

My 2018 event calendar started badly, with a horrendous day dragging my post winter hibernation frame around the Donadea 21k course in mid-January. Nice to complete it with ATC pals but it was a shocker of a performance. Very demoralising to post my slowest half marathon time EVER!!! As with all life's disappointments, I find the best thing to do is to leave it in the past and look to the future. In search of a new running target (& maybe some form of penance for winter indulgences), I came upon this enticing gem.....

A race trilogy with a quirky 3 piece (fidget spinner) puzzle medal for finishers of all three.



First up the Wicklow Gaol break 10k & Half Marathon. ATC had a small but eager showing with myself, John Cuddy & Vincent Collier tackling the half marathon and Baco Mc & (a clean shaven aero dynamic) Arnold Kane taking on the 10k. Tickets for this event were like gold dust soon after registration opened. It's extremely popular as a stand-alone race as well as the 1st in the series. I suspect the location history & atmosphere drive that popularity. It certainly isn't for those hunting PB's, as this is a monster of a course. Basically it's just all hills.



Dodgy calves and mental blocks have seen me avoid hills like the plague in the past, but having watched ATC club mates' progress so much after incorporating them into their own training and race calendars I decided to tackle the elevation demon (a little) this year.

With the weather Gods shining on us, we lined up along the Harbour for a bright and sunny mid-morning start. After leaving the water's edge the route meanders through the town for a nice flat section for all of 2km, after that the pain starts. The elevation chart for this bad boy doesn't quite do it justice so I'll break it down a bit:

Heading out the ridiculously named Relief road (there is no relief in this first cheeky climb) and off out Main St. around Rathnew to complete the 1st 5km. Immediately followed by a 47m elevation climb to 6.3km – This is a b@stard of a calf burner and about the time I started regretting skimping on the prerace warm up. By the time you reach the much more aptly named Rockey road (Balboa would struggle to run up this beast) at the 7.6km mark you've stair-mastered your way to 76m in elevation, and as you pass the 10km marker at Tubberville (in complete silence cause you've not got a breath to spare for chit chat) you've reached the lofty elevation height of 102m. That's 80m of climbing over 5k. I dunno if it was because of the elevation but it started to seem warmer on the route from this point too!

From here the course tips downward for a while. You'd think the body would get a bit



of rest bite but the fact that the elevation plummets 40m over the next 1.5km is an absolute catastrophe quadastrophe!!!! Especially for those among us who are familiar with the art of arthroscopy. Having little to no knee cartilage left means you feel the thumping downhills in your back teeth. Seriously, why do we do this to ourselves!!!

The course continues on a softer gradient to about the 14k marker, approaching Three-Mile-Water at its most southerly point. From there you are on your way back towards Wicklow Town. To get there though you have to go, yes you guessed it, uphill again. From about the 16k marker at Blainroe, you starting climbing for 3k, up about 30m in that distance. On tired legs that is zombie shuffle material. Thankfully from there it's a nice roll home, through Dunbur and back into Wicklow Town. You actually have to put the brakes on in the last km just to make sure you don't finish with a tuck n' roll but it's a cracking downhill sprint to the sharp right turn in to the Gaol yard finish line.

At the finish line you are met with the obligatory bottle of water & banana before collecting the prestigious 1/3 puzzle medal and a lovely complimentary cup of veggie soup.

I must also mention the hospitality, support and encouragement overall from event marshals & locals. There are quite a few open road crossings along the way but no one seemed too fussed, and there were waves & thumbs up a plenty from waiting car passengers. I think they were thumbs anyway?

Lots of encouragement throughout the course in fact. The kids manning nicely spaced out water stations seemed to be making it a goal to be prepped and ready with the bottles of water for every runner. It's the little things like well managed aid stations & properly stocked water bottles with flip top lids that mean so much to tired runners trying to maintain a steady cadence.

In summary, this course is a doozy of a physical and mental test. The total elevation for the half marathon course is 204m. To put that in perspective the total elevation for the Dublin City Full Marathon is approx. 180m. The majority of the climbing is done in the 1st half of, so the course is technically a "negative split time" course. It also means the 10k participants have to squeeze in 150m of elevation on their route – OMG!!!!

For all the complaining and suffering throughout this course, I absolutely loved it & will be back next year to cuss my way through it again!!! Next in the series is Wexford, flatter and kinder on the joints I hear.

The Final word must go to me auld fella. The running juggernaut that is Baco Mac, not content with his weekly parkrun 5k PB's has now belted out his 1st ever 10k race – and is signed up for the series. Some course to do it at lad. #proudclan #GoATC #rollon2018

