

A gift from the milky lagoon

Lala International Marathon, Mexico. 6 March 2005

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The Lala marathon is unique: the organisers and title sponsors, Grupo Industrial Lala, regards it as their gift to the community of La Laguna.

The first Lala marathon was held in the La Laguna area in 1989 as a festivity to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the company, and since then it has become a traditional offering. Organizers not only give all participants the chance to compete for the prizes at the finish, but registration is free at the start. Grupo Lala doesn't, as might be expected, manufacture or sell sporting goods - but is one of the largest manufacturers of milk products in Mexico.

La Laguna lies close to the City of Torreon, dead in the centre of Northern Mexico and halfway between Mexico City and El Paso on the US border. It commands the neighbouring countryside and became established as a railway town in 1887, mainly because of its strategic position.

Torreon was the stage for Pancho Villa's first big victory in 1910, during the Mexican Revolution, which gave control of the railways radiating from the city.

Three more battles were fought for control of the town in the years that followed. Today it is a modern industrial city with many



attractions, including the Teatro Isaura Martinez, one of the most beautiful theatres in Mexico, the Regional Museum of Laguna with its Mayan archeological collections, the Cueva de la Calendaria with evidence of pre-hispanic culture, the Alameda and many fine museums.

Not least among the town's attractions is the Bosque Venustiano Carranza Park (the Carranza Forest). This large wooded area, is the traditional gathering place for sportsmen and nature lovers, where many cultural

and sports events are held annually on its numerous sites, and where the finish line of the Lala Marathon is located.

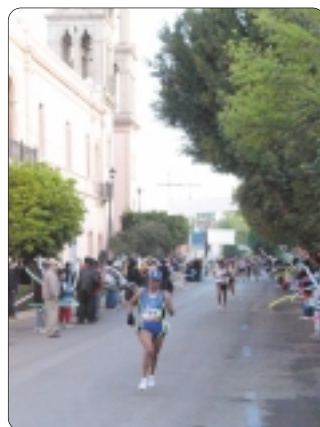
Further afield, but still within the vicinity of Torreon, lie several natural phenomena. Few places in the world have provoked as many theories as the Silent Zone. The whole region was previously covered by the Sea of Thetis, traces of which are seen in the fossils.

There is radio silence in some sections of the area, due to magnetic fields, a characteristic

that is shared by the Bermuda Triangle, the Egyptian Pyramids, and the sacred cities of Tibet, all located between the 26th and 28th parallels. The area is famous for the abundance of purple cactuses and other rare desert plants. Some unique animal and reptile specimens are found in the Silent Zone.

The Bilbao Dunes are another natural wonder that occurred due to soil erosion, leaving an impressive Sahara like landscape with fine desert sand, the place where many movies were made.





The dunes are only 45 minutes ride from Torreon.

The wildlife in the area is very interesting but is rarely seen during the day, the majority of it being nocturnal. Different extreme sports are practiced in the Bilbao Dunes. One can see many four-wheeled motorcycles traveling in the dunes and dragging a board in their wake, as if water skiing on the sand.

The Marathon starts in the city of Gomez Palacio, not far from the main office of the title sponsor. At 06.40, Anna Gabriela Guevara, Olympic silver medalist at 400m in Athens last year, signaled the start for the women's elite race. After 20 minutes she set the men's elite race off, at the head of more than 4000 everyday runners.

Among them were participants from 29 Mexican States and 53

foreign athletes from 12 countries: including Kenya, Ethiopia, Russia, U.S.A., Germany and Belgium.

As in previous years the weather on marathon day treated the athletes to excellent running conditions of 13°C and no wind. A trio of women, Kenyan Margaret Torotich and the Mexican pair Dulce Maria Rodrigues and Adriana Fernandes, led the race on the flat 42km loop course. At an altitude of 1200m, the course runs through the City of Lerdo to the finish line in the Bosque Carranza.

The marathon course not only runs through the three cities, but also on the roads connecting them. These roads are the setting for a surprise: a notable feature of the race is the great number of spectators and numerous cheering groups lining the route. This year there were 31 of them.

The runners have a chance to admire the music and dancing, helping them to transcend the difficult task in hand. In tune with the popular character of the race they can also nominate the five best groups, who receive prizes from the organisers.

There is a serious athletic side to the race as well. It incorporated the National Marathon Championships for the fourth time and also served as a qualifying race for the IAAF World Championships in Athletics.

Many of the best marathon runners from around the country took part along with some strong foreign competition. Despite the absence of two of the top Mexican women runners - Madai Perez (2:27:08 in Rotterdam) and Margarita Tapia (2:28:36, winner in Houston) - there was still a Mexican winner. Dulce Marie

Result

MEN:

1	George OKWORO	KEN	2:11:47
2	Robel TAFERE	ETH	2:14:30
3	Juan Gualberto VARGAS	MEX	2:16:01
4	Christopher TOROITICH	KEN	2:16:33
5	Eliud KEIRING	KEN	2:17:12
6	Kipkemoi CHERUYIOT	KEN	2:17:27
7	Alfredo GOMEZ	MEX	2:17:31
8	Josefat ONGERI	KEN	2:17:57
9	Luis REYES	MEX	2:18:03
10	Odilon CUAHUTLE	MEX	2:18:54

WOMEN:

1	Dulce Maria RODRIGEZ	MEX	2:29:00
2	Margaret TOROITICH	KEN	2:31:23
3	Adriana FERNANDEZ	MEX	2:34:33
4	Albina GALLYAMOVA	RUS	2:36:02
5	Alicia RODRIGUEZ	MEX	2:36:19
6	Judith RAMIREZ	MEX	2:36:29
7	Margarita CABELLO	MEX	2:37:43
8	Erica GUEVARA	MEX	2:40:23
9	Irma Carina SANCHEZ	MEX	2:41:04
10	Estela XOLALTENCO	MEX	2:42:09

Rodrigues from Mexico City won in 2:29:00, a new event record.

George Okworo won the men's race with a good time for this course: 2:11:47. The course record is held by Andres Espinoza, at 2:10:57. Mexican runner Juan Gualberto Vargas, finished with a place on the podium.

Besides the prize money won by elite athletes, many ordinary runners received prizes. This race can be called a people's marathon, and the local dignitaries recognise its popular appeal.

The Governors of the two states and the Mayors of the three counties through which the marathon course passes all turned up to make the presentations. But the gifts borne by them come from the milk of La Laguna.

