Bahamas Marathon – January 2011
By David Holman

On January 16, 2011, I ran Marathon Bahamas in Nassau. Nassau is mostly on New Providence Island, but also includes nearby Paradise Island, which is connected by bridges. The marathon course consisted of a six mile loop through downtown Nassau and Paradise Island, followed by a long out and back section going past Cable Beach and along the shoreline to the west end of New Providence Island.

I stayed at the British Colonial Hilton, which is very close to the start and finish. It's also close to the cruise ship terminal, so there were always a few cruise ships nearby.

I could have taken a cab to and from the airport, but I decided to rent a car, so I wouldn't be constrained to the downtown area. In The Bahamas, people drive on the left side of the road, which is something I had never done before. I had also read that drivers are aggressive, roads are poorly maintained and scooters often drive between lanes and weave around cars. This sounded intimidating, but I decided to embrace it as an exciting new foreign experience.

When I got into my rental car, I was surprised to see it was an American-style car (with the steering wheel on the left). Usually if you drive on the left side of the road, you have a British style car (with the steering wheel on the right). It was easy to get used to driving on the left, but the first time I reached a roundabout, I had to make a conscious effort to drive clockwise. The drivers didn't seem unusually aggressive. The roads had a few potholes, but weren't bad. As for the scooters, there were only a few, and I was looking for them, so I wasn't surprised when they drove between lanes.

The weather was about as cool as it gets in The Bahamas. Lows were in the mid 60s and highs were in the mid 70s. It wasn't really warm enough to go swimming, but it was somewhat hot for running a marathon.

The race started shortly before sunrise, so there was enough light to see. This made it easy for me to locate old friends and meet a few new ones before the race.

I didn't get enough sleep the night before the race. I also had to get up early the previous day, so I felt tired as I started running. Since I ran all-out in marathons on the previous two weekends, I didn't know if I would be able to run very fast. My goal was 3:25. That's somewhat fast, but not as ambitious as my previous two races.

In the first mile, we passed a beach, and I could see the sunrise. After a mile and a half, we crossed a bridge leading to Paradise Island. It was a high arching bridge, so it was a fairly tough hill. We weren't on Paradise Island very long before we crossed another high bridge back to New Providence Island. All this up and down made it difficult to gauge my pace.

My pace in the early miles felt faster than a training run, but not as fast as my last two races. I didn't see the first three mile markers, so I didn't really know my pace until I saw the four mile mark. I was on about the right pace for 3:25, but it felt like it was taking more effort than it should. During the early miles, I saw a local runner who had a small Bahamian flag attached to the back of his shorts. I ran alongside him for awhile, but had to leave him behind when I noticed we were slowing down.

After the first six miles, we left downtown and started a long out-and-back along a road that follows the shoreline on the north side of the island. We passed a number of beach areas, and we were treated to views of waves breaking on the beaches. We also had views of some nearby small islands.

At the halfway mark, I was on pace for a time in the low 3:20s, but it seemed to take more effort with each mile. As we neared the turnaround point, I was counting the runners who were on the way back. When I reached the turn, I was in seventh place. This fired me up, because I was wearing bib number seven. I was nice to know that I was living up to my low bib number.

In the next few miles I started catching up to a few of the runners ahead of me. I picked up my effort and gradually passed three of them to move into fourth place. With about four miles to go, I started to struggle. I heard a volunteer say, "I think he's second." I was sure he was wrong, because I had counted three more runners that I never passed. I was starting to gain on one more runner, but I was too tired to reel him in. I was tempted to try and catch him, but it was difficult just maintaining my own effort.

When I saw mile 26, I knew it was too late to catch the runner in front of me, but I still tried to finish strong. He ended up beating me my 14 seconds. After I finished, I discover the runner who just beat me was the first place male. One of the runners who appeared to be leading had been disqualified because he turned around in the wrong place and didn't run the full distance. The other runner ahead of us was the first place female, a woman from Germany who beat all the men by a wide margin. I was momentarily disappointed that I had lost the men's race by 14 seconds, and I wondered if I could have closed the gap if I had realized we were racing for first place. I quickly got over my disappointment when I discovered that I was the first male runner over 40, making me the winner of the Masters division. My time was 3:23:33. It wasn't as fast as my previous two races, but it was a good time for tropical conditions.

After getting some food and beverage, I picked up my drop bag. Then I waited for the award ceremony. While I was waiting, I was introduced to a member of the Parliament. I regretted not having a camera with me. At the awards ceremony, I received a trophy. Then I climbed into the bleachers to watch some of the other runners finish. While I was waiting, I saw the local runner with the Bahamian flag cross the finish line. A few minutes later, my friend Laura finished. Before returning to the hotel, I bought a "slice" of pizza. (It was about one third of a pizza.)

I spent part of the afternoon driving around the island and stopping to take pictures. I revisited some of the sights we saw during the race. Then I explored the downtown area on foot. There were a lot of small shops and restaurants. The architecture had an old world charm – particularly older building like banks and government buildings.

The next morning, as I walked across the street to get breakfast, I noticed how warm and humid it was. I wondered if it was really this humid the morning of the race. If so, I must have just tuned it out.