

El Paso Half Marathon

(I always appreciate contributions from runners/walkers who have an interesting story. Competing in a race in a different city helps expand a runner's horizons. Fiona Green provides a look at a first-time race in El Paso.)

By Fiona Green

After moving to Texas 15 months ago, I made a list of places in the state I'd like to visit. Topping the list was the Big Bend National Park.



The idea of combining a trip there with a race in El Paso was very appealing, so when I read about the city's inaugural marathon and half marathon on March 4th, I quickly signed up.

Exploring El Paso prior to race day I couldn't help but notice a nice hill leading from the race's starting point. Having neglected to study the course elevation map on the event's website, it came as a lovely surprise to find out that the course would in fact be fairly challenging with the first 4 miles consisting of an uphill climb. No chance of a PR here!

Packet pick-up took place on both the Saturday before the event and race morning. Items of interest in the goody bag included an attractive drylete running shirt and a delicious new nutrition bar that tasted like fudge.

Locating an Italian restaurant for some pre-race carbo-loading was no problem. We ended up at Cappettos, a simple restaurant on Montana Street where everyone left with a doggie bag because the portions were so large.

Because the marathon and half marathon started together at 7 a.m., it was still pretty cool with temperatures hovering around zero as the runners lined up and prepared to attack the hills. To send us off, the mayor of El Paso, resplendent in his Stars 'n' Stripes leather jacket, delivered a rousing rendition of the Star Spangled Banner, and then we were off!

Two miles into the race I realized that the Lake Benbrook Half Marathon had really been pretty flat. In fact, even Waco's hilly half marathon and Muenster's 'rolling hills' 15K paled in comparison. I made a mental note to do more hill training. The course was well marked and water and Gatorade were plentiful.

At around mile 6, the half marathoners split from the marathoners and doubled back on the course. It was at this point that I noticed my hamstrings felt tight, like someone had pounded them with a baseball bat. As I couldn't recall this happening (in previous races),

I assumed it must be a result of the hills. Undeterred, I continued plodding along, my mind busy with thoughts of what I should do if I felt a pop or a snap. On the plus side, this new muscle soreness took my mind of the pain in my knee.

The course soon returned to the downtown area where traffic control was less evident and some streets were actually unmanned. I recalled the Brazilian in the Athens Olympics who'd been bodychecked in the final miles of the marathon and wondered if I'd be able to continue running if I were hit by a cyclist or a woman pushing a stroller. Fortunately, I didn't find out and managed to finish the race in one piece with a PW of 1:36, good enough for 4th female overall and 1st Masters. For some reason, however, the Masters winners were not recognized; only the top 3 overall and the usual age groups. The trophies were attractive and post race refreshments were pretty impressive with everything from burritos and bananas to smoothies and beer. All in all, I felt this was a well organized event that was certainly worth the trip.