

Little Rock Marathon

Big medals and big satisfaction for serious runners.

Marathoners go to Little Rock because they have heard tales of the huge finisher's medal, but they return to the Little Rock Marathon because of the welcome they receive. Helpful volunteers work tirelessly to make visitors feel welcome from the expo to the finish line. The police officers who patrol the entire course are friendly and encourage the runners. The most important thing the race committee would like the runners to take from the Little Rock Marathon is *fun*.

Little Rock, Arkansas, has had a rich history. Quapaw Indians were primarily on the south side

of the river, and Osage were mainly on the north side in the wilderness that was to become Little Rock. It was found by Europeans in the 1500s, and several expeditions visited the area over the next 200 years. Arkansas was part of the Louisiana Purchase from France to the United States, and the area slowly grew. Arkansas became a state in 1836, with Little Rock as the capital. It seceded from the Union during the Civil War, and Little Rock was later taken over by Union forces. During the turbulent civil rights era, Little Rock was in the spotlight



© Brightroom/Action Sports International, Inc.

The Basics

NAME: Little Rock Marathon

ADDRESS: 500 W Markham, Room 108, Little Rock, AR 72201

PHONE: 501/371-4770

WEBSITE: www.littlerockmarathon.com

E-MAIL: ghampton@littlerock.org

RACE DIRECTORS: Geneva Hampton/Gina Marchese Pharis

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2003

FUTURE RACE DATES: March 4, 2012. The city has committed to holding the marathon on the first weekend in March for an indefinite time.

COURSE TYPE: Loop course with some out-and-back sections, some hills, and some flat sections

TYPICAL WEATHER: Temperatures are typically from the 40s to the 70s and dry. The coldest temperature was 28 degrees, and the highest temperature was 75 degrees.

COURSE ELEVATION: Seventy-three feet above sea level at the finish, and 116 feet above sea level at the highest point

START TIME: 6:00 A.M. early start; 7:55 A.M. start for wheelchairs and hand cycles, 8:00 A.M. general start

TIME LIMIT: Eight hours, with an early start for those who need more than six hours

TIMING: The Sportag (IPICO timing system)

COURSE RECORDS: Augustus Mbusya, 2:20:46 (2009), Albuquerque, NM; Leah Thorvilson, 2:44:23 (2009), Little Rock, Arkansas

ASSOCIATED EVENTS: Marathon, half-marathon, 10K, 5K, Little Rockers Kids Marathon

PRIZE MONEY: Total prize purse is \$19,850

MARATHON AWARDS:

Overall awards: special overall awards revealed on race weekend. Plus top three in the hand cycle and physically challenged athlete divisions and an award to the fastest male and female marathoner over 70

Age-group awards: top three finishers (both male and female) in 14 age groups, starting with 16-19 and going up to 80 & over

MARATHON ENTRY FEE: 7/1/11 to 11/1/11: \$85; 11/2/11 to 12/31/11: \$90; 1/1/12 to 2/24/12: \$100; at the expo: \$110

COURSE MARKINGS: Marked every mile

MARATHON FINISHERS IN 2011: 1,902

MALE/FEMALE RATIO OF FINISHERS: 59 percent male/41 percent female

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS: 3,200-3,500 volunteers for aid stations and pre- and postrace activities.

AID STATIONS: Eighteen course aid stations (one approximately every two miles to mile 19 and then one every mile from miles 20 to 25. Water, Gatorade, and porta-potties at each aid station. Some aid stations will choose their own themes, and many will follow the 10th-anniversary theme of the race.

MEDICAL AID: Medical aid stations are located at miles 6.2, 13.1, 20.9, and 23.5, and at the finish line. MEMS Paramedic Bike Patrol will be all along the course.

ON-COURSE ENTERTAINMENT: There are from 18 to 23 bands, DJs, and cheer groups along the course.

PACE TEAMS: Pace teams are set up for finish times from 3:10 to eight hours.

EXPO: Friday from noon to 7:00 P.M. and Saturday from 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. at the Statehouse Convention Center at Main and Markham Streets

PASTA PARTY: From 5:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M. at the Peabody Grand Ballroom for \$20 per person

PERKS PAVILION: For runners who pay an additional \$25, the perks pavilion is set up at a premium location at the start/finish area. It provides additional restrooms, food, beverages, and a photo.

LODGING AND TOURIST INFO: The host hotel is the Peabody Little Rock, 3 Statehouse Plaza, Little Rock, AR 72201. 800/914-3202. www.peabodylittlerock.com

GETTING THERE: Little Rock National Airport (LIT) is served by seven major airlines.

because of the *Brown Versus Board of Education* ruling and because of the nine black students who entered Central High School after the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional.

Marathon history

In 2002, Geneva Hampton was asked to organize a marathon for Little Rock Parks & Recreation, which receives no money from the city and needed to raise funds for the parks. She agreed to organize the event if Gina Marchese would help her out. The two had worked together previously, and Geneva knew that the event would be successful if they worked together once again. It took them only nine months to plan the first Little Rock Marathon. There were 842 finishers in the inaugural 2003 race.

One of the distinctions of the Little Rock Marathon is the finisher's medal. The medal has grown in size and weight each year. The race directors make sure that each medal has the signature "kiss" and a globe included in the design. Starting in 2005, the reputation of a big finisher's medal translated into the theme of "Size Matters." As Geneva and Gina, the self-proclaimed "chicks in charge" (CICs), travel around the country to promote their marathon, they have cleverly advertised with outrageous outfits and thematic backdrops. In 2006, the theme was "Big 'N Bodacious" and was loosely based on the movie *Animal House* and Marilyn Monroe. A choice of a pink or blue finisher's medal showed off their theme of "Runapalooza" in 2007. For the sixth year of the marathon, "Six in the City" was the theme. The CICs and friends wore clown outfits when they promoted 2009's theme of "It's Big—The Greatest Medal on Earth." "It's a Natural" was the theme for 2010, and the CICs dressed as a Spartan and a gladiator for the "Medal of Mythic Proportions" in 2011. The medal was of the epic proportions of 7 1/2 by 5 3/4 inches, including the signature globe that spins and the little "kiss," all held up by Atlas. They will celebrate the Little Rock Marathon's 10th anniversary in 2012 with a "Silver Glam" theme and travel the country with mirrored disco balls. Runners can't wait to see what the CICs will come up with next. Marathoners can be sure that they will be welcomed with open arms to the friendly city of Little Rock, Arkansas.

The course

Running through the capital city of Little Rock takes marathoners through historic places, parks, beautiful neighborhoods, and some hills. The race starts on President Clinton Avenue in front of Riverfront Park. It runs past the William J. Clinton Library within the first mile. The course then follows East Third Street for about a dozen blocks and crosses the Arkansas River to run a three-mile loop around North Little Rock. The climb on both sides of the US 70 bridge is quite

must see/must avoid

MUST SEE

The Clinton Presidential Library on the banks of the Arkansas River in downtown Little Rock is a 30-acre city park that replaced old industrial warehouses and vacant space. There is an authentic replica of the White House Oval Office and Cabinet Room. www.clintonpresidentialcenter.org

The Arkansas Queen sails along the banks of the Arkansas River in North Little Rock. It offers sightseeing and lunch and dinner cruises. www.arkansasqueen.com

The Arkansas Heritage Trails are several historic trails that pass through Little Rock, including the Butterfield Trail (overland mail route), Civil War trails, the Southwest Trail, and the Trail of Tears. www.arkansasheritage trails.com

Places to eat. There are several can't-miss spots to eat in Little Rock, and one that locals recommend is Dizzy's Gypsy Bistro. It has a collection of foods including pasta, sandwiches, burgers, salads, and dinners that are made from scratch. www.dizzysgypsybistro.net/ Vino's Brewpub boasts of being Little Rock's original brewpub. It is known for its pizza, calzones, salads, sandwiches, and brews.

Hot Springs is about an hour west of Little Rock. There are resorts, bed & breakfasts, cabins, condos, houseboats, and camping areas for visitors to enjoy. The historic area boasts thermal springs of 143 degrees. The native tribes could bathe in peace in the revered and neutral Ouachita mountain valley. In 1832, the natural hot springs were set aside by Congress as a federal reservation. This made Hot Springs National Park the first federally protected area in the national park system.

MUST AVOID

Nothing. The event is top notch, and the race committee thinks of everything. The course is hilly, but if runners prepare, it is not a problem. The people in Arkansas are friendly and helpful.

an incline, but it's a short distance. Runners double back along Third Street and turn to run along the Interstate 30 frontage road. Just before the seven-mile mark, the course goes past MacArthur Park and the MacArthur Military Museum. The museum is in the Tower Building of the Little Rock Arsenal, which was the birth-

place of General Douglas MacArthur. The course climbs up and down small hills as it crosses over Interstate 630, the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway, three times from miles seven to nine and a half. The Governor's Mansion is just before mile 10. Between miles 11 and 12, the course passes in front of the historic Little Rock Central High School campus and Central High Museum. Many people recognize the sites from 1957, when nine black students entered Central High School under





the protection of the 101st Airborne Division after the Arkansas governor called out the National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school. The course then crosses back over the Wilbur D. Mills Freeway so that marathoners can run past the Arkansas state capitol building around the halfway mark.

Heading west and uphill into the beautiful Hillcrest neighborhood is one of the most beautiful and steepest parts of the race. This area was previously called Pulaski Heights and was the first suburb of Little Rock. The farthest-western point of the race is between miles 16 and 17 and also climbs to the highest point of the race. Runners finally go down a steep hill from mile 17 to 18, and much of the course is flat after mile 18. From miles 18 to 23.5, the runners travel out and back along Riverfront and Brookview Drives and Rebsamen Park Road through Murray Park. The last few miles are along the Arkansas River with a few hills and on to the finish in Riverfront Park behind the River Market. At mile 26.1, L’Oreal sponsors a “lipstick aid station.” Gals can “glam up” for their finish with a free tube of lipstick. When runners cross the finish line, they are greeted with cheers and a humongous medal.

Changes for 2012

Because 2012 is the 10th annual Little Rock Marathon, the organizers will replace the relay with a 10K. The course will remain the same. They will have the posttrace party at the convention center and plan to have even more Jell-O shots for finishers.

Race weekend

Race weekend starts with the two-day Health and Fitness Expo and packet pickup at the Statehouse Convention Center in downtown Little Rock. The expo is not huge, but it has many running and health-related exhibits, displays, and products.

On Saturday evening at the Peabody Grand Ballroom, there is a pasta party at a cost of \$20 per person. There is entertainment and plenty of food.

For an additional \$25 per person, participants, family, and friends may purchase a “Perks Membership.” Many runners find the perks helpful for prerace gear check, prerace massage, prerace snacks, and ample toilet facilities. After the race, there is a variety of food and beverages, complimentary photos, and massages.

On Sunday, a 6:00 A.M. start is available for marathoners who feel they will need more than six hours to complete the race. The start for wheelchair, hand-cycle, and physically challenged athletes is at 7:55 A.M., and the general start is at 8:00 A.M. Traffic is controlled for eight hours, beginning with the early start. Later finishers will be supported but may be moved to the sidewalk. All finishers will receive a medal.

There is a postrace party on Sunday evening at the Statehouse Convention Center at Main and Markham. It is free to participants but costs \$20 for all others.

runner's highs/runner's lows

HIGHS

The medal is one of the largest that a runner can receive. It is always distinctive and likely to be coveted by friends who didn't participate.

The volunteers, churches, and community of Little Rock are helpful, friendly, and enthusiastic, with lots of southern hospitality.

LOWS

The long out-and-back through Murray Park can be very tedious. The plus is seeing your friends behind you, and the con is seeing your friends in front of you. The park is very flat, but legs can be worn out from the hills prior to this section.

The pasta party and perks/VIP pavilion are pricey compared with similar races and fill up quickly. Some finishers are disappointed with the finish line food if they did not purchase the perks pavilion membership.



In summing up, it is best to listen to the comments of runners who were there:

Tyson Poskochil from Lincoln, Nebraska, commented on the course and the spectators: “Course is closely and carefully monitored the entire time, and the spectators, many of whom move about the course as you progress, are very supportive and motivational.”

One California runner mentioned the hills but liked the course: “Loved the course. It is hilly, but takes you through many neighborhoods. This was my 24th marathon, and one of the most challenging. The spectators were wonderful.”

Alan Birdsell from Hesston, Kansas, put it simply: “Hard to find anything negative about the race.”

And coming from a cycling background, Steve Campisi from Texas summed it up this way: “This was my first marathon and I was overwhelmed with the extent to which every detail was managed. I’ve been in competitive cycling for 11 years and I have never been to an event this well organized.”

the bottom line

We have weighed various aspects of a marathon within a 1,000-point scoring grid. Besides the author of the article, two dozen runners at the race were randomly chosen to score the race for us (LRM = Little Rock Marathon). The results follow:

1. HISTORY/TRADITION

Evaluate the race’s sense of history and tradition.

Possible points: 30 LRM score: 29

2. ENTRY FORM

Is the race entry form clear, concise, attractive, complete, and easy to fill out?

Possible points: 20 LRM score: 20

3. ENTRY COST

For most races, the entry fee covers between 30 and 50 percent of the cost of putting on the event. Rate the value of your dollar relative to this race.

Possible points: 30 LRM score: 30

4. LOCALE/SCENICS

Is the race held in an area that is easy to get to and scenic and that offers adequate food and housing services and nonrace activities for family and friends?

Possible points: 50 LRM score: 44

5. REGISTRATION/PACKET PICKUP

Is registration well organized and efficient? Does it bog down unnecessarily?

Possible points: 20 LRM score: 20

6. PRERACE ACTIVITIES

Evaluate activities, such as pasta feeds, parties, and so on, during the days before the race.

Possible points: 50 LRM score: 42

ad

7. EXPO

Does the expo offer a fair number and variety of booths relative to the race's size? Are there quality exhibitors and good guest speakers?

Possible points: 50 LRM score: 43

8. COURSE

Take into consideration the following: degree of difficulty, certified, sanctioned, quality of road or trail surface, adequate mileage and directional markers, aid stations, medical coverage, race communications, accessibility to course for friends and family, typical weather, and so on.

Possible points: 400 LRM score: 349

9. RACE AMENITIES

This category includes race T-shirt, finisher's medal, finisher's certificate, adequate and efficient finish area, ease of sweatbag retrieval, showers, postrace refreshments, awards ceremony, raffles, results postcard, results book, and so on.

Possible points: 250 LRM score: 246

10. VOLUNTEERS

Are the volunteers experienced and adequate in number?

Possible points: 100 LRM score: 100

TOTAL SCORE FOR LITTLE ROCK MARATHON

923 points out of 1,000 possible points

January/February 2012 *M&B* Sneak Peek

Here are just some of the stories we're working on for our next issue:

- Rich Engelhart examines the wonderful life of 1957 Boston Marathon winner John J. Kelley.
- Jacqueline Hansen puts together the history of women in marathoning.
- Roy Stevenson takes runners a step further into advanced marathoning.
- Kevin Polin reviews the marathons of North Carolina.
- Portland Marathon's Les Smith takes a look back at 40 years of marathon running.
- *M&B* goes to visit the Scheels Fargo Marathon—and meets a famed wood chipper.