

SURFSIDE MARATHON 2005

By Paul Cooley

The Surfside Marathon on February 12, 2005 appealed to me as an alternative to the Freescale Austin Marathon, which was also run on the same weekend. I had never raced a marathon which was guaranteed to have fewer than 200 runners (actually it was limited to a total of 200 in both the ½ marathon and full marathon), nor had I entered any race that ran on the beach. I had heard warnings about the beach: that it was bad for your Achilles, it was bad for your knees and since there is no real change of scenery on the beach it would simply bore you to death. Despite the nay Sayers, I was excited about racing in a new venue and running a marathon which was close enough to home that I could drive there and back the day of the race, but still had the feel of an out-of-town adventure.

We left Houston around 6:00 a.m. The weather forecast was for a cloudy day with the temperature ranging from the low 50's to the mid 60's with a 5-10 mph breeze from the southeast. We arrived at Stahlman's Park, which is about 2 miles east of the bridge over the Intracoastal canal, about 45 minutes before the 8:00 a.m. start time. We parked on the beach in front of the park. A start-finish line had been set up in the sand along the shore. I opted to start the race in just a singlet knowing that I would warm up soon enough. After some photos of the race entrants, divided by sex and event, someone produced a "boombox" to play the national anthem. They chose the slowest version of the Star Spangled Banner I had ever heard. I thought I would freeze before it ended. In fact the tape stopped (froze?) about one line short of the end and the runners finished the song off with a strong chorus. The race actually started going west down the beach to a turn around about 1.5 miles down the beach, and then back east across the start finish line and then, for the marathoners, all the way to San Luis Pass and back. As we crossed the start-finish line the runners had already begun to spread out pretty well. Along the dune side or left hand side of the beach going east the race organizers had set up mile markers. The markers were numbers glued to plastic buckets, but instead of telling you how many miles you had run, they told you how many miles you had left, meaning the first mile marker was 26 and the last was 1. This took some getting used to, especially when trying

to calculate your pace and realizing that somewhere the “.2 mile” needed to be factored in



as well.

Our strategy was to take it easy while running east – into the wind – and when we turned around with the wind at our back see how well we could improve our position. For the most part this worked out pretty good. At about mile 12 we left the beach for a 2 mile loop that went through San Luis Pass, crossing the highway over to the old KOA campground and then back to the beach again. Once on the beach, with the wind at our back we took aim at the runners we could see in front of us. By mile 20 I had passed 4 people and was working on a 5th. For this small of a marathon I thought that was really an accomplishment. When I caught up to the 5th person he told me that I was the first person to pass him since mile 4. He said he was now running about a 10 minute pace and was hoping to break four hours. I felt pretty good and believed I could maintain a better pace than that for the rest of the way. I passed him and for mile 21 I was below 9 minute pace and for mile 22 I ran a 8:13 split, which I believe was my fastest mile of the day (I had missed a number of buckets so I was not able to record all of my splits). With about 4 miles left I finally could see I was closing in on some people ahead of me. I thought that perhaps I was catching up with some of the people finishing the ½ marathon or, possibly, with marathoners who had slowed down in the later stages of the race. I kept up a pretty good pace, running at an 8:30 pace for the last two miles. I could see that one of the persons ahead of me was someone whom I had seen earlier running the marathon and pushed harder to see if I could pass him before the finish, however as I closed within a few feet of him (and a few yards from the finish line) my legs said I was pushing it beyond the limit, so I let off, finishing in 15th place overall with a 3:54:23, and about 10 seconds behind 14th place. I was the last runner in the race to break four hours.

I waited for my training partner, Larry Lindeen, to finish and we walked up the long stairs to the pavilion. They had a big spread of fresh fruit, cake, cookies and barbeque and beans for the finishers. The crowd that was present at the start had thinned out quite a bit, and most if not all of the ½ marathoners were long gone. Running this was a lot like running a trail run, but without the hills, roots and stumps to navigate. The sand was wet and hard, so the running really was easy. My legs recovered well that day and the next, a lot quicker than from running a marathon on the concrete. My only other

problem was a sunburn on my forehead in the shape of a large crescent. This was the shape of the back of my ball cap, which I had turned around to make it more aerodynamic in the wind. This was the first time for this race and I believe they are planning to do it again next year. The members of the Brazosport Road Runners Association put on the race and did a great job.

Comments from Larry Lindeen: (1) The wind speed was actually 10 to 20 miles per hour, but there was no tail wind coming back; (2) the two mile turn around at San Luis Pass included: up a inclined board walk, onto a crumbling black top road, through a short cut up and down a ditch, down the side of the highway west, across the highway, up the side of the highway east, down the entrance to the old KOA campground, and back the same path to the beach; (3) lack of port-o-cans (two at the pavilion in the parking lot away from the beach, and one at about 9 up on the access road to the beach), of course the runners were so spread out you could take a pit stop in the surf and no one would know the difference; and (4) lack of a sense of humor at the water stops, no one was ready for the question: “where can we find a bike rental around here?”