



Let's
get out of
here!



The crocodiles
should look for another
appetizer!





Anton Reiter & John Wallace (eds.)

Country Marathon Collecting

Passion – Determination – Obsession

Country Marathon Club, Florida, USA

Imprint

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Prologue

by Anton Reiter

In February 2020, I proposed to our president John Wallace to create a community book of the Country Marathon Club and invited him to help me. John agreed and sent my basic concept to all members. The feedback was positive; about 40 colleagues agreed to write their own contribution and submit it within the deadline of about ten weeks later. We wanted stories about a special marathon, for example in the form of a short report or an account of one's own development towards becoming a marathon runner and country collector.

John and I decided to complement each other organizationally and take over the supervision of the authors together. There is essential work to be done before an article or report reaches an editable level. One has to pay attention to the quality of the photos inserted in the texts - their printable resolution is an often underestimated criterion, orthographical oversights and sometimes linguistic ambiguities have to be corrected in order not to overwhelm the reader.

I do not want to go into detail here about how a community book is created, that would take too long. But I have been asked: Why did I want to create such a book?

I only became a member of the Country Marathon Club in 2016. I had already met the admission criteria of 30 countries for several years. On my marathon trips to other countries I became aware of certain runners who I had already seen at other events and had often spoken to briefly. So for years I had been moving within the framework of a community of convictions, each of us had the same goal: to run a marathon in a country that you could check-off for your own counting purposes afterwards. I was meeting colleagues who had the same consistency, power, passion and obsession as I did. In the last few years we seemed to meet more often, and before the marathons we would take a group photo, which the club's president, John, would put on our homepage. We would sometimes also go on excursions together at the venue or hang out together for a few days after the marathon.

I soon realized that I was not the only one who has to take privations, collect thousands of air miles on the long journeys, and have to cope with climatic contrasts. Like other members, I don't spare costs for my favourite hobby, namely travelling to foreign, and far away, countries and running a marathon there as well as see the sights.

In the conversations with club members it became clear that many of them have achieved almost unbelievable sporting successes: they have run marathons on all continents, have completed ultra runs over thousands of kilometers transnationally, have climbed the highest mountains, and are enthusiastic triathletes, deep-sea divers and parachutists, among other adventurous pastimes.

After my hundredth marathon in Rome 2012, I increased my rate of running marathons, and just two years later in Casablanca I completed my 200th marathon. My current count is just over 400 marathons. I have asked myself how one should evaluate collecting marathons when a few runners regularly organize their own races with some faithful colleagues and thus easily expand their statistics, while others, quite consciously, or because such opportunities are not offered in their country, have to wait for official running events (in some places, there are very few marathons). This is a relative matter, not to say a delicate one. In the end, however, we country collectors all strive to go far away, and are happy to be there and tell the story afterwards.

Many of the articles you will read in this collection have really impressed me. Concentrated strength, passion, energy, will, joy, pride and also melancholy, can be recognized linguistically – maybe not so directly – but as they say, between the lines. Hats off! It's been fun to cooperate with our colleagues as we put this book together, and we call them our running friends. I do not say it out loud, but now: I am proud and thankful that I am able to co-create and co-edit this book together with John.

by John Wallace

When Anton approached me about co-writing a book on the Country Marathon Club, I was excited to participate. It provides an opportunity to educate runners and the broader public about the goal and purpose of the club and the significant impact it has had on the development and growth of a new sport - 'Country Marathon Running'. When I founded the club in 2007 with 10 initial 'pioneer' members, I never believed the club would ever surpass 25 members. Today we have 137 members from 6 continents and 26 countries. This book has contributions from 47 members from 6 continents and 20 countries who share the same common goal – a passion to run and travel! As well, the club provides an opportunity for members to enjoy camaraderie and experiences with fellow members. Each author shares a memorable marathon or experience or explains how their hobby became a passion and obsession in their life.

We hope you enjoy the book!



Dear friends!

by Paco BORAO

At a time when the coronavirus pandemic has left the whole world in a state of rigidity, when the global economy is facing a huge recession, when companies are on the way to bankruptcy, when many people have lost their jobs, and the whole of human beings' existence is threatened, we are all looking for ways to exit this crisis. 2020 was so promising. One of the best Olympic Games was scheduled for this coming summer, hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic runners all over the world had already registered at some venue, organizers had put all their efforts into organizing their running events, tour operators had made appropriate arrangements, and we at AIMS had been promoting the worldwide marathon organizations calendar as we keep doing every year. In summary, the 2020 running year should have been a new highlight in the long history of AIMS as a link between marathon organizers and the running community.

All this seems so far away now. And it was just beginning in March. Now, the sports world is facing an unexpected shock; a strong, immediate, full stop to events. Marathons will most probably not be allowed to come back on the streets until late autumn, and maybe even postponed to 2021.

Referring to the current crisis, this book is not only of documentary importance but should also be seen as an incentive for the future of the hobby running sport. As soon as things get back on track and life returns to normal, we should hopefully all be able to travel again and meet up again in far-off countries for a marathon run.

I congratulate and thank the two editors and the more than 40 authors of this successful book, which is an enrichment for the interested running community with its well-balanced mixture of descriptive, photo-enhanced, worldwide experience reports of important marathon events of the past and present as well as personal views and statements.

We all wish with all our hearts that we will be able to return to our accustomed running life in the foreseeable future with renewed vigor and anticipation.

Valencia, 22 April 2020



Paco BORAQ, AIMS-President



Malcolm at one of his favourite runs with son's Callum and Jack

Experiences of the Long Distance Runners – Passionate Addiction of Lives Well Lived

by Malcolm Anderson

About ten years ago I completed *The Messengers* – my book about runners who had completed 100 marathons. That book had evolved out of another book ‘*A Marathon Odyssey*’ on my own distance running experiences. One of those experiences was talking to a runner on a train platform in Athens on a chilly evening as we both waited for the train to take us back downtown from the airport hangar where the Expo for the marathon was located.

This would be a special marathon, he said; it would be his 200th. I was stunned. At that point I had no idea people were able to run that many, let alone actually did run them. We talked for about forty minutes, although I think it was Dave who talked most of that time as my worldview of running was changing before me.

‘Has anyone written about you people’ I asked, and to the best of his knowledge he said no. By chance, I met up again with Dave and his friends at the end of the Athens Marathon and we exchanged email addresses. He got me in touch with others – the various 100 Marathon clubs around the world – and soon I was talking to runners from around the world about why they ran so many marathons, what effects it had on their own lives, what stories could they share and so on.

Before I began interviewing and researching there had been initial concerns expressed that maybe I would be writing that these 100 marathoners were crazy. Crazy! Was I simply going to take a quick look and write something sensationalist, and inaccurate, just to sell a book? Whatever I said must have eased the minds because I was always given green lights to proceed with the book and the interviews.

I interviewed these runners in-person and over the telephone. I went to 100 Marathon club meetings, talked to the runners during actual marathons and ultras, stayed with club members in their homes, and was sent photos, newspaper articles, video clips and more names of people I should talk to or must talk to. One runner, someone who never talked to the media and who lived a quiet nomadic running-based life, actually called me out of the blue one day.

In short, I was met with open arms. The runners often shared their innermost stories and feelings. In fact, I left a lot out of *The Messengers* book because some things are, well, simply too personal.

It was a very privileged time for me.

I interviewed runners of all ages from around the world – numerous European countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland, United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, for example. Some runners completed most their 100 marathons locally, or within their own country. At the other end of the spectrum others had run in dozens of countries. Think of anywhere on the planet and someone had run a marathon there. Even underground, or under a river. At the time of writing *The Messengers* no-one had run a marathon in 100 different countries, but that has now been achieved. Some runners were speed demons, others much slower, some walked, and others were blind, or completed their marathons in a wheelchair. Incredible.

What I found is that these runners shared several common themes, regardless of age, nationality, gender, speed, number of marathons – some runners had totalled hundreds of marathons; and a few, over a thousand. And these themes, to me, were instructive – not just for other runners, but for non-runners as well, as they firmly cement the positive messages for living a good life that distance running – and lots of it – provides.

Briefly, the common themes consistently told to me are as follows:

- Rewards for the long distance runner include greater self-respect, greater respect for others, greater self-esteem, humility, and greater levels of confidence.
- Long distance running creates deep and enduring social networks which themselves are vital elements for happiness and well-being.
- Physical activity contributes to building happiness and our emotional, spiritual and mental well-being.
- Being happy is addictive.
- Running long distances creates a level of contentment, a sense of the unworried.
- It is possible to overcome adversity. Never give up.
- Believe in yourself. Have courage. It is possible to transform your life.
- The achievement of goals contributes to a can-do attitude that embraces life and its infinite possibilities.
- Inspire and be inspired. Enjoy what you do.

When it came to publishing time, it was suggested that I should change the title of the book because *The Messengers* title wouldn't sell as well as other possible titles would. I choose not to do that because I truly felt, and still do, that the 100 marathoners are indeed messengers. I also wrote the book not to be sensational with my findings but to accurately portray the lives of the 100 marathoners.

I had dozens of pre-orders for the book from marathoners, some of whom I had interviewed, and the early sales were very nervous times for me because I didn't know what the actual runners would say about a book written by someone who had popped into their lives for a brief moment.

I'm thrilled to say that they thought I had captured the essence of what running 100 marathons was all about. I have heard stories from some of the runners I interviewed that upon learning more about the others in the book they decided to meet one another. I finally met one prolific messenger who I had talked to and emailed with, but had never met, by chance in the 2013 Boston Marathon; we talked as we ran together for a bit, and then again much later as we stood in shock at Mile 25 upon hearing the horrific news. I have also kept in touch with many of the messengers, and just a few days ago I talked with one of them who I hadn't spoken to in years and it was like we had been chatting the previous week. Wonderful. It still amazes me that so-called ordinary people can do extraordinary things. Lessons for us all.

The many, many messengers' stories were wide and varied, sad, funny, inspirational and transformative. Always interesting and engaging. And when you travel and run marathons, it's hard Not to have amazing experiences.

So, the views expressed in this book's collection of articles is of much interest to me because in some respects they put my observations from *The Messengers* to the test. Regardless, there are complementary stories and experiences – all of which will be of interest to runners and non-runners alike.

Ultimately, I believe, the simple action of putting one foot ahead of the other over long distances is a physical enabler to live a happy and full life – a life well lived. The experiences of the runners shared in this book will reflect just that.



The Country Club

by John Wallace

I am pleased and honored that a good friend and fellow member has decided to write a book about the Country Marathon Club and the exploits and accomplishments of some of its members.

What is the Country Marathon Club – normally called the ‘Country Club’?

A good question!

Following is the story of how it came to be.

While I was pursuing my first major ‘country’ goal of completing a marathon in every country in Europe, I started to recognize the same runners at many races around Europe. Most of us became friends, and would arrange to meet at races around Europe and the world. We often shared rooms and expenses, and always shared new adventures. I started to form an idea about founding a club for crazy people like us?

During those early years, when we enjoyed an informal club relationship, we would have lively discussions about two important questions:

- What defines a marathon?
- What is a country?

What defined a marathon had been established by many running clubs around the world, but the definition was/is not consistent. The 2nd question had not really been addressed, because most running clubs were not interested in countries. We were pioneers of a new

Sport – Country Marathon Running! And I found that whenever my friends and I discussed the subject, the discussions were lively – then became heated and often ended in arguments! I concluded the reason was because each person had an opinion based on a) emotion b) politics and c) religion. No wonder it was impossible to reach a consensus.

As the years, and Maddog's accomplishments progressed, rather than continue to 'argue' with other runners and clubs about these questions, I decided it was time to form a club in February 2007 that I appropriately named the 'Country Club', for runners who share a passion for travel, and to run marathons in countries around the world. Our Club would establish rules and guidelines appropriate to our club and goals and the Sport of Country Marathon Running! Rules and guidelines were established, but not written down in the early years. Finally, in Feb 2014, we developed a website, www.countrymarathonclub.com where we published our rules, and a formal list of countries approved by the club. How did we create this list? Let me explain how we answer the question:

Q: What defines a 'country'?

A: Some Running Clubs and Travel Clubs use the United Nations List as their list of countries – period! The UN List is a 'political list' of countries. The Country Club is a Sports/Running Club, and thus, figures that a political list such as the UN List is a good starting point to define a country, but sports must also be considered.

Other clubs use a list of countries that have been assigned an ISO code. However such a list typically identifies every speck of land on the planet with an ISO code as a country irrespective of whether it is considered to be part of another country?

The Country Club looks at member lists of major International Sports Federations such as FIFA, IOC, IAAF, Commonwealth Games, etc., and these lists have more importance than the UN List or an ISO code in determining a country for the purpose of a sports club or sports event.

For example, England, Scotland, Wales, are not recognized as countries by the political UN. However they are members of FIFA and can win the World Cup - one of the biggest sporting events in the world!

Similarly Guam (a US territory) is not recognized as a country by the UN political list but is a member of the IOC and can win Olympic gold medals against most of the countries on the UN political list?

Puerto Rico & the USVI (US territories) are members of the IAAF and IOC, and compete against the USA and many members of the UN political list in international sports events sponsored by the IAAF and IOC?