

Wakefield Marathon

This marathon coincided with my family going on holiday for a month leaving me home alone, so what better way to spend one of these free weekends than by visiting my brother and running a marathon on the way home? Checking the race calendar, Wakefield was at the right time. Later Hamsterley marathon was added to the race calendar but I had made up my mind to go those few extra miles south.

Entering the marathon was easy using the SIEEntries website, who also give a handy start list that showed that NEMCs Ian Richardson was also entered to run. There were a couple of e-mails from the organisers with race details, everything on the e-mail was also on the race website. Wakefield is organised by the same people who organise Huddersfield and Halifax marathons and a few other events. A portion of the race entry fees is donated to charity. At £35 it is verging on the top end of the middle priced marathons however take away the charity donation and it would probably work out cheaper than most, showing again that you do not need to charge anywhere near £50 to put on a good marathon. The race website is decent, it shows everything you need and is clear, without excessive adverts that can clutter up some race websites.

The Race HQ is at Nostell Priory, a national trust property and quite a nice building close to Wakefield. Number collection was easy - find your number on the printed lists, go to the number table and ask for it, simple, then I had a 5 minute walk to the car park to get changed, and 5 minute walk back to the start area. That is one thing to note, leave time to get from parking to the start. I arrived about half an hour before the race, perhaps peak time for arrivals and found it quick to park, and no long queues on the road. There was a £3 charge for parking, pay and display machines so remember some change. Like most National Trust sites, there are good toilets and a cafe.

The race route exits the priory grounds, over the main road, down a short stretch of road passing a brickworks on the right, taking a turn and onto the footpaths and trails. The route then spent about 6 miles on footpaths in woods and round lakes. There was a mile section where the route ran alongside a river in the woods, starting with a sharp double back, passing under a bridge we had just crossed which I particularly liked, in this section there are a couple of short sharp rises as the track crossed other tracks. The route then crossed a dam wall and then back onto the road. The road took us up the hill into Ackworth village (I think that's the name I read) before we turned to go off road again along tracks. This junction had marshals with Jelly Babies. The track cut a corner off the road, re-joining the road took us uphill back to the brickworks road again in the opposite direction as before. Heading back to the priory and within view of the finish we were sent across the main road, right and round the priory grounds away from the finish. In this section we ran past a Ha-Ha, separating us from a field of cows. At mile 11 1/2 we turned back towards the priory again to have the finish snatched away again with a mile long grassy loop up the hill to give us a half mile descent to the finish section. Perhaps the organisers had seen the Ha-ha and added their own sense of humour, the climb to mile 12 and 25 over grass. Downhill to mile 13 and the finish section. The half marathoners peeled off to the right to finish and the marathoners carried on to try it all again.

As a marathon route it is a good one, I enjoyed it anyway. A lot of this was off road and trails, the paths we were sent along are quiet at the time we were running. The route is a good varied mix of running, along roads, through woodland, round lakes and along rivers so should appeal to anyone wanting a marathon outside of a big city. If I lived in the area I could see myself training on much of the route at various times too. All the tracks and paths were good enough to run at marathon pace.

The route was well marshalled generally, or well signed otherwise. I might add that in the run in to the priory there were 2 gates that the front runners opened and closed, on the second lap these gates were open - perhaps an added gate marshal could have been in place if possible? I can understand how gates were left open - the runner in front leaves it open rather than shut it in the face of the runner behind, who leaves it for the runner behind and this back runner was not aware that the gate was opened by the front runner. So the gates were open on the second lap. Marshalls were all friendly - when are they not friendly though? Water stations were every 3 miles serving just water in cups, I think there was water at the half way mark but I missed that one. The race was

held at the end of June, but also Wimbledon was playing - the weather could have been anything, there did appear to be plenty of water just in case it got hot.

I didn't really have a race plan for this race, more to get around the route and hope to do well. You never know with trail races what is going to be ahead and it is harder to pick a pace aim for. I stayed with my brother in Nottingham the night before and had the obligatory beer and burger at a BBQ, again another reason for not having a plan, some nights we might just have a cup of tea in the evening, some nights and the empty spirits bottles clank in the bin in the morning. Just for the record, it was a tea drinking night. I didn't even make a plan on my journey to the race. On the journey north there was a bit of rain, I hoped it would clear up but not warm up. I think I mentioned that I had half an hour at the priory before we set off, about enough time to get a number, get to the car, change and jog to the start but I was cutting it a bit finer than I like (OK I had 5 minutes and the jog was a good warm up). I met Ian Richardson near the start and after a quick chat we were given the usual kind of race briefing "Thanks for coming, stay safe, come again next year please", and we were off. Oh, my only real plan was my standard take an energy gel every 3 1/2 to 4 miles which nicely coincided with the water stops.

The first half mile was the usual jostle for position and working out who was likely to be around you for the rest of the race. Just after the brickworks I was matching pace with Paul, the second place half marathoner. This pace suited me so I asked if he minded the company for 45 minutes or more. He was OK with this and we spent the next 6 miles having an easy going chat. I will explain this, I am often a talker when I run, it takes my mind off the legs and lungs. In a marathon a few miles chatting paces me well and stops me going off too fast and having to slow dramatically later (we ran at about 6:24 a mile pace, and I know I didn't have a target in mind, but 6:30 a mile pace would be a 2:50 marathon and I will always be happy with that), Paul explained that he was recovering from a cold, yet he was running easily, able to keep a conversation going and be 2nd place in a half marathon, not bad (he was overtaken in the last part of the race and this is where the recent illness showed - he didn't have anything left to keep ahead). The company through the woods made it feel more like a faster paced training run than a race, thanks Paul. At 10k we hit the road and Paul said for me to go at my own pace and he dropped back, I know I should have kept a steady pace but I sped up slightly pushing up the hills.

Leaving the chat and company behind, I now had about 18 miles of lonely running to do - the part in a marathon where there are no runners ahead or behind and probably the hardest part of a marathon to keep going and push at an increasingly hard pace. At 6 1/2 to 7 miles the road went uphill to the village, which was OK on the first lap. There were a few spectators in the village, friends I assume of other runners which was nice, up until then there were only interested passers-by. I had a couple of comments asking if I was a marathoner or half. After the village there were more trails to follow, nothing much of note happened there, I was just enjoying the course and running well - I had also hit a nice speed for me. Passing the brickworks for the second time I retraced my steps back to the priory, a left turn towards the main road and then a right turn at the main road and a road crossing. First lap this road crossing appeared a bit frantic, but I was only the second runner past. The second lap was less frantic as the marshals knew better what to do. Going back into the priory grounds was down a grass track, so had to watch where my feet were going, then a couple of gates before the final up and over mile loop to the finish and start of lap 2.

At the half way mark I was feeling good and kept on at the same pace, I also knew that I might pay for this pace later, but that would come later in the race. Crossing back over the main road the marshals were all looking at runners coming towards me but luckily I timed my crossing when the traffic was stopped for them. Down towards the brickworks again and I got a few encouraging comments from the other runners, which is always nice. The second lap was much the same as the first, my legs got more tired as I ran but nothing unusual and I will admit to needing to walk on a couple of the road hills near the end of the race. One thing about this route is that the big climbs were mostly on roads - better for running I think. At around mile 20 I passed a couple of half marathon back markers, great encouragement from them and as they were on a hill it made me run to the top rather than giving in for a short walk. I didn't pass any more back markers for about a mile. In the last stages of a race back markers and lapping people gives me a target to aim for if there is no competition around me. Push to catch them up and then push to find the next ones.

It was beginning to get warm and at the next water stop I had a full cup rather than a mouthful then I pushed on to the finish - I had no idea where second place was and a paranoia I always have is that I will be caught in the last 100m and loose the place. I don't often have a good sprint finish, I prefer to work harder through the rest of the race than gaining a couple of seconds in the last sprint. Near the finish I eased off and ran alongside a charity half marathoner and shouted to encourage her - and to her credit she humoured me and sped up to the finish line. I finished 1st placed, 2:46 which was a PB and as this was the first time running for the marathon, also a course record - not a bad days effort!!

So what went well for me this year? I am running a lot more miles than a year ago, my run home is 6 2/3 miles two or three times a week which includes a 1 1/2 mile hill - great training for this type of race. I am doubling up training as well so will do 5 miles at lunchtime and then run home with a pack one or two times in a week, and locally in Glasgow the end of May and start of June have a lot of 10km races (I think there are 6 in 5 weeks), and I do prefer trail races. I think the timing for this race was perfect for me to get good a fast time.

I would run this race again, and probably also look at the organisers other races. The route was well chosen and a good variety, the race HQ was a great building, the organisation to me ran smoothly, can't say a lot more than I would run it again. Value for money, it was OK considering the donation to charity, they had managed to persuade a lot of marshals to stand out for us (not sure if they got donations for their charities or not?), water every 3 to 4 miles, the goody bag as a goody bag was OK - a few snack bars, water and a T shirt (I think I prefer a medal or other memento though).

After the race I saw online a couple of negative comments, mostly relating to teething troubles of organising a new event I think, and getting the results out.

Steven