

A journey to London Marathon 2024

Well, where do I start?! Ripon Runners club ballot night seems like a good a place as any to begin... unfortunately, I wasn't able to make it in person this time, but I received a call from Andy saying I had won a place in the Marathon ballot, and so had he!

After the initial disbelief and excitement of getting a place had waned, the realisation of what was involved and the training I'd need to do sunk in. Up to that point, my longest run was around 15 miles, which happened once and about 3 years ago. In the style of a reality TV cliché, I soon realised that I was about to embark on my very own journey from occasional runner to marathon runner!



Thankfully, a conversation with Ben Imeson at Parkrun resulted in him very kindly putting together a 16-week training plan for me. The mileage gradually increased week on week, and regular check-ins with Ben followed. During this time, I was blown away by the many offers from fellow Ripon runners to join me on training runs and at that point I knew I was going to have exactly what I needed to keep my motivation up. Words can't express how grateful I am to each and every person who joined me on my long runs, which included a few "Parkrun sandwiches" (sadly not the bacon variety from the NT cafe!) along the way. Training with friends really helped to get the miles in, and before I knew it (well, not really, as I definitely knew it), I was running my last long run of 22 miles. This was my longest and toughest run, and it really tested me, but I'm glad I reached that distance, saving the last few miles for the Marathon Day itself. Luckily, I managed to get through the training relatively injury free. The only exception was a sore calf from doing a Parkrun too quickly, a bit of tendinitis from upping my mileage and of course, the obligatory black toe nail as a lasting memento of the experience.

Finally, the weekend of the Marathon had arrived, and I travelled to London on the Friday to get settled in and have a good mooch around the Running Expo before collecting my race pack and number. The family joined me in London on Saturday, and we enjoyed a lovely meal in Ealing with Andy and Michelle, which naturally consisted of a big bowl of pasta and a bit of chocolate cake for extra sustenance!

On the morning of the Marathon, Andy and I set off from the hotel early, leaving Michelle, Yvonne, and the boys to follow on a bit later with a plan to hopefully see them at a few points along the route. We jumped on the tube and the DLR to Greenwich and after dropping our bags, popping to the loo, and passing a guy in a flamingo costume, we were on the red zone starting line. Andy and I ran the first couple of miles together - it was great to unexpectedly see Phil Chatterton and



family at mile 3. Andy then picked up his pace and we agreed to meet at the finish line. Spotting the family and Michelle cheering me on shortly after the Cutty Sark and again at the half-way mile 13 point really boosted my morale. After that the miles and landmarks ticked by with amazing crowds cheering until mile 18, which is definitely where I hit my wall. I was saving an extra strong caffeinated gel for mile 22, but decided to crack it open early in a bid to help me carry on. Thankfully, it did the trick and I reached mile 21 where Yvonne and the boys were there with surprise banners they had made with motivational messages on, and also my work colleagues from PAPYRUS who were at the charity cheer station encouraging us all on.

The last 3 miles were hard, there wasn't much left in the tank by that point, and I'd never got to running that distance before, but the crowds were amazing and so loud in parts that it really got your legs going when you just wanted to walk! Coming past Parliament square I noticed Yvonne and the boys on the left-hand side, and I knew then I only had half a mile to go. Rounding the bend on the Royal Mall I could see the finish line ahead! I crossed the line, 5 hours 34 minutes after starting the race and immediately burst into tears when a lovely volunteer put the finisher medal around my neck. I had a quick video call the family to let them know I had finished and to wish them luck getting out of London and on the 6.30pm train back home ready for school the next day. I headed to the meeting point I'd agreed with Andy, which was easier said than done with tired legs and hundreds of wobbly runners bumping into each other. I eventually got there and was gratefully greeted by big hugs and congratulations from Michelle and Andy. All I can remember from the time in the finishing area is muttering over and over, "never again, one time only, never again." A slow walk to the tube (via Greggs for some refuelling) followed by a short hobble back to the hotel and I was back in my room. I had done it - I had run the London Marathon!! After a quick shower and changing into some comfy joggers and shoes we had a meal in the hotel bar, proudly wearing our medals.



As part of my Marathon journey, I decided to also raise funds and awareness of Suicide Prevention for PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide where I work as the Area Manager for England North. So far, I have raised an amazing £3264.33. There's still time to donate to my page if you haven't already and would like to do so:

https://www.justgiving.com/page/jamesparkeslondonmarathon?utm_medium=fundraising&utm_content=page%2Fjamesparkeslondonmarathon&utm_source=copyLink&utm_campaign=pf-p-share

Well, that's it you'll be pleased to know (congratulations if you've managed to read this far, not long left, I promise) - the highlights of a once in a life time achievement that I will treasure for ever. Never did I ever think I would run a Marathon, but I am so, so pleased to say that I DID! What have I learned from this experience? I've learned that it's good to occasionally step outside of your comfort zone and do something that really scares you and challenges you.

Finally, a personal thanks to Yvonne and the boys for allowing time for me to train and for calming my "Maranoia" as the race got closer. Thanks also to everyone at Ripon runners who ran with me, encouraged me and shared words of advice and wisdom while I trained, and last but by no means least, a heartfelt thanks to Andy for starting this journey with me, and making sure I finished it - alive and smiling!

PS I said "never again" after I crossed the finish line, but I may give Minister to Minster a go. An Ultra Marathon is totally different to a Marathon, right?! Asking for a friend...

PPS Congratulations to Andy who ran a 04:53:38 marathon!

James Parkes

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