



# SPORTING MATTERS

## BY PETER JACK

**THE** Purbeck Marathon in Dorset is only in its third year but has already been voted by Runners World "the UK's number one marathon." Your



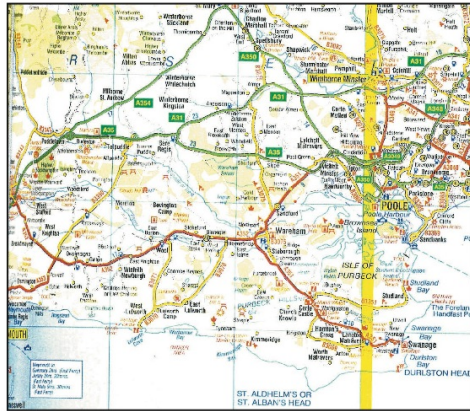
**PJ tackles the Purbeck Marathon.** uk3914



**PJ takes time out to grab a picture with one of the stewards.** uk3913



**PJ pictured with the Bell Ringer at the Purbeck Marathon.** uk3911



**Purbeck.** uk3916

roving red haired reporter decided to give it a lash. Why? Because he had been invited over and it would have been churlish to refuse.

I had met my hosts, Gary and Mandy, in the Caucasus mountains in Russia when we were jogging up Mount Elbrus, the highest mountain in Europe earlier this year and you really get to know people when you live with the cheek by jowl, 24/7, cramped and cocooned in a tin box being buffeted by hurricane winds at 4,000 metres whilst attempting to sleep and a few hours later when you are struggling you way up a mountain, step by agonising step.

As usual my preparation plan had been hit by a glitch - I had got a nasty chest infection and hadn't been able to train for 7 days, during which period I had planned to do a 60 minute, a 40 minute and a 20 minute series of runs to taper down to race day. I had been pleased

enough with my build up. I had joined Iain O'Kane for a 16 miler, an 18 miler and I had run up to the top of Binevenagh and back down to Ballycarnon and I also had a solo 72 mile bike ride in my legs. A long bike ride is as good as a long run because it's the same heart and lungs you will be using - but it's a lot easier on the joints.

Up at 4.30am on the Saturday I got a flight from Belfast to Southampton where Gary and Mandy kindly picked me up and drove me round parts of Hampshire which were surprisingly rural. We saw ponies wandering through the streets of local villages, seemingly without owners, and we drove through the New Forest which had cattle and horses crossing the road with alarming frequency. I was taken to local harbours where swans, ducks and boat owners all were enjoying the beautiful weather. We all swapped stories about the great craic we had in Russia and we plotted a few more trips. We visited Bournemouth for a coffee before spending a quiet night as time spent off the feet is always a good idea before a longish race.

Before I knew it, it was 5.30am on race morning and Mandy made me a big bowl of porridge which hit the spot. Before an Ironman you have to pack your wetsuit, goggles, swim hat, race belt, gels, spare tubes, bike kit, running kit etc. but for a mere run, all you need is whatever you use to trot around the Roe Valley Country Park but I did however put in my camera so that I could take a few shots as it would be a good excuse to stop and have a breather! We drove to Swanage where I was able to register on race morning. That in itself was a novelty because most races like the Belfast Marathon insist you register one or two days beforehand. The registration staff could not have been more helpful or friendly and that set the tone for the entire race.

I put on my computer

# A perfect marathon

chip on to the laces of my running shoes as this would time me at the mat at the halfway stage to ensure I didn't take any shortcuts. Mind you, the shortcuts would have been through some military firing ranges so perhaps that wouldn't have been such a good idea... Gary wisely suggested I put my race number on to my bum bag to avoid sticking pins into my precious TTC tri suit top.

Gary also said "be bold - start cold" so I just wore the tri top and not a t-shirt. It was good move as it was to hit 20° centigrade during the event. I did however spot lots of people who were overdressed for the occasion, people wearing tight, long sleeve shirts etc. Many people confuse a long race with the need to keep warm. They tend to forget they are going to be working hard for four or five hours, which has the same effect as putting on your central heating i.e. you get warm without trying.

We jogged up above Swanage pier, up to a grassy field and listened attentively as the Race Director gave us a safety briefing. We would run over a railway track at some stage - if a train was coming we would be delayed. There would be 8 water stops and also some food stations. I looked around at my fellow competitors and they were all wearing either a rucksack or a camelbak drinking system or a bum bag. Everyone was taking fluid and food with them because we were going to be crossing some fairly inaccessible terrain and you needed to be a bit like Alex Salmond - independent.

We had a "3/2/1" countdown and suddenly we all ambled over a start mat to activate our computer timing chip and we were off. I fell into conversation with two of Gary's mates who had two months earlier done the Dorset Dodder. This was a 32 mile yomp over even higher ground than the Purbeck marathon - all I had to do was 26 miles with 1,000 feet of climbing and descending!

It's never easy to run a marathon with anyone else. You're either struggling to keep up or you are going too slowly. You have to set your own pace and keep your own rhythm. This way I merged into lots of different conversations as I ebbed and flowed up and down the field. One moment I would be talking to a bloke in a yellow t-shirt which proclaimed that he was a member of the marathon mania club. To join the club you have to do two marathons in a month. He was from New York City, had just retired from the US Army at a young age and was doing Purbeck and was then flying to Dublin to then do 6 marathons in 6 consecutive days. He asked me to join him "would love to" I replied as I moved away in case this particular form

of madness was infectious... I then drifted up to a girl who met her future husband when they both did a marathon together, "I knew he was the one for me because he waited for me the entire race..." I met a lady from Manchester whose son taught in Thailand. I told her about my son teaching in Beijing. I was dying to ask her if she supported United or City but I thought for once I would try and be civilised; she was all set to do a new marathon in Bath in two weeks time through some newly discovered tunnels... I met a bloke, Danny, who was proudly wearing a marathon 100 club shirt so I asked him how many he had done it expecting an answer of 120. He replied: "this is marathon 532." He was 73 years of age had done the Warwickshire marathon the week before, was going to do the Malaga marathon in two weeks' time and he had done 3 hours 47 mins at the age of 70. He gained an entry for the London Marathon every year as he was qualified for the "good for age" category. I also met lots of people doing their first ever marathon - and what a marathon to pick!

The scenery was stunning. We ran out beside the sea for the first 13 miles with the coastline way down to our left as we climbed up high coastal paths. The weather was as stunning as the scenery. I just drank it all in, reflecting on how fortunate I was to be in this beautiful part of the world. Gary and Mandy came out to the course where the roads allowed access, which wasn't very often as only about 2 of the 26 miles were on the road, the rest was trail or forest path or cliff top.

Although the coastline was different, the race reminded me of the equally fantastic Causeway Coast marathon (and Half and Ultra) organised by the Team 26 crew. In fact my

marathon mania friend had travelled to Northern Ireland to do the Lost World Race which is an ultra marathon which attracts people from all over the world - talk about a small world! Here was I, a perfectly sane Ironman, talking to a marathon maniac...

The Purbeck Marathon was the same day as the Weymouth iron distance race which was just 30 miles away. It was also on the same day as Ironman Wales. Competitors saw my ironman tattoo and gave me some friendly grief, "why aren't you swimming and biking in Pembrokeshire today as well?" It reminded me that at the end of the day a marathon is just a marathon and today all it involved was a stroll in the sun, putting one foot in front of another.

I didn't exert myself for the first 10 miles as I knew my system was still recovering from the chest infection. I went through halfway in 2:31 and although that's not fast, I didn't give a monkeys. It is what it is and the longer I stayed out there the better my suntan would be! After 15 miles at Tynham we went over the timing mat, then were confronted with a huge hill which seemed to be about a mile in length. It wound its way up seemingly forever. No one was running up this. It was just a case of hands on knees and get on with it. A path was covered in sleet which made it even harder. At the top there were spectators and marshals applauding, telling the usual lies, "you're looking great!" and "you're nearly there!" - wrong on both fronts unfortunately.

At mile 20 we had a 2 mile climb up to a TV mast, usually a sign that the road couldn't get any higher but I was wrong. It snaked on remorselessly and relentlessly for another heart-breaking mile or so. I talked to an athlete who just lived a mile away so it really was her local race. Eventually there

was a big downhill which sounds great news but wasn't. It was too steep to take advantage of. The fell runners would just eat this up but I had to brake and slow myself down to avoid tumbling. As I was tired, my foot whacked into a rock and I thought I had busted my big toe (again) and I nearly ended up on my mouth and nose. I was annoyed because some guys passed me on the descent that I had earlier worked hard up the hills to get in front of.

We passed a sign proclaiming mile 25 so all I had to do now was the final lap of honour i.e. the victory mile. I was still on a rocky road however and couldn't get into gear until we hit the tarmac. Three competitors passed me which woke me up and I then repassed them - old habits die hard! The last mile seemed endless (and it was it turned out the course was 26.7 miles - i.e. half a mile longer than normal) but we shuffled, pathetically grateful, on to a closed road beside the cooling beach and a welcome sea breeze before one last wee, then a turn into the finish line funnel. I don't care how many marathons you do but the last 100

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**PJ attaches his time chip at the start of the Purbeck Marathon.** uk3912



**Completed!** uk3915