton Park the route uses parallel roads to the way to the park and then the opposite side of a dual carriageway to get back to the top of Parliament street. The route back was again through fairly nice streets, and quite enjoyable to run. After the town centre the crowd support was sporadic, but welcome and quite enthusiastic as we passed. A quick run down Parliament street, 1 mile along the flat road, a quick left turn and marathon was over – should have been a great finish... however the leg was still causing me problems, I hadn't managed to run more than half a mile in the last 6 before having to stop again. As I got to the bottom of the hill, the last runners were just starting to go up the hill, I had a mile left, they had 12 to go. The last ½ mile was fantastic, from the relative quiet on the road back from Sefton Park the noise of the crowds here was encouraging and I ran to the finish happy to be stopping. My finishing time of 3:15:30 is good but with a fit leg I think I can knock 15 minutes off that.

The finish funnel was well organised, loads of drinks and snacks to take. I found Henry and Cindy before they went to the pub for lunch leaving me to meet up with my friends in the race, then the rain started.

Everyone agreed that while the course looked fast on paper, it was harder than expected and times were a bit slower than they thought they would get, but everyone enjoyed it and would go back there to race it again. As a new race there were no doubt a few teething troubles, the delay at the start being the most noticeable. The support was good, plenty of marshals around the course and some very mobile ones on bikes. Crowds were good and enthusiastic where they were and to be honest having quieter sections where I could just run was also good. The organisers managed the whole weekend without playing a single song from The Beatles, instead concentrated on what Liverpool is now rather than what it was 40 years ago

Would I go back? Yes I would race it again, it clashed with the nearby Chester Marathon and I might try that first but Liverpool Marathon with a few adjustments has the ability to be a great marathon.

Steven Prentice