

The Queenstown Marathon? Are you serious?

Didn't I know what the mountains around Queenstown are like? Such was the reaction of friends when I told them I was thinking of Queenstown, New Zealand, as venue for the annual run of the Marathon Fellowship of Rotarians for 2018.

"But", I protested, "I've looked at the route profile and it's quite a flat course, believe it or not. They start you up the valley and you finish up around the shore of the lake. It can't be that bad!"

As president of the fellowship for 2016-18, I thought it would be great to bring our members to the southern hemisphere again for a change, as we usually meet somewhere in Europe. Let our Rotary running friends experience some real jetlag, just like we have to most years! With great memories of the Townsville Marathon and our tour of eastern Australia in 2011, the die was cast, the board agreed, and Queenstown got the nod. Being such a long way for our mostly European members to come, we organised a 20-day tour of the north and south islands, to make it especially memorable.

And memorable it was. Starting in Auckland on 2nd November, 25 members and friends from Germany, France, USA and Australia travelled by coach to the Bay of Islands, Cape Reinga, Rotorua with its famous geysers and Maori cultural experience, Napier, Wellington, then across on the ferry to Picton, back in the coach to Nelson, Greymouth, Franz Josef, and then to the site of our running focus, beautiful Queenstown. We met up here with another dozen members and friends of the fellowship who were to join us for the run and our pre- and post-race functions.

Our coach captain (don't call him a bus driver!) took us out to the start of the 10km, half marathon and full marathon events, the latter starting in historic Arrowtown, east of Queenstown. Race day, Sat 17th Nov, dawned with perfect running conditions – cool, fine, very little wind, and a mix of overcast and sunny. Off we went, but, what's this? A hill. Must be just an aberration. Oh, no, another one! And going down is worse than going up – rubble, roots, and, damn that dodgy knee! Reality dawns – that "flat" course has dozens of short, steep hills with as much down as up so they don't register on a 42.2 km small-scale profile. I grind my way up yet another rise, and down the other side. Never mind, the scenery compensates for the pain of the course. Superb – mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, even a boardwalk across a swamp, and the camaraderie of runners makes for a fantastic experience for all. Finally, the finish line comes within reach, and confidence grows that it will be attained! Three km to go, now two, now just one – the legs don't want to work, but, hang in there, legs! You can do it. And, finally, the roar of the crowd, and the medal is placed around the neck. A banana has never looked so good!

Many thanks to President Russell McGrouther of the Rotary Club of Queenstown for arranging the venues for our pre-race pasta party and post-race dinner. We also very much enjoyed meeting D9980 District Governor Andrew Hamilton, who drove up from Dunedin to join us at the pasta party.

Leaving Queenstown the next day, we travelled to Milford Sound for an overnight cruise – magnificent fiordland wilderness. Even locals were commenting on the beautiful weather. Driving out, as we approached the Homer Tunnel, snow was falling heavily and we were glad we were leaving, not on the way in. Sure enough, we heard later that the road had been closed, with 40cm of snow at the high point of the road.

After visiting Dunedin and Twizel (great views of Aoraki/Mt Cook, highest peak in NZ), our tour finished in Christchurch, where we gained an appreciation of the heartbreak and hard work which has followed the catastrophic earthquakes of 2010-11.

Aotearora/New Zealand is such a beautiful country, and its people so friendly, down-to-earth and resourceful. We had a fantastic journey and gathering. Best of all was the establishment and renewal of friendships with our fellow Rotarians and friends whose interests in both Rotary and distance running give us a common bond.

As usual, a donation to The Rotary Foundation *End Polio Now* program will be made on behalf of those participating.

At our post-race dinner, I handed over the presidency of IMFR to Lutz Bachmann of Norway, who has announced that our next meeting will be in Reykjavik, Iceland, for the marathon and shorter events, in August 2019.

We would love to have more IMFR members from Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific. There must be more Rotarians out there who have an interest in distance running. We would love to meet you, in Iceland or before! Visit our website at www.rotatianrun.org, and you can contact me at kesnsuz@ncable.net.au , or (03) 4212 0712.

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