

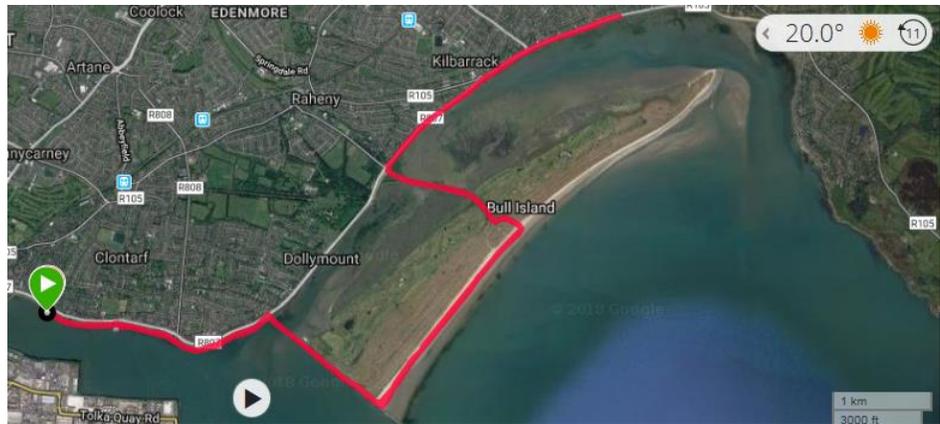
Clontarf 5 mile & Half Marathon – July 2018

Oh I do like to be beside the seaside.....Sunbathing & sipping Sangria, yes. Running flat out on dry sandy beach? Not so much, but that's what was required at the Clontarf Half Marathon to complete the 3 race series & collect this year's must have race bling.

A day out in Dublin's Costa del Clontarf, clear blue skies, fresh sea air, flattest of half marathon courses on the circuit. After suffering through the hills in Wicklow and Wexford races this one was to be a bit of a treat for ATC members (Vincent, Arnold, John Cuddy, Baco Mac, Dave Lynch, Siobhan Harmon). Earlier in the year, I had even eyed it as a potential Half Marathon PB course. So the mood was relaxed & jovial travelling to Dublin (with Cuddy & Baco) for the 10am start. The 3 bling amigos sharing bib collection & race day driving duties over the series. A small/simple bit of organising, always worth the effort to carpool and travel with fellow members, it adds to the race day experience for sure.

The event (in its 10th year now) is very well organised, although the 25min walk from the official car park to start line was a bit of slog (worse on the way back!). But done at a brisk walking pace it was as good a warm up as any prerace jumping jacks n bendy stretches.

My own preparations for this race could have been better, I'd let my diet & hydration slip a little that week but at the off, Billy Bigshot here ignored all that and lined up at the front of the pack, behind the sub 1:30 balloon fella. That lofty ambition went out the window about 2 minutes down the road, as the stampeding herd of proper runners left me in their dust. Sure no harm dreaming!!



The course itself is a simple out and back, commencing right on the seafront promenade, parallel to Clontarf road. It heads along the coast & across the bridge on to North Bull Island Nature Reserve. At about the 4k mark the fun starts. You descend on to the beach for approx. 2.5k of beach running. The majority of it is dry hard packed sand, a few divots to avoid and seaweed hurdles to jump. Either end of this stretch however, as you enter & exit the beach, you are plodding through loose deep sand & MDS like dunes (only a tiny exaggeration there!!). It's not even a 150m stretch but the combined beach effort (let's call it 3k) absolutely knocked the stuffing out of me. The calves were burning only slightly harder than the lungs. You could clearly see which participants had beach run training behind them as race positions changed quite quickly in that particular section. Billy Bigshot going backwards in the placings fast.



Michael O'Connor's recent Facebook comments/view on the course "never again" echoing through my mind as I contemplated quitting the run for some sandcastle building & ice cream instead. But I cracked on.....



Getting off the beach and back on terra firma, the rest of the 1st half is mostly on the promenade along James Larkin Road, out past Kilbarrack & Bayside to the turnaround point. Pavement/tarmac underfoot, flat as a pancake all the way. While there are some lovely sea views to enjoy, I found myself thinking less about those, and even less still about chasing lost time and more about the dread of having to retrace my steps. My usual race day “mindfulness mantra” cr@p, designed to keep me all focussed and “in the moment” had been left at home (along with my anti-inflammatory gel and blister plasters - the beach sand doing a right old number on the latter). With the PB dream being replaced by a sand-demon nightmare (yeay, a new demon!!) my outlook on the race changed. This day was quickly turning into more of a grit yer teeth and get it done kind of challenge. That’s fine too of course, big dividends to be had hitting it hard occasionally. In fact all this year, as part of my overall go long and slow plan, I’ve purposely used the half marathon events to fill up my Zone 4 quota (80/20 disciple that I am!)

Stats Splits Time in Zones

Heart Rate Zones

Z5	0:00	0%
Z4	1:37:46	0%
Z3	0:12	0%
Z2	0:45	0%
Z1	0:15	0%

98%

So for the return leg, spurred on by very supportive participants going in the opposite direction, road side cheers & a real battle with this one lad who was chasing me down hard, I zoned out in zone 4 till the job was done. Race splits were about even but the 2nd half definitely felt much much harder/slower. At the finish line, you are met immediately with the obligatory water and banana and then what we came for, the final 1/3 of the race series medal.... A nice touch also was the MC calling out each finishers name. “Here’s Eamonn McEntee from Athy Triathlon club, just sneaking in under 1:40, well done Eamonn”. With 1,400 participants in the half and another 900 doing the 5 miler, that lads day was as tough as anyone’s!!!



This was a hard day. I made it worse than it should have been, by not being properly preparing so no real complaints. Lessons learnt: **1) Hydrate properly for hot weather 2) Don't be so cocky with finishing time expectations 3) Take Mick O'Connor's advice on race selection in future.**

4 happy ATC peeps pictured below. Cuddy is looking a bit flushed & worse for wear only because we grabbed him for the photo immediately after he crossed the finish line. Fair to say we were all in a similar exhausted state as we finished.



Special mention to Arnold Kane. Running comfortable all the way, a vision to behold, with his newly (and apparently naturally) acquired lovely blond locks dancing in the sea breeze as he cruised to a half marathon PB. Massively impressive display from Arnold, surely a contender for “most improved” runner this year. After Baco that is, who is knocking out races like no one’s business these days.

Go ATC