

ADELAIDE MARATHON HISTORY – INTRODUCTION

by Ian Hill

The 40th running of the Adelaide Marathon was held in 2018 and it had been moved from its traditional August date to May to take advantage of the Commonwealth Games held at the Gold Coast in April 2018. Adelaide would be the first “big-city” marathon after the Games and was expected to attract many entries from outside South Australia including some from overseas. It worked – finishers in all distances in the marathon festival increased by 570 from the previous year to nearly 2000.

In anticipation of the 40th marathon I began writing the history, one year at a time, during 2017. I had plenty of material from which to write a story which was both factual and interesting. It helped that I was there at the beginning after receiving a letter in June 1979 from the organisers of the first Adelaide Marathon because I had run the previous year’s City-Bay Fun Run, a distance of 10.8km at the time. Having decided immediately to enter I received a host of reading material to do with training and nutrition as well as logistical information about the marathon day itself, which was 7th October 1979.

After meeting with the general manager of the SARRC to discuss a display of Adelaide Marathon memorabilia being prepared at Adelaide Oval in May 2018 to celebrate the event’s 40th running, I set about organising the quickest and most effective means of doing this, which was to involve as many Warriors (people who had finished ten or more Adelaide Marathons) as possible. Later at the Christmas function I was introduced to the newly elected President of the Club who was enthusiastic about the display. We talked about releasing a booklet during 2018 although given the sudden date change of the marathon festival it was unable to be ready in time.

Unfortunately circumstances beyond my control arose in March 2018 and my need to deal with them over the following two years severely curtailed my progress with the historical preparations. Fortunately I had done enough to have a draft of the history up to 1994 completed and was able to quickly put together a summary of each year’s highlights from 1995 until 2017 for the general manager to use in a speech at the Town Hall on the Friday night before the 2018 marathon. The text-only format became “Version 1” of the history and this new release with photos, newspaper clippings, mementoes and statistics forms Version 2. As more information comes to hand later versions will be created.

The history is presented in seven sections according to the different eras the marathon went through which were defined by either a major change to the course or the structure of the event.

Broadly speaking there have been four distinct courses:

1979-1983 – Gawler to Adelaide,

1984-1994 – Anzac Highway and City Loop,

1995-2011 – Western Suburbs outwards and Linear Park return,

2012-2021 – Two laps of the parklands immediately north of the City.

From 1979 to 1989 the event was the marathon only. From 1990 the marathon festival began with the addition of a half marathon and later shorter distances. A fun run, mostly from 10-12 km began in 1994 and in 2018 a 5km event was added.

As noted above the marathon date was changed in 2018 from August to May and this was intended to apply for three years but in 2020 Covid-19 forced the marathon festival to be postponed twice, from 31st May to 23rd August and then again to 20th September when it was finally held under substantially revised conditions. For 2021 the date reverted to August and is likely to remain there in the future.

The sections are:

1. 1979-1983 Gawler to Adelaide
2. 1984-1989 Anzac Highway and City Loop – marathon only
3. 1990-1994 Anzac Highway and City Loop – marathon festival
4. 1995-2002 Western Suburbs and Linear Park – part 1 (featuring Old Adelaide Gaol)
5. 2003-2011 Western Suburbs and Linear Park – part 2 (featuring Santos Stadium)
6. 2012-2017 Two laps of parklands – including North Adelaide residential
7. 2018-2021 Two laps of parklands – excluding North Adelaide residential

Each section will include at least one “Special Feature” directly related to the marathon. The first is the story of why it was necessary to create the South Australian Road Runners Club in late 1980.

Contributions invited

If anyone would like to make a written contribution to the history no matter how big or small please contact me using my email address given at the top of the SA Distance Stats page. This could be about your experience as a participant in any of the festival events or as a volunteer, supporter etc.

20 December 2021