

Bank to bank

By Sergey Porada
and Yelena Kurdyumova

Quebec is the cradle of French civilization in North America. Founded by Samuel de Champlain in 1608, he named it after the local Indian description kebec, meaning "where the river becomes narrow". Today it takes only 10 minutes by ferry to cross the St. Lawrence River here, bank to bank. It is only one kilometre between Old Levis on the southern high bank, where the marathon starts, and old Quebec City on the northern bank, where it finishes. The thousand marathon runners and 1,500 half marathoners, including 200 foreign participants from 27 countries and 41 US states, take a roundabout route on the scenic historical course along the banks of the mighty river, which connects the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean.

Established as a fur trading post Quebec City developed into the centre of "New France", an empire stretching from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. Old Quebec is the only North American city which has preserved its original fortifications. From atop its ramparts the view recalls old Europe: narrow winding streets and the pointed roofs of 17th and 18th century houses and churches. Old Quebec became a World Heritage site in 1985.

Quebec's fortifications crest a plunging cliff, towering over the St. Lawrence River. At a length of 4.6km they encircle the Upper Town and show the evolution of Quebec's defence system over the centuries. Quebec has also mounted a parallel cultural defence and as capital of Quebec Province the city enjoys a resilient economy. The Marathon, in turn, enjoys the benefits of this.

Cloudy skies, no rain, and a start temperature of 13C created almost ideal conditions. Over the first 12km of the course runners contended with the ups and downs of the Old Levis hills, but gradually descended to the flatter part of the course along the St. Lawrence River's south bank.

A tail wind over the next 11km allowed marathoners to breeze past the half marathon start line. They then turned uphill towards the Quebec Bridge. The 576m centre span of the bridge, built in 1919, remains the longest in the world, and a major engineering feat.

Descending from the bridge runners took an about-turn and things changed. The wind stopped being





RESULT

MEN:

1	Fethi OUKID	CAN	2:30:32
2	Terry GEHL	CAN	2:32:53
3	Richard TESSIER	CAN	2:34:25
4	Louis-Philippe GARNIER	CAN	2:36:57
5	Michael MUSILI	KEN	2:47:26
6	Thomas CLARK	USA	2:48:06
7	Alain GUIMONT	CAN	2:49:50
8	Camilien BOUDREAU	CAN	2:51:03
9	Marc JULIEN	CAN	2:51:17
10	Rory GILFILLAN	CAN	2:52:45

WOMEN:

1	Nathalie GOYER	CAN	3:01:14
2	Louise VOGHEL	CAN	3:02:34
3	Isabelle RODRIGUE	CAN	3:10:24
4	Suzane MUNGER	CAN	3:15:45
5	Genevieve BLOUIN	CAN	3:16:54
6	Valerie ST-MARTIN	CAN	3:20:29
7	Odette FORTIN	CAN	3:28:41
8	Annie BRONGEL	CAN	3:29:27
9	Isabelle BROSSEAU	CAN	3:29:33
10	Linda TALBOT	CAN	3:30:34

HALF MARATHON:

MEN:

1	Henry GITHUK	CAN	1:07:14
2	Danny KASSAP	CAN	1:07:31
3	Abel ONDEYO	KEN	1:07:43

WOMEN:

1	Josiane ABOUNGONO	GAB	1:21:11
2	Isabelle LEDROIT	CAN	1:21:22
3	Valerie NOLET	CAN	1:28:02

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friendly and confronted the runners through the next 12km. Although flat and packed with historical sites the course was a challenge. But not for defending champion Nathalie Goyer, who gradually built her lead to cross the line nearly 400m ahead. "My trick is easy: I am a teacher, therefore I can train all the summer" she said. "Moreover, it is a beautiful way of approaching the new school year."

Those unwilling to fight the wind could find relief by resting their eyes on the surrounding scenery: beautiful parks adorn both sides of the course, each of which retains historical glimpses of the city's past. These mostly feature clashes between the French and the British Empires in the 18th century. Battlefield Park, better known as the Plains of Abraham, is one of the best urban parks in the world, spread across 108 hectares and containing the Citadel, in which Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt met at Quebec Conference of 1943 to discuss the strategy for World War II.

In 1759 General James Wolfe established a camp on the high hills of today's Lévis, exactly where the marathon starts. He laid siege to Quebec City, firing cannon for three months before winning the famous battle of the Plains of Abraham. The British were then in control.

Fethi Oukid, Algerian-born but resident in Montreal from 2001, led

his first marathon race from the start. "I do not know the marathon pace very well, and did not have any plan how to run it, but I trained hard all year, running 250km a week" said Fethi. Beyond 30km Oukid duelled with his Kenyan friend Michael Musili, who eventually finished fifth. Second-placer Terry Gehl kept close to the winner throughout the race, lagging by less than 400m with 4km to run and setting a new personal best. Last year's winner Richard Tessier contested only for the first half, but finished third.

Despite the windy conditions Oukid did not look tired and immediately shared his plans to run his next marathon in Montreal in two weeks' time.

In the half marathon those foreign-born but with "landed immigrant" status took top honours: Henry Githuk and the Gabonaise Josiane Aboungono.

Finishing the marathon journey through history, visitors then had a choice of what sight to see next. In any casual stroll through the streets you stumble upon innumerable monuments and churches. The Ursuline Convent, the Museum of Augustine, and the richly decorated Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Quebec with its accumulated treasures of the last three and a half centuries are just three of them. The imposing Louis XIV style Parliament Buildings which lie just

outside the city walls were inspired by the Louvre museum in Paris. Though Quebec City is entirely French in feeling, spirit and language, hospitality and the tourist industry is bilingual.

The finish area of the marathon lies in Quebec's Old Port, from where wood was shipped to England two centuries ago. From here an 11km-long bike path leads to the spectacular Montmorency Falls, which at 83m high are one and a half times higher than Niagara Falls. The cable car runs up to the historic Montmorency manor house, dating from 1781, and

suspension bridges hang across the falls, providing a breathtaking view. The bravest come in winter to climb the challenging frozen waterfall when it becomes a wall of ice and snow.

The Quebec City marathon is a well-organized event with great capacity for expansion. For the city's anniversary year of 2008, the organizers plan on 12000 people participating in marathon weekend and are already working under wraps to mount a grand spectacle.



RACE CONTACT DETAILS

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Full race contact listings start on page 66