

LE QUESNEY 1980

When "they" ask you, "Why do you do it?" the response varies with your current mood or the situation, but after a weekend like this a ready answer is easy . . . "To travel with a group of good friends - at someone else's expense - and thoroughly enjoy good food with the best of French hospitality, rounded off by a satisfying race - what more could one want?"

We set off on Saturday - what a team! Barry O'Gorman, Les Roberts, Ian Wilson, Joe Clare and Chris Woodcock, must have been one of the best squads to represent Blackheath in a marathon for years!

Our crossing of the Channel was uneventful. Upon arrival, we were installed in the local Agricultural College. We were given rooms overlooking the track where we were to finish. A jog around the outskirts of this beautifully walled town and its substantial moat was followed by a real pre-marathon repast.

All the "international" opposition being present, we were able to sum up our chances and engage in the usual banter with the "British" squad of Brighton, Concorde, and Falkirk Harriers.

The day of the race was humid and windless. An excellent breakfast was followed by a period of intense relaxation, interspersed by bouts of liquid consumption! Everyone has his own pre-race ritual, but heavy hydration was obviously the order of the day. We acquired our numbers, under the guidance of Barry's contact, who spoke excellent English and who had competed in the Paris Marathon a few weeks earlier (one to avoid from what he says).

The race followed the expected pattern with the quick boys flying away on the two initial laps of the town. We followed at a respectful distance. Out of the town we went, on a quiet but wide road. It was too warm for an early effort. After about an hour's running we entered the pine forest - a good road with no traffic, but with cyclists to assist us.

Apparently, all the Blackheath runners could be seen by our "sweeper" on the long, undulating straight - we were all running well! At just over half-way, with the major part of the 'undulations' completed, we were catching the weaker of the fast starters. Ian Wilson and Les Roberts caught Chris Woodcock about then, and we ran together for the rest of the race. Barry and Joe were in good shape and not far behind.

Re-entering the town for the final lap, Les and Ian gained a few yards, then we were directed off the course by a very insistent soldier! He assumed we were in the leading group, whereas we were, in fact, some four kilometres in arrears!

We finished with a couple of laps in the small stadium with Les breaking into fluent French to explain the error. (We all reckoned that marathons ought to end about four kilometres short—it definitely takes the edge off the fatigue!)

We watched the rest of the field run in — some running an extra four or five kilometres at the request of another pointman! Barry finished the proper distance in 2 hours 43 minutes and was the first veteran home. Joe was second veteran, just behind in 2 hrs. 43 mins. 08 secs. They were 16th and 17th respectively.

At the champagne reception in the Town Hall, we sorted out the results. Being credited with Les 12th (2 hrs. 21 mins. 42 secs.), Ian 13th (2 hrs. 42 mins. 46 secs.) and Chris (2 hrs. 21 mins. 55 secs.) - a reasonable estimate was that we were about 18 minutes short. Falkirk won the team race with Blackheath in second place. Les was the fourth Englishman to finish.

That evening we ate royally again, rounding the day off with a beer with the rest of the British contingent. It was interesting to compare notes on this and other races with the winner, Jim Dingwall (2 hrs. 18 mins. 02 secs), and his team mates.

After another good night's sleep we bade farewell to our generous hosts and wandered back to Calais.

We arrived home with a vehicle crammed with souvenirs, prizes, tee shirts, as well as the usual array of duty-free goods. When's the next one, Barry?