***Two Castles Marathon – Northumberland***

***Alnwick to Bamburgh Castle – Sunday 26th October 2014***

Following our weekend away for the Chester Marathon we were off again for a weekend in Northumberland – staying in Bamburgh on the Friday night (disappointing) and Alnwick on Saturday, which was busy (school half term) with good meal at Di Sopra (just got the last table) and fine B&B apart from the noisy plumbing.

Sunday Morning an extra hour in bed (when all you want to do is get on with the run ah…..).However, our New Zealand hoist made porridge, toast and I set off via the high street to the start for registration and too collect my number. Just prior to the registration point (by gate to Castle gardens) a road sign indicated that it was 16 miles to Bamburgh and I wondered how the organisers were going to add in another 10 miles to get us to the marathon distance!

The pre-race organisation was a bit shambolic with little information unless prompted and quick to reply that e-mail sent (never received) or pointing us to the web site. However, on race morning it seemed smooth, efficient and organised.

A small field (compared to Chester) of 75 runners approach the start line and off we went (not a Castle view in sight) along the road out of Alnwick and up the first of many hills. What a shame that they kept the race route more inland along small country roads as we had few glimpses along the way of what I know to be the stunning coast line of Northumberland. Marshalls were plentiful and encouraging as were the number of water points (that had only water!).

The course route twisted and turned more often than not into the strengthening head wind, road conditions good mainly dry with one or two light showers. I past the half-way point ahead of the planned half marathon start time but was quickly overtaken by the half marathon leaders and progressively by others half marathon runners. Coming round yet another bend I got my first view of Bamburgh Castle on the hill with town, beach and sea all in view – stunning that will long stay in the memory, but it was all to brief a view as we were again turned away up a long straight road into the head wind that at times was pushing us backwards down the hill.

The final part of the race was the approach to Bamburgh uphill for over a mile with the sea on our left hand side, is it not hard enough to run the marathon length without race organisers wanting to make it harder for us runners?

The run into and through the town of Bamburgh itself was good with some vocal support and others wondering what was going on and there ahead the finish line with a view of the castle and a time just 3min outside of 4 hours, pleased given the windy conditions.

The race end area was chaotic with spectators, family and friends all milling about when all you want to do is get the gift (if on offer) grab a drink, find your bag relax recover thank race organisers and plan the journey home.

The organisers Run Nation must have gone for the cheaper gift end option as both the marathon and half marathon runners received the same t-shirt and medals (marathon runners got white string) no post recovery drink or shower, a disappointing end before the drive back to Alnwick swimming pool for a great post run shower (£1.30 well spent) and the drive home.

On checking the results I noted that there were three NEMC members in the race with Richard Cutter 3rd overall in 3:20, Keith Robson 12th 3:34 and me 37th just on half way in 4:03.

Mike Trant