

## **The Boston Diaries, Part 2**

**January 1:** Boston. What is it about that one word that carries such mystique for runners? It's not the oldest marathon in the country - that distinction belongs to a race run in 1896 from Stamford, Connecticut into New York City. But it is the oldest continuously run marathon, having been held every year since 1897, on the same course each year. Plus, it is the only marathon in the world for which runners have to qualify to enter. So, believing that knowledge is power, I decided to find out what I could about the course, and especially those notorious hills.

Surprisingly, much of the race is downhill. The first four miles drop some 300 feet in elevation, and the next ten miles are essentially rolling but still falling in elevation. After a moderate rise just after the half-way point, the course plummets another 150 feet in only half a mile. But then it all turns around.

From mile 16 near the town of Newton until almost mile 21, it's uphill and gains back almost half of what has been given up in elevation. Infamous Heartbreak Hill looms in the 20<sup>th</sup> mile. After that, however, "the course is finally sweet and you can just glide," according to four-time winner Bill Rogers. As if.

**January 2:** In preparation for the hills, I decide to do each long Sunday run along Tramway, finishing with a segment from I-40 back up to Montgomery. According to my GPS, it's a climb of about 340 feet. But unlike the Boston Marathon course, which has a high point of some 465 feet above sea level (and that at the start), my finish will be at almost 6,000

feet in elevation. If this won't get me ready for the "hills" in Boston, maybe I should take up croquet.

**January 9:** Pain in my Achilles tendons shortens a planned 13-miler. This has been my bugaboo for years but some rigid orthotics had seemingly gotten it under control. You'd think that I could at least develop some other infirmity just for variety.

**February 5:** Achilles feeling much better, so I go to the ARR handicap around the Arroyo del Oso Golf Course. Pleasant run at a 7½ minute pace, and then an easy six miles later on the North Valley irrigation ditches with the dogs. But why is the instep of my right foot so sore?

**February 6:** Oh, great. I have to cancel a scheduled 18-miler because I can't bend that foot without pain. I'll never make it to Boston at this rate.

**February 12:** Spend the weekend at an RRCA board meeting in New Orleans checking out the facilities for this year's annual convention and closing down the Acme Oyster Bar. Oysters increase endurance, right? so I shovel them in (even though I hate oysters). Then a very pleasant ten miles from the hotel through the Garden District, past the brooding Gothic mansion where Anne Rice wrote those vampire stories. On to Audubon Park, where I join a parade of runners on the path that surrounds the park. On the way back, I notice the broken, uneven sidewalks and curbs that I've been jumping over and around, not to mention the protruding roots of moss-covered trees causing these upheavals. This as I notice a vague soreness in the joint behind my right toe.

**February 27:** In San Diego for a college friend's kids' *b'nai mitzvah* I do twenty miles around Lake Miramar . My legs feel strong but there are still the aches and pains in both quads as well as the right toe. My body is aging too rapidly.

**March 1:** See a podiatrist about the toe. He blithely informs me that I have a bone spur developing there. What to do about it? Either whack it off (his words) or learn to live with it. I chose the latter. He also suggests ultra-sound for the quads, which turns them to jelly.

**March 6:** Remember the fall of the Alamo with a good run in light rain, which seems appropriate – and portentous.

**March 10:** First bad allergy day as the wind picks up and the junipers are flinging pollen with abandon. During an afternoon five-miler I have to stop several times to clear my throat.

**March 13:** A satisfying 20-miler to I-40 and back along Tramway, twice. Maybe I'll make it after all! But a very queasy stomach teaches me to never use a certain energy gel again.

**March 19:** Green Dress Handicap Run in the foothills. Last year I slipped on some loose rocks and fell, so I take extra care. A fall is the last thing I need right now.

**March 26:** And then the last thing I need happens. Toward the end of an easy run with the puppies, one of them darts ahead and trips me with her leash. I land hard on the sidewalk and spend the rest of the day with ice on my left knee.

**March 27:** More ice. A cautious 20-miler, thankfully devoid of pain. More ice.

**April 10:** Stride for Pride 5000 on a day that begins overcast and cold, then turns to snow. Fall to Winter in less than an hour. Not a good day for a run but on the way to the race, the season changes from Winter to Spring, and the sun even makes an appearance just before the start. I stay, mainly to watch the elite field that has come out for the cash purse. The field proves so strong that Robert Kipkoech Cheruiyot of Kenya, the 2003 winner of the Boston Marathon, comes in third. The following day it's announced that he will run again this year.

**April 11:** Realize that with all the races I've run, I've lost what used to make running special - the excitement of anticipation before an event. But today is one week before the Boston Marathon, and I'm as excited as I've ever been with butterflies like I've never had before. I even have to be extra careful not to let it interfere with a conference call with a client.

**April 15:** The plane ride to Boston is loooong. But in the city, the streets are filling with runners from around the world, and the air is electric. Walking home from dinner, I find a good luck penny on the sidewalk.