

Springtime in the Big Apple

by John Farrow

The Big Apple! Wall Street! The Great White Way! Faye Raye and King Kong! The drama of the New York Marathon! The city that never sleeps! It's also next to impossible to get in a training run. Racing, however, is another matter. Nothing could be easier.

The New York Road Runners' Club is one of the largest running clubs in the country and sponsors races virtually every weekend, most of them in Central Park. A quick check of their web site at www.nyrrc.com reveals an extensive year-long race calendar, and registration is as simple as it comes. Just click on a race for the details. Want to spend some time in the City and do several races? Each entry form has all the club's races for that month. Just check them off and e-mail one form back. Prior to a recent trip, I signed up for a 10k on Saturday and a 5k on Sunday.

Arriving at the airport, the cabbie didn't speak much English (he may have been a former Prime Minister of Moldavia), but he indicated he knew where the hotel was. Before long, he was rocketing along, jockeying for position on the four-lane street with five other cars abreast. Clearly, every car in front represented a personal challenge.

Once at Times Square (which is actually a triangle), we were a block and a half from the hotel. Two more dollars in fare later, we were still inching along. Crowded? Times Square is crowded 24 hours a day, a true crossroads of the world. It is also full of glittering, 4-storey tall super-models in their underwear and less. Even Elvis was in town, all 30 feet of him, at Radio City Music Hall.

The next day, after hours spent wandering through the Museum of Natural History, my wife and I decided to walk across Central Park to the NYRRC and pick up my race packets. A docent at the museum said it would take at least half an hour to walk across the park, but ten minutes later we were striding up Fifth Avenue.

Walking through Central Park is an almost surreal experience, being surrounded by acres and acres of green grass and trees, blooming jasmine, daffodils and snow crocuses,

surrounded still by massive skyscrapers towering above the trees. The weather was beautiful and the trails in the park were full of runners, walkers and roller bladers.

The NYRRC is located at 9 East 89th Street, a.k.a. Fred Lebow Place, in a tiny little brownstone across the street from the Guggenheim Museum, the only building in New York designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The first floor is about the size of Leona Helmsly's walk-in closet, but everything about it says "Running Spoken Here." Where the walls are not covered with posters of Grete Waitz or Joan Benoit or Alberto Salazar, there are rows of race flyers. A counter to one side sells running gear and memorabilia, while in the back, there is a line for the one bathroom. Outside, runners are starting or finishing their runs, or simply talking with friends. Clearly, this is the place for runners in New York.

Prior to leaving Albuquerque, I had checked the weather and found that this winter in the city had been the mildest in a hundred years, with only a half-inch of snow. Great, but I took tights and gloves just in case.

Race day dawned with freezing rain and wind. Undaunted, I took heart in the fact that the weather was supposed to clear up later in morning, and the race didn't start until 10:00. I decided to wait in a nearby Starbucks with a cup of coffee and the morning paper.

By race time, it was still raining and the wind had, if anything, intensified, driving the freezing rain horizontally. The only runners going by were dressed for arctic exploration, and I didn't even have a wind breaker. The forecast was still for clearing weather, and there was another race the following day. It was time for a sweet roll and more coffee.

At 6:30 the next morning I was up and ready to run. Outside, there were six inches of snow on the ground and every flight out of La Guardia had been canceled. No way, José.

ARR News, May 1998

Albuquerque Road Runners Club