

## DUNDEE MARATHON July 21<sup>st</sup> 2013

Approximately 3 weeks ago I received an email from Nicholas Kydd of race organisers Eventfull Management Ltd informing me that he'd made a decision to definitely go ahead with a marathon on the same day as his annual half marathon event. This was all news to me – I had no idea that he was planning to repeat last year's first attempt and had certainly not seen it advertised anywhere. I'd done the event last year and remember writing at the time that I didn't think it would be on again given all the extra work needed for the few who took part, particularly as the half marathon attracted so many runners anyway. I know Nicholas took a lot of unfair criticism for perceived organisational errors, much of it personal and hurtful – sufficiently so as to make him unwell enough to end up in hospital. While there had been a couple of teething problems, I'd enjoyed the race and made a point of telling him so.

Further investigation unearthed a report from the Dundee Evening Telegraph dated 4<sup>th</sup> June headed “Low numbers see Dundee Marathon under threat” including a quote from Nicholas that we “need 300 people to definitely say we will do the marathon for it to be viable” At that stage there were already over 600 entered for the half. On the morning of the race only 87 had registered for the full and I would imagine that the week's blistering heat would have guaranteed a fair few non-starters.

Both Steven Prentice and I were last minute entrants, travelling together for this one. Steven was using it to test his form prior to the Montreal Marathon. I just wanted to run again! After some controversy regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> places – the guy who came 2<sup>nd</sup> had been sent the wrong way but was sportingly given 1<sup>st</sup> place by the first over the line - Steven finished 3<sup>rd</sup> overall and 1<sup>st</sup> Senior Male in sub 3 hours on what was a red-hot day. I'd like to think that I contributed to his performance by feeding him pints of Bellhaven on the Saturday night and providing a Hob Nob for his pre-race breakfast. After all, it's important to get your preparation spot-on if you want to perform well on the day.

The course was exactly the same as last year – a multi-terrain circular route around Dundee's “Green Chain” with the half marathoners stopping at Broughty Ferry with the rest of us continuing a further 9 miles along the banks of the Tay before ascending the final 4 miles uphill through a business park/residential area back to the finish in Camperdown Park. I've already described the route in more detail in last year's race report so won't go into the same details. Suffice to say that most of the minor teething problems of last year, like making the marathoners go through the half's crowded finishing funnel, had been identified and rectified by the organisers. Most importantly on such a hot day was the plentiful supply of drinks at regular intervals around the course. Yet again, the Police were conspicuous by their presence at the many road intersections – the Dundee Constabulary's final invoice for manning the event must have been the stuff of nightmares. I can see now why Nicholas talked of needing 300 entrants in the marathon.

While Steven was racing ahead at the front I was happily chugging along at a comfortable 10 minute/mile pace near the back, just pleased to be running again. The stretch along the Tay from 12 to 22 miles was particularly enjoyable particularly as, by then, most of us had the cycle path to ourselves. I lost time in the climb away from the river but that didn't matter. It was a great day out in the sunshine. Perhaps the only disappointment was that we again got the same medal as the half marathoners and although there was a gel, Alpen bar and a drink in the goody bag, I'm sure the £26.50 entry fee would have been sufficient to cover a different medal for the two groups of runners. It'll be interesting to see if it's on again next year. I'd like to do it again.

Jim Manford  
22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013

## RESERVOIR MARATHON July 28<sup>th</sup> 2013

I'd originally intended to be in Davos for the Swiss Alpine Marathon this weekend but, thanks to the vagaries of the NHS had to settle instead for the flatter terrain of Northampton. Having been told 5 months ago that I needed an urgent operation, I've been unable to plan ahead with any certainty and, instead, am confined to last-minute, get-in-where-I-can entries. Having missed out on so many marathons while at the mercy of the NHS, I've a lot of catching up to do. Like Dundee last week, I was only able to enter the Friday before the race. Fortunately, good friends Dave & Linda Major, the organisers of the Reservoir, were able to slot me seamlessly into Sunday's start list.

The obverse of a late entry though is that you're penalised by having to pay through the nose for last minute rail fares and extortionate hotel prices. It's just as well that the Majors adhere to the value-for-money approach to marathon organisation – the mere £15 entry fee at least softened the blow of travel & accommodation costs.

I'd last done this event in March almost 4 months to the day. This weekend was likewise a double marathon affair with separate races on both the Saturday and the Sunday. There was virtually the same set of runners involved too, with approximately half the field being familiar faces from the 100 Club "family" The March event had been bitterly cold and it was with some irony that I recalled the final sentence of my race report from that occasion. – "hopefully it might prove a little warmer"...when the race is repeated in July. Be careful what you wish for! Sunday was extremely warm and humid following the record-breaking thunderstorms of Saturday evening as the sun evaporated the remaining surface water. Apparently though, the Saturday race, coming just before the thunderstorms struck had been even hotter resulting in more than twice the number of Sunday's DNFs. 28 runners ran on both days with almost half of these posting a faster time second time round – testimony to the brutality of Saturday's heat.

I've described the course previously so just to recap, it's 6 laps around the Brackmills Reservoir with almost exactly half on a tarmac foot/cycle path and the rest on good firm turf around the perimeter of the reservoir itself. It's quiet and scenic with a well-stocked drinks station at the end of each lap. Storage and changing are in the nearby Holiday Inn with its bar for catching-up with everyone afterwards. The whole experience makes it an excellent day out.

Altogether there were 56 finishers on the Saturday and 59 on the Sunday – very similar to the numbers who ran in March. From a personal viewpoint, I ran strongly for the first 4 laps and then like many of us, started to struggle as the heat took its toll. Strangely, the difference in my time from March to July was a mere -7 seconds, (or 1 second per lap) Not sure whether I should call that consistency or a failure to improve!

Jim Manford  
July 29<sup>th</sup> 2013

### Round and Round We Go!



Swissalpine c42 – Davos – 27 July 2013 by Ian Richardson

I have been visiting the Swissalpine for the last fifteen years and running in the C42 since its inception in 2003.

I have written about this event before, but as it is probably my all time favourite, here it is again!

There are a number of events on the day, ranging in distance from 10k, 21k, 30k, two marathons and a 78k, which is essentially the two marathons linked.

This year was even more so for the C42, as over the years it has had many variations to the route and complete route reversals.

This year it started with the K30 and K78 in Davos at 7a.m. on a day that was to be as hot as the period that had preceded it. Fortunately, the early start and shaded nature of a good part of the course meant that running conditions were mostly very good.

For a group trip, these events form the culmination of a week of walking and running in a very relaxed environment. We have been using the same hotel since before I first started going and for the last ten years it has been managed quite excellently by Barbara and Dennis. To mark their ten years, at the Friday evening pre race pasta buffet, we were all presented with a running vest, and many of us chose to wear this on race day.

The K30, C42 and K78 all follow exactly the same route along a valley, part on roads and part on very runnable trails. Very runnable apart from how hilly it can be !

After the K30 finishes in the village of Filisur, we were then led towards Bergun for the C42 finish.

This was very different to recent years. After a lovely 3k or so beside a river, we then had a short stretch of road, before embarking on a fearsome uphill of about 3k, which could only be walked. This gave us a lovely view down into Bergun, having climbed way above it. Following the K78 route would not have given the correct distance for the C42, so at this point we had another very hard 2.5k loop before rejoining the K78 and then also the K42, which starts in Bergun.

A low key finish, with a good T-shirt and medal and excellent showers.

I managed 4:43 for 35<sup>th</sup> out of 295, so was very happy with that.

Will I go back? What a daft question!



And here I am, a picture of sartorial elegance in my hotel vest and ever present Buff, crossing the mighty Wiesen viaduct, just over half way into the race.

Ian Richardson 29 July 2013

## SOLIDARITY MARATHON GDANSK POLAND AUGUST 15th 2013

I had a special personal reason for going to this one – Gdansk was the city in which Mo's late father had spent much of his 5 years as a prisoner-of-war as slave labour, loading cement onto barges for his German captors. This was to be the 19th edition of the Solidarity Marathon running through the streets of what is known as the Tricity, (the three cities of Gdynia, Sopot and Gdansk), in commemoration of the 44 striking shipyard workers killed by the Communist Government in December 1970. The second objective of the marathon is stated as "the popularization and propagation of running as the easiest form of leisure" In common with other Polish marathons the organisers of this one are deadly serious in their intent with low entry fees and large cash prizes on offer in every age-group category. Competitors, like myself, over 60 years of age are offered free entry and accommodation is provided free to anyone who wants it in a nearby sports hall.. The marathon is held annually on the 15th August regardless of which day of the week on which it falls. This year it was a Thursday.

Of the three cities in the Tricity through which the marathon is run, Gdansk is by far the most historically important. To describe its past as eventful would be a major understatement. The city has been fought over continuously throughout its history and at least two of the significant events in recent European history have their origins there. For example, World War II started in Gdansk while the second, more recent event of historical significance, followed on from the shipyard workers' strike of 1970 on which the marathon is focused. Though brutally stamped out by the authorities this protest signified the first major crack in Eastern Europe's communist wall. A decade later a Gdansk shipyard electrician named Lech Walesa led a further series of strikes resulting in the formation of the Solidarity movement and eventually to democracy for Poland, with Walesa as its first President. Most Poles will argue that this movement was the catalyst for the overthrow of Communism in Eastern Europe.

I found the Registration somewhat disappointing. It was a long trip from Gdansk to Gdynia simply to pick up a number and an unattractive white T-shirt in the foyer of a building. It did, however, give me the chance to meet up with the inevitable fellow-member of the 100 Club and seemingly the only other English-speaker in the race. This turned out to be an American member named Robert Bishton, better known for some reason as "Cowboy Jeff" on account of his trademark wearing of a cowboy hat in every marathon he takes part in, (it takes all sorts!) Robert, or should it be Jeff?) was heading off to run the Helsinki Marathon on the Saturday immediately after this one. There was a Pasta Party to be held that afternoon in the Hotel Rezydent, Sopot, (I guess they had to let Sopot feel as if it too was part of the event), but as it was 28zł to enter and involved yet another train ride, I didn't bother.

Marathon day dawned dry and sunny after the rain of the previous two days and it was back on board the train again for another trip up to Gdynia. Before the 10am start to the race itself we had what the organisers called the "Ceremonial Start" in front of the Victims Monument at 9.45. This was a solemn affair in which some of the older local runners took part along with various dignitaries, speeches and the laying of wreaths – all in front of the TV cameras. Then we were off, approximately 750 of us – following a circuit of Gdynia's main shopping streets before turning and heading south towards Gdansk. For the next 19km or so we ran along an uninspiring closed section of motorway with minimal crowd support. Without thinking, I found myself among the sub 4 hour pacer's group for much of this stretch. This obviously convinced a friendly Polish runner called Peter that I must have been aiming for a sub 4 hour finish. I wasn't! I don't make plans like that any more, simply preferring to run at how my body feels at the time. Peter, it seems, decided to "adopt" me as someone he could assist and someone who he could practise his English on. The problem was, he was not only 25 years younger than me but a lot fitter too. Eventually, approaching the half way point just outside Gdansk it took all my powers of persuasion to get him to go on ahead and leave me to my own pace. By this stage the combination of trying to maintain a conversation in broken English and the increasing warmth of the day was beginning to tell.

We continued through the busy cobbled streets of the city centre, packed with crowds celebrating their Public Holiday, (the Assumption), before crossing the river for a 20 km out-and-back stretch along the Westerplatte peninsula. At this point an amusing incident occurred. I'd brought gels with me but forgotten to pack my gel bag to keep them in so had arranged with Mo that she'd hand me a gel at a designated point in the city centre. I'd gone past the point without seeing her so had simply continued running before hearing my name being shouted out from behind me. On turning I was confronted by the sight of a woman in a blue mac racing up the course waving a gel while at the same time being pursued by burly policemen trying to block her progress. Those of you who know Mo will know how determined she can be. I got my gel. Sad to say, she was actually catching up with me!

Westerplatte turned out to be a big let-down – a lonely, desolate stretch with little signs of activity. Being a public holiday all the shipyards and factories were closed and all we had for company was an empty, endless dual carriageway. The turning point at 32km was, I believe, meant to show us yet another monument. I missed it, I'm afraid! The finish though was spectacular – entering the Royal Way via the Golden Gate and running past cheering crowds along its length to finish outside the magnificent Town Hall

I'd enjoyed the run and had managed to maintain a sub 10 minute per mile pace for all of the second half, stopping only to take on isotonic drink, banana and sugar lumps at the 25km mark. (These had been provided at 5km intervals throughout) Unfortunately, apart from the couple of kilometres within Gdansk city centre and

especially the final sprint down the Royal Way the course had been dreary and unexciting throughout – not at all conducive to fast times, though this didn't seem to affect the leading Kenyan who was virtually back in the city before I'd left it for Westerplatte! The heavy, double medallion at the end was excellent though – one of the best I've received – as too was the warm food that followed. Though no expert on Polish food, I believe we were given Bigos (Hunter's Stew), a traditional dish consisting of meat, cabbage, onion and sauerkraut. Whatever it was it was very welcome. I found Gdansk to be a fascinating and beautiful city – not at all what I expected. I'm really pleased I made the effort to go. We even got to visit the very spot where Mo's Dad had worked all those years ago.

Finished at last!



## **Hell on the Humber – 6 hour race – Saturday 17 August 2013**

Not all events are aptly named. This one is.

It is a six (or twelve, if you prefer) hour run back and forth over the Humber Bridge, starting at 7p.m..

Starting on the north side by the visitor centre, it goes south over the bridge for 2 miles on the cycle/pedestrian path that is separated from the roadway, before turning at a traffic cone and coming back north for 2 miles to complete a lap of 4 miles.

Repeat until you have had enough or your time is up.

On this evening, it looked very pleasant with a village of small tents in the wooded area by the start, containing runners kit and supporters, and I foolishly thought that I would be in for a pleasant evening.

The wind was of Druridge conditions with warning lights and speed restrictions on the bridge. We also had some horizontal rain just before the start, which was nice.

As soon as we set off and climbed from the visitor area to the path proper, the wind hit us full on and did not lessen as the night wore on. Coming back over the bridge with the wind behind wasn't that easy either as it would blow you about, meaning that the level of energy expenditure was very much out of proportion to what might have been expected. It is also not a flat event, with the first part of each section being uphill and the end part being downhill, so there was little respite.

The tediousness of the route also made it a considerable mental challenge. I am not normally a wearer of mp3 equipment, or much of a supporter of those who do, it would really have helped in this event, but was forbidden by the organisers, on pain of being thrown off the bridge. I like a robust approach to rule enforcement.

The aid station at the lap start/finish was well stocked with sweet and savoury foods and a supply of High 5 gels, so I didn't need any of the supplies I had taken. There was also very encouraging support at this point, and some supporters braved the wind to walk over the bridge and cheer on the runners.

I discovered that distance recorded was in laps and that if you wished, on completing a lap in the last hour, you could then stop. As my purpose was to cover a marathon distance, I am happy(ish) to report that I completed my 7<sup>th</sup> lap, for a distance of 28 miles in the rather desperate time of 5 hours and two minutes. Whilst I could have managed another 4 mile lap in the time available, I had no desire to do so, and gratefully baled out, picking up my oversized T shirt and making the long journey back to Newcastle.

The above does come over rather negatively and I think most of that is down to the awful weather conditions and the fact that I hadn't really recovered from the Coastal marathon 6 days earlier.

It was a well organised and very friendly event, and with decent weather it is well suited to a particular type of runner. I know now that I am not that type of runner!

Ian Richardson

29 Aug. 13

### REKYJAVIK MARATHON, ICELAND August 24<sup>th</sup> 2013

Mo and I arrived in Reykjavik on the Thursday evening in the pouring rain for Saturday's 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the city's marathon. Next day, (Friday), was registration day for the event. This was held between 10am and 7pm in a huge sporting complex in an area known as the Laugardalur Valley some 3 kilometres west of the city centre. We arrived early for registration hoping to beat the inevitable queues of later in the day, (last year there were over 13,000 entrants in the 5 events on offer.) Unfortunately, our plans for a quick exit were thwarted by a computer malfunction in the verification of our timing chips, resulting not only in us having to stand in a long queue waiting for things to be sorted, but also being unable to use our own chip for the race. Our goody bag contained a rather nice official T shirt and two vouchers: one for a free Camelbak drink bottle and the other for a free swim in any of the city's 7 thermal pools.

Unlike Gdansk the previous week, however, there was a proper sports expo accompanying registration with stalls selling all manner of clothing and equipment plus some very generous hand-outs of yoghurt, chocolate milk, coffee and assorted treats to supplement our pre-race diet. It was with some apprehension that we returned to the sports hall later that afternoon for the Pasta Party, fully expecting the place to be packed to the rafters with heaving wet bodies. Our fears were unfounded, not only were family and friends allowed in for free, we were served immediately with a full plate of pasta, salad and bread and allowed to return for refills as many times as we wanted – (I went 3 times) Given the exorbitant cost of a meal in Reykjavik city centre this was a real bonus.

The marathon start was at 8.40am the next day, (no, I don't know why!) and, unbelievably, it was still raining. In fact, the mist was even further down to the ground than when we arrived – so much for the beautiful pictures of runners in the sunshine in the event literature. This was the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the race in which the number of participants has grown each year from the 214 entrants in 1984. Apparently 14,272 registered this year. I don't have a full breakdown of the figures for 2013 but last year 806 ran the full marathon, 116 ran in the marathon relay, 2,004 ran the half, 5,177 ran the 10km while almost 2,000 entered the 3km Fun Run and 3,379 took part in something called the Lazy Town Run, (don't ask!) At 62 to 80 euros to enter, depending on date of entry, the marathon itself is obviously the minority event in this little lot. Within all these figures we're told that there were altogether 1,693 foreign entrants representing 63 different nationalities – making it a nice little earner for Iceland's booming tourism industry.

While sheltering in the over crowded baggage/changing area near the start line I was delighted to bump into Kate Taylor, a long-time running friend from Yorkshire. Kate is a very independent lady who often travels alone to some of the most far-flung marathons around the world. This was to be her 98<sup>th</sup> marathon and with the Ypres Peace Marathon next on her agenda, she'd planned October's Munich Marathon for her 100<sup>th</sup>.

The race started in conjunction with the half marathon outside Reykjavik Junior College on Laekjargata in the heart of the city centre. The 10km set off approx. one hour later. The first kilometre took us alongside Tjornir, the lake bisecting the city on which the new Town Hall is built, before crossing the lake and heading in a southerly direction to the fjord across the peninsula. On our way there we passed both the National Museum and the University of Iceland. There followed a 10km loop around the shoreline back to Harpa, the monstrosity of an Opera House, close to where we had started. The course then headed eastwards along the Atlantic shoreline to approx 16km: past the iconic Sun Voyager aluminum sculpture resembling a Viking ship

designed to commemorate the city's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1990, past Hotoi – the house in which Reagan and Gorbachev met in 1986 to try to find a resolution to the Cold War and finally to the International Shipping Terminal where a recently arrived boatload of American passengers had to wait patiently in their tour buses for the runners to pass before they could head off on one of their day tours.

Heading back towards the city at 18km we finally lost the half marathoners as they made their way back to the finish. At this point we were able to see Videy Island, first inhabited soon after the discovery of Iceland in 870, before heading inland to the half-way point in the aforementioned Langardalur Valley. Up to this point we had largely been running on closed roads. The rest of the route was to take us mainly on good walking/cycle paths all the way to where we'd started in the centre of town. From 24 to 25km we ran through Ellioaardalur, a nature reserve containing a salmon river and a lovely mini waterfall before crossing the southern ring road over a footbridge at the 29km mark near to Nautholsvik, Iceland's only serviced beach. This is a partly man made facility where the water is held at a constant temperature of 20 degrees, being a mixture of the cold Atlantic Ocean and hot spring water. As we ran past the temperature on the course was a mere 8 degrees in the horizontal rain and I was feeling more in need of a hat and gloves rather than a swim in the sea by this stage!

We continued on the footpath beside the shoreline behind Reykjavik's domestic airport before heading out at 36km to Grotta, another nature reserve and protected birdlife area from where we turned eastwards again for the long run-in past the Icelandic Prime Minister's Office and Catholic Cathedral to the finish line and the prospect of at last getting dry. I have to admit, though, that I didn't really mind the cold and wet. I enjoyed the course, showing us as it did so many of the city's tourist sites. It was largely flat and scenic with most of it being within sight of the ocean and I invariably run best in colder weather. I later discovered that I'd finished as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vet 65 in a time of 4 hours 11minutes – some five and a half minutes behind the first runner in that category.

On finishing we were handed a medal, (Mo swears that the half marathoners got the same medal – I hope she's mistaken), a banana, a bun and a bottle of water. This was a very well organized event and one I'd definitely want to do again despite the weather.

#### Mo & I with Kate Taylor before the Start



Jim Manford 29/08/2013

## **Ultra Tyne Tour – Hexham to Tynemouth -37 miles by Ian Richardson**

Who would have thought, only a few short years ago, that we would now have so many long distance events in the North East.

This one is organised by Avid Runner and had the options of one or two day, with day one starting from the sources of the north or south Tyne to Hexham and day 2 being from Hexham to Tynemouth.

I chose the day 2 option, knowing most of the second part of the route and as it fit nicely into my route to 100 marathons.

Originally billed as about 30 miles, it was revised to the actual distance, to make it “more interesting”. As I had never run more than 32 miles before, it was certainly going to be interesting seeing how I managed.

There were due to be about 15 starting day 2, but this was sadly depleted by a high drop out rate following day 1.

Nevertheless, our hardy band left the scout centre in Hexham at 8a.m., armed with written route instructions, startling in their brevity, and maps, all on waterproof paper. Within 50 yards of the start we had people going in different directions, but our group were doggedly determined to follow the written instructions until we gave up on them and stuck to the map instead.

Once out of Hexham and into the countryside to the south we got onto an easterly trail towards Dilston and it all became much easier from there on. The map was still needed at path junctions, but was quite straightforward.

We reached the first of the mobile aid stations after about 8 miles, where we were offered water, coke, tea, coffee, sweets, crisps, biscuits and chocolate. Lovely stuff! After that it was onto Prudhoe where we saw a number of people heading off to do the Jelly tea race. 10 miles, what’s that all about!?

The checkpoint at Prudhoe saw cheese sandwiches added to all the other goodies and the rest of my run was fuelled entirely on this fine foodstuff. Much better than gels and chewy bars.

By this time we were on the C2C cycle route which we to follow to the end, so only had to look out for the blue signs as we progressed on mostly tarmac surface. I had been running with Anna Seeley, an NEMC regular event attender, and we parted company at Newburn, approximately half way into the event. Apart from being excellent company, Anna also helped me to pace myself for the long haul into uncharted territory towards the end.

Newburn (more cheese sandwiches) gave way to Lemington then Scotswood and down through the Business Park where I used to work, to run along the Tyne to Newcastle Quayside.

The Sunday market was in full flow and took quite some doing to negotiate. Just after came the marathon distance and another checkpoint and cheese sandwich.

Then it was carry on down the cycle route past Byker and Walker and the Roman fort at Segedunum in Wallsend.

After that it was the last 5 or so miles to the end. My Garmin had expired by this time and the distances indicated on the cycle route signs gave every indication of having been put up in the wrong order. In one case, pointing the wrong way too, as I had a detour though the car park of Wet and Wild before backtracking to go through Royal Quays and the last cheese sandwich before the push through North Shields Fish Quay and the finish in Tynemouth.

We were fortunate to have been running west to east as a strong westerly pushed us along the route and would have been most unpleasant to run into.

So my longest run to date, of approximately 37 miles in 6:50 was celebrated by a giant plate of fish and chips, courtesy of the race director, who then gave us a lift back to Hexham to pick up our cars.

It was an excellent day, a really good event and one I shall certainly look forward to doing again.

Ian Richardson 2 September 2013.



Advice always worth following !

## TALLINN MARATHON ESTONIA September 8<sup>th</sup> 2013

Isn't it strange that things can go so badly wrong at the outset of a journey but you can still return with great memories of the trip! I'd planned to meet up with my 100 Club friend Dave Goodwin for the 6 am flight from Manchester airport. Firstly, my overnight train to Manchester simply conked out in the middle of nowhere, losing all power and leaving us passengers sitting in the dark for ages not knowing whether the problem could be fixed in time for the flight. It was, but there was no sign of Dave at the airport – he'd over-slept his wake-up alarm in the Manchester Travelodge and missed out on the whole weekend. Never mind, both Andy Glen and Gary O'Brien from the 100 Club were also on our flight so we'd already got the basis for a good social drinking team for the coming weekend.

As neither of us could get into our respective hotels until 2 pm we thought it best to pick up our numbers at Registration before the crowds arrived. This was easily accomplished by a short stroll in the hot sun to the registration marquee in Freedom Square, Tallinn's showcase square full of national symbolism and civic pride. The square is dominated by a huge pillar with a cross known as The Monument to the War – commemorating Estonia's battle for independence from Russia from 1918 to 1920. As well as receiving our numbers with incorporated chip, we were also handed a rather disappointing grey T-shirt that didn't even include the word marathon anywhere on it, (I'd seen last year's shirts and they were of a much more appropriate design), a free ferry ticket to either Helsinki or Stockholm and a discounted pasta restaurant voucher.

This year's event was dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Estonian marathon running. Apparently the first running competition in Estonia took place on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1913 over the old distance of 40.2 kilometres and was won by a Russian athlete in the time of 3 hours 23 minutes 45 seconds, (I guess that's a poor time for a short course!) The organizers seemed to make a great deal out of their marathon being the best attended of those in the Baltic States – hardly surprising I suppose if you insist on counting the large numbers of children who participate in their Saturday afternoon races with age groups going upwards from 2 to 12. This year the numbers broke the 20,000 mark for the first time. This consisted of: 2,077 in the marathon, 2,728 in the half, 7,689 in the 10k, 7,201 in a Nordic 10k and 2,661 in the children's races. The children's events culminated on the Saturday evening with an Official Opening ceremony on a large stage in Freedom Square from 6 to 7 pm. This started with all the elite runners in the 3 main events being introduced to us individually on stage. These were, of course, largely Ethiopian and Kenyan athletes. As their personal best times were displayed electronically on screen behind each runner, I couldn't help thinking was that there was little to choose between the 3 favourites in the men's race. This proved correct the next day when the same 3 came flying past me with scarcely a hair's breadth between them. (All 3 finished within seconds of each other.) After the introductions came the speeches from various suited and booted dignitaries. As it was all in Estonian I hadn't a clue what they were on about. Then it was 30 minutes of a rather old-fashioned looking and sounding "rock" group, (a cross between Frank Ifield and the Seekers if any of you are old enough to know who they are!) The curtain finally came down with a decent fireworks display. As I left the Square the temperature on digital display was still showing 19 degrees. It had been a hot day and, at 25 degrees, it was tipped to be even hotter for tomorrow's race.

Despite having had 15 years in Australia in which to acclimatize, I still don't run well in the heat. That night I had a decision to make. – should I forgo the pleasures of a convivial, boozy evening with Gary, Andy and Martin Bush or should I have an early night and try for a decent time the next day. No prizes for guessing what happened. – either those boys are very persuasive or I'm easily persuaded, (probably the latter!) The upshot was, I left Mad Murphy's at 1am knowing that I'd be standing on the start line with 2,000 other, more sober runners, in less than 8 hours time. Not unnaturally, I struggled badly with the combination of heat and hangover, coming in some 35 minutes later than my time in Reykjavik two weeks previously. I'm realistic enough to know though that my suffering was all self-inflicted. I had a choice and even with hindsight wouldn't have changed my decision. I'd had a bad day at the office but a great night out on the town! At this stage of my running career it's become more important to me to have a good time than to run one.

At the 9am start next morning we were policed into pens according to our race number, before heading out of the city centre for 2 laps of the half marathon course along a fairly flat out-and-back route, following the Baltic shoreline to the 9km mark. Incidentally, the half marathon set off 2 and a half hours later at 11.30 am and the 10km had a 13.30 start. It meant that, after having the roads to ourselves for most of the race, many of us were overtaken by pushing and jostling half marathoners as the race progressed. The endless stretches of long straight roads could have been monotonous had it not been for the views of the open sea and the giant Helsinki and Stockholm ferries on each return leg. With about 3km to go before the finish of each lap we were directed along narrow, cobbled streets around the perimeter of the ancient city walls before entering the welcome shade of Toompea Park en

route to Freedom Square. I managed to keep going at a steady pace until the 25km mark but it wasn't getting any better and, from thereon in, I opted for a walk/run strategy to the finish. It wasn't worth killing myself just to come in a few minutes earlier – I wanted to go out on the town again that night! On finishing we each received a heavy, distinctive marathon medal before being led past numerous stalls handing out bananas, isotonic drinks, water, snickers bars and all manner of assorted free offerings. The best was yet to come, however. Discreetly tucked away around the corner was a marathon runners' only enclosure to which runners from the other events were barred from entering. Here we given hot food and drink in the form of unlimited amounts of tasty, thick soup, pasta, rolls/bread, pastries, tea and coffee. There was a furnished marquee in which to sit and eat too. An added bonus was the free bar where pints of the local Saku 4.7% beer was handed out as many times as you cared to visit. I'd planned on using my Pasta restaurant discount voucher that evening but managed so much to eat and drink on finishing that I didn't need another meal that day. Unfortunately, many of the marathon finishers I spoke to later hadn't known about the free enclosure and missed out on the treat. Gary and Martin for example were sitting in a nearby bar paying for their post-race beverages while Andy and I were filling our boots. Needless to say, they weren't pleased to hear about what they'd missed when we all met up later that evening.

I have to say this is a really well organized and value for money marathon, up there with the best as far as both aspects are concerned. In particular, the spacing of the drinks stations every 2 km worked really well on such a hot day – each of these had isotonic drinks and bananas as well as copious amounts of water. There were even free gels at the 12 and 33km marks so the 4 gels that I'd paid 2 euros each for before the race were left for another time. The marathon cost from 20 to 35 euros to enter depending on date of entry but we certainly got our money's worth. The generic T shirt we were given was selling to non-runners for 15 euros, the pasta ticket saved approx. 5 euros, 4 gels saved 8 euros, I must have had at least 20 euros worth of free food and drink at the post-race marquee. Factor in the free ferry ticket, (it's something like 60 euros return to Helsinki), do the math and you'll see that we got a good deal. (I'm not even including several free bottles of sports drink, a couple of bottles of coke, a bar of snickers etc. etc.) There were also prizes in every 5 year age-group category up to M75. (The 100 Club's Dave Ross who I met later that evening took the V45 trophy home with him) I do hope some of those greedy UK race organizers currently charging over £50 for their marathons and giving so little back in return read this and take note!

I really enjoyed every minute of my time in Tallinn and would certainly go back for the marathon again. Next time, with the correct preparation, I'm sure I could acquit myself well. The weather for the full four days was as hot and cloudless as Reykjavik had been damp and cold. There was a general feel-good factor about the place which, combined with the low-cost outdoor life style, makes it a pleasant city in which to spend a few days. I'd visited an exhibition depicting Estonia's history of struggle and suffering and found it hard to equate what I was reading with what I could see around me. Tallinn's Old Town is one of the best-preserved examples of medieval architecture in Northern Europe with its winding cobblestoned streets and chocolate-box facades. It is also a dynamic and exciting city with impressive examples of modern architecture symbolizing its recent growth. Having been impressed with one of the Baltic States, it makes me now want to experience what Vilnius and Riga have to offer. I'm not just talking about their marathons here, but what ideal vehicles on which to focus a visit. Don't you just love marathon tourism!

Jim Manford  
September 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

## Cotswold Way 102 mile Ultramarathon September 21st/22nd 2013

This was the inaugural staging of this event, part of a series of events held by Cotswold Running, an organisation ran by Kurt Dusterhoff.

The route was basically the entire length of the Cotswold Way, which we were informed at the pre race brief was 102.7 miles long. This year the course ran north to south. From Chipping Campden to Bath.

It was to be my first attempt at starting 100 mile plus distance after having to DNS my original entry to the Winter 100 last year due to injury.

Training didn't go perfectly for this one, with a knee injury meaning no running at all in weeks -4 and -3, but when do we ever get the perfect training in?

I had planned to travel down on the morning before the event to allow for the chance to relax on the evening before. Unfortunately an emergency at work followed by a traffic jam I hit on the 8 hour drive to Bath soon put paid to that. Nevertheless I managed to get a relatively good night's sleep.

We were collected by a coach from a park and ride in Bath at 9.15am to be taken to the start at the village hall in Chipping Campden. When the coach broke down en route I was beginning to think that this race just wasn't to be!

A replacement coach came and the start was delayed half an hour, to allow time for the for registration, the pre race brief and collection of a smart technical tee, and a gel.

The sun was out and it was the perfect day to start a run, 68 of us set off running out of Chipping Campden, and up onto the trails, taking in some beautiful villages such as Broadway and also some amazing views from the top of the hills. There were to be checkpoints approximately every 13 miles so I put to the back of my mind how far there was to go and only focused on reaching the next checkpoint.

Despite the smallish field of 68 the first quarter of the race was spent in good company, and the miles rolled by. The checkpoints were basic but definitely had all the essentials. The second checkpoint staff warned us of a wasp nest that we were to pass in the next couple of miles, and were asked to inform the staff if we were allergic to wasp stings. This was put to the back of our minds until when walking up a steep ascent a couple of lads ahead started sprinting out of no where. I'd never seen such a huge swarm of angry wasps! One of the runners described them as being about a foot long but I think that was a slight exaggeration! As there was no alternative route on the narrow trail I held my breath and sprinted through, luckily I made it through unscathed. I was one of the lucky few to not get stung.

From that point on we made slow progress, darkness fell and I was feeling low on energy the ascents seemed to be never ending. I had buddied up with a lad called Jason from the Scottish Borders, the trouble was we were both not the best at reading a map!

Having got lost 3 times, once in a field with menacing looking bulls, seemingly intrigued by our head torches, we had lost some serious time. We were lucky enough to bump into a local girl who knew the route, she informed us we were on the correct route but we were following the markers in the wrong direction! Although we were both mainly walking by now we put in an effort and kept up with her so we could reach the next checkpoint. We stayed with her until mile 63 and she turned out to be a fantastic tour guide.

The sleepy Cotswolds country side has a surprising amount of nighttime activity, one of the

group was stopped by police for acting suspiciously 'oh it's ok you can carry on' they said after seeing his race number. ( next time I rob a bank I'll be sure to wear my race number!) I was stopped at 3am by a young mother in tears with her kids in the back of her car wanting to borrow my phone, and there is a large dogging community who didn't seem mind sharing their car parks with our checkpoints for their outdoor pursuits. I suppose you could add a strange group of runners running through the dark woods to that list!

By the time the 63 mile checkpoint came the daylight was back although it was quite foggy, and we were still making very slow progress. To reach the 87 mile cut off I worked out that we needed to complete the next 24 miles in 5 and a bit hours, which considering how little running I had in my legs just didn't feel possible , my soles of my feet were covered in blisters and the 2 weeks of missing training were really starting to tell. Along with several others I made the painful decision to DNF . My first ever DNF so far. The time we had spent getting lost had proved crucial.

After catching a lift back to the post race HQ at the Hilton in Bath I just had time to see a few finishers coming up to the finish at Bath Abbey, weaving in and out if the crowds of shoppers and tourists who seemed a little confused as to what was going on.

Overall I worked out there was a 57% drop out rate, caused mainly by the tight cut offs.

It was a generally well organised event and one that I definitely plan to come back for next year, I don't like to be beaten!

Andy Bristow

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSON MARATHON, ODENSE, DENMARK September  
22<sup>nd</sup> 2013

This one definitely goes down in the quirky/different category. I found myself with three reasons for wanting to run this marathon in Odense –Andersen’s birthplace and Denmark’s third largest city. (Hands up if you can name its second largest) Firstly, I’d not yet got round to running a marathon in Denmark – my initial plan had been to go there for the Copenhagen marathon next May but, at the time, that seemed such a long way away. Secondly, I’d been looking through some of my back copies of Distance Running and come across a very favourable article about the event. Finally, like most kids, I’d grown up on a diet of Hans Christian Anderson fairytales. Stories like “The Little Mermaid,” “The Ugly Duckling” and, particularly “The Emperor’s New Clothes” had held a fascination for me during my childhood and deeply stimulated my imagination at the time. Years later I’d read these along with others such as “The Snow Queen,” “The Fir Tree,” “The Tinder Box” and “The Little Match Girl” to my own two children, deriving as much pleasure from their timeless stories as an adult as I had all those years ago. I decided I’d go and find out more about the man. I found he had some pretty dark secrets!

I took the inter-city train to Aarhus for the 1 hour 35 minute journey from Copenhagen to Odense. Not realizing that weekend fares are considerably more expensive than those in mid-week. Even with an over-65 discount it cost me a well over budget 290 DKK to get there as opposed to only 140 DKK to return to the airport on Monday. (£1 == 8.42 DKK) Having dropped my bag off at the hotel I made immediately for the Saturday afternoon registration at the local Sports Park some 2.5 km walk out of town. (I later found that I could have taken the number 31 bus, but fancied the walk anyway) This area reminded me very much of the registration facilities at Reykjavik: in a sports hall with expo on a huge campus We were handed a rather nice dark grey Newline T- shirt with V neck together with a ticket for that afternoon’s pasta party taking place in a large marquee nearby. This proved excellent value with as-much-as-you wanted pasta and mincemeat with sausages plus chocolate mousse. There was also a choice of bottled beer or water to drink while a local band, Cutting Grass, provided bluegrass and country to aid digestion.

The marathon there is promoted as “The Fairy Tale Marathon” for obvious reasons. This was the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the event and each year finishers are presented with a medal bearing the portrait of Hans Christian Andersen with a representation of one of his famous stories on the rear. To my delight, this year’s medal showed a scene from “The Emperor’s New Clothes”. Entry fees are between 550 and 650 DKK depending on the date of entry with entries being taken right up to the 6 pm closing of registration on Saturday. As far as I am aware the event is unique in holding a Women’s Only Half Marathon, separate from the main race, starting at 9 am. The full marathon together with the men’s half marathon both started at 10 am. Numbers have continued to increase over the years with this year approx. 800 in the women’s half, another 800 in the men’s half and approx. 1,400 in the marathon itself. Those of us in the marathon were to run two laps of the half marathon course. Given the distance from the city centre to the start line, the organizers had thoughtfully provided a free shuttle bus station to and from Odense central station both before and after the race. Baggage and changing facilities with hot showers and post-race massage were available inside the stadium building. The finish was to be in front of the grandstand in the adjacent Odense Athletics Stadium following one lap of the track itself, making it an ideal venue for spectators to watch the runners come in.

It had been a sunny weekend in Denmark and the warm weather and stiffening, blustery wind were to be a factor in the race. Fortunately there were well-stocked feed stations every couple of kilometers so we never wanted for food or drink throughout on the somewhat unexceptional course. This took us on a clockwise, circular route through residential streets and uninspiring industrial areas, the monotony only being broken by a 2km stretch through the streets of the city centre from between the 13 and 15 km marks of each lap. At least on these sections we had some vocal crowd support and interesting sights to see. After crossing the river and running for a short distance through one of the riverside parks we were soon back into the residential street routine again. Personally, I found it difficult to maintain concentration knowing what we were faced with again on the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap and having tried and failed to stay with the 4 hour 15 minute pacers after 28 km simply settled for a comfortable finish. I always enjoy the feeling of entering a big athletics stadium and finishing the race on the track.

On finishing we were given our medals plus flowers for all the female competitors, (a nice touch), before being led into what they described as the “depot” – basically a free-for-all of bananas, apples, water, energy drink and yet more Vestfyen bottled beer. It was nice to relax in the sunshine and have a couple of beers with some of my Danish fellow runners, all of whom spoke perfect English and had the good manners to converse in my language while I remained in their company. As far as I could see I was the only runner from the UK entered in the marathon. I doubt if I’d go all that way to run it again though. I’d succeeded in my objective of adding Denmark to the list of countries in which I’ve run a marathon. I also fulfilled a desire to revisit Copenhagen, a city I’d last been to while hitchhiking around Europe some 47 years ago, this time as a marathon tourist. I did hear some excellent reports of the North Sea Beach Marathon held on a beautiful 26 mile stretch of beach north of Esbjerg on the last weekend of June each year. Now that sounds like a plan!

Jim Manford

September 25<sup>th</sup> 2013

#### Registration at the Sports Hall



## NORTHUMBERLAND COAST Marathon August 11<sup>th</sup> 2013

Billed as 'one of the UK's most scenic marathons' I would really have to concur. This is an off road event so it was all on trail and sand but there were some surprisingly speedy runners. There were large groups from other running clubs plus a lot of people who knew each other through other NEMC events. I spoke to a couple of guys beforehand, for one it was his 4th marathon, the other guy had never run a marathon before and said he didn't like running! They were worrying about the heat so thought I was crazy in my jumper. It was a real boutique event with only 100 places available. This meant you weren't hemmed in for the most part and it's probably all the trail could handle.

The course was mainly on the coastal path with three long stretches of beach running. We started in Alnmouth which is a picturesque coastal village. Jim gave an introduction and we were sent off along the beach. From there we continued up the coast through Boulmer, Craster (famed for its kippers), alongside Dunstanborough castle (the largest in Northumberland) and all the way to Long Nanny Bridge. I had to lift my sweater up to show the guys at the turn around point my bib number, one of them said, "I didn't think you were one of ours, you look so fresh!" I knew at this point I'd not been pushing it enough, I find it hard to run fast on trail!

I came across the North East Marathon Club (NEMC) whilst looking for events to run during my trips home, to keep me focussed. I wanted to run the Northumberland Coast Marathon last year but it was full and there was already a waiting list for places, so I wasted no time in signing up when it went on sale in January this year. The Northumberland coast, as my Mum has pontificated in this magazine, is the UK's best kept secret. Rugged dunes, castles in varying states of repair and swathes of sand sometimes white, often golden, in places gritted with the coal our county is famous for. If only we had the weather it would be as busy as Cornwall. This summer we have had lots of lovely days but it's generally inconsistent enough to keep the numbers down.

On the day of the run it was scorching by northern standards and the beaches were packed. However, I was cold! My teeth were chattering at the beginning. I had a sweater on over my running clothes that I never felt warm enough to remove. A volunteer at one of the aid stations asked me "Are you our runner from Kuala Lumpur?", as I was the only one in long sleeves! It's always colder at the coast with that North Sea breeze.

The club who organise the marathon is headed by Jim Manford, a handsome, young man (68) who has run over 200 marathons in more than 20 countries. I overheard him at the start of the marathon saying that he was missing this one as in the coming week he was running marathons in Gdansk and Reykjavik! He said that he was only going to run in new places rather than do the Luton marathon for the 10th time. What an inspiration. The club organises a Tour of Northumbria, four marathons per year in the region with a special award for anyone completing all four.

The beaches were busy and there were hikers and dog walkers on the trail. Everyone

seemed very supportive clapping and cheering and making wise cracks like, “You’re the last one” and, “I saw you mate a good half hour ago.” One lady asked me how far we had gone and I was only able to reply, “I’ve no idea, it’s a marathon!”

There were no markers and as it’s not a trail I’ve run before I had no idea where I was up to. I even saw my high school business studies teacher! I don’t think she recognised me and while I recognised her, it took me until the next day to work out who she was.

This was an out and back route and people started to pass me at a kissing gate around Low Newton. I said to the first guy, “Ah man, I’ve not won then!” He didn’t even stop to grin; his dad was there with a drink for him saying his mum would meet him next

(he was actually the winner). After a flurry of about 20 people who almost all gave me some words of encouragement as they passed, including one girl with the biggest smile ever (the female winner), I didn’t see another person on their return leg.

I discovered this was because there was a loop of about a mile at the end so I couldn’t ascertain just how close to being last I was.

Part of the run went through a pub beer garden and I was dreading that on the way back but the clientele were all families having Sunday lunch rather than the drunken males of my imagination. I was running with two guys I’d got talking to on the trail at this point, one who lived locally and knew the trail well, he kept me and the other guy right when we had an ‘erm...moment’, coming back past Dunstanborough castle. The other guy’s wife and kid met him at the next aid station with a drink and encouragement. It was a really friendly run.

There were two girls in front of me who ran the whole race together. I kept catching them up and occasionally overtaking them but I think I served as a benchmark for them (“we can’t be beaten by that old dear”) as every time I overtook they sped up! They beat me in the end. The last stretch was on the kind of wet sand that is in wavy ridges like the roof of your mouth. How are you supposed to run on that without looking demented? I got overtaken by about ten people in the last ten minutes which was a little crushing!

I finished in just under five hours which I was pleased with considering the terrain. I went to the organiser to get my medal and he asked me how old I was; I’d only come in first in my age group thus getting my very first trophy! I wasn’t near the front of the pack so I can only assume that there were very few veteran females in my category. Still, it made me very happy and Jim suggested I come back next year to defend my title. I initially thought no, but by the next day had decided I would, I’d just wear a warmer outfit! I am really preferring these smaller, off road events. Let’s face it, I’m never going to win a prize in a road race and these are so much more enjoyable. I have looked into events for while I’m home at Christmas but fear that the cold may be too much.

Rachel Joseph

Nottingham Robin Hood Marathon – 8 Sept 2013 – Ian Richardson

“Robin Hood, Robin Hood, riding through the glen...” for those of us of an age to remember Richard Greene in the lead role.

First time since 2000 for me and I was really looking forward to it. It was a bright warm day with a breeze, rather than the howling gales which seem to have typified 2013 in the UK.

The car park that I used was about 20 minutes walk from the start and the delays in getting to it meant that I was likely to miss the actual start, but as it was chip timed and I was out for a decent run and not a race, I wasn't too bothered.

There were 8-9,000 in total, about 1,000 of who were running the full marathon, the rest doing the half and all were mixed together, but in coloured zones. As I approached the start area, I heard the call of one minute to go and being unable to see my red zone, I just hopped over the barrier into the nearest zone, which turned out to be very near the back. I was immediately greeted and hugged by someone who I knew, which was a nice way to start.

The wave, or pulse, start, meant that it was some 13 minutes later that I crossed the start line, but the system worked well, and there was very little in the way of bottlenecks as we made our way from Victoria Embankment into Nottingham proper, past the castle and out west, before turning back at about 6 miles through part of the grounds of Nottingham University.

During this part of the race, I managed to spot and be spotted by a number of friendly faces and had the opportunity for a chat or two along the way.

We then headed back through town towards the start where the split between the half and full occurred and it was immediately apparent how few, relatively speaking, were doing the full.

The course headed out past the racecourse and through Colwick Country Park, reaching the fearsome water sports centre of Holme Pierrepont, usually the scene of hideous winds. Not today though, as it was very pleasant to run around it, being able to see runners behind and in front as we circumnavigated it.

After that, it was back along the embankment to the finish, where we got a very nice medal, and a goody bag which seemed to just have a few edibles and flyers. None of the lace panels of yesteryear.

The whole event was very well managed with some very enthusiastic marshals. Drinks stations and Portaloos every 3 miles, and the water was in the sort of squeeze pouches used at the Sunderland marathon. Several of the stations also had bottles of Lucozade Sport.

For me it was job well done for marathon 98, with a time of 3:54.

I really enjoyed my return to this event and will not be leaving it so long before my next visit.

Ian Richardson  
1 October 2013.

## Montreal Marathon September 2013

The Montreal Marathon was the 3rd marathon I'd planned for 2013, but turned out to be my 4th after I made a late decision to join Jim Manford in the Dundee marathon, and I was hoping to do well in this one. The marathon coincided with a trip to Canada and I took the opportunity to add a new country and continent to my marathon races. I have however raced in Canada twice before, both 5km races. The first race I finished quite far down the pack. I did better in the second to record a win in the December 2011 Resolution Run, an icy and hilly race down then up Montreals' Mountain, Mont Royal. This race was also cold, -18 Deg C!! Montreal was going to be my 24<sup>th</sup> marathon but with the addition of Dundee turned out to be my 25<sup>th</sup>.

I like to add notes about the accommodation, hints and tips for getting around but for this trip we were being hosted by family so my hints and tips are limited. Montreal is a fairly compact city, with a metro system and decent bus service from what I have seen. I have no idea about travel to or from the airport but it is quite close to the city. Montreal is in Quebec, the French speaking province of Canada. Most people in the city will understand English even if their preferred language is French. Like any city there are lots of choices for food and drink. A city centre hotel or a hotel near a metro line makes travel to the race and around the city easier. For a couple of pounds you can get a return metro ticket, travel in and out of town is not expensive if you want to stay away from the city centre.

The Marathon was part of the Rock n Roll Marathon series whose basic idea is to run a marathon and to have live bands playing every mile or so. Since it is a professional company organised event and with lots of entertainment on closed city streets it did come it at the pricier side of things (I think it was about £50 depending on exchange rates). The number collection was at the Expo and was well organised when I was there - all organised with plenty of (short) queues - queue to get in the hall, queue to get numbers, queue for the t shirt and queue for the kit bag. With the 1km, 5km, 10km, half and marathon they had sold about 32000 race entries all expected to pick up numbers in the 14 or so hours that the expo was open I it must have got busy but when I was there number pick up was quick and easy and the queues not too long. After the important business you had to walk past all the trade stands to get out again (never miss an opportunity to sell me something).

The marathon started early in the morning, 8:30 with advice to get to the local metro about an hour before which I would agree with. Getting out of the metro station was slow, there were lots of people trying to get out of a station not really designed to handle large numbers, after that there is a 5 minute walk to the bag drop busses and another 15 minutes to get to the front of the runners and start line (if you are in the front corral).

The marathon and half both set off together, about 18,000 runners. The start is a 'pulsed start' - a block of runners released every minute to ease congestion and let you get into your stride early and it was chip timed so that is OK. The morning of the race was cooler and rainy - but during the previous week temperatures had been mild with a couple of hot days

While I was over there I was sent a route description for the first half (this year the second half of the route had been changed). I have blatantly copied these tips to put in here.

"In Montreal, wind is the key because the course is not that hilly. Usually, the wind comes from the south-west.

Ok, first kilometre: after about 200-300 meters on Jacques-Cartier bridge (by far my favourite in Montreal), it's downhill all the way. A long and gentle hill, maybe 7-8% in the steepest part, which is quite short. A good way to warm up. After that, with the wind in your back, you will make your way around Ste-Hélène island, through La Ronde amusement park (which is closed at this time of year). The island is kind of flat and to be honest, this part of the course is quite boring.

The wind you not bother you on your way back (km 4 and 5), because of a small hill and some trees protecting the runners from it. At about the sixth kilometre, you will be entering Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve, where the Formula One Grand Prix is held every year. Yes, you will make an entire lap of the race track. European runners always enjoy this part. The race track is almost entirely flat (there are two little bumps around km 9 and 10, but that's it), but if the wind blows, km 7 to 9 will be tough: time to run in a peloton! In this section, you will also notice a kind of rectangular lake on your left. This was built for the 1976 Olympics and the rowing competitions were held there.

Km 10: you will step on Concorde bridge. Again, if the wind blows, and it always blows there, you will need running partners. The next 2-3 kilometres will be slower, it's always like that, even with the little downhill around km 12. Around this time, you must look around you because on your left will appear what I think is the most beautiful building in Montreal: Habitat 67. It's an apartment building built in 1967. Looking at it, you might think it's going to collapse, but it's still holding on...

After that, you will have to keep a good spirit because km 13, 14 and 15 are... ugly. A long straight line (head wind) followed by running under a highway overpass and an industrial section. At least, beginning at 14 km, the wind will now help you.

Km 15: the old port, in the heart of Old Montreal. You will enjoy nice views: the St-Lawrence river, some old (by North-American standards) buildings. You will hit the first course's first "hill" at km 16. It's quite short, 150-200 m, and not very steep. But pay attention to your ankles because you will be running on cobblestones, with the City Hall in sight. Maybe the most beautiful part of the course.

You will get out of Old Montreal at km 17, via a fun downhill. The next 2 kilometres will pass without anything interesting. Flattish and nothing really nice to see. The at kilometre 19, you will have THE obstacle of the course in sight: the Berri hill. A two-part uphill where there is always somebody who stops running right in front of you. It's not that long, but quite challenging.

Not long after that, you will get to Lafontaine park and the halfway mark"

I can't add much to that - a really good course description, perhaps a little too detailed to remember it all as I ran. Personally I ran the first half pretty well, teamed up with another marathoner in the GP circuit to share the wind and jumping onto the back of larger groups where we could. We made pretty good speed here. After the GP circuit there is a bit of a hill back onto the mainland and over the windy bridge. I felt comfortable all the way apart from a niggle in my knee that went away later in the race (other pains to worry about by then). At half way the marathoners carried on down a road and the half marathoners went off to the finish. I was in an unusual position for me to be able to see 5 or 6 marathoners ahead of me - but worse, another half dozen behind me (recently a lot of my marathons have had fewer numbers than the 4000 in this race).

For the rest of the race I am afraid that I don't know the route well enough to go into great details. The route was then a couple of out and back loops and these let me get an idea of my position on the race. At about half way I was 12th to 15th place but beginning to slow. I know I shouldn't make excuses but I had suffered recently with a cold and had had a few weekends

where I needed a long run unable to go out and run and this began to show in the second half. I passed the half way mark in about 1:21 - a pretty good half marathon time. The runner in red who was running with me pulled away and I was overtaken by the group just behind him. The route was pretty flat, a couple of short sharp inclines to pass under a road but the rest was gentle but long slopes. The second half of the route took us into the suburbs, an area that I hadn't really been to and good to get a more rounded view of the city. These were along wide streets (all the streets in Canada are wide streets compared to the UK). Montreal is quite a nice city to run around.

At mile 15 I felt like I was struggling but counting the runners passing me, I was hopeful of a top 25 place and Garmin hinted at another sub 3 hour marathon. Mile 18 (I think) was the start of a long 3 or 4 mile road (it felt like) to double back to the finish, I was passed by a group of runners going at a pace I should have been running at which appeared to be a sprint to me by then, and the first placed woman runner. The second placed woman passed a couple of minutes later accompanied by another male runner and a cyclist who was passing her drinks as she needed them - obviously out to do well she had 2 assistants with her (not sure if that was fair on 1st place though, running the race by herself). At mile 20 I knew I wasn't going to break any records.

The marathon also had a 10km, 5km and 1km races along the marathon route and the last 6, 3 and 2/3 miles were along these, there was a bit of evidence of the previous races, a few water bottles, mile (or KM) markers and so on. The last 3km felt all downhill. I finished quite well in 3:00:52, a decent time but slower than I really wanted, and 47th place. I was also 1st runner who was registered as an overseas runner - does that count as a 1st place?

The finish was crowded with the half marathoners and a few of the shorter race runners. The finish area was quite well set out, the race number had a token for a free beer (I made sure I got that) and after the awards was a concert for runners and their friends. Since I was on holiday I finished my beer and went to see my family instead of hanging around too long.

Overall I enjoyed the race route and if I was in the area again at the right time would consider running it again. Well organised, well marshalled where needed, closed roads

A couple of comments now.

For the money you get the heaviest medal I have ever had (don't pack your bag at the airlines baggage allowance limit!), a technical T shirt, the race on closed city roads, water stations, chip timing, live music every couple of miles, concert at the end, a beer, and a few free bits and pieces from the expo.

The bands appeared to have been given an authorised play list or a few songs are really really popular in Montreal (I heard the same ones a few times) which is a shame that the musicians couldn't play what they play best - their own stuff, I suspect that since I recognised most of the music the playlist would be similar whichever rock n roll marathon you run.

There were almost as many water stations as there were bands, each with water plus either energy drink, gels (Gu gels which are too thick for my liking), or bananas. So many drink stations you don't need to stop at each one, there will be another within about 10 minutes.

As a visitor to the city (and I am sure a few locals would like it), I felt that the race started at the wrong end of the Jacques Cartier bridge, instead of running straight off it, I would have liked to run straight down the middle of the road across the bridge

I thought that the route was well thought out and there didn't appear to be a section tacked on to make up the distance like a lot of marathons do (This is something that the North East

Marathon Club do well - no tacked on parts to make up the distance but don't add anything to the race)

Steven Prentice