Cork City Marathon – 1 June 2015

I had been to Cork airport twice before, in order to run the Clonakilty double, and I thought it was time to visit Cork itself.

Flight schedules meant that this was always going to be a bit of a rush. The flight into Cork was after registration had finished, so I had arranged to pick up my number on the morning of the race.

In addition, the flight home was such that I couldn’t really afford to take much over four hours, and even then there was the likelihood of a mad scramble in a taxi.

This wasn’t helped by spending the month leading up to it recovering from unexpected surgery, and having to stay very quiet. Certainly no running.

Getting into Cork itself was easy as there is a regular bus to the bus station. I noticed that it had a good sized taxi stand and that there seemed to be a lot of taxis in Cork generally, so that didn’t look to be a problem.

I walked down St Patrick’s street, where the race started and finished on the way to my hotel, so was able to get an idea as to the general layout of the place.

The weather forecast was awful. Strong winds and heavy rain. The only saving grace was that this was not due to start in earnest until about 10a.m., by when we would have had an hour of running already completed.

Bright and early the next morning I reported to the bag drop at City Hall to pick up my number. I was also handed my race T shirt, a very nice blue number, not ruined by lots of advertising, with red side panels, and a sculpted back which also had a small zipped pocket.

I’ll be wearing this one a lot.

I didn’t get the goody bag, but I understand that it contained mostly sweets.

I didn’t leave my bag there as I was so concerned about saving time at the end. Instead I had found a bar/hostel, near the bus station, who were happy to let me leave it there. I felt that would save 10-15 minutes after I had finished.

This done, I made my way to the start in St Patrick’s street. I don’t usually like being very early as the hanging around is both tedious and tends to get the nerves going. Happily, I was spotted by Bill and Pauline Howes, who were sheltering in a shop doorway. After a good chat, they spotted someone else they knew and I saw a chap I had met at the Donegal Quadrathon last year, so went and had a natter with him.

Eventually it was time to take up our positions. I got behind the 4 hour hour pacers and after the gun went off, took about a minute and a half to cross the start line.

There were around 1200 in the marathon and there was also a five stage relay and a youth challenge starting at the same time, so it was quite busy in the first few miles.

As Cork is quite hilly, especially to the north, the route was mostly out and back to the east, then out and back to the west.

Firstly we had a coupe of miles around the town before heading out past the docks and the first drinks station. These were very frequent and each had a group of friendly volunteers handing out 250ml bottles of water with sports caps. Absolutely ideal as far as I was concerned. Some of the later ones also had Lucozade sport in plastic cups.

As forecast, the rain started at around 10a.m., driven on by the increasing wind.

This was where my tendency to dress like a polar explorer started to pay off. I had on a waterproof jacket and a (no longer) waterproof hat and when the rain got too bad, just pulled the hood over the hat and got on with it, perfectly warm and comfortable.

It still amazes me the number of people in just a vest or T shirt. It must have been very unpleasant for them. Quite a lot were wearing their race T shirt, which also seems odd to me, but each to their own.

Headphones, whilst not banned, were strongly discouraged. As you might expect, this was very much ignored by many of the runners.

After about 7 miles we turned south to go through the Jack Lynch tunnel under the river. There were then a few miles of loops in the general area of Blackrock castle where we started to get the full effects of the weather. Happily there was then a stretch to the marina along an old railway line that had raised, wooded embankments on either side. This was shaded from the wind and proved a very pleasant section.

By the end of this part we stared to encounter the slower runners from the half marathon, which had started an hour and three quarters after us. It was nice passing people!

Due to my concerns over my level of fitness and the need to get back to the airport, I had seen that the nearest part of the course to the start/finish was around 16 miles. I had said to myself that if I did not reach this point in under 2:40 and feeling OK, I would walk off the course.

I am happy to report that I made it in 2:27, feeling good and carried on into the driving rain as we made our way out east to about 22 miles and then turned back for the final stage with the rain and wind mostly at our backs.

Passing the relay changeover points was always good as there was a great deal of enthusiastic support there. It was however, a bit disconcerting having fresh runners bound past shortly after each changeover and I kept being passed by a runner in a bear costume. I felt better when I realised it was someone different each time it happened.

It was also in these later miles that people came out of their houses with trays of cut up oranges and sweets, which was wonderful to see.

I was determined to finish strongly and just got my head down and went for it as we approached the city centre. There was a surprisingly large (to me) crowd in the monsoon to cheer us in and I now have a rather nice medal to add to the collection.

Armed with a bottle of water and a banana, I retrieved my bag from the hostel, flagged down a cab and made it to the airport in plenty of time.

I was still in my running kit and dripping water everywhere as I went through security and found myself in the queue for people going to Lourdes. I did wonder at the number of inform people and carers!

My bedraggled appearance gained much interest and attention from the security staff, all of whom seemed to want to know how I had got on and what I thought of it.

I was able to get changed after that and relax in advance of the flight home.

It was a great event, well organised and very friendly. I really would like to go and do it again, preferably with more time to see the place.

My official splits were

First half 2:01:00

Second half 2:01:20

For a total of 4:02:20

Not bad for an old man after a month off.

Ian Richardson

3 June 2015