

A capital marathon

Canberra Marathon, Australia. 9 April 2006

By Alison Kay

Canberra is Australia's capital city and home to its Parliament. Lying between Sydney and Melbourne, it was chosen as the site of the federal capital in 1908 and planned in 1912 by master designer Walter Burley Griffin. Now in its 30th year, the Canberra Marathon has been equally carefully planned and well-organised.

Griffin was a Chicago architect who won an international design competition with his plan which combined nature and urban living. Even today, 53% of the Australian Capital Territory in which Canberra was situated remains as nature reserve. It makes the Canberra Marathon one of the most scenic races in Australia. Traffic-free roads are bounded by parkland and offer panoramic views of Lake Burley Griffin and many of Australia's national buildings.

Current race director Dave Cundy took on the role in the fifth year, 1980, after running the event in 1977-79. Canberra is Australia's oldest city marathon, and after 26 years in the job Cundy must be one of the longest-serving marathon race directors anywhere in the world.

Canberra is one of only two Australian city marathons that hasn't gone down the path of short options. A 10km and 5km fun run are held as separate marathon eve events. On Marathon day, youngsters can run the final 2.195km of a full marathon distance that they have completed in shorter legs over the previous few weeks. These three events together attracted 850 runners.

Other than that, the focus is on the thousand-odd full marathon runners and the really keen athletes who choose the 50km ultra distance option.

For the past 13 years finishers have been offered the possibility of continuing for another 7.805km to complete a 50km ultra marathon. This year the race incorporated the inaugural Australian 50km Road Championships and a record 78 runners went 'beyond the marathon'. New Zealander Mark Hutchinson, now living in Queensland, and Siri Terjesen (USA), also a Queensland resident, took the honours, running 3:09:05 and 3:35:19 respectively.



The marathon starts and finishes at Telopea Park. Conditions were cool, calm and sunny (0-16C, 59% humidity). First up is a 10km circuit of Canberra's "Parliamentary triangle" followed by a double out-and-back route on the road along the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. Runners on a five-hour plus schedule are guided onto a scenic cycle path that follows the lake shore more closely and avoids lengthy road closures.

Given that more than 80% of the marathon field comes from out of town, it is appropriate that the route provides a tourist's guide to the capital's major buildings and attractions. Within minutes of the marathon start runners pass by several sights. The National Gallery is Australia's premier art institution housing more than 100,000 works of art. Next comes the High Court of Australia, a concrete-and-glass structure on the lakeshore, opened in 1980 after a national architectural competition. Inside are three courtrooms and an impressive public hall decorated with murals depicting the development of the Australian nation and its Constitution.

The course passes by Questacon, the National Science and Technology Centre, that offers visitors a variety of interactive exhibits that makes learning a by-product of fun - like a 6m free fall or a virtual roller coaster ride. Then runners pass by the National Library, with its 220km of shelving.

From this point runners move up and around new Parliament

House, acclaimed for its impressive architecture, landscaped gardens and collection of contemporary Australian art. The 81m flag mast soaring above the building is a Canberra icon.

All this and not yet past 10km, but at that point, runners pass around Old Parliament House, now a heritage building that was home to the Federal Parliament from 1927-1988. It's affectionately known as "the House where Australia grew up".

Now the marathon crosses the Kings Avenue Bridge over Lake Burley Griffin and turns left to follow the lakeshore. Runners head past the National Carillon on Aspen Island. This was a gift from the British Government to the people of Australia to

celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National Capital in 1970. While most carillons have a minimum of 23 bells, this one is large. It has 55 bronze bells, each weighing somewhere between 7kg and 6 tonnes. It is often used to celebrate national days and special occasions.

Further along Parkes Way, and in a straight line of sight from both the new and old Parliament buildings is the outstanding Australian War Memorial, a museum and exhibition centre commemorating the sacrifice of Australians in war and peacekeeping duties. It includes the Hall of Memory, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Pool of Reflection and Roll of Honour listing the names of more than 102,000 service people who have died in war.





Further along the lake is the Captain Cook Memorial Jet (a water fountain), one of Canberra's most eye-catching attractions, built in 1970 to mark the bicentenary of Captain Cook's discovery of Australia's east coast. When operating at full capacity, the jet reaches a maximum height of 147m and has about 6 tonnes of water in the air at any one moment.

From here runners simply focus on the distance still to go, under the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, through the underpass at Acton, past the Australian National University, under the shadow of Black Mountain almost as far as the Glenloch Interchange. Here they turn to come back the same way.

This time they cross the lake on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and retrace their steps past the National Library, Questacon, High Court and National Gallery, to complete the first of the out-and-back laps.

If runners didn't catch all the sights first time around, then they

MEN:

1	Barry KEEM	AUS	2:24:10
2	Magnus MICHELSSON	AUS	2:25:02
3	James BARKER	AUS	2:27:07
4	Jeremy HORNE	AUS	2:29:29
5	Matthew THOMAS	AUS	2:32:53
6	Ben STUTTERD	AUS	2:33:23
7	Jonathan BLAKE	AUS	2:38:17
8	Rod DRAPER	AUS	2:39:02
9	Damien JACKEL	AUS	2:39:59
10	Ian JONES	AUS	2:40:12

WOMEN:

1	Shireen CRUMPTON	NZL	2:42:55
2	Emma MURRAY	AUS	2:45:42
3	Verity TOLHURST	AUS	2:58:20
4	Siri TERJESEN	USA	2:58:35
5	Kirra RANKIN	AUS	2:58:48
6	Suzanne KELLY	AUS	3:02:28
7	Julie MCNAMARA	AUS	3:05:20
8	Erin HARGRAVE	AUS	3:05:43
9	Fleur FLANERY	AUS	3:07:15
10	Jacqui PARRISH	AUS	3:08:36

can refresh their memory during the second lap around the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, before they turn off towards the finish at Telopea Park.

Even then it will not have been enough. The Marathon is the means whereby visitors can orientate themselves and whet their appetites for what Canberra has to offer as a purpose-built capital city modelled along similar lines to Washington DC or Brasilia. Some slower-paced sightseeing in the following days is definitely worthwhile.