

## The Manx Mountain Marathon 2010 – by Stuart Walker

Last weekend was the 40th Anniversary of one of my favourite races - the Manx Mountain Marathon. The race took place on Saturday, over 31.5 miles from Ramsey in the north of the island to Port Erin in the south. It's definitely more of a fell ultra than a trail one, climbing and descending 8,000 ft over 12 summits along the route. I travelled over with Si Berry on Friday and stayed in Port Erin. We were up by 6 (well Si was, I sort of was) to set up the Runfurther banners and flags at the finish, then got on the minibus up to Ramsey for the start.

Race entries were at a record high this year, with around 150 competitors in the full marathon. The half was also popular. The weather had looked a bit nastier than the last time I did the race (2008) when it was cold but sunny, this year we were promised some rain and the Isle of Man had a day of snow on Wednesday! The early start runners set off at 7:30 and at 9:15 the rest of us were off in some lovely drizzle. We ran down the promenade and along a little bit of road all together, then along a narrow track which started to climb up the first hill (North Barrule). At this point I could see the first three pushing ahead up the climb, followed by Andy Davies, then the rest of us.

There are some fantastic views all the way round this race, and the first hill is a good one as you can look forward and backward at the long line of runners making our way upwards. As we got nearer the top the view disappeared and things started to get a bit damp, with plenty of snow patches on the ground along the undulating ridge linking the first two tops. Walshes were definitely the order of the day and those who wore the wrong shoes had fun on the slippery descents. I went flying over on a stile and covered everything with mud, which pretty much set the tone for the day...

After descending and crossing the road we set off up to checkpoint 3 at the top of Snaefell with the leaders still in sight. A moment's navigational ponderence and we were off down another exciting descent to the drinks stop at the Bungalow, then up the fourth and fifth summits of the first two hours, Beinn y Phott and Carraghan. I had gone out fast and at the Injebreck drinks stop was feeling pretty tired, with most of the race still to go. After the interesting river crossing we took the route up the plantation edge and to Colden summit, then over to Sileau Ruy and around to Greeba.

After the descent we joined the old railway track to St. John's. Along here I felt rubbish and tried to eat as much as possible. The half marathon started from St. John's a while after we had passed through, and their first climb is the Sileau Whallian plantation. I trudged up here behind another runner and we eventually emerged from the trees into improved weather. The tops from now on were clear and the temperature felt warmer through the rest of the day. Up and down the top of Sileau Whallian and after about four hours I reached and set off towards South Barrule. This road has caused me problems in the past and was no easier this year, but eventually I was glad to reach the path up South Barrule. I climbed slowly and ate more, but half way up was made aware just how slow I was moving, as Lloyd Taggart flew past on the way to winning the half marathon in record time, in far from ideal conditions! Very impressive.

Eventually we descended South Barrule and crossed to Cronk ny Arrey Laa, the nearly last hill. From there and onto the last page of the map, I started looking forward to the finish. I had hoped to finish inside 6 hours and at St Johns this looked very unlikely, but now I started to get going again and by the time we got to Fleshwick Bay I thought I was on schedule. Unfortunately this was not the case and after the actual last climb to Bradda Hill I was still a few minutes down. The coastal path around this area is very beautiful and I enjoyed the last run up to Bradda Tower, and finally the grassy descent and last road section down to the finish, four minutes over my target.

After the race we had the usual great food, drink and presentation evening, with certificates presented by Murray Lambden of Manxathletics.com. The winner was Paul Thompson for a record 6th time, and the fastest lady was Jackie Lee who looked like she had just set off when she passed me with 2 miles to go.

This may not be an easy race to get to but it's definitely worth it. The route, organisation, marshalling and everything is fantastic. Thanks very much for the lift Si!