

Breathless in Tahoe

Lake Tahoe Marathon, USA. 11 October 2003

By Kelly Sparks

Pictures don't do it justice. The view from the plane only hints at what is to come. Nothing prepares you for a close-up view of Lake Tahoe's breathtaking splendour. I saw it for the first time while winding my way down Spooner Summit on the Lake's East Shore. Lake Tahoe does take your breath away; its beauty is unparalleled.

I had come here to compete in the 8th Annual Lake Tahoe Marathon. It is billed as "A Saturday morning run you will never forget", but there is also a full week of pre-race activity.

Tuesday, October 7, 2003

The five-mile "Meet and Greet" hike along the Tahoe Rim Trail, seemed like a good way to introduce my lungs to the 2000m elevation. The Rim Trail winds along the crest of the hills that surround the Lake. The hike started off with a slow climb but levelled out at about 2500m. From this elevation the majesty of the lake and its surrounding forest is revealed in full.

Casinos dot the Nevada shore of the Lake. On the California side lies Emerald Bay, a verdant jewel of an inlet on the West Shore. In the marathon it is at mile 20, the last hill of the course. From the 19-mile point of the marathon I hiked the one-mile trail down past Eagle Falls to Vikingsholm, a Scandinavian-style mansion built in 1928. I took in the tea house on Fanette Island, then made a stop at Taylor Creek Bridge (23 mile mark) to watch hundreds of bright red Kokanee Salmon spawning in the creek below.

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

To help acclimatise to the elevation the marathon organisation offers two fun runs. I joined the Race Director's run, meeting race director Les Wright, at his home for a morning run along Cold Creek, chugging through the aspen groves.

As my feet hit the trail, I again



felt the altitude. My legs felt heavier than usual. Wright said that 99% of the marathon runners would be "flatlanders" and that we should slow down and enjoy the course because this was not a place to set personal records. I concentrated on the scenery for the rest of the run down Cold Creek Trail.

The second run was that evening. Assistant Race Director Don Sheetz took us for a circular three mile jog by lake front mansions, the edge of Eagle Marsh and then up to Fallen Leaf Lake to view the fall foliage.

The run was leisurely and informative, ending at the Beacon Restaurant where we hydrated with water and sunk a round of sinful Rum Runners. Back at the host hotel I paid my Nevada taxes at several of the Black Jack tables.

Thursday, October 9, 2003

Two of the Lake Tahoe Marathon's three-day events began today. The 3rd Tahoe Triple kicked off with 72 ultra runners stepping up to the start line at Inspiration Point, and tackling the first of three marathons over the next three days.

The Triple covers the entire 72-mile perimeter of Lake Tahoe with a six-mile overlap at the most scenic part. Three-time winner Sean Meissner won with an average of 3:10 per marathon.

The second event was the first-ever Lake Tahoe 3-Day Triathlon. For triathlon novices or those wanting events 'a la carte' while

enjoying Lake Tahoe over three days, Wright came up with this innovative idea. Participants choose a five or nine-mile kayak or a one-mile swim before they gear up for a 72-mile bike race around the lake on Friday and the Lake Tahoe Marathon on Saturday.

I chose lounging by the hotel pool and attending the Tahoe Sports and Fitness Expo. Neal Chappell, a local Tahoe runner led a group of us through Kahle Meadow to Nevada Beach on the South Shore, where we witnessed a dramatic sunset over the Sierra. After only two days it was obvious that the small community of Lake Tahoe is threaded with running trails.

Friday, October 10, 2003

To rest up the day before the marathon, I took the scenic Around the Lake and Course Bus Tour. Though intimidated by the challenging hills between mile 15 and 20, I was awestruck with the

John Weru



scenery. This has to be one of the nation's most beautiful courses.

The pre-race pasta party is held aboard the Tahoe Queen, a Mississippi-style paddle steamer, at sunset. There was more than enough pasta to go around, people aboard were in high spirits, and the views from each of the boat's windows and decks were brilliant.

As the sun put on a departing spectacle in the western sky, a full moon came up and eventually cast a reflection off the glassy water as it rose over the Eastern Sierra. This had to be the high point of the trip so far.

Saturday, October 11, 2003 (Race Day)

At the gun, 3,000 runners and walkers at the various start lines departed Tahoe City, Rubicon, and Inspiration Point towards the finish line at Pope Beach on the Lake's South Shore. After the first few miles I knew that my time would not win any bragging rights. But simply participating in this marathon would; it is one of the most awe-inspiring races in North America.

With legs a bit heavy and breath a bit short, I experienced a sensory overload as I took in the pine trees and surrounding fall foliage. I listened to my cushioned strides as I made my way along the shoreline and climbed to points as high as 2,100m at mile 17.

From mile 20 it was all downhill to the lakeside finish and though I could no longer feel my feet and every bone in my body wanted me to quit, I was determined to push through the next six miles and cross that finish line. It was worth it: I felt an incredible sense of accomplishment after finishing.

The overall winner went home with a \$1000 cash prize. As for me, I went home with a sense of accomplishment, some new friends, and treasured memories of a Saturday morning run I will never forget.

Result

MEN:

1	John WERU	KEN	2:35:05
2	Matthew HOLTON	USA	2:44:30
3	Richie BOULET	USA	2:57:30
4	Opswaldo LOPEZ	USA	3:00:54
5	Steve HACKWORTH	USA	3:03:06
6	Mike MILLER	USA	3:07:32

WOMEN:

1	Christina CASTELLANI	USA	3:29:48
2	Judy ANDERSON	USA	3:39:29
3	Anne Marie THIESSEN	USA	3:39:30
4	Shelly MOSS	USA	3:30:46
5	Maria PERRY	USA	3:46:36
6	Ramona LEE	USA	3:46:57

Result

TRIPLE, MEN:

1	Sean MEISSNER	USA	3:08:31	3:08:40	3:12:08
2	Jeff RILEY	USA	3:15:43	3:12:09	3:15:25
3	Alex Vaz WADDINGTON	USA	3:13:20	3:07:46	3:19:24

TRIPLE, WOMEN:

1	Gretchen BRUGMAN	USA	4:07:03	3:58:51	4:08:11
2	Kim FORGET	USA	4:21:20	4:08:42	4:24:08
3	Jennifer TAYLOR	USA	4:13:59	4:06:16	4:38:36