ORTING MATTERS

BY **PETER JACK**

d' Italia on the 10th of May.

On that occasion, the competitors will be travelling a distance of 120 miles on bikes. However, I merely wanted to do 13.1 miles on foot i.e. 21K i.e. twenty one thousand strides i.e. a long way! Particularly if one of the participants i.e. yours truly has a broken toe and hasn't run for four weeks until a week ago.

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So how do I get ready for this event? I decided to run five times in three days to dip my toe into the competitive waters, as it were. Not exactly scientific but I have hunches about things and they generally seem to work so where would I be dipping my toe? Malta was to be the testing ground both for my foot and also for my supposed fitness...

Malta is the fourth most densely populated country in the world and is also in the middle of the Mediterranean.

Mediterranea of the Mediterranean. Churchill saw the island as the gateway to win-ning the Allied cam-paign in North Africa in the Second World War and to prevent the Mediterranean from becoming "Italy's Lake" as Mussolini becoming "Italy's Lake" as Mussolini called it in 1940. I had called it in 1940. I had been in Malta once before when I hired a mountain bike and went around the entire island in five hours. On this trip, I was only there for three and a half days so time was of the essence and I decided to run

ther than bike.
The Jack family was The Jack lamily was companied by our od friends Mark and otherine Kinkaid. good iffence state of Catherine Kinkaid.
Mark and I have entered the Coast to Coast race in May i.e. Sligo to Newcastle via 147 miles of running ,kayaking, cycling and crawling so I need to bring my fitness up to speed. Pd often thought we don't often thought we don't race enough, we just seem to train for train-ing sake which is all very well but most peo-ple would agree that a race can be the best training session of all particularly if you race can be the best training session of all particularly if you remember that the race you have entered is just a b race i.e. it's not your main goal. It's therefore important to keep you ego in check.

My ambition when I stood on the start line in Larne was to (a) Finish the race and (b) Enjoy it because I saw it as part

of the bigger picture.

I never managed to get good time for a half marathon. It is one of the Big Five race disthe big rive race distances namely, a 5K, 10K, 10miles, half marathon and full marathon. I was very happy with my 10k, happy with my 10k, 10miles and marathon times but achieved what I thought I could for the 21k dis-

LAST Saturday saw the annual running of the Larne Half Marathon a very scenic course on the Antrim coast, the route that will be used for the 200 cyclists in the Girod of Italia on the 10th of May.

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We kept ourselves busy in Malta – we had a boat tour of the biggest harbour in the Mediterranean Valetta; we walked through a World War Two air raid shelter in Mehillea, we explored Malta's sister island of

Gozo; we walked through the ancient cobbled streets of cobbled streets of Mdina the nation's first capital as they put up decorations for the fesdecorations for the fes-tival (which coincided with St Patrick's Day!) we marvelled at an orig-inal Caravaggio in St John's Cathedral and we all squeezed into an electric moke for an exhilarating trip down through narrow cobble through harrow cooler streets and we tried not to fall off the top of a cliff which precariously was the ceiling of an arch which had been worn away by centuries of surf. We tried to of surf. We tried to cram into three days that we would normally do in seven, and we started the trip on a high note as we found a T.V. in the airport bar when we arrived where we sat surrounded by French Rugby supporters and we cheered on the men in green to beat France. Brian O'Driscoll's sporting journey had ended in triumph but what could

I achieve with my run-ning shoes over the next three days? It's great to have a running mate, it's all very well saying you're going to get up at eight o'clock next morning but when you wake up, you sometimes have second thoughts but if you know that nave second thoughts but if you know that your buddy is down-stairs in the hotel lobby waiting for you, it makes it more likely that you'll get on the kit and stride over the lift with nurses with purpose.

I love training at 5pm but it's the 8am stuff but which is tricky which is why I take my hat off to the 6am Evolve crew. Until Until was only one six o'clock in everyday... Mr Kinkaid and I took our first steps somewhat Kinkaid and I took our first steps somewhat tentatively as we gazed out at the big blue Med and a strange shiny yellow thing in the sky which locals tell me was called "the sun". The night before in the restaurant fortified by a nice local bottle we gazed out the window and saw a lighthouse on top of a cliff and thought that would be a great spot for our first run. What seemed a

To Larne - from Malta!

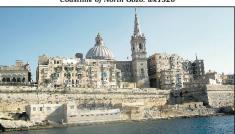
great idea at 8 pm didn't seem so smart twelve hours later as we puffed a wheezed our way up a steep rocky trail but eventually we made it and paused for breath. We then ran past a castle known as the Red Tower which was built by one of the Knights of Malta in the sixteenth century so the sixteenth century so that the locals could keep an eye out for the next invading force. Malta has been raided colonised by and been raided and colonised by most marauding hoards over the last two millennia including the Romans, the Turks the British etc. The Nazis tried their best seventy years ago

best seventy years ago which is why the name of

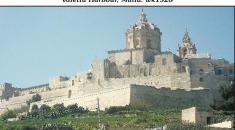
my uncle in on a RAF War Memorial in Valetta, one of 7,000 casualties in the defence of Malta, the only country to have been awarded the George Cross. Mark and I even-tually made it back to the hotel so I had finished my first run since I broke my first run since I broke my toe. One run down, four to go! I wanted to do an hour each day i.e. forty minutes before breakfast and twenty minutes before dinner with the second run minutes before dinner with the second run being faster. Next morning Mark and I were out again on a different route but we ran for the necessary time, then that night we went out for a swift twenty minutes only this

time we were joined by young Mark Jack who obviously hach't read the script as he ran the legs of both his old man and also off the man after whom he was named. The next day as we would be flying home at the time of my proposed second run, we decided to run for an hour i.e. to run for an hour i.e. to run for an hour i.e. thirty minutes out and then back trying to finish strongly. Malta's a bit like the Roe Valley – hills everywhere so we ended up struggling uphill. Mind you, going down-hill hurt nearly as much as the quads complained. At least my toe wasn't as sore as it had been in a bike shoe last week. As

Coastline of North Gozo, wk1326



Valetta Harbour, Malta, wk1328



The walls of Mehillea. wk1329



Springwell runners pictured before the Larne Half Marathon. wk1330

with any injury, you just

It's great to out run in the heat. You don't need seven layers, just a t-shirt and shorts and sunglasses. It's also nice to run somewhere different, the eyes and ears focus on the somewhere dimerent, the eyes and ears focus on the new sights and sound and the kilometres tick by. Mark and I tested each other on a few hills on the way back and it was great to return to the hotel pool having run more in three days than in the previous month. I had overloaded the system, now all I had to do to finish a half marathon was to keep healthy and not drop any more boxes on my toe... I went to the gym on Wednesday, had an easy run on Thursday and then the plan was to rock up to Larne and put in an honest performance. Malta had proved an excellent testing centre and preparation place for my athletic reshabilit tre and preparation place for my athletic rehabili-

They say the best thing about Larne is the road out of it, but that's certainly not what 1,400 runners found last Saturday. We were met with blue skies and a with blue skies and a route up the coast road which was sublime. There were over 50 Springwell runners in the field and we travelled in luxury on the Sandy Arthur Coach which picked us up from all parts of the Springwell Empire i.e. Limavegas, Coleraine and Ballymoney. Driver John, looked after us John, looked after us regally and we even secured a coveted parking slot in a very busy car park beside Larne Leisure Centre, which has a view over the sea to die for from its café. Mind you there is not a beach near Larne worth its name. We take glori-ous beaches for granted

on the North Coast.

In the changing room, there was the evocative smell of deep heat and other liniments as we got togged out and ready to do battle. The race included also a three person relay team. I am not sure why because unlike the Belfast marathon, the Larne half has more than enough individual runenough individual run-ners to justify its exis-tence. The hooter sounded, we wished each other well and we were quickly in the town cen-tre which was closed to

on the North Coast

traffic – can you imagine that? A busy provisional town centre closed to traffic on a Saturday traffic on a Saturday morning? Well done to the Larne Borough Council and the PSNI who obviously value the spending power of well over 2,000 visitors (including supporters and families etc.) in their

(including supporters and families etc.) in their midst for a few hours.

Before mile one, we were serenaded by a live rock and roll band in the town centre. I thought I could have done with their energy in another 11 miles time. Soon we had the coast road were the views where dazzling. We could see bits of Scotland. views where dazzling. could see bits of Scotla and we ran underneath one of the famous coast road arches, which will feature prominently when feature prominently when 200 world class cyclists enter Larne going a damned sight faster than I was. My first two miles were at 8.20 pace which was probably a bit rich. The coast road was traffic free and it was a privilege to be part of this vibrant running community. to be part of this vibrant running community. There were many of the Springwell girls doing their first ever half marathon and therefore guaranteed a PB! The Coulter family were out in strength and Heather and Becky both gained PB's with only Kenny letting the side down. I thought if I could break two hours which is just over 9

the sace down. I mought if I could break two hours which is just over 9 minute mile pace, I would be satisfied.

Just before half way, I saw the leader Joe McAllister steaming back towards the Finish Line on this spectacular out and back course. I swear Joe was only running one mile, he was positively sprinting, his legs were a blur, he was out on his own and already had the race won, but was keeping his foot on the gas, which is the true measure of a great athlete. He still wanted to push himself, he was prepared to hurt even though there was no need. I was delighted to see former traithete Heather Wilson leading the women's race.

We turned left at the still the sti

the women's race.

We turned left at
Ballygally and headed up

a hill. I went over the half way timing mat in 55 minutes and of course I began to get greedy. If I minutes and of course I began to get greedy. If I kept at the same pace, I mused, I would finish in 1.50 or even dip under it if I increased my pace slightly. The hill wasn't as bad as I had heard, soon we crested it, came down the other side and were back' on the coast road heading back towards the finish line and a cup of tea and a massage. I had lots of chats with lots of different athletes who had come from all parts of Northern Ireland to compete in this very popular race.

pere in this very popular race.

I thought I had my goal in sight when I went through mile 12 in 1.40 but it seemed to slip tantalizingly out of my reach when we hit a wee hill on the way back into town. Funny, I didn't remember that particular downhill on the way out. 21 did my version of a sprint but just missed out with the dock hitting 1-50-04. I practically seized up before limping into the changing room. My spirits rosse later on the bus on the way back when two of the guys with Garmins told me the course was actually 13.15 miles i.e. my half marathon/13.1 mile time would have been under 1.50! No matter, it gave me an incenter, it gave me an incentive to try to break 1.50 officially later in the year.

I have ticked off two of the Big Five this year, a 5K and a half marathon. Now, all I have to find is a 10K, a 10 miler and a marathon somewhere.

In a land marathon somewhere.

I won't be in Omagh this Saturday (as I am climbing Errigal in Donegal) but over 2,500 runners will be for their half marathon. Running is alive and kicking and the Springwell Club would love to have you as a member. Their next two races are the Ladies only in Ballymoney on the 30th April and the Round the Bridges 10 miler in Limavady at the end of June. Enter now, then get out that back door and turn those miles into smiles!



My late Uncle Maurice Cheyene Reid's name on the RAF War Memorial in Valetta. wk1327