Achill Island Marathon – 29 August 2015.

Having run on the west cost of Ireland at the extreme south and extreme north, this seemed like an opportunity to do on e in the middle of the country, in County Mayo.

It was a long way to travel for one marathon, but it was on a Saturday, and there was a marathon in Longford on the Sunday, so there was a weekend double sorted out.

An NEMC gang of four took on this challenge. Stevie, George and I flew to Dublin where we met up with Ivan, who had flown in from Glasgow.

Then it was a case of pick up the hire car and drive nearly four hours to Achill. The island is connected to the mainland by the Michael Davitt bridge. I had been expecting something quite wide, but it would have passed unnoticed if Ivan hadn’t pointed it out.

Our hotel was just the other side of the bridge and after dropping off bags, we walked the few hundred yards to the pub that was used for registration. Both on the way to the pub, and inside, we met a number of 100 marathon club members, who have also been supporters of NEMC events.

Registration was much the same as at our own events. As long as you can remember your name, you are fine. We were handed our numbers, with a chip in them, and a rather nice blue long sleeved shirt. Not had one of those for a while.

I noticed some Buffs as well, and being an inveterate Buff wearer, asked how to get one. Turned out they were for late entries, instead of the pre ordered shirts, but if any were left, I could ask after the race. I did and there were!

The race was a half marathon lap which you could do 1, 2 or 3 times, with walkers and slower runners setting off with the 3 lap ultra runners at 8 a.m., an hour before the main race. The half started at 10 a.m..

Stevie and George opted for the early start, which was accommodated with no problem.

After that, it was back to the hotel for fish and chips and locally brewed beer, and an early night.

The very nice hotel had provided a very early breakfast and were even offering porridge. Not sure if anyone took up the option of the full Irish, but you never know.

As the start was only a few hundred yards away, Ivan and I ambled up there at about 8.45.

It was on a gravelled area used for motorhomes and caravans, and so had toilets available. I didn’t do a full count but reckon there can have been no more than 40 at the start and I knew 10 of them!

This made the chip timing seem like and expensive overhead and I still haven’t seen the results.

As you may imagine, it was a very low key start as we made out way onto the road and with the first uphill of the course to join a slightly more major road. The roads were all open but with very little traffic. The course was also well marked and marshalled.

We were led through some tiny villages to the first drink station at about three miles. Typically they had water in cups, with small bottles also available. There were also supplies of chocolate bars, (KitKats and suchlike) and other sweets. Some gels of a make I didn’t recognise were also at some stations. All in all, a good spread.

After the first station we carried on near the sea, continuing onto the Atlantic Drive. The views here were spectacular, as was the wind. We also started to do some climbing here. At the top of the climb, there was a steep corkscrew down, which was almost harder work than going up.

Rising again, there was a left turn to an out and back with a drinks station at the turnaround point, some way after 9 miles.

After the out and back, it was pretty much flat to downhill all the way to the end of the lap.

Entering the gravelled start area, we were led around three sides of it, through the start/finish arch and then out for the second lap.

I passed George on the first lap and he was taking plenty of photos which will no doubt appear on the club website.

I finished in 4:23, which I was happy with and was given a rather unusual pottery type medal. As mentioned earlier, I also made sure that I got my Buff!

The hotel had kindly allowed us to keep a room for showering and changing, so after that it was on the road to Longford.

This was a lovely event that seems almost like a well kept secret. It is certainly a long journey unless you can fly into Knock, which is quite nearby.

It is well worth the trip and I hope that they can get more entries for the future. It certainly deserves it.

Ian Richardson

3 September 2015