



News release

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Date: 4th September 2005
Location: Margate, Kent

By: Wendy Harding

First Marathon - Wendy's Story

If you had asked me this time last year about running a marathon my answer would have been a definite NO !! I had already completed a half-marathon but felt that 26.2 miles was just too far and would be much too hard on the body.

However, during autumn last year something changed – for some reason I had the feeling that it would be good to give it a go, so I duly completed my Flora London Marathon form and sent it off together with thousands of others. By the time early December had arrived I was obsessed and wanted to get in more than anything. But you've guessed it - I wasn't successful. I was so disappointed but pinned my hopes on either getting one of the club raffle places or being accepted onto the Runners World Dream Team, that I had also applied for – but no luck on either front.

I therefore decided to look for an alternative marathon, preferably later in the year, so that I could take advantage of training in the light mornings and evenings. I chose the Kent Coastal Marathon on 4 September as it wasn't too far from home and was a smaller event which I thought would be a good way to start.

That's when all the madness began. I decided to use a training plan from the Runners World book which entailed 4 runs plus an hour's cross training per week for 18 weeks. The mileage gradually increased to a maximum of 40 miles at week 15 (which consisted of 2 x 5 miles, 1 x 10 miles and 1 x 20 mile runs). I felt that the best pace I could keep up for the whole distance would be 10 min/mile so set my target as 4 hrs 30 mins.

I am quite a disciplined person and like having a schedule to follow, so that part was no problem. I also enjoyed the challenge of doing the longer runs. Of course I was doing the training during the hottest part of the year which was a bit tough at times. Mike Monk (*Tone Zone Runner*) very kindly offered to come with me on some of the longer runs which really helped. He is a past master as sticking to 10 min miles!! We chatted during the whole distance which made the time pass much quicker. (*Editors note - Wendy did most of the talking and I can't go any faster!*)

I'm sure my friends and family couldn't wait for race day to arrive so that I would shut up about it – I think I became a little obsessed!! I enjoyed the whole training experience, but I must admit, it does take up a lot of your time – my husband Mick was very understanding.

Mick and I had decided to travel to Cliftonville (near Margate) on the Saturday, stay 2 nights and come home on the Monday. I found a hotel which was right opposite where the race started and finished, which was really handy. Cath and Kelly (*Tone Zone Runners*) also came down on the Saturday and stayed to cheer me on, which was fantastic – it's so nice to have some people from home to support you.

AT LAST, RACE DAY ARRIVED – we got up in plenty of time so that I could have an early breakfast; the only problem then was that between breakfast and walking over to the start I just couldn't sit still – I was like a cat on hot bricks.



There was a half-marathon being run at the same time, which Pat and Alan (*Tone Zone Runners and Party Animals!*) were taking part in, but even so, the field was very small. There were 450 registered for the half and 250 for the marathon. So the total number of competitors was smaller than for the Bognor 10k!!

At 9:30am we all set off, to the sound of the starter saying "Ready, Steady, Go" as his hooter didn't work!! We all followed the same course for the half-marathon which went in the direction of Ramsgate. The views were absolutely fantastic. We followed the coastal path for most of it and there were beautiful views over the cliffs to the sea. The race had been described as "Mildly Undulating" – well I think it must have been an Estate Agent that dreamt up that description – in reality it was Bl***y Hilly !! The temperature was around 28 deg C, so the going was pretty tough.

I ran for a short while with Pat and Alan but as we were doing different paces we split up. I really enjoyed the first half and actually felt great at the end of the first 13.1 miles, which I completed in 2 hrs 9 mins, so I was on course for my target time. The finish of the half-marathon was right near the start, and I must admit it was a little tempting to stop there – but I didn't. I kept going. The second half was quite lonely as there were far fewer runners and we were all really spread out. So at times I had no runners in sight either, in front or behind, which was a bit weird. By this time it was around 11.30am and was VERY HOT. For the next 7 miles or so we ran along the prom, where some places were lined with sunbathers and others were deserted. I must admit, it would have been nice to have had some supporters but everyone just ignored us mad runners.

The marshalls and the organisation, I thought, were great. They supplied bottled and cup water plus SIS energy gels every few miles which I took full advantage of. I had found out before the race which gels would be supplied and I used them for training. (*Editor - good tip*) I think they really helped me and consequently I didn't hit the dreaded WALL!!

I remember asking one of the marshalls at about 22 miles if that was the last hill, he said there was one last one at Margate, it turned out that it was at 25 miles !! – I must admit I walked up that one – I just couldn't face a steep hill at that late stage. Not far before the finish I heard a car toot and someone call my name – it was Pat and Alan on their way home shouting encouragement to me. As I caught sight of the 26 mile marker my heart leapt and I thought "nearly there" Ironically enough, on my ipod, I was listening to a song by Kylie Minogue with a line in it saying 'Breathe, breathe, it won't be long now' – how appropriate was that ???!!!

As I rounded the bend on the grass, and the finish line came into sight, I heard Mick, Cath and Kelly shouting for me and I couldn't help but grin and hold my arms in the air for a victory salute. It felt absolutely wonderful to cross that line and know I had done it!! It felt better than I had even imagined and made all the training worthwhile. My time was 4 hrs 34 mins – just outside my target – but hey! Who cares?

I am writing this 4 days after race day and my legs feel OK now. I found that on Sunday evening and Monday, if I sat still for too long, I just seized up but things are gradually getting back to normal now.

So, next stop, the Great South Run in a few weeks. I have put in for the London Marathon '06 and who knows, maybe one day I will get in and perhaps beat my time !!

Wendy

Editor - It will also be great to be surrounded by runners and spectators all the way!!

Congratulations and well done Wendy. A great report - let's have some from you other Tone Zone Runners.

Send me post race news and information that our Club might find interesting to:

MikeandWynne@aol.com