

BEN PHILLIPS

**2011 BLACKMORES SYDNEY RUNNING
FESTIVAL MARATHON DIARY**

“How NOT to train for a Marathon in 10 weeks!”

Sunday 10th July

Decided today that I'd like to run the Sydney Marathon. It will be easy! My guide Markus turned up at Achilles a little bit under the weather from a big night out on the town. We ran slowly and quietly, until Charlie and Martin came flying past and I had to give chase, much to Markus's dismay. A great start to our Marathon preparation.

Tuesday 12th July

Couldn't run this morning due to heavy rain.

Thursday 14th July

Couldn't run this morning due to heavy rain.

Saturday 16th July

Couldn't run this morning due to heavy rain.

Sunday 17th July

Couldn't be bothered to run this morning due to light rain, so slept in instead.

Tuesday 19th July

Couldn't run this morning due to heavy rain.

Thursday 21st July

Couldn't run this morning due to heavy rain.

Saturday 23rd July

Had a beautiful nice sunny day at last, but decided it was more comfortable to sleep in. Our Marathon training is off to a great start, it's been easy so far.

Sunday 24th July

Went to Achilles and ran to the start of the Harbour Bridge, but had to turn back due to lack of fitness. Began praying for rain so we could go home earlier, but it didn't happen.

Tuesday 26th July

Ran 2 laps of Centennial Park and felt really good. I must be a naturally supreme athlete, this Marathon will be a walk in the park!

Thursday 28th July

Ran 2 laps of Centennial Park and felt really good again. Now convinced the Marathon will be easy! I might even run it backwards.

Saturday 30th July

Ran from Paddington, down ANZAC Parade, through Randwick, up towards Bondi Junction, then finished with 2 laps of Centennial Park. Now convinced the Marathon will be bloody hard. Might settle for the Family Fun Run instead.

Sunday 31st July

Ran from Paddington to Achilles, and managed to run all the way to the other side of the Harbour Bridge and back, however struggled to keep up with Charlie due to lack of fitness, then crawled all the way back home to Paddington.

Tuesday 2nd August

Prayed for rain, it didn't happen. Had to run 2 laps of Centennial Park. Body is now sore and sorry. At one of the drink stops, Markus was confronted by a giant spider waiting for him as he put his face down into the bubbler for a drink. This was rather amusing, and now we refer to this particular place as the Spider Fountain. From now on Markus is granted permission to always drink first before I do, because I have now officially appointed him as the honorary spider checker of bubblers. He seemed thrilled with his new role.

Thursday 4th August

Still praying for rain, still not happening. Ran 2 laps of Centennial Park. Keep telling myself things will get easier. I don't know what's worse, the laps of the park, or the ice bath afterwards?

Saturday 6th August

Ran 10kms of the City2Surf course with Markus and Jeremy. Found it very hard going up the hills. We had to

run on the footpath, so this always makes it so much more steeper than running on the road! This is because, in my logic, if you consider the elevation from sea level, the footpath is actually a few inches higher than the road surface, therefore it must be a much steeper altitude to climb. Well, that's my excuse for struggling up the hills today, and I'm sticking to it!

I was surprised how well Jeremy handled the hills, he powered up them with little effort, and waited around for us to arrive at the top. Markus gave me a hard time about letting a South African beat me, which didn't make the hills any less painful. Coming down the final hill towards Bondi Beach, I opened up and started sprinting like an Emu across the Nullarbor. It was time to show Jeremy what an expert professional downhill runner I really am. In full flight, my foot found a bad patch of the footpath, and I dived head first into the concrete, tumbling all the way down to the beach. Then on Campbell Parade, Markus picked me up, dusted me off, and made me run all the way back home to Paddington. He said it's all part of my Swiss-Army Commando Training.

Sunday 7th August

Battered and bruised, I didn't run today, but played Goalball instead, which is probably just as punishing.

Tuesday 9th August

**Ran 2 laps of Centennial Park, round and round we go!
Managed to convince Markus to run anticlockwise, as it's slightly down hill, but not sure if he has realised that yet.
Finished with some steep hill sprints, they were painful!
Maybe he has realised what I'm up to?**

Thursday 11th August

Ran 2 laps of Centennial Park, finished with some more steep hill sprints, I don't like them very much! Desperately tried to convince Markus to go back to running in a clockwise direction, he didn't buy it.

Saturday 13th August

Didn't run today, just had the day off to prepare for the big race tomorrow.

Sunday 14th August

Ran the City2Surf in a time of 87:05. This is my best time yet, and the run went very smoothly. The training has certainly paid off. I ran this race as a dress rehearsal for the Marathon.

I tried to keep up with Charlie for the first 100m, then pulled back realising that I wouldn't be starting the Marathon this quickly. I ran in a steady consistent rhythm, focused on controlling my breathing and heart rate, being able to lower them at times throughout the race, and ignored all other competitors on the course, staying in the zone of my own race. Rael and Markus guided me brilliantly through the thousands of other runners, and navigated expertly around the course to deliver me safely at Bondi Beach. We ran the whole way, which I didn't expect to do, but was hopeful of achieving. Markus carried drinks of water on his special running belt, which meant I didn't have the luxury of stopping for a rest at the drink stations. It seemed to work to our advantage, saving us time and the hassle of fighting the crowd for a cup of water.

I arrived at the finish, still feeling fresh and able to run another 7kms or so. I still had plenty of fuel left in the tank, so I take a huge amount of confidence with me into the Marathon knowing that I'll be able to conserve my energy for when it's needed. It turns out that Charlie beat me by 3 minutes. He's lucky that I was practising for the Marathon, otherwise I would have really given him a run for his money. I'm surprised though, that he only finished 3 minutes ahead of me when I was running slow and steady. I eagerly await the City2Surf next year when I'll really show him what I'm made of.

Tuesday 16th August

Prayed for rain, it didn't happen, but fortunately for me Markus didn't have transport this morning so we were unable to run. I'm devastated! I think I should go back to my nice warm cozy bed and cry myself back to sleep.

Wednesday 17th August

Went to the gym, did 40 minutes on the exercise bike, 20 minutes on a swivel stepping machine, and 20 minutes on a forward stepping machine. The gym, although hard

work, has given me a whole new dynamic to my training schedule.

Thursday 18th August

Thank God, it finally rained! You just can't run in the rain, you don't want to get a cold this close to the big event.

Saturday 20th August

Ran 18kms today, we practiced the Centennial Park section of the Marathon course. It was a tough run, and the part going back and forth along ANZAC Parade is very boring. I now realise this will be both a test of physical endurance and mental focus. I have been wearing a sign on my shirt that says Blind Runner, which seems to encourage most people to go around me, except if they don't speak English and can't read the sign, in which case we accidentally slam into them and leave them baffled and confused about what just happened. Felt sick towards the end, my hands and arms were tingling, and I felt dizzy, but somehow made it all the way back home.

Sunday 21st August

Ran another 18kms today, this time from Paddington, to Achilles, up and over the Harbour Bridge, then back and around Mrs Macquarie's Chair, through Hyde Park, and back to Paddington. It was good to cover this section of the Marathon course as it gives me a clearer indication of what I'm in for. Felt tingly and dizzy towards the end again, then got home and spewed my guts up. Now I'm not so sure I want to run the Marathon anymore.

Tuesday 23rd August

Prayed for rain, it didn't happen, it never does. Ran the smaller 8km section inside Centennial Park again without the backwards and forth along ANZAC Parade. Found it getting easier to run this section as my fitness is rapidly improving, however we're determined that I need to eat more protein to keep my energy levels up. This is a real challenge as I am vegetarian.

Thursday 25th August

Prayed for rain, even considered doing a rain dance, but it turned out sunny. Ran 3 laps of Centennial Park.

Saturday 27th August

Didn't run today as I had a cricket match to play, however the match was called off due to wet weather, so I attended the finish of the Sydney Oxfam Trailwalker instead to cheer my mates in the Tigers team across the line. Had a tough Goalball training session late in the evening, which was a good cardio workout but punishing on the knees and ankles.

Sunday 28th August

Ran 26kms today, this is by far the longest distance I have ever run! Up until now the 21kms in the 2 Half Marathons I ran last year were the furthest distances I had survived. I feel totally exhausted, but I now know that my body can go much further than I think it can. Today's training was particularly difficult because I had the bright idea to suggest we try a different route. Going round and round in circles in Centennial Park is driving me crazy, I'm starting to feel like a race horse. Markus decided to extend the run by taking me down ANZAC Parade and around the back of the Royal Randwick Race Course. This is where you'll find

lots of race horses just like me how ironic! There was a strong smell of horses in the stables, which was a welcome change to the boring same old smells of fresh air and flowers at Centennial Park. After circling the Race Course, we headed back into Centennial Park, much to my disbelief, for a couple more rounds. In my haste, I suggested another outer track that Martin has once told me about, this was a big mistake. Although it was a change of surface and sounds, the outer path is extremely long on a steady incline uphill for about 700m. Markus was delighted to find this new section of road to punish me on, and that he certainly did.

Tuesday 30th August

Ran 18kms around the Race Course and a few laps of Centennial Park, which included the hilly new section. I have concluded that it doesn't matter whereabouts we run in Centennial Park, there is no escape from having to climb up a steep hill of some kind to get back home.

Thursday 1st September

Ran 18kms today, went around the Race Course again,

which involves a steep hill, then into Centennial Park again, round and round we go, then up the steep new section I mentioned recently. The novelty of this new section is really wearing off quickly, it's a killer of a hill, it just keeps going and going forever. I held off until the end of our run before telling Markus that I would be away for the entire weekend at a Convention. I delayed this announcement for as long as I could to prevent him from making me run so much harder during our training session, as this weekend should really be our biggest training effort in the lead up to the Marathon. Markus promised to make me pay for it next week.

Saturday 3rd September

Didn't run today because I was away. Sadly my healthy diet came undone today. I intended to eat fruit for lunch, but McDonalds was just so much more appealing. I ended up having a pizza for dinner, very naughty.

Sunday 4th September

Didn't run today because I was away. The diet has really gone off track now, with Subway and McDonalds drawing

me in with their delicious smell and taste. Well, the whole diet has gone out the window this weekend, I'll get back on track during the week, but I might as well enjoy the treats while they last. I splashed out and had Indian for dinner. Markus called and wants me to run early Monday morning at 6:00am. He must be joking.

Monday 15th September

No he wasn't joking. Got up at 6:00am and ran 18kms. I had some pineapple for breakfast in a feeble attempt to get my diet back on track. The pineapple was a bit out of date now, seeming that I didn't eat it for lunch over the weekend as intended. This made me feel sick during the run, but I managed to keep going and powered on. The junk food from the weekend was making me feel heavy and sluggish. We went around the Race Course again, and this time a horse in a stable on the other side of the fence went nuts when we ran past. It's a very narrow path for us to run on between the busy road and the leafy fence of the Race Course, therefore the frightened horse's head was just centimeters away from Markus when it went berserk! I found this somewhat amusing as it scared the heck out of

Markus, and I quietly chuckled to myself thinking that will serve him right for getting me up so damn early in the morning!

Tuesday 6th September

Got up at 6:30am today and ran another 18kms. Was thrilled to have an extra half hour to sleep in. These longer runs mean we need to get up at these ridiculous hours so Markus can get to work on time. It's great that I have a guide willing to sacrifice his free time for me, I really am grateful of that, I shouldn't be complaining. These hills are getting steeper and steeper every day, and Markus keeps finding new ones to try me out on. I also believe the circle track we run around in Centennial Park is getting longer and longer everyday too, it definitely doesn't get any shorter.

Thursday 8th September

Ok, now I am seriously praying for rain, I'm not just joking anymore, I'm really doing it this time. I want it to rain so badly! Not just for my sake to save me from running this morning, but also for the farmers in the drought, and all

the poor little thirsty plants that need a drink. I'm a very caring guy you know, always thinking of others first. I was so concerned about this that I could barely sleep all night, and kept waking up every half hour to check outside if it had started raining yet. Sadly it turned out to be one of the hottest days in weeks.

I'm so over the training, I really don't want to do it anymore. It's so tiring, and I just hate it. Nevertheless, I'll still do it. I know we are so close now to the big day, and I don't want to let Markus down. I have good reason to keep going. We are running to raise money for the Fred Hollows Foundation, although I haven't been very successful at raising many funds yet, and also to fly the Achilles flag, to run in the Marathon representing all the members of the club and to do it for them, and to follow in the footsteps of my heroes Nick and Charlie. Well, that's what I keep telling myself anyway to stay motivated, but to tell you the truth, at times I would just as happily give up too. This Marathon stuff is really hard work, but I know in the end it will all be worth it.

We ran 18kms, up all the steep hills, several times. Boy, I was glad to finally get home and rest. I hope if terrorists

bomb Sydney, they will successfully hit Centennial Park and completely destroy it, but of course it should happen at night so nobody is in the park to get hurt, I don't want anyone killed, I just want the Park to disappear! Then again, Markus would probably enjoy running me up the hills of the deep crater! I can't win! And I think my diary entries are becoming more delirious as my sanity slowly dissolves. No sane person runs a Marathon anyway!

Friday 9th September

In a cruel twist of fate, it's not our training day today, but it's raining cats and dogs outside! Why does the weather mock me so?

Saturday 10th September

Ran 20kms today from Paddington, down South Dowling Street, onto ANZAC Parade, around the Race Course, then down to Coogee, up along the coast line to Bondi Beach, then made our way back to Paddington. This was a good hard run, involving plenty of steep stairs and hills to climb. It was a welcomed change from running around Centennial Park – that was until we entered Centennial

Park and ran up that great big damn hill again! There's just no escaping it!

Sunday 11th September

Ran 16kms today from Paddington down to the City to Achilles and back home again. We had the opportunity to run a few kilometres with Ellis who will be assisting us for part of the race next week.

Ellis is not used to running as a guide without a tether, so he felt uneasy about the whole process. Markus didn't seem to have his mind on the job this morning, perhaps he was distracted by having Ellis joining us. As a result, I had a few close shaves with poles and stumbled on a few steps along the run, which didn't help ease Ellis's concerns. I can completely appreciate how Ellis feels, for a guide it must feel like you haven't got much control in guiding me other than for verbal commands, which is potentially somewhat less effective than physical touch to initiate an immediate reaction and quick response.

As someone being guided, it's extremely difficult and terrifying to be guided without a tether, you really have to be on your game at all times to make it work effectively,

and it takes a lot of practice to perfect it. I can certainly see the benefits of not using the tether, as it gives both the disabled athlete and the guide a lot more freedom to move in their natural running style. I believe Markus and I have managed to perfect this art over the years, and would now find it restricting and awkward to go back to using a tether.

Of course, at times during the race it might be beneficial for us to use a tether for safety when we are in heavy traffic of other runners, but for the most part, we can achieve a much better result without one. I think that's what makes our race so amazing, that we don't use the tether to run. I'm not sure many other blind runners would feel comfortable doing this, and I pride myself on the brave reputation I have for running without it. Having said that, I would highly recommend that all other disabled athletes use the tether at all times unless training for a long distance event such as a Marathon, and have the full approval of their designated guides to practice without it. To be honest, besides the benefits of freedom of movement, not using the tether is really nothing more than just showing off. There is a certain thrill you get of being a

dare devil when you dance along the foreshore towards the finish line without falling into the harbour.

Tuesday 13th September

Went to the gym with Markus, spent 30 minutes on the exercise bike, 10 minutes on the swivel stepping machine, and 20 minutes on the forward stepping machine. It's a shame I haven't been able to get in more gym sessions before now, but I just simply haven't had enough spare time to get there as often as I would have liked. Unlike the running training we do, I always come away from the gym feeling pumped and energetic. Maybe I'll hit the gym for a few hours on Sunday morning before the Marathon.

Wednesday 16th September

Went with Markus to visit The Fred Hollows Foundation Headquarters. We had the opportunity to meet a lot of the staff and find out about all the fantastic work they are doing. I was really impressed. They told me a few stories about people who have benefited from the Foundation's work. I was moved very deeply by these experiences, and will use them as motivation to finish the Marathon when it

gets tough and painful. Being a former patient of Fred Hollows when I was very young, and never having the opportunity to thank him in person for all the help he has given me, I feel very passionate about this cause, and will push my body to the absolute limits to finish this race for Fred.

Thursday 15th September

No training today, we are resting this week in preparation for the Marathon, however I did babysit a very energetic 2 year old in Centennial Park, who quickly got tired of the playground and took me for a few laps running around the park! Even when Markus isn't around, I still get sucked into training, it's not fair.

Saturday 17th September

Nerves are starting to set in. Less than 24 hours to go before the big race. I'm trying to stay calm and relaxed. I'm also trying to drink lots of water as the forecast is for a very hot day tomorrow. The diet over the past two weeks hasn't gone very well, I've given into junk food on a few occasions. My running has improved along with my

fitness, but I wonder if we have done enough? I have a mixture of emotions. I feel excited that the race has finally arrived, but fearful of the unknown.

We have a radio interview lined up for 6:00am on Monday morning, and I don't want to go there to answer questions about why I didn't finish the race. It seems like giving up is no longer an option. They say that only Marathon runners truly know the pain of de feet!

Sunday 18th September

Today is the day of the 2011 Blackmores Sydney Running Festival Marathon. I awoke early and felt very tired. We enjoyed a good pasta meal last night to give us lots of energy for the race, I hope it works.

Markus picked me up, and we made our way to the starting line. I was feeling really nervous. The thought of running 42.2kms is terrifying. But there is no turning back now.

We started the race well, enjoying the unique experience of running over the Harbour Bridge. Ellis had joined us for the first few kms of the race, and would meet us later on for the last few kms towards the finish. My body was feeling sore before the race, and by the time we got to the

other side of the Sydney Harbour Bridge my legs were screaming out for me to stop. I had serious doubts about running the remaining 40kms. We continued on and successfully made our way around Mrs Macquarie's Chair, being familiar ground for us as this is where Achilles meet on Sunday mornings on the steps of the Art Gallery. I felt at home here, although my shoulders and hips were really starting to hurt. We made our way through Hyde Park, and had fun running over the temporary bridge over Park Street. The bridge seemed to bounce when you ran on it, and this was a lot more fun for me than running on the road.

My fun was short-lived as we made our way up Oxford Street and down towards Centennial Park. I shook my head in disbelief that we were going to run around Centennial Park again! How cruel could this race be? The approach towards Centennial Park was made easier by Martin joining us, and he was able to give Ellis a break by temporarily relieving him from his guiding duties for awhile. Martin led us up and down ANZAC Parade, and although I had a rough idea where we were from our previous training of this section, I became very

disorientated. I was really struggling by this stage, and decided it was best to just keep running and not worry about where we were. It seemed to go on forever, going back and forth along this road until we finally entered Centennial Park.

We weren't even half way yet, and I was doing it really tough. I wanted out. The sun was beating down upon us with intense heat. The forecast for today was for about 26 degrees, but it felt much hotter, more like 30 degrees in the shade! I was losing hope fast, as my body was struggling to go the distance, and we hadn't even reached the half-way point. How could I possibly keep going for another 21kms if I was feeling this bad already?

Somehow, we managed to fight on. We passed the half way point, and to be honest, I would have been happy to take my bat and ball and go home right there and then. I reasoned with myself that there's no shame in quitting. It just means that the race was much bigger and better than I am. I could live with that! But I couldn't live with letting others down. Markus had invested a lot of time and energy into training me for this event, and Ellis and Martin had given up their time to help me finish the race, even though

their injuries probably should have prevented them running as far as they did with me. Of course, there are also the donors who have contributed their hard earned money towards our cause, and the thousands of blind people around the world who are counting on us to finish the race so we can raise the funds to help The Fred Hollows Foundation help them. I also had to do it for all my fellow disabled athletes at Achilles, I had a point to prove to them that they can do anything they set their heart and mind to, and I had to lead by example by completing this Marathon.

Then there was myself. I'm not a quitter, I never give up, no matter what. Why was I suddenly considering throwing in the towel now? I couldn't let myself down as well. These thoughts kept going through my mind and before I knew it, we were exiting Centennial Park and heading towards Randwick. Wait a minute, isn't Randwick taking us further away from the City? I knew what this meant, we'd have to run all the way back along the same road again! This kind of broke my spirits, as my breathing was now all out of rhythm, and my legs were in extreme pain. I knew we had passed the half way mark, but we had so much further to

go. We had only run 24kms by this stage, and I was struggling to convince myself to continue.

Markus talked me into continuing, he might have a promising future career as a car salesman. I knew he was right, we had to finish this race one way or another, I just couldn't see how it would be possible. I figured if I just kept going I could probably make it back to the City, around the 30kms mark, but that would be it, I wouldn't be able to go any further. I decided that's where I'd be pulling up stumps and calling it a day. The last 10kms out to Pymont and back just seemed too daunting at this stage. I then realised that I was looking too far ahead, I needed to stay focused on the section we were running at the moment, and not to jump too far ahead of myself.

By now, Martin had handed the reins back over to Ellis who would stay with us for the remainder of the race. Like Markus, Ellis also talked me into continuing. It was 2 against 1, I was outnumbered. I was drinking gallons of water by the time we hit Oxford Street again. Markus's water bottles that he carried all the way on his belt came in very handy, and the water at the drink stations just weren't enough to keep me cool and refreshed.

We were making good time, well ahead of the 5 and a half hour cut-off requirement to finish the race, so I tried to ease up and go a bit slower to ensure that we could at least make it to the top of Hyde Park before collapsing. Well, we made it through Hyde Park alright, over the fun bouncy bridge again, and got to the top of Hyde Park and beyond without collapsing as predicted. I was feeling very light-headed and dizzy though. The sun just seemed to keep getting hotter. I was slowly reaching the 30kms mark, where I planned to depart the race.

It was really hard getting to the 30kms, I was so incredibly tired. I had to just keep pushing on to the next corner, and then to the next. Eventually we got to 30kms, but Markus and Ellis wanted to keep running. They must be insane? There is no way that I can keep going! They forced me to keep going, and I cried with frustration. My body was now taking a huge beating, I had never run this far before in my life, and now I know why, it's a really really really long way! Fortunately for me, all of my common sense and logical decision making had evaporated by this stage, so I just went along with them all the way to Pyrmont.

We had to avoid several competitors lying on the road in

the shade trying to recover or waiting anxiously for paramedics to arrive. This long hot stretch of road was pure torture! The road just kept going and going and going, it never ended. Worst of all, I knew that I would have to eventually turn around at some point, hopefully soon, and run all the way back along this same road. I couldn't maintain my running along this section. It now involved a slow exhausted jog, followed by walking for a few metres while I gulped down fluids and tried desperately to get my breath back. Markus kept shoving gels into my mouth to give me a burst of energy. I had eaten so many of these gels by now that I couldn't really stomach any more of them, but I willingly accepted them because it gave me a chance to walk for a bit.

By the time we got to Pymont, I was done and dusted. I couldn't go any further. Not because I didn't want to, but because it was just no longer physically possible. My head was spinning, I could barely stand up anymore, and my coordination had completely disappeared. It was becoming dangerous. When Markus and Ellis would tell me to drift either left or right, it barely registered with me anymore. I knew they were saying something, but it just

didn't make any sense. When I did understand the command, my body refused to move in that direction, or it would go the opposite way to their request. I knew at any moment I was going to fall flat on my face, but it didn't happen.

We rounded the streets of Pymont slowly, my feet barely lifting off the ground, they felt like they were weighed down with blocks of concrete. For some ridiculous reason, I chose to tackle the long uphill road leading back into the City. Perhaps it was Markus reminding me of the encouraging experience I had heard whilst visiting The Fred Hollows Foundation that spurred me on.

The story was about a little girl called Nie, who is only 5 years old and was blind. She was finding it really difficult adapting to the world around her, and was struggling to fit in with the other children her age. The Foundation's Doctors were able to operate on her eyes and restore her sight, giving her so much joy and a very bright future. Being blind is a really hard thing to deal with, especially for a 5-year-old. She didn't deserve to begin her life in a world of darkness, and through someone's generous donation, she was given the gift of sight. For me this story

really touched my heart because I was a patient of Fred Hollows when I was young myself, and he gave me a great start in life too by diagnosing my rare eye condition and investigating ways of correcting it. Even though my sight couldn't be restored as my condition is very complicated, it's still very reassuring to know that Fred's work still lives on to help people like Nie. I suppose this gave me the second win I had been looking for during the race. I had been waiting 39kms for it to arrive, and here it finally was. With tears welling in my eyes, I pushed on up the hill towards the City. Markus advised me that we only had 22 minutes left to run the last 3kms if we were to finish in under 5 hours. I no longer had the strength to walk let alone run hard for the last 3kms, but we did!

I put my head down and went for broke. We charged up the hill back towards the Harbour Bridge. I was hurting so bad that I figured no matter what I did it was impossible to hurt anymore than it already was.

BANG! My vision suddenly disappeared. Usually I can see light and dark, but all of a sudden I was thrown into complete and absolute darkness. I could no longer see the sun above us, I thought I was dying! It was really scary. I

could still hear footsteps, but could no longer hear Markus and Ellis talking to me. All I could do was just follow the footsteps and hope for the best. My entire world had rapidly closed in on me, and it felt as though the entire universe was no bigger than a metre or so around me. I describe it as almost being in a state of unconsciousness. I followed the sound of the footsteps, running as hard as I could, and bracing myself for the sudden sensation of cold water that would mean I had fallen into the harbour. With about 2kms to go, I tried to communicate with my guides, but was unable to, I couldn't speak anymore. I think the intense heat had really taken its toll on me. I started to regain comprehension of their commands again, hearing them faintly saying to run up a ramp, and I recall hearing someone saying there is only 1km to go. The funny thing is over that last 1km I heard several different people saying exactly the same thing at different points. How much further could it really be? Which of these people were telling the truth? Perhaps it was just a really really long last 1km to run. It sure felt like it to me. All of a sudden I was surrounded by cheering. I knew we must be close, but how close? It really seemed to go on forever.

“I’m doing this for Fred!” I told myself. I felt my hands being held by Markus and Ellis, and my arms being raised up. This must be it! With a burst of overwhelming emotion I roared out aloud with sheer delight and triumph as I felt my feet dragging across the finish line! What a moment! We had done it! We had completed a Marathon. We had achieved the impossible. We had conquered the 42.2km race. It was all over now.

As I slumped to the ground in total exhaustion, I pondered why I had ever decided to do such a stupid thing in the first place. Had I bitten off more than I could chew? Was it realistic to expect that we could train for a Marathon in only 10 weeks? Was it as easy as I had thought it would be? Well, no, it wasn’t easy at all, it was extremely difficult, but very worthwhile and not stupid. I had certainly bitten off quite a lot, but we had chewed up that Marathon in 4 hours and 56 minutes. We had finished in under 5 hours! As for training for this event in only 10 weeks, well, I can tell you that we did it, but next time we might take a bit longer to prepare for such an enormous challenge. Indeed, I’m sure you can see that this Diary clearly demonstrates, “How NOT to train for a Marathon in 10 weeks!”