***Septembers Marathon***

I had a choice of two Marathons in September; Saturday 5th September Highland & Perthshire (Aberfeldy) or Sunday 6th Forres Harriers Glen Moray (Elgin).

Highland & Perthshire was more expensive (charity), but around 200 miles closer (round trip) and would provide an extra day to recover - both races start at 9.30am and would require an overnight stay. On balance I choose the Highland & Perthshire perhaps next time Glen Moray. Note both have local distilleries!

***Highland Perthshire Marathon (Aberfeldy) –Saturday 5th September 2015***

The event is organised by the local Aberfeldy & District Rotary Club and consists of the Marathon (9.30am start), Half-Marathon (10am start), a cycle marathon & half- marathon (time trial from 1.30pm) and in the evening a Ceilidh. This is the fourth running of the event and is limited to 500 competitors for each event. You could pick up your number and timing chip on the Friday night at the Moness Resort (one of the main sponsors) or on the Saturday morning at Wade’s park or Showfield which was the base of operations and finish line for all events.

The marathon course starts @ Weem Church approx. 1,000m from Wade’s park, passing Camserney, Dull (yes a place called Dull), Kenmore, through the grounds of Taymouth Castle leaving by the east exit onto the A827 back down to Aberfeldy via the Black Watch Monument. The marathon consists of 2 laps on a flattish course with one main hill per lap and a downhill run home on the A827 before turning right alongside the river Tay over the hump backed bridge for the start of lap 2. The organisers had four water stops with water & high5 energy drinks in cups (the fourth one just 200-300m from the end of the lap!).

107 runners started the marathon (275 in the half), and we ran out into the rural landscape passing dozens of race marshals (some had yellow flags warning on-coming traffic) down to Kenmore (Loch Tay) and the turn for home, you actually pass and run around Taymouth Castle before the one main hill and the downhill stretch back to Aberfeldy, this bit was slightly dangers as we were running on the left side of the road so cars etc. were coming from behind us. For some reason (madness) I started off at 8min pace and kept this going before slowing down to 9min by the end of the first lap and 10min by mile 18 mile completing the course in 4:02min yes the 2min still hurts. This was my best time since Chester 2013 and maybe proves that I am at heart a road runner (beep, beep) who puts up with our clubs multi surface races.

No goody bag as such (is this due to the 5p bag law in Scotland), but President of the local Aberfeldy & District Rotary club greeted you as you crossed the line, a firm handshake, hung a medal around your neck (nice touch) and china mug of water. You could also get a certificate and get your medal engraved (time, name date etc.) for a £1. Tea and other refreshments were available (Free for runners) in a tent that also had your bags.

You could have had a free shower up at the Moness Resort (shuttle bus) but I and others chose to use the super local community centre facilities (combined schools, sports halls, pools and community centre) £1 to refresh, change before the drive home via Pitlochry and the A9 with its new average speed cameras.

In reflection, and this is the second race this year organised by a local Rotary Club (Windermere) you have to hand it to them, they got lots of people to act as marshals, hand out drinks (even using the local Scouts) but at times it’s too committee organised, organisation for the sake of it, e.g. three separate table for pre-race registration and timing chip plus raffle! But they have a great venue and ideal course (little crowd support), but it is far too expensive and this may be a reason for the small field.

I’m not sure why they have the two separate starting points (Marathon, Half-Marathon), this means that you passed three mileage signs every mile, e.g. marathon mile 2 marker yellow, half marathon mile 2 marker blue and yes the second lap marathon mile 15 marker, that’s a lot of unnecessary work and organisation both pre and post-race.

A few days later I received in the post an unexpected bonus, a larger medal as over 60’s age group winner (yes more than one over 60 in the field) and as they say you have to be in it to win it. But in all seriousness if club members are looking to run a Scottish Marathon then this could be it, but perhaps stay in Pitlochry approx. 13 miles away as much more accommodation & choice.

Will I be back, I’m not saying never again but I would not rule it out.

Mike Trant