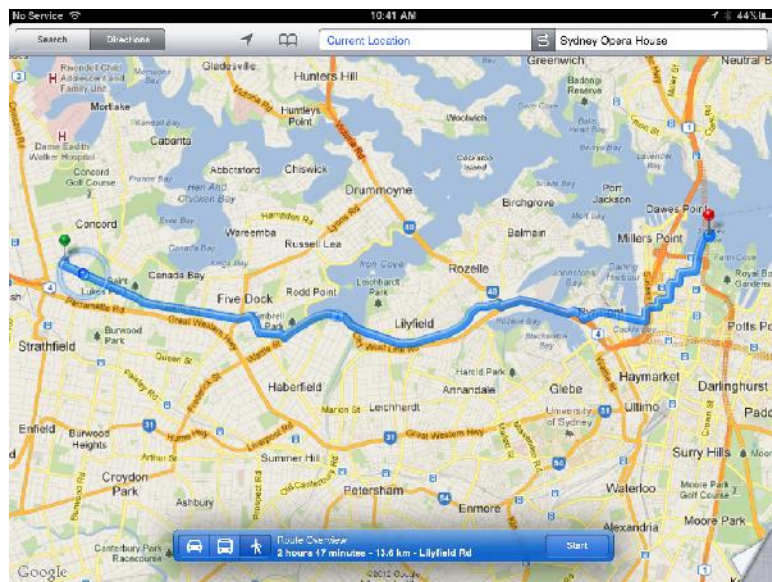


Race Report-An Involuntary Participant

Sydney, Australia

David Jones jonescpa@gmail.com

I rolled out of bed before day break and strapped on my cold running gear. It's Winter here in Oz and the weather was a perfect 45 degrees (7 for my metric friends). My plan was a nice out-and-back 18 mile long-run starting at our Western suburb in Concord and pivoting at the Opera House, pausing just long enough for photo.



Being pre-dawn on a Sunday, the traffic was light which allowed me to run straight through the multiple city intersections. However my route was hilly, hilly, and hilly. There really wasn't a flat stretch the whole run. After about 10 miles, the undulations begin to wear on you. However, they also break up the course and add little interim challenges along the way.

About five miles in, I began the long stretch to the apex of Anzac Bridge, where I saw a beautiful unobstructed view of the inner-city just as the sun was rising behind the downtown office

buildings. In my mind, I imagined getting a great shot at the top of the Opera House stairs.



Then, with two miles remaining to the Opera House, I unexpectedly and spontaneously entered a race. It happened just as I crossed over Pymont Bridge and started toward Hyde Park. Running between two large buildings I saw a long stream of runners passing across an intersection about 100 meters ahead.

I thought, Awesome! Some locals out for a Sunday morning long-run. I'll latch on and chat about the local running scene. However when I

reached the intersection, I discovered about three thousand runners, wearing large race bibs, and stretched out over a half a mile. The course was roped off to prevent spectators from crossing. Unable to continue straight on my planned route, I turned left and started to run parallel with the racers, but outside the course barriers.

About 25 meters along, a race official acerbically called out to me, "Back on the course! Stay within barriers!" I jumped across a roped barrier and voila, I was instantaneously 'entered' in some kind of race, but I had no idea what kind. This is so cool!

I looked up and saw a mile-marker that read "7". I then realized that I had run dead smack into a half-marathon. Oh, this was perfect! I actually had wanted to do a half marathon while Down Under; how fortuitous.

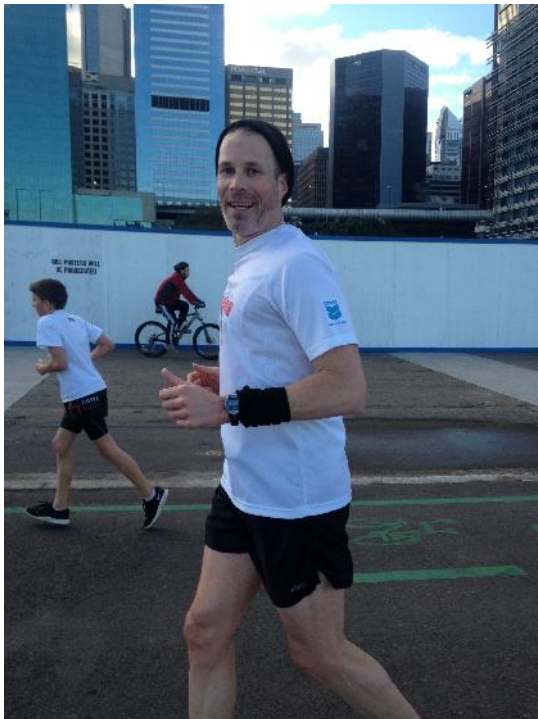
I pulled along side a runner so I could start a chat, "Morning, morning. What's the name of his half?" "Uh, what, uh!" he curtly replied without even looking in my direction. I figured he was struggling so I ran forward looking for some runners with a more relaxed stride or already in conversation.

To my surprise, I couldn't find any. There were absolutely no runners conversing. In fact, most stared toward the ground with a focused determination as if they were trying to qualify for the Aussie Olympic marathon team. I tried once more, "Morning, where does this half finish? Does it go by the Opera House?" Again, "What!? I don't know. What?" I asked, "Is this a half marathon?" "No mate, 10k. It's a 10k!"

Now my reaction was "What!?" I then realized that it wasn't mile-marker "7", it was kilometer-marker "7" (mile 5). I was incredulous. Our pace couldn't have been more than 8:00 minute miles, and I had already 13k under my feet before converging on the course. I felt great which was why I was a bit taken back at the labored effort and seriousness of the other runners. At that point I thought it best to step off the course.

I wasn't three feet off when another official yelled out, "No no no! You have to stay on the course." At this point it became comical. I couldn't stop grinning. I gotta get a picture; Jen is not going to believe this." I finally found an entrant walking on the side of the course; I pulled up and handed her my phone, "Excuse, can I get a picture."

We both stopped and she took a few seconds to focus the shot as the stream of runners passed behind me. "Okay, ready?" she asked, and then she began running. What the Hell! Oh!, I get it; she thinks I'm racing and that I want a live action shot for prosperity. I couldn't stop laughing.



As we ran along the water, I had no idea where we were going. I did hear another runner tell a friend, "We're almost to the Rocks," which I knew was by the Sydney Harbor Bridge. Sure enough, a few minutes later we ran straight under the south riverside of the Bridge. Best I could tell, the course was headed back toward Circular Quay.

I tried one last time with two kilometers remaining, "Morning, wow, beautiful weather for a run." Nothing--Not a reply, not a nod, not a grin. O' righty! I decided, You want to race, then let's race. I dropped the hammer and split through the pack, "On your right; to your left please." "Coming up between you; excuse me please!" I was on a 6:30 pace buzzing runners left and right. With half a mile remaining, a pack of four came up behind and were about to ask me to move. Oh no no no. I dropped to a 6:00 min pace and pulled away.

Within 100 meters, I could see the finish. Not only were there hundreds of yelling spectators, they were giving out finishers medals. Finisher medals for a 10K? The humorous (pronounced "smart-ass") in me decided to have some fun. I was going to spring across the finish, grab a medal, triumphantly flare my arms over my head, and scream out "YES!"

But with 50 meters remaining, I just couldn't do it. I turned perpendicular to the course and slid through two barriers, cutting straight across an open restaurant patio, where the patrons looked at me like I was nuts.

About 10 minutes later I found my bearings and headed toward the Opera House for that fantastic photo I planned.

Unfortunately, all I got was this.



The area was blocked off by construction. I turned back and rounded home to get in my full 18.

Well, what I planned to happen turned out to be crap. What I didn't plan to happen turned out to be great fun! Yep, running is a "real-life" experience.