

Homage to Hatshepsut

**Egyptian Marathon,
Luxor
8 February 2002**

When North America and Northern Europe still lie in the grip of winter the Nile Valley is at its most alluring. The scorching heat of summer is replaced by mild sunshine, in which running a marathon is as pleasant as can be. Instead of averting their eyes from the glare and dust, runners can gaze uninhibitedly at the dramatic scenery and archaeological riches lying all around to see.

The scenic tour starts with the breakfast run the day before the race. Runners marvelled at the splendour of the Luxor Temple before gathering outside the entrance. The 3.4km breakfast run starts from here and finishes in the equally dramatic setting of the Temple of Karnak, the centre of the Theban civilisation.

The route was just as inspiring, along the tree-lined esplanade of the Nile's right bank. The sky was clear and the sun bright as traffic plied alongside – onlookers in the traditional caleche horse drawn carriages, or organisers on foot wearing pharaonic costume. Then on the ancient thoroughfare of the Nile itself tall-rigged traditional boats, their sails patched and filled with the breeze, tacked between huge modern cruise ships and small motor launches.

The procession over, runners mingled with tourists among the towering ruins of Karnak. Apart from a press conference and a pasta dinner, the action was due to re-start at 07.30 next morning, on the west bank of the Nile. Luxor lies on the east side, previously linked to the outlying settlement of West Luxor by a



Racing past the Colossi of Memnon

ferry, but now also by a pristine new bridge, 10km to the south. The race convoy crossed the bridge after a 05.30 breakfast, and headed up into the dry hills and the Temple of Hatshepsut.

Three different races start and finish in the same spot just outside the temple compound. As a band played traditional music of Upper Egypt and Nubia runners streamed away from the temple of Egypt's female Pharaoh. After 1200m, they start a lap which is run either once in the Ramses Run (12.3km), twice in the Luxor Run (22.3km) or four times to complete the full marathon. Runners from 34 countries completed the three races this year.

The lap starts with gentle twists and undulations through scattered habitations spread over the rocky landscape. In the distance this rises up into craggy scarps. Among them lies the famous Valley of the Kings and countless other antiquities. The roads are wide and well surfaced, but provide little shade, so runners can be thankful for the

seasonal mildness.

After four kilometres the road twists through the Kom Lolah village surrounding the compound of the Temple of Ramses III. As runners pass in front of the sheer stone entrance they turn past the Marathon Café, a teashop renamed in honour of the race by an enthusiastic local proprietor. By 5km the race joins a long straight road heading over the flood plain towards the Nile.

To the left, a kilometre later, lie the Colossi of Memnon. These 8m tall faceless twin statues are all that remain of the Temple of Memnon, previously larger than that at Karnak, after the rest was swept away by repeated flooding.

Runners can grab water and bananas here as they press on towards the village of New Gurna. A left turn at 7km is followed by another 2km-long straight beside the Al Fadliya irrigation channel, with date palms sprouting to either side.

Just after 9km another left turn takes runners back away from the canal, winding through the village of Taref and towards the road into the Valley of the Kings. On this road runners do an about turn before rejoining the main lap.

The Ramses runners peel back off for the finishing straight soon afterwards, but the others repeat the tour. By the time the marathon runners are on their fourth and final lap they have established almost personal relations with some of the onlookers: the proud proprietor of the Marathon Café; the volunteers handing out refreshments in the



Marathon support

shadow of the Colossi; stallholders in the villages of New Gurna and Taref; the policeman manning the checkpoint on the road into the Valley of the Kings.

The last of these may have had a special cheer for Salama Al Akraa, a fellow policeman from Jordan who chased the runaway winner, Giorgio Calcaterra, eight times past the checkpoint. Loredana Ricci made it an Italian double.

MEN:

1	Giorgio CALCATERRA	ITA	2:22:37
2	Salama A AL-AKRAA	JOR	2:24:56
3	Marco D'INNOCENTI	ITA	2:26:36
4	Hirao MASAHIKO	JPN	2:29:15
5	Jiri WALLENFELS	CZE	2:31:07
6	Mohamed EL-SWITY	JOR	2:35:12
7	M Ebada EL-SAIED	EGY	2:39:20
8	Hussein A ALI	EGY	2:40:51
9	Sabri K AMIRA	EGY	2:41:40
10	Gianluigi GONTE	ITA	2:42:09

WOMEN:

1	Loredana RICCI	ITA	3:00:49
2	Fabiola RUEDA-OPPLIGER	SWI	3:10:39
3	Miyao AI	JPN	3:19:13

LUXOR RUN (22.3km)

MEN:

1	Alian A EL-KAHTANY	SAU	1:10:24
2	Mohamed M KHATAB	EGY	1:10:31
3	Awad A SERIES	JOR	1:12:50

WOMEN:

1	Mona M MOHAMED	EGY	1:36:22
2	Aisha F HAFEZ	EGY	1:39:56
3	Monica SMITH	USA	1:46:14

RAMSES RUN (12.3km)

MEN:

1	Saad EL-ASMARY	SAU	38:05
2	Faisal R ELNADY	SAU	38:08
3	Hasan A ELASMARY	SAU	38:44

WOMEN:

1	Nadia H AHMED	EGY	51:43
2	Abeer AHMED	EGY	55:33
3	Walaa M AHMED	EGY	57:51



The Breakfast Run along the Nile Embankment