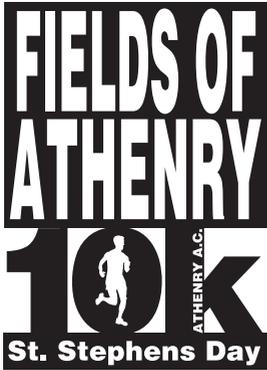


**FIELDS OF
ATHENRY**



2005

www.athenryac.com



Introduction

It is with great pride that we welcome you to the fourth annual Fields of Athenry 10km Road Race. When this race was dreamed-up a few short years ago we had no idea of how quickly it would become an established part of the Galway road-running scene. From humble beginnings, and a field of 70 finishers in 2002, the organising committee now worries more about how to handle all the entrants than how to get the numbers out.

We are delighted with the way this race has become an annual day out in our community - from the 30 minute finishers through to the last of the walkers, everybody is welcome. What better way to balance the excesses of the season that's in it?

This year we decided to publish a booklet as a token to you, the competitor. We hope that you enjoy our ramblings. Maybe you will find something in here to inspire you in the New Year, or maybe you'll just have a laugh at some of our exploits. In here you'll find contributions from Athenry AC members - race reports, a word about our speedsters, a description of our website, a note on previous St. Stephen's Day races, information on the club and a few other nuggets.

Let us take this opportunity to thank our race sponsors and some people without whom we could not provide a race.

Proactive Design and Marketing have been with us from the very start. They have been very supportive, providing us with posters, mile markers, brochures, entry forms and this booklet. Proactive make our amateur efforts look professional. They have also sponsored generous prizes for our first man home and first lady home, and for the first male and female 'stalwarts' – these are people who have completed all four races to date. The prize is four entries for The Connemara International Marathon in April.

This year we have a new supermarket in Athenry and we were first past the post (excuse the pun) to look for sponsorship. Joyce's supermarket did not hesitate to provide the post-race refreshments so that we can offer you a hot cup after your efforts.

We'd also like to thank a number of anonymous supporters who have provided us with financial support to ensure we can supply good prizes and keepsakes for our runners and walkers.

St. Mary's Athenry GAA club has been very generous in providing a first class facility as race HQ each year. We are lucky to be able to provide you with changing rooms, showers and a place to warm up afterwards. Many thanks to Athenry GAA and we wish them luck in their 2006 campaign.



Across the road from the clubhouse, our overflow carpark has been provided by Mike and Kathleen Forde. This has meant that we can run the race in safety, avoiding long lines of traffic along a country road.

Dermot McNamara is the secretary of the juvenile Athletic Club and we'd like to extend a big thank-you to him for his words of encouragement and advice since the senior branch was resurrected a short few years ago. The juvenile club has also played a big part providing much appreciated help on race day.

A big thank you goes to the volunteers without whom there'd be no race - our registration crew, our stewards, the race starter, the gardaí, the civil defence, the refreshments team and everybody else.

Finally, the biggest thank you goes to all our competitors. We wish you good luck in this year's race and hope to see you back next year. Enjoy the rest of the Christmas season and have a great 2006. In the words of Tegla Loroupe the great Kenyan female runner "Be your own inspiration."

Go neirí an bóthar leat.
From all the Athenry AC members.

Stalwarts

The following seventeen people hold the distinction of competing in all three "Fields of Athenry" 10km races to date. We wish them the best of luck on their fourth outing this year.

Name	2002	2003	2004
Bernie Kelly	0:45:48	0:49:31	0:49:05
Brian Geraghty	0:40:02	0:40:38	0:40:51
Danny Carr	0:36:15	0:38:11	0:36:00
Darragh O'Brien	0:38:16	0:40:53	0:39:59
Finbar Flaherty	0:48:14	0:48:56	0:49:04
Fionnuala Keane	0:39:12	0:38:18	0:39:11
Gabriel Collins	0:58:54	0:47:24	0:49:55
Gerard Quinn	0:38:43	0:39:17	0:37:39
Kevin O'Dea	0:48:27	0:50:16	0:51:25
Liam Mulloy	0:42:34	0:45:49	0:53:50
Martin Keane	0:51:20	0:50:02	0:54:48
Martin McEville	0:36:25	0:36:01	0:36:08
Mary Mullins	1:05:50	1:00:37	1:06:27
Patrick Kelly	0:49:16	0:51:48	0:52:15
Roger Rushe	0:45:07	0:44:29	0:46:15
Siobhan Keane	1:37:10	1:35:20	1:34:38
Tommy Joe Whyte	0:36:35	0:36:16	0:36:29



ATHENRY RUNNING Club

Your local running club wants to recruit new members. If you've ever wanted to improve your fitness, or even just jog a few miles in company, this is your chance to join in the fun. The Senior Section of Athenry AC (over 18's) was reconstituted in 2002 and since then has grown steadily to take it's place on the running scene in the West of Ireland. At the moment we have a mixed group of runners some of whom take part in road races and other events in the Athenry colours. We'd like to expand our numbers this year and this is your invite to come along for a few miles of fun running.

Currently club members train as a group once a week each Saturday morning at 9:00am at the church car-park. Training takes place every week; hail, rain or shine. There's no need to make any commitments or arrangements, just turn up any week and you'll be most welcome.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q:** Do I need to be fit to run with the group?
A: I'm not in great shape.
- A:** Absolutely not! We're a mixed bunch and the Saturday run is at an easy conversational pace.
- Q:** Do I need to fill in a form or join straight away?
A: No. Everyone is welcome to join us for a run. Why not come along for a few weeks and then decide for yourself if you want to join up.
- Q:** How far do you run each Saturday?
A: We don't have a fixed schedule. When we meet each week we decide amongst ourselves what to do. Sometimes we'll split into smaller groups if needs be. An average run would be in the 3-5 mile range.

10 REASONS for Joining ATHENRY RUNNING CLUB.

- 1: Fun! - Athenry AC's motto is "Run for Fun".
- 2: Improve Your Fitness - There's no better way to a healthier lifestyle.
- 3: Company on the Road - Club Members join together for training runs throughout the year.
- 4: Explore Athenry - There are hundreds of lovely running routes in and around Athenry and we know most of them.
- 5: Make New Friends - Believe it or not, Athenry runners are a very sociable bunch.
- 6: Help and Advice - Our experienced runners are always available to advise on training.
- 7: Be Part of the Team - We often enter teams to local races. Why not join in?
- 8: The 'Fields' 10k - Join in the organisation of your local road race each St. Stephen's Day. The Best in the West.
- 9: Don't Leave it to the Kids - Sport is for all ages and it's never too late to get fit.
- 10: The 'Feelgood Factor' - There's no better way to start each Saturday than with a few miles under your belt.

Fun! Company
Fitness SAFETY
HELP AND ADVICE
Be Part of a Team
Feel Good

ATHENRY A.C.



Athenry Athletic Club's Paul McNamara races to victory to capture the National 10K of Ireland title - 2005



The Story of a Club

By Peter Delmer

On the 9th of October 2002 three road-runners met with Dermot McNamara, the secretary of Athenry AC, in order to re-invigorate the senior branch of the club. Mick Rice, James Landon and Peter Delmer registered as members and a new club was made available to the Athenry community.

The agreed ethos of the club was, and still is, simple ... 'we run'. The club is there for people who like to share half an hour out on the roads, chatting as we make our way around the picturesque roads and lanes; it caters for anybody training for the ladies mini-marathon; it's there for people who want to keep fit; for those who travel to races all around the country; it's there for those who put in 60 or 70 miles a week training for the next marathon; it caters for national champions and world medallists. In short ... we run!



Athenry AC on Tour.

In the three years since that inaugural meeting, membership has grown steadily. We now have thirty members on the books and a few more waiting in the wings ready to sign up for the 2006 season.

So what does the club do? First and foremost we meet every Saturday

morning in the Church car park at 9am for a run. This run changes every week, depending on who turns up. It's a sociable training run at the pace of the slowest runner, and usually covers 5 or 6 miles. For anybody who's nervous about the distance or the pace, we often run short loops and we will tailor the run to your capability. We maintain a proud record of never having missed a Saturday morning since the club was started. There's always somebody there hail or shine. We also race. In the New Year we'll be found at the Tuam 8k (2nd January) blowing off the Christmas excesses. Then there's the end of the cross-country season for those who love the mud and an annual trip to the indoors in Nenagh for a run on the banked timbers. We'll spend a weekend in Cork in early March to run the Ballycotton 10 mile race with more than 2000 other competitors. That leads up nicely to the Connemara Marathon weekend where we'll be represented in the half-marathon, the full marathon and the ultra-marathon (it's exhausting just to write that!). As the Summer months arrive we'll be found all over Connaught and further afield racing various routes from 5km up to 10 miles ... Headford, Balla, Claregalway, Castlebar, Claremorris, Kildysart and other exotic locations. The road racing season usually culminates with the Streets of Galway race in August and the Loughrea 5 in October and we'll have a big turnout at both. Of course the long distance runners will have pounded the roads at the London, Belfast and Longford marathons too, just to get fit for the Dublin or New York marathon in October (or indeed both!). Once Dublin is out of the system the cross-country hacks will be pulling on the



spikes again. And there's no rest for the wicked - on Christmas Morning we'll run the Goal mile to raise a few euro for charity on the NUIG track in Dangan.

So what else does the club do? Well just to burn off any excess energy we might have, we organise a few races and trips.

Ray O'Connor, our most experienced marathoner, is race director of the Fáilte Ireland Connemara Marathon. Ray organises the three races, the food, the transport, the entertainment, the portaloos, the first aid and the water stops. When he's finished all that he picks up litter - all the way around the 40-mile course.

On a smaller scale Athenry AC hosts a number of short races – just for the craic. We've raced around the park in Rinville, the racecourse in Ballybrit and around the NUIG track in Dangan in a 2x1mile relay. The club championship 5k race takes place on the track in August. This is a handicapped event, which means every runner has an equal chance of winning the perpetual cup.

In 2005 we travelled to Edinburgh to run the historical 26.2 mile route around the city and this year the talk is of a trip to Belgium to run The Night of Flanders – a trio of races taking place during the night.

We run. We run to win and we run to take part. We are proud to have Paul Hession as a club member. Paul has represented Ireland on many occasions, primarily over 200 meters, and was silver medallist at the World Student Games in 2003 and again in 2005. He missed out on qualifying for the Athens Olympics by a mere two-hundredths of a second but did run for Ireland at the World

Championships in Helsinki this year. With a best time of 20.61 seconds for 200 metres there's plenty more to come from Paul.

On the 24th of April this year we sent a team down to Bilboa in Co. Limerick for the AAI National 10k Road Championships. It was a proud moment for us when Paul McNamara took the title wearing the Athenry colours. Paul has raced, and won, the Fields of Athenry 10k on two occasions. In 2003 he was unfortunately sidelined due to injury, so he rolled up his sleeves and worked as a race steward instead. He represented Ireland in the World Cross Country Championships in Saint-Galmier, France in March and has just returned from the Netherlands where he competed in the European Cross Country Championships. Athenry AC wishes him great running success.



Bridget-Anne collects the Club Championship Trophy from Dermot McNamara and the 2004 winner, Gary Doherty.

At the other end of the running spectrum we have more heroes. Mick Rice finished 10th in the London to Brighton 54 mile ultra-marathon in October. Tony Harrington became the second club member to complete the Comrades marathon in South Africa – a distance of 56miles – Terry Redmond has finished this race many times.



James Lundon took a large leap up the distances to complete his first marathon in Longford this year, and Alan Burke ran an excellent first marathon in Dublin. Ray O'Connor raced six marathons in twelve months - London, Belfast, Edinburgh, Longford, Dublin and New York - to become the club's most experienced marathoner with twenty under his belt. (Only eighty more to go to achieve his target.) Philip Magnier completed his first marathon in Dublin and then followed it up with a faster one just four weeks later in France. Mick Rice, Peter Delmer and Colm Rowe ran as a team in Dublin 2003 in order to break the 3-hour barrier – and all three achieved it on the day.

Mick and Peter have both since knocked considerable chunks off that time. Deirdre McGrath took part in the Galway Tri-athlon and was the first Connaught woman over the line. Bridget Anne Walsh beat all the men to win the 2005 Club Championship 5km.

These are our highlights, but week-in and week-out we win personal victories – completing a distance, achieving a personal best time, beating that runner who always finishes ahead of you, or simply enjoying a moment as you cross a finish line. *We run!*

Paul Hession Blazes to 20.61

Just Misses Olympic A Standard

From the AAI website www.athleticsireland.ie - 20 July 2004

Athenry AC's Paul Hession put together one of the greatest ever Irish sprinting performances in Thessaloniki on Monday night to knock 2/10th's of a second off his personal best and take victory at the IAAF GP11 meeting over a top class field. His winning time of 20.61 was just .02 outside the Olympic A standard, a mere .07 outside the National Record, destroyed his own Under 23 National Record, and moved

him ahead of Gary Ryan to number two on the all-time Irish 200m list. Among the scalps he took in the race were Marlon Devonish (2003 World Indoor Champion), Marcin Urbas (sub-20 second man) and Julian Golding (1998 Commonwealth Games Champion). Gary Ryan himself finished 5th in the race with 21.00 as he suffered from a quad problem in the home straight.



True Romance & True Grit

By Paul McNamara

"Will you marry me? - now before you say anything, I've just had a call from the AAI and I've got to rush to catch a plane to Amsterdam, sorry I didn't get a chance to mention that before now, so you have a think about it and we'll talk next week. Bye!!"

It didn't happen quite like that, but a phone call from the Irish team manager at 5 past 5 last Thursday evening, just as I was getting my head around the finer details of how I was to propose to my long term girlfriend, Clodagh, later that evening really caught me by surprise. I had finished 5th at the AAI Inter-Counties Cross Country Championships in Sligo two weeks earlier and as a result was named as 1st reserve for the Irish team for the European Cross Country Championships in Tilburg, Netherlands on December 11th. There is always a reasonable chance that the services of a reserve are called upon in the case of injury or illness to one of the team but, as the days went by and everyone was reporting a clean bill of health, the likelihood of a call-up was diminishing rapidly. Within a week of the event I had ruled out the possibility altogether and by Thursday evening, literally hours before the plane was due to leave, it was the furthest thing from my mind. With the phone call from the AAI I learned both of Alistair Cragg's withdrawal and my own elevation to team member. I met it with a mixed bag of emotions. In truth, I was quite disappointed with the news of Cragg as I felt the Senior Men had a reasonable chance of team medals given the personnel on board.

I was delighted that I would get to compete in my second European's and, along with the World XC Champs last March, my third straight major cross country championships in a row. I was also completely flustered by the news and its impact on my plans for the rest of the evening.

Being the suave, sensitive romantic that I am (please suppress your sniggers), I had planned to coincide my proposal of marriage with the fifth anniversary of our first meeting, which was, incidentally, Thursday, December 8th. Having got the call up, it crossed my mind that it might be best to delay conjugal discussions to a later date. But it occurred to me that if Clodagh ever twigged that I delayed our engagement in favour of a cross country race, any cross country race, I would be hung out to dry. It also occurred to me that a reasonable course of action would be to decline selection in order to focus on the task at hand, but I'm a runner for crying out loud and, as you all know, reason or logic plays no part in the decision making process of any runner, and that notion was dispensed with as soon as it arose. So the decision was made to proceed with both the wedding proposal and the trip to the Netherlands.

The first task was to phone my boss to tell her she wouldn't see me until the following Tuesday. As most people in the office don't even know that I run, and those that do think it's an eccentric obsession that is trotted out as an excuse to avoid meeting them





Paul is in big demand after the Connemara Half-Marathon 2005

for lunch ("Sorry, have to run") or going for pints every Thursday ("Can't, have to be up at 7 to train"), the task of explaining the significance of the phone call and it's consequences was not as straightforward as it might seem. "You've just had an emergency call and now you're going to spend a long weekend in Amsterdam, Hmmm. And that report I wanted by tomorrow morning will not be ready until next week? Right. You took a day off six months ago and now you want to take time off again, already! And tell me again what this has to do with the Irish team. Okaaayyy! Will Roy Keane be playing?" By the time I had tidied up loose ends at work it was gone 6pm and I had to dash (on 2 legs) across town to the florists before they closed which would have left me rightly up the flu (brownie points from the ladies there, surely), via a trip to the off licence for a bottle of bubbly which was now tucked under my arm. Got home, hid the champagne, dashed out for an 8 mile run, home again, showered, taxi to the restaurant, 15 minutes late. 45 minutes late actually,

but I called ahead to the restaurant to push the reservation back a half hour.

Fast forward to Sunday and the start line of the European Championships. I absolutely love these occasions, the atmosphere of the team hotel, the nerves of the team meeting and motivational speeches, the pride of wearing the green, the thrill of toeing the line with greats of the world of XC like Sergiy Lebid and Paolo Guerra, the rush of that first onslaught after the gun, and the sheer physical agony of the latter stages of the race. I like to go out conservatively when racing but if you go too conservatively at an event like this you could find yourself forty metres adrift very early on. There are no sloggers here so you will have to fight for every single place after that. The gun went and initially I found myself in a reasonable position. The course was very narrow with a series of tight bends and ditches which contributed to a very stop-start feel to the race and made it difficult to pass anyone. It also made for a very physical opening couple of laps. A pair



of sharpened elbows and a begrudging zealous protectiveness of the patch of mud you hold are essential attributes on days like this. The early stages were a virtual fist fight as expected and I was holding my own, but once we hit the first open stretch of the course I was passed by an army of runners who made a dash for freedom. I was far too close to the rear end of the field now and it was already time to start clawing back every place I could.

I started to make steady progress and was gaining a place here and a place there. In truth I was a long way from the business end of the race but I still had a job to do. Gareth Turnbull, our 4th man, was in my sights and I was using him as a target in trying to make up ground. There was tremendous Irish support on the course and the shouts from the side lines helped to keep the mind focused on the task at hand. Several more places were gained while in turn I was passed a couple of times also. I finally came with in sight of the finish line and put everything

into the last stretch home. I was shattered crossing the line and felt that I got the best out of myself on the day. I never caught Turnbull who made up a lot of ground in the latter stages and learnt that Gary Murray and Martin Fagan had outstanding runs to finish in 12th and 16th respectively. Mark Kenneally was our 3rd man in 51st and Gareth Turnbull came in 60th. I managed 72nd With David Kelly in 77th. We were 8th of 15 teams and just ten points behind our good friends and rivals from GB which was quite a solid if not exceptional effort. In truth I was somewhat disappointed with my own run as, at the very least, I had hoped to improve on the previous year's performance of 65th. However the build up to the race was far from ideal with a couple of niggles here and there and the late call up. I aim to be back next year and intend to improve significantly.

In the meantime I have to plan a wedding. She said yes!



The start of the 2003 Fields of Athenry 10km Race

"Just Do It"

A Short History of the Fields of Athenry 10km

By James Lndon

The first Connemara Marathon was organised by Athenry AC member Ray O'Connor in 2002. As a result of the success of this venture, the club toyed with the idea of organising its own race - you're not a real club without a race, right? All sorts of excuses were offered up as to why the event would be oh-so-difficult to organise. How would we select a date? Spring, Summer or Autumn? The overall hassle of organising such an event? Did we need it? Lots of ifs and buts, but...

Ray cut through our guff on a Saturday morning club run in October 2002 by exclaiming simply: Just Do It! Just Do it! The first race would be a dry run! If it didn't work out, we had ventured a little and gained a lot of experience.

The race was organised with minimal publicity but 70 hardy souls turned up for the first Fields of Athenry 10km Road Race on St. Stephen's Day 2002. Most of them had heard via word of mouth, or were friends and family of the organisers.

The course was not (whisper!) officially measured the first year. Therein lies a story: three engineer's wheels were employed independently to measure the course and identify the individual kilometre markers. All three wheels were quite uniform in their readings and the start and finish points were established close to the GAA clubhouse - we had a properly measured course. Or so we thought!

Kind permission was obtained to use St. Mary's Athenry GAA clubhouse - we had a race HQ! The now customary Galway Crystal glass prizes were secured and maroon T-shirts were ordered for all competitors - we had our prizes.



Seamus Gilhooley in the Headford 5m 2005

Paul McNamara won the first race by a full five minutes from another Athenry native, Danny Carr. Kathryn Casserly won the women's race. We were off...

The course was officially measured, using a Jones Counter, in October 2003, with the kind assistance of TJ Beatty and Dave Evans. It turned out that we had been 135 metres short the first year despite using three engineer's wheels! Luckily no world records were broken so official course ratification was not necessary. A large number of pre-entries were



received for the 2003 race and it was decided that extra parking was needed. Mike and Kathleen Forde kindly allowed us to use their field for parking in order to relieve the traffic that would otherwise be dangerously parked on the very narrow approaches to St Mary's.

A bigger push was made to publicise the race and the enticement of a blue woolly hat resulted in nearly 170 competing. The race now had its own web site, where the results were published soon afterwards.

Noel Kelly from Mullingar beat Sean Dowling for the top men's prize while Fionnuala Keane won the women's race.



Paul, Mick and Peter gearing up for the All Ireland Clubs Cross Country Championships in Sligo 2004.

2004 brought new challenges very close to race date. Organisation started in mid-September to ensure all tasks were assigned and completed in time. Pre-entries rolled in. Coffee mugs were ordered for all competitors. T-shirts were printed for the top 30 finishers. But despite all our preparations the weather intervened and Galway had its first White Christmas in many years. For safety reasons the race was very much touch-



Mick Rice crosses the line in Dublin 2004.

and-go all through Christmas Day. We awoke on St Stephen's Day and the thaw had set in. Exactly how much wouldn't be clear until just before 11 o'clock - race start time. Luckily the snow was gone before most people set out to travel to the race. Over 270 toed the line, including about 75 walkers, despite the elements.

Paul McNamara won for the second time, edging out Gary Thornton by less than 20 seconds in a course record of 31:11. Lucy Brennan came down from Sligo to set a course record of 36:36 in the women's race.

Most of the profit from the 2004 race was donated to Goal's Tsunami appeal – you may recall that the Tsunami occurred around the same time the race was taking place.

As we go to press we have received over 100 pre-entries and are gearing up for the largest field yet. This year we are offering woolly hats to competitors again due to popular demand. We hope you enjoy the race and don't forget to bring a friend next year!



athenryac.com

By Alan Burke

After I struggled through the half-marathon in Connemara last March, I thought I needed some more competitive races over the summer to help my Dublin Marathon training. I searched high and low for a definitive list of races, but couldn't find one. But a ray of light appeared on the Connemarathon website chat-room, when Mick Rice offered to send me a list for the coming year, and while he was at it, convinced me to join the club. Like many others I believed the club was for elites, but I was quickly assuaged of this notion.

Fast-forward 6 months, and our first meeting to plan the Proactive 10km road race. I put my hand up and volunteered to build the club's new website. Sure, it wouldn't take much effort, a few pages with some information, easy peasy.

The client [i.e. Mick] quietly informed me he had plans for world-domination, or at the very least, a slick website. He wanted photos, news stories, discussions, but importantly he wanted a calendar of events that everybody could refer to.

And so it came to pass. I slaved away and added all the features that made the site into what it is today. The beauty of it is that any club member can add web pages with no huge technical ability needed. There is plenty more to do and indeed a few rough edges to be smoothed out, but that will come in time.

In the meantime, there is a good resource of results, fixtures and photos, among other things. Because members can do their own thing there is always plenty of fresh content.

The results, reports and photos of today's race will be posted on-line as soon as possible. Check them out on www.athenryac.com.

Alan Burke is available for website design and construction, as well as consultation, at an exorbitant, maybe even extortionate, rate. You can contact him at alanburke@fastmail.fm, or through the athenryac.com website.

www.athenryac.com

13



James Corbett accepts all the plaudits in Connemara 2004

Someone has to be Second Last

So Why Not Me?

*A view from the back of the
2005 Connaught Cross-
Country Championships,
by James London.*

Sligo on a very wet and freezing cold, early Saturday morning in the middle of the wettest January in recent memory. One to warm the cockles of the heart? Absolutely not!

Mick drove and did his best to get us there well before the start. Athenry team: Mick Rice, Peter Delmer, Gary Doherty and Johnny O'Connor. Oh and myself, along for a "training run."

Had just finished off my first-ever three consecutive weeks of 20 miles plus. In the process, I was just about holding off a case of shin splints. I wouldn't have to worry about them up here if legendary stories of previous jousts on Sligo's horse racing course were to be believed: timber fencing-posts mysteriously flying up and hitting fellow-clubmates in full flight and mud up to runners' bellybuttons.

We got there and the place was almost deserted. Soon the Galway City Harrier's car pulled in and out stretched Gary Thornton, Michael O'Connor, Ian Egan and Co. With Sligo AC and Mayo AC there too, our chance of a team prize appeared to be gone up in smoke!

When we poked our toes outside the warmth of the car it was flipping freezing. The sort of weather that dogs would be insulted to be thrown out in, let alone willing adults to run around a bog in.

The women's race was kicking off and we ventured out to watch. If the ISPCCCR (Cross Country Runners) had been there, the race wouldn't have been permitted. Did I already mention the rain, the cold, the wind, the hills, the rushes, the muck and the large puddles of water? And that was only the first 200 metres!



James 'Out in Front' with Johnny, Tony, Gary and Alan on a training run in Connemara.

The women had to do two laps but after one circuit, there were a few of them seriously tailed off. I could foresee my fate the next time around!

We decided to get our feet wet and slosh around on a "dry" part of the circuit. I would have gladly taken oxygen at the end of that little out-and-back too.



The women's race finished, or rather the first four, out of thirteen, crossed the line and the lads were let off. At this stage, having "competed" in two AAI Novice cross-country championships - 7th last of 140 in 2003 and 8th last of 190 in 2004 - I knew what to expect. The leaders were almost 100 metres ahead of me by the first turn. It was already a race for me to avoid being last. Four laps to complete...

About six of us were tailed off the back after less than three minutes. This was going to be "our" race. A Mayo lad and I were swapping last place, with a bit of jostling going on. Obviously we were both fighting to avoid the illustrious last place but I decided to stick in behind him and let him do the hard work. However after most of the first lap was run, he dropped back, not to be seen again.

The circuit was quite undulating with the short hill before the final long-and-punishing incline being the most gut-wrenching, in my opinion. I had four runners in my sights for most of the first two laps. This was cut to two as Johnny O'Connor and another runner slowly pulled away. The rest of the field didn't matter to me, until the end of my third lap that is.

With the likes of GCH's Gary Thornton in the field, I instinctively knew that a "lapping" incident was very possible. I knew for that last half lap that I was running for my racing life as Gary was coming up behind me, quickly. Now I was running against the race leaders.

I did make it through the line and onwards onto my final lap with a few seconds to spare as Gary finished to cheers from the very small crowd. Where was my encouragement?

At this stage, Johnnie had opened up a thirty second gap on me. I was much closer to Gary Doherty and another Mayo runner. I was really hopeful of nabbing Gary as he'd (according to himself!) only trained three times in the previous two months. I was only a handful of seconds down on him going into the final lap. I was primed...

At this stage the course was well and truly cut up, with little chance of getting a decent foothold going into a lot of the corners. The boggy patches had gotten boggier, if that was possible.

Gary got ahead of the Mayo lad and it looked like my only chance of not finishing second last lay with passing my green and red fellow-traveller. He was getting worried as he started to look back with about 6 minutes running to go. Must have heard my wheezing behind him? He sped up a little, either trying to stay ahead of me or attempting to catch Doherty?

I didn't get within reach of him again until we hit the final hill. At this stage he looked back twice more. I had him, or so I thought! My legs were sliding all over the place and my legendary final burst was mis-firing. Up and around the final turn and I was sliding around the place like I was on a bloody ice rink. Couldn't build up a head of steam at all. He looked back at least three more times in the final 200 metres but got home about three or four seconds ahead of me nonetheless.

Strangely enough, I didn't feel completely exhausted at the end and I was up and about almost immediately.

Stopped on the way home in Curry for a bite to eat. No, not for a curry either!



The Day I Met A Hero

By Mick Rice

When I was a lot younger I used to idolise sixties rocker Jim Morrison. It was only a little while later that I came to realise the true irony of this situation as, apparently, Mr. Morrison had forcefully disowned hero-worship in all its forms. He said he had no heroes of his own and didn't see why anyone should choose him as a role model. Having no original thoughts of my own at the time I took him at his word and moved on. In later years I became convinced that the whole idea of considering even the most admirable of individuals as heroic was pointless. Where did it get you? This didn't mean that I stopped dreaming and like many young men at that time I drooled over Debbie Harry posters and despised Pat Kenny with a vengeance. Even as the years passed and memories of Debbie Harry faded into the sunset I remained a hero-free zone.

On Christmas Eve seven years ago I went for a training run in Dublin's Phoenix Park. This was the first time I can remember actually deciding to 'go for a run'. Over the time since that first tentative expedition I have come to enjoy running greatly. I enjoy feeling fit. I enjoy being a part of the action rather than sitting on the couch. Sport really should be for all of us and not for the especially talented few. I'm living proof that this can be possible. As I became more interested in running and decided to take my place in a few local races, I learnt a little more about what it meant to be a runner. This was a sport that suited me perfectly. If I arrived home late from work and it was lashing rain outside, I could still run if I wanted to. If I found myself without company or

cash or both, I could still run if I wanted to. The independence and freedom from structure that running offered me was addictive and I hope nobody ever finds me a cure.



Who's the guy with Mick?

Over years and months I began to pick up books and magazines connected with athletics generally and running specifically. I was astonished to read about the talent, dedication and sheer unadulterated grinding toil that some runners had invested in making a success of their sport. In comparison to almost any other sport I had come across, these people, and the training they pushed themselves through, were astounding. I read of Ted Corbitt the American Ultra Distance Runner who would routinely train for over 250 miles per week while working full-time as a physical therapist in New York. I read about Robert De Castella from Australia who won the World Championship Marathon in 1983 and the famed Boston Marathon title in 1986. 'Deek', as he was known the world over, dominated marathon running in the 1980s. The fact that he



looked more like a bricklayer than a distance runner only made his huge weekly training mileages and lightning fast marathon times even more impressive.



Mick is Ray's hero!

Having developed a healthy respect for what it took to become successful as an elite athlete, I picked up one more volume a couple of years ago. To be more precise I started reading the two-volume autobiography of a runner from East Lancashire in the North of England by the name of Ron Hill. Although he is perhaps not as widely known as some other stars he has an unbelievable record in athletics over the years. Leaving aside for a moment all of his considerable achievements on road and track his endurance in athletic terms is legendary. Perhaps most notably, Ron pulled on a pair of running shoes one day in December 1964, went out for a run and hasn't missed a day's training since. Think about it; that's over forty years of running each and every day, come what may. Along the way Ron became the second man in history to run the marathon distance in less than two hours and ten minutes. In common with Deek he won the famous Boston Marathon title, setting a course record in 1970. He won many other prestigious marathon titles and

set four world records at various distances on the track during a stellar athletics career. He was tough almost beyond belief. What distinguished Ron Hill from all of the other running greats for me was that he steadfastly refused to give up in the face of declining performances and the inevitable advance of time. Typically for him, in the preface to his biography, he wrote, "There is no end... I will never cease running and competing..."

Without even realizing it I had slipped back twenty years and acquired a new hero. In a modern world where the most successful sports stars often came across to me as detached and remote, here was a man seemingly determined to revel in the work and pain of his sport almost for the sake of it. In deference to my own advancing years and wanting to avoid public ridicule I avoided all outward signs of this devotion to my newfound hero and satisfied myself instead with respectful reverence from a distance. There was however one more twist in this developing process of adulation; one that I never could have expected. In April this year I travelled to London to take part in the Flora sponsored London Marathon. In the good company of Galway runners Ray and Johnny O'Connor I was casually informed that Ron Hill was nearby signing copies of his most recent book. I would have been less surprised to hear that Jim Morrison was about the place - and he died in 1971. Of course, I had no choice; I had to see if I could meet the man. I'm relieved to be able to say that if anything the brief few words we exchanged that day only served to enhance my impression of the man. Perhaps it was best that we only spoke briefly before he had to move onto the next supplicant because we're all human after all and I'd quite like to hang onto my hero for a little while longer.



There's Only One 'F' in Cuckfield

London to Brighton Road Race 2nd October 2005

By Mick Rice



This race had called out to me for the last couple of years. I had read about it, thought about it and dreamt about it. All that was left was for me to run it. The whole package is almost irresistible to anyone with an interest in ultramarathons. This race combines running history with a raw physical challenge in a way that no other event can hope to. For many ultrarunners I know this race represents the very best that the sport has to offer. There may be tougher races out there, and there are certainly longer courses, but a rare combination of virtues continues to ensure that the London to Brighton Road Race remains, for my money at least, as the premier ultra distance event in the world. I had no choice. I had to run this race at least once.

On race morning I was woken by the alarm on my mobile phone at 4:59am. Thirty seconds later my watch alarm went off. A minute after that, my wake up call from the hotel reception came through. It wasn't a morning to be late. As is usual for me all my race gear was laid out on the chair in my hotel room and all I had to do was dress, eat and leave. The 'Breakfast of Champions' consisted of shortcake biscuits water and a banana that morning. My plan was to leave the hotel in Westminster at 6:00am. Registration was at the London Nautical School in Stamford Street, which I reckoned was about a ten-minute taxi ride from the hotel. The

race was due to start at 7:00am. On the advice of the hotel porter I started walking towards registration and watched for a taxi to hail. By the time I reached the Houses of Parliament I was still walking, late and in a panic. I eventually got a taxi on Westminster Bridge. Registration was a blur of race numbers and baggage tags. Within a few minutes I was back on the streets again and running towards the race start, which was about a mile away in the shadow of Big Ben. Even for someone like myself, with a decidedly tenuous grasp of what might constitute normality, it was clear that this wasn't ideal preparation for a long race. What could I do? I arrived at the start with about four minutes to spare.

While I knew that the race absolutely had to start on time, the assembled group of runners appeared mostly unconcerned as the fateful hour approached. This race famously starts on the first stroke of seven o'clock as announced by Big Ben. We had been warned against being fooled by the preliminary chimes but rather to start on the 'B' of the first 'Bong'. As these preliminary chimes rang out the runners moved casually out onto the road and seconds later we were on our way.

On the advice of a good friend I had noted where defending women's champion Vicky Skelton was running.

She was one of the few runners I recognised and I had been told that she normally ran a well-paced race that would most likely see her finish in a little over the seven hours. If everything went perfectly for me I was hoping to finish in just less than seven hours but I realised from the start that this was being optimistic. Over the course of the next fifty-four miles there was going to be a lot of room for the unexpected. The early miles were quite relaxed. Superb stewarding allowed runners to glide easily through the early Sunday morning traffic. As distance markers would only appear every five miles it was going to be tricky to judge pace with any accuracy. I tried to relax and glide. I thanked as many stewards as I could and soaked up the experience. I spoke briefly to another runner but for some reason I wasn't really in the mood to chat. I just wanted to drift along and look around myself. Streets of shops and offices came and went as we moved, ever so gently, towards Brighton and the coast.

At the five-mile aid station my 'pacer' Vicky was about a hundred yards ahead and she appeared to be moving along effortlessly. We passed this point in a little over thirty-eight minutes, which works out at about 7:49 per mile and all was well with the world. Although London was starting to get up to full speed the traffic didn't seem too bad. Some of the time I ran on the road and more often I ran on the pavement. Keeping clear of the cars, bikes and busses gave me something other than the miles ahead to think about. Somewhere around Brixton I passed by Vicky. Without being aware of it she had eased my nerves through the first six or seven miles of the race and I shall be forever grateful. It takes a long time to move out of London on foot and we seemed to pass one commercial center after another. The suburbs of Streatham Hill, Norbury

and Thornton Heath came and went. The stewarding was still impressive. Each major junction had at least one yellow-bibbed race steward looking after our interests.

At race registration many runners had handed in bottles of sports drink and other supplies like fruit and energy bars. Each bottle was individually labeled with the name of the runner, their race number and the mile-point at which it was to be kept. The refreshment stations were placed at five-mile intervals along the road. These drinks were then transported ahead to the appropriate place on the course to await their owners. To the outside of each of my own bottles I had taped an energy gel and I also carried some electrolyte replacement capsules with me in a waterproof container. My plan was to drink the entire contents of each drinks bottle along with the energy gel and to supplement that with an electrolyte capsule every hour. In broad terms this plan worked out perfectly. In the later stages of the race I passed on the gels twice but I don't think I suffered in any way because of it. The only other hitch came towards the end of the race when I realised that the electrolyte capsules had shaken themselves apart in the bottle. I think the lesson here is to use a smaller container the next time. I passed through the second drinks station at the ten-mile mark in Croydon with a little over an hour and fifteen minutes on the clock. My pace had dipped under 7:30 per mile but I still felt very relaxed.

Even in these early stages it seemed a long way between distance markers and, as I've said, this made it difficult to judge pace with confidence. Five miles is quite a long way between reality checks. The day was heating up and for the first time I could feel myself starting to sweat. Occasionally I checked my stride slightly and





consciously tried to slow the pace. Slowing from 7:30 or 7:40 minutes per mile pace felt a little awkward but I knew I needed to be conservative. We passed through South Croydon, Purley and Coulsdon before reaching the fifteen-mile marker just before Farthing Down. There was a good sharp uphill stretch at this point, which came as quite a surprise to me. I had been prepared for a hilly finish to this race but hadn't previously contemplated too much climbing in the middle miles. Boy was I was in for a shock. This first climb was but a gentle introduction to a series of long challenging inclines that continued in almost unbroken sequence until the finish in Brighton.

Having crossed Farthing Down we descended once again through a twisting series of small country roads. From time to time the course would wind in amongst houses and activity and then pass through into greener pastures again. As I look back my memories of this part of the course wash into one another and sometimes it's hard to recall the exact order of events. I can see from the race map that we moved on through Redhill and Salfords and approached the 'marathon' point somewhere close to the Horley Roundabout. Although the marathon point wasn't marked on the road I reckon I passed it with about 3:18:00 on the clock. I was still a little ahead of schedule but couldn't see much profit in slowing. There was still a lot of ground to cover and I was keen to keep going.

My first real sign of difficulty came at around the marathon mark or perhaps even slightly before then. Unusually for me I was having trouble with my quad's and running downhill, even gently, was getting very uncomfortable. Obviously this was a concern with thirty miles still to travel. There wasn't a lot I could do apart

from trying to run cautiously on the downhill stretches. The field was very strung-out by this point and, although I'd occasionally see another runner, long periods would pass where I ran on my own. Having passed through Pound Hill and Balcombe at thirty and thirty-five miles respectively, I felt I was at last making progress. By this point I had been on the road for nearly four and a half hours and fatigue was starting to kick in. I was starting to realise that this race was going to more of a waiting game than anything else. It was going to be a case of just keeping-on, and on, and on, and on. My five-mile splits had been consistently in the 37:00 to 39:00 range and if I could just take whatever the course was going to throw at me, and not stop running, there was a chance I could make it to the finish line in respectable shape. We left Balcombe behind and headed on towards Cuckfield.

I had never even heard of Cuckfield before race day but I will forever remember the tortuous, grinding, two-mile hill that leads up into that admittedly very pleasant village. The route wound and twisted along forested roads following a steady incline that seemed never-ending. Even though I shortened my stride to meet the rising ground I still passed another runner roughly half way up. Afterwards he told me that he had vomited several times during the climb such was the shock to his system that this obstacle provided after nearly forty miles on the road. It was with great relief then that I eventually emerged into the village itself. Another runner later remarked that, "Thank God there's only one 'effing Cuckfield." Personally, I couldn't have agreed more.

Although Cuckfield was behind me the remaining fourteen miles or so of the course was far from level. As we left

the village I could spot the last great barrier along the road to Brighton. In the distance a huge ridge of land arose sharply on the horizon in a sweeping line. If you were going to the seaside you were going up and over. Before meeting this monster in the distance, which is called Ditchling Beacon, there was roughly ten more miles of plod to get through. I could feel my pace slowing although I thought hadn't tired drastically. I felt sure that the fall-off in pace was more to do with the hills than real tiredness. As the road descended out of the village it only served to exaggerate the scale of the rising ground far ahead. The road wound on towards Burgess Hill and Hassocks where I picked up my second last drink. At the last two stations I had chosen to have watered-down Red Bull in place of sports drink. This concoction normally doesn't agree with me but when watered down it loses some of that sickly sweet aftertaste that many people find disagreeable. I was running reasonable freely now along a blessedly flat section between Keymer and the last great climb at Ditchling.

There was a moment of calm before the storm. As the sharply rising slope approached the course ran along the appropriately named Underhill Lane for about a half-mile. I had been cautioned that this Ditchling Beacon was 'unrunable' for all but the elite. I wasn't really sure what this meant but I was just about to find out. As I approached a junction a race steward directed me sharply to the right and uphill, with the terse advice "Fifteen hundred meters of hill!" Over the preceding mile I had bargained with myself that I would continue to run until I ran out of steam and only then I would allow myself to walk up the remainder of the hill. I had harbored vain dreams of plodding all the way up if things had gone well. This folly was exposed within seconds of turning

the corner. It's difficult to explain just how steep Ditchling Beacon actually is but suffice it to say that I'm sure it would be 'first gear and a prayer' if you were driving. I walked as briskly as I could manage towards the top with my hands firmly planted on my knees. This was perhaps the one part of the course where traffic caused me problems. The road was very narrow and steep and cars were passing in both directions. After a moment or two I settled on the novel strategy of completely ignoring everyone and everybody and looking at the ground six inches in front of my toes. Surprisingly enough nothing actually hit me although I did get a few 'friendly' toots of the horn. Up and over Ditchling, back to running, and we were four miles from home.

Just over the top came the final aid station just before what locals call 'Old Boat Corner'. At the fifty-mile marker my split was 6:31:00, which was a nice round figure if nothing else. Normally I would consider the closing miles of a long race as the 'Glory Stretch'. By this I mean that you can relax in the knowledge that the main work has been done and that in all likelihood you will finish the race. This time things were a little different. For one thing, after the near euphoria of cresting Ditchling Beacon, my spirits had dipped sharply along the relatively lonely stretch that started to wind down into Brighton town. Another difficulty was the downhill gradient itself. My quads, that had given trouble earlier, were by this stage completely shot. Each step forward was painful but even the prospect of stopping didn't seem very attractive either. There was absolutely nothing else to do but jog as gently as I could in the direction of the beach.

The view over the last few miles is spectacular as all of Brighton is laid out below. I was now totally focused



on the finish line and making sure I got there as soon as possible. Of course there was absolutely no question of running any faster; it was just a case of not stopping until I arrived. I had been warned that there was one last sneaky climb before the end, around Hollingbury Golf Course, where the road sweeps up over a hillside before the very final descent to the finish line in the suburbs of Brighton. It was only late into these final few miles that I sank into 'death-march-mode'. Running downhill was painful, breathing was painful and I suspect lying very still on a bed of feathers would have been painful too, if I had tried. All of the mental tricks I had used to cajole myself forwards through the preceding fifty-odd miles had long since passed their sell-by date. My right hamstring was starting to cramp and I had to shorten my stride again into a sort of choppy 'trit-trot' for the last half-mile or so. Eventually I was directed around a corner, along the footpath and over the finish line. It was over. I was done. I had crossed the line with 7:04:00 on the clock, which was good enough for tenth place overall and I was more than happy with both of those

statistics. In my wildest pre-race nightmares I had never anticipated such a hilly course but on the other hand the weather was about as benign as it possibly could have been. I'm so glad to have had a chance to take part in this event and the organisers deserve great credit for putting on the race in the face of huge administrative difficulties. Unfortunately I had to leave Brighton within a couple of hours in order to catch a flight home and so I wasn't able to attend the presentation of prizes that evening. Before I left Brighton I spoke briefly with the winner, Johannes Oosthuizen from South Africa, who was full of praise for the event. He spoke with apparent great sincerity of his admiration for the each and every athlete that finished the race. I also bumped into the fourth place finisher, Massimiliano Monteforte from Italy, who claimed with a completely straight face that the longest race he had previously run was 5000m. He said he was disappointed because he had started to cramp after 15 miles and only managed to finish in 6:29:04 - and some people have to cheek to say that I'm a lunatic.



Ballycotton 10' 2004

By Peter Delmer

I felt the spears of pain, through my head as the cold waters broke over me in Ballycotton Bay. The small waves washed away the sweat of a hard day's work leaving only the satisfaction that comes with a target achieved. It would take more than the coldness of the Atlantic to wipe the smile off my face.

This was a goal I had set – but never really believed I could achieve. Previous goals such as the sub-3 marathon had been set and achieved, with a fair amount of confidence before the event. However, running 10 miles in less than 60 minutes in Ballycotton was one goal that I could not picture in advance, not to mention a top 100 finisher's tee shirt. None of your 'visualisation' this time around – the mental preparation wasn't going to work because I didn't believe I could do it.

I had put in the training – two solid months in January and February – hill reps, long runs, recovery runs, tempo runs and those tough sessions with Mick, pounding out four-mile loops over the hills at Ryehill near Monivea. I also had the track record; running 61:15 the previous year in the rain and running 60:26 in the Galway Bay 10' in September. But still my head wasn't right.

This disbelief personified itself in the last two weeks before Ballycotton. All my training runs were slow slogs, devoid of energy. I had shin pain. My left hamstring was creaking every time I went harder than an easy jog. I missed a few training days. I was not at the top of my game.

I tried to put all that behind me as Mick and I lined up nervously at the start. I created a little space in the crowd for

one final stretch of the left hamstring, looked around for familiar faces in the crowd, shook hands with James London, smiled across the heads at John Hunt and tried to steady my breathing. No hiding places when you're on the start line.

The gun sounded and I kicked into action, only to discover that nobody was moving. Even just 5 metres back from the line it took a full seven seconds before I crossed the start line and punched the watch. Mick had gotten away better than I and I had to negotiate my way through the first 800m before any running space opened up. About a half a mile into Ballycotton 2004 I pulled up alongside Mick and attempted to settle into my race stride.

Settling into a race stride in Ballycotton is not easy because of the terrain. The first two miles are downhill leading out of the village followed by a relatively flat third mile. The course then follows a four-mile loop before re-tracing the first three miles, back up the hills and into Ballycotton. This 10-miler is predominantly downhill for the first 5, and obviously uphill for the last 5.

This being my third run in Ballycotton, my strategy was simply to run downhill at speed without over exertion (or hamstring damage!) for the first two miles. I would then settle into my target 5:55 per mile for as long as was humanly possible. The theory was that any time gained on the downhill would be needed on the uphill.

I passed the first mile marker in 5mins 36sec's and when Mick asked me for the split I grunted "5:36 ... too fast". The second mile was more controlled as by now we had cleared most of the people who were travelling slower





Peter in the Galway Bay 10m 2004 race for Cancer Care West

than us, and had settled into a bunch of 6 or 7 runners. We rounded the 90-degree bend at the bottom of the hill and hit the flat road with the sound of cheering crowds and ghetto blasters in our ears. The second mile took 5:46. Now was the time to find a sustainable pace.

During the third mile a very fresh Ray Glynn pulled up to my shoulder and started to chat. I was surprised that he had the energy for this but managed to eke out a civilised answer. However my replies to his second and third questions were mere grunts and I was a bit relieved when he pulled away ahead of me and started to open a gap. I was surprised at how easily he wound his way through the runners and was soon lost to sight. Ray eventually finished in a fantastic 68th position in 57:32 on his first Ballycotton 10'.

Mick and I passed the third mile marker with a 5:56 split. We had managed to find the right pace over the first flat mile; now the trick was to hold pace.

We entered the 4-mile loop and I began to relax into the race. I was beginning to enjoy the sunshine, the noisy crowds at the bends, the rhythm of the road and the knowledge that I was on-track. The fourth and fifth miles passed in 6:00 and 5:57. As I passed the halfway point, close to Ballymaloe House, my watch showed 29:15. I reflected on the fact that it was only 18 months ago when I achieved a similar goal – to run 5 miles in less than 30 minutes. It had taken me over a year, and multiple attempts before that one was cracked – now I was running the first half of a ten miler in 29:15. Note to self: 'never set limits!'

Halfway in Ballycotton probably means that you've still got two-thirds of the race left in terms of effort. I knew from previous years that concentration was now vital until we reached the climb with two to go. The hill has a remarkable way of concentrating effort!

Mile 6 passed in 5:56 – good. Mick and I pulled each other along ... speed up if you find yourself drifting back. Mile 7 in 5:54 – better. The Ballycotton course is marked out really well, and a clock at the 10k point indicated that I was running at personal best pace for that distance ... I quickly reminded myself that it was a downhill 10k. The 7th and 8th miles were steadily uphill so I was pleased to record another 5:54 for mile 8.

Close to the 8-mile marker we encountered an official jogging towards us, calling out our race positions. In the only words Mick and I had exchanged, we realised that we were in 105th and 106th position. Suddenly reality began to hit and I became conscious of the fact that I was on target for both a sub-60 time and a possible top 100 finishing position.

The effect was two-fold. Mick appeared to dig in and concentrate on catching

people ahead. I however, felt it better to keep going with the steady pace in the 'knowledge' (desperate hope!) that those in front would start to fade back. Suddenly, the 10-mile time-trial became a race. I urged Mick to maintain the pace, but he pushed on and I decided to let him open up a gap.

The next half-mile was the toughest yet. Now that I was 'racing' my rhythm began to desert me. The familiar first pangs of a stitch started to bite and my breathing became very laboured. I passed the 8.5-mile mark and decided to get it together before I hit the hill. In the space of about 200 meters I managed to relax a bit and regain my composure. As I rounded the 90-degree bend and started the ascent I was back on track. Mick was a good 10 or 15 meters ahead but I was focused only on getting up the hill.

My memory at this point deserts me, but I do remember passing a few people on the lower slope. I somehow managed to get up the steepest part of the hill and pass the 9-mile marker with a 6:03 split. The four-mile loops over the hills at Ryehill were paying off and I felt I was probably inside the top 100.

With slightly less than a mile to go I passed Mick and felt that I was running strongly. I pulled out a few meters on him and continued to overtake other runners. However, this period of strong running was short lived, and with hindsight I had probably pushed for home from too far out (as I have done on other occasions). As I passed over a road-marking indicating 800m to go, my situation was not pretty. All speed seemed to drain from my legs and I hit that familiar experience of running on empty. At this stage of a race the mind seems to shut down unnecessary functionality – in other words the only thing I could do was run. I didn't see

the crowds, couldn't hear the noise, completely missed the blaring music ... just ran. I felt slow but nobody passed me.

With 400m to go I died a death. The thought entered my head that I still had a full circuit of a track to go and I that I wasn't going to make it. The legs kept going. I felt I was running backwards, but I managed to maintain my position. And then, as the line drew closer, with about 4 or 5 meters to go, three hurtling runners passed me. The sudden rush of bodies confused me but I still managed to process the information that Mick had passed me. Fair play to him, he had done it again! This was the Dublin Marathon all over again, where Mick had beaten me to the line by two seconds.

I stumbled over the line and was only able to stay on my feet by shuffling along the wall that formed the left-hand side of the finishers' chute. My head was light, my breathing was heavy but my heart was happy. I knew I had achieved the sub sixty. The last mile, which had felt so slow was completed in 5:46 to give an overall time of 00:58:47. All that mattered were the first two digits – zero zero.

Somebody handed me a Ballycotton 10' mug. I shuffled on. Some fliers advertising future raises were pressed into my hand. I dragged myself forward and there it was – the trophy I so desired but didn't believe I could achieve – a top 100 finisher's tee shirt. I had finished in 95th position.

Alone later in the cold Atlantic water, washing away the sweat of a mission accomplished, I made another note to self – never listen to the inner voice saying "I can't."

I can!



I Almost Ran the Full Distance

Okay if you've got this far through our booklet you're probably ready for the hardcore marathon experience. These next two race reports, printed verbatim (well almost), describe the highs and lows of Ray O'Connor's favourite sport.



London Marathon 2004

London Marathon 2004 ('the coldest and wettest ever' according to some news reports) wasn't that bad! Pre race excuses out of the way first... Due to organising Connemara my training had not gone according to plan. Intended doing five long runs over 18 miles; managed three but the last of these was five weeks before race day.... a five week taper running only twice a week? Good marathon prep? I don't think so.

The plan: Run 8 min miles or maybe 8.30's for as long as possible.... see how I felt after a couple of miles... maybe surprise myself and get in around 3:40,, a personal best would be 3:51; sub-4 hours, would be fantastic; 4:15 disaster.

Very cold at the start. Managed to squeeze into one of the very crowded tents and sat for an hour.

RACE ON

- Mile 1. 8.51 (8mins 51 sec's for the first mile)
- Mile 2. 8.26 (impossible to get any rhythm, very very crowded)
- Mile 3. 8.23
- Miles 4 to 13 (eased into a steady pace)
- Mile 13 8.17 Half Way in 1hr 47. (felt good, but was waiting for the usual tiredness to start creeping in)
- Mile 14 8.15 (got very cold very suddenly)

- Mile 15 8.21
- Mile 16 8.32 (every London marathon in the past I've crumbled at mile 16, but I convinced myself this time that I was feeling great... it worked)
- Mile 17 8.29
- Mile 18 8.44 (instantly felt that my race was over?????)
- Mile 19 8.49
- Mile 20 9.44 (It was, but I kept running)
- Mile 21 10.04
- Mile 22 11.00 (still running... believe it or not)
- Mile 23 10.52
- Mile 24 10.48 (would I keep running to the end?)
- Mile 25 12.35 (oh no!) Just before the 25 mile mark I decided that a personal best was out but a sub 4 was looking good, then I crumbled... what was around the next corner? The photographers... ready for a lovely shot of me walking the London Marathon!
- Mile 26 12.12

Finish 3.56.44

Official time 3.56.21

13 seconds better than my previous marathon in New York 2002 so I was over the moon. 2nd best marathon time, 10th marathon in 3 1/2 years, almost ran the entire distance, sub 4, cold, very wet, very pleased. Roll on my next 10.



*Ray in Connemara 2002
none of your NY crowds here!*

New York Marathon 2004
*So good they named it twice...
So bad I felt I ran it twice!*

Target: 3:41 personal best (as if!), but
also just to finish two marathons in 13
days.

Reality: Half Way 1hr50 (odd), upwards
of 20 degrees, and hot hot hot.
By mile 20 (2hr56) I was
running/walking
By mile 22 I was walking/running
By mile 24 I was walking/retching
By mile 26 I was retching/walking
By mile 26.2 I was just bloody sick!

Spent half an hour in the medical tent
licking salt out of my hand like a
wounded cat... salt, a new miracle cure
by the way. I've never seen so many 4
hour marathoners walking towards the
finish line, and I've never seen so many
people getting sick after a marathon. It
was horrific. Never underestimate the
effects of heat.

Back to the hotel for a pint before my
shower. 14 marathons down 86 to go!

Ray O'Connor, race director of the
Connemara Marathon, is the most
experienced marathoner in Athenry AC
with twenty finishes over the classic
distance. Reading these two race
reports you might wonder why...





*Hope you enjoyed our ramblings.
See you one Saturday morning for a run!*

From all in Athenry AC.