

06.07.13 MONTAFON ARLBERG MARATHON 42.195km / 1300m

Having decided on some walking in St. Anton, Austria for our holidays this year I decided to see if any events were on in the area, and discovered a trail marathon starting at Silbertal in the Montafon valley and finishing in St. Anton (right outside our hotel as it turns out).

Throw in approx. 4000 ft of ascent and I thought this would be worth missing Northumberland's greatest race "The Chevy" for one year.

We arrived in St. Anton on Tuesday 2nd July giving me a few days to acclimatise and enjoy some high level walking with Wendy. The weather was ideal, dry, clear and not too hot with the odd late afternoon/early evening thundery downpour, as is often the case in mountainous regions, but mainly after we had done our day's walking. The forecast for Saturday though was for it to be a fair bit hotter – 25/26deg in the valleys and about 15 deg at 2000m.

We had a more relaxing day on the Friday taking a cable car up to about 2500m, enjoying the surroundings and carbo loading on apple strudel which the Austrian's seem to have perfected.



It's so important to get your preparation right before these events.

Registration was in the local sports complex on the Friday evening where I was given instructions for the Saturday and collected my goody bag. It turns out there are 5 events on – a marathon, a march, a speed hike, a 20km run and a childrens run.

Early to bed as I had to catch the local train at 6am for the journey to the start. At the station I got chatting to a German guy Peter who spoke decent English and who proved to be great company for the next 3 hours before the run started. We seemed to have lots in common, a love of the mountains and running, the same age and the banter just seemed to flow.

About an hour on the first train we changed to another train for about 15 mins and then to a bus for a further 15mins or so before arriving in Silbertal with a good hour to spare before the start of the run.

Factor 50 now on and ready for the start. Fair few announcements before the off (us British are pretty lazy when it comes to languages, so oblivious to what is being said).

A small loop of the town to begin with before a long, long continuous ascent through the trees on forest road for about 18km, with about 75% being runnable albeit slowly. There are regular food and water stations which are greatly appreciated in the heat and staying hydrated is not a problem. Eventually after 2hrs 10m we reach the Obere FreschAlpe at 1890m and the course begins to level out a bit before reaching the highest point, the mountain path to the silver valley's Winterjochle at 1945m said to be the most beautiful passing of the state boundary of Vorarlberg into Tyrol.

This path proves to be the highlight of the race in stunning surroundings and I pass a few runners and make time up on this rougher section. After about 5km the descent starts on forest road and gravity carries me on at a reasonable pace passing the Konstanzer hut at 1688m through the Verwall Valley towards St. Anton am Arlberg at 1304m.



Who would not want to run in places like this.

We then hit a 10km tarmac section which levels out a bit and this proves to be the toughest part of the race, but I dig in and try to hang on to a couple of runners. We near St. Anton and start descending more steeply and I ease ahead only to be passed by another runner who is finishing really strongly.

On reaching St. Anton the route turns to go around the outskirts of the town (thankfully I reccied this part yesterday as one or two runners are unsure of the route). 5km to go and trying to maintain position which I do to the finish banner and am welcomed home by Wendy who manages to get a couple of photo's. Quite a relief to finish and am pleasantly surprised to have finished in 4h12m30s 33rd out of 212 and 6th V50. Not bad for my first ever marathon.

Soft drinks, fresh fruit and a nice cold beer at the finish all taste wonderful and make it a great end to the run and a memorable part of the holiday.



Job done
now for a
beer.

Austria is a beautiful country, very clean, fantastic mountains, lovely food and hotels, friendly people and reasonably priced and I can highly recommend it.

Paul Appleby.