

The race day started with a safety briefing but it has to be said that this briefing was without doubt the best one I have had covering all the usual stuff and an in-depth review of the course.

The briefing completed we made our way to the start and were soon off. The Marathon route follows the Ultra route with a deviation at around 24Km to climb the two highest mountains in South Wales, before rejoining the Ultra route.

The first 5Km is alongside a narrow canal path where overtaking is difficult, it then heads up the Beacon way before detouring off to the Tor Y Foel this is around 15km of constant incline and because of its many false summits requires quite a bit of mental strength. There's then a short downhill section through forest tracks before climbing again to a section the locals call the Gap, to the first checkpoint. I was running this Marathon with my son as a training run for the Brecon to Cardiff Ultra in February so time was something that we were not too concerned about especially since I'd been off colour for a few days previously.

At the first checkpoint we were on target for a 6 hours, finfish and set off for the next checkpoint feeling quite good. At 22Km I started to feel a little lightheaded but took on some more fuel and pushed on. On reaching Penyfan we understood why several of the Ultra runners commented on the folly of entering any race requiring climbing Penyfan.

My son went on ahead with me slipping further and further behind. I became conscious that I was not climbing in a steady line. There are no words to describe the climb up Penyfan. Somewhat embarrassingly at the top of Penyfan I was sick. Once we had checked in we set off down Penyfan. If going up was difficult coming down such a steep mountain was no better. Now my knees were complaining I knew that pain would eventually go, but the worse was still to come, at the bottom of Penyfan you have around 80mtrs of flat and then you have to climb the next Mountain, Cribyn, another killer. Half way up I started to stagger quite a bit and I was now on autopilot, luckily my son caught me on the two occasions when I could have gone down. We decided that the only way to avoid me retiring would be to forget the time completely and spend some time resting at the top. Unfortunately the weather started to close in and at the top we had gale force wind so the wise option was clearly to carry on, knowing that from this point to the finish was pretty much all down hill. However, apparently according to my son my face was now ashen and my eyes glazed. This should have been the point for me to withdrawn it would have been the sensible thing to do, but we were now back on the Ultra route and mostly downhill to the finish, so I decided to continue especially since my son would also have retired with me and I was already feeling guilty about holding him back.

From the bottom of Cribyn to the next checkpoint was along a narrow path with a hedge on either side. Underfoot there were loose rocks making it difficult to run and actually this offered me some time to recover and I did start to feel a

little refreshed helped also by my constant refueling. A couple of kilometers of this type of path and we arrived at a tarmac lane, at last I could run and make decent progress. This led onto a section of the route along farm fields and back again to a path of loose stone.

At the final checkpoint we were told there were only around 10Km to do but my fatigue now was reaching a level where I doubted if I had 10km left in me I'd been running on empty for 10K already but common sense had gone out the window and against my son's better judgment and indeed my own I decided to carry on.

The next 6K was on tarmac making life a little easier, but my pace was getting slower and slower, in fact if I'd gone any slower I'd have been going backward and now I was running on instinct. Finally we reached the canal path and knew there were only 2k left at last we saw the run HQ which meant one bend and a 25 yard run to the finish. From somewhere I dragged up enough energy to make a decent run.

How close I'd come to collapse I have no idea, but although every marshal was encouraging and offering details of the next stage I guess there must have been a radio conversation about my appearance because at the finish there were 3 officials waiting, especially, for me who sorted out my T-shirt, print out and medal and then took me to the Tepee where there was hot food and drink. I did feel a little embarrassed by this treatment but it does show that care for the runners didn't end when they crossed the finish line.

Reflections

Initially I was disappointed and concerned that maybe I should consider carefully the races I entered. As to why I did so badly, there are only 3 reasons (1) Age has caught up with me (2) Lack of preparation (3) The slight cold I had. Of these the most likely cause was probable the 2nd training has consisted mostly of runs on tarmac and a couple of long off road runs one of which was a marathon along the relatively flat St Cuthbert's way.

In the cool light of day if I look for the positives from the day, I'd taken my body to extremes it had never been to before and completed the course. There were 354 entries and with only 150 finishers, so although I was 149th I did not DNF.

As a Training run it served its purpose I now know that I need much more hill training.

If by some utter madness I considered running this route again I'd opt for the ultra, although it's 28K longer it avoids the 2 mountains so is possibly more achievable for my little old legs.

Below are a couple of photo's that might be of interest.



Marathon Course Profile. Max height 886M



Cribyn Mountain immediately after Penyfán Mountain