



A tale of two beaches



The Start.....NCL18-12-19s

CHARLIE Dickens once wrote about two different cities, London and Paris, but I want to tell you a yarn about two beaches which are only about 30 miles apart as a fit crow flies but they really are in two different worlds.

The game of Golf links them (if you will excuse the pun).

The two beaches are in the towns of Portrush in County Antrim and Ballyliffin in County Donegal and both towns have been - or will be - the epi centre of the golfing world.

Ballyliffin hosted the 'Dubai Free Irish Open' in 2017 and Portrush hosts 'The Open' in less than 12 weeks from now.

I wasn't playing golf in these places but I was running on their beautiful beaches.

The first was the familiar sand of the Park Run of the East Strand in the Capital of the North Coast Tourist market of Portmagic and the other beach was the not so well known magnificent arc of a beach on the top of the Innishowen Peninsula which is nearly as North as you can go on the island of Ireland.

I wanted to undertake some overloading in my training and give my legs and lungs a good hammering so that later in the year when it counts in the middle of a race, I have got something to draw on.

After a normal Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of gym work, a swim, a bike ride and a fast run in the unusually warm Roe Valley Country Park with son Mark, my aim was to do the tonne on the bike on Friday (ok, just a metric tonne i.e. 100 kilometres as opposed to the imperial 100 miles) then do two running races in the next 24

hours.

I have been busy trying to train for three objectives as my goals for the sporting year are fairly disparate - a 3.8K swim in Lough Melvin in May as part of an Iron Law Relay Team; the infamous Wicklow 200K bike sportive on the hills outside Dublin in June and then hopefully, finish the season at the Istanbul

Marathon in November which is the world's only marathon where you run from one continent to another.

My running training had been disrupted by a new injury, even for me i.e. posterior tibial tendonitis and I had benefited from the expert ministrations of a Chiropractor, a Physiotherapist and a Podiatrist - all I needed

now was a Psychiatrist! The cure was the hardest thing of all for a triathlete - rest. I had ten long weeks of not running.

When I decided to gingerly return, I tried a short jog in the beautiful surroundings of the bluebells of Portgleone Forest, what a gorgeous spot.

The forest paths led you to the river Bann which nearly looked as wide as the Danube to my unfamiliar eyes. Patience, however is not one of a runner's virtues and I failed to understand why I wasn't quickly running at my old pre injury pace, so I tried to forget about pace and concentrate instead on plodding my way back to some kind of form.

One of my favourite routes has always been in Castlerock.

When I leave the Castlerock Golf Club Caravan site, I duke over the golf course (what a beautiful springy, spongy surface).

I once ran from tee to green in all 18 holes in just over 32 minutes (many moons ago); down through the sandhills and along the Barmouth where the River Bann was stopped in its tracks as it collides with the Irish Sea; then up the pretty little beach to the top caravan site, further along the cliff paths, trying not to stumble along the way; down into the Black Glenn, then up the 69 long uneven steps over the steel bars which form a stile; up to Mussenden

Temple while sneaking a peak over the walls at the crashing Atlantic with the gulls wheeling over the clifftops and the caves; then up and through the Castle, bringing back many childhood memories; then at last bit of downhill into the forest, up a fierce set of steep steps looking down at the sparkling lake filled with noisy ducks, then climb/crawl back up to the exit crossing two lanes of traffic and running quickly back through the National Trust property before anybody can ask me for a ticket; up and around the Black Glenn, eventually arriving at the 12 Apostles (houses) to benefit at last from a cooling breeze, then down through the quiet village back to the welcome respite of the caravan site, what a run! I had always wondered what distance it was and now thanks to my new singing, all swimming, all dancing Suunto watch, I learnt it was just a fraction over 10K but it took me the full hour, i.e. six minutes a kilometre.

Any disappointment at my time was compensated by the beauty and variety of the run - this has to be one of Europe's top 10 trail runs!

Good Friday was going to be even better if I was to manage my century ride, my longest ride of the year had been precisely half that i.e. just over 30 miles. So how do you double the distance in one easy go?

Answer, you don't!

You just suffer more! The smart way to do it would have been rides of 40 and 50 miles first but lack of time - and patience - led me to dive headlong into the major distance.

Training with others can be a lot of fun.

Two weeks ago I was with a bunch of fellow old blokes leaving the Roe Valley Leisure Centre on a Saturday at 9.00 a.m. for an adventure and a coffee stop, but sometimes your diary doesn't suit other peoples, so at 8.15 a.m. I rolled down the Ringsend Road trying to find 100K of easy terrain.

Downhill soon became uphill and Coleraine led to Portstewart and Portrush where the start of the Easter holiday madness was in full bloom.

I noticed very little building work at the pits for the NW200 but boy, what a contrast Portrush Golf Club was!

There are already two huge stands on the first hole alone to accommodate some of the record numbers of 215,000 people who will be descending on our shores shortly.

Where they are all going to stay is anybody's guess but I do hope our weather for once matches the warmth of our welcome for our much needed visitors.

I made it to Bushmills for a welcome coffee where 34 miles of sweat dripped off my helmet.

Fortified and with my water bottle replenished, it was back to Coleraine into a cross wind and back via the Garvagh Road where I had a cunning plan to bike the last three miles all downhill to the house - doing 40 miles an hour for seven minutes after toiling at 12 miles an hour for several hours does wonders for the morale as upping the average speed.

My joy at making it home was tempered by the disappointment of the bathroom scales telling me that I had lost only 300 grams in over 4 hours of hard work, maybe I shouldn't have indulged in that cream scone in Bushmills?

The next day Patrick and I were privileged to be standing on the start line of the incredible Portrush Park Run where a record 480 runners and joggers were starting their Easter weekend in the best way possible.

We had bucket loads of fresh air on the magnificent East Strand where waves were crashing to our left and sand dunes loomed up above us to our right and the goal of the half way mark was a flag planted in the sand at the very far end of the beach. The East Strand is just long enough to accommodate this out and back 5K needed for a Park Run.

Is there a more glorious one in the British Isles or Europe

Continued on next page

