

Firecracker Triple by David Holmen
July 2-4, 2001

On July 2-4, 2011, I ran three marathons in the Portland, OR area. These three races were collectively known as the Firecracker Triple. This was the first time I ever ran marathons on three consecutive days, so it was a new challenge for me.

The Foot Traffic Flat Marathon is an annual event held on July 4th. Since July 4th fell on a Monday this year, Steve Walters organized two low-key marathons on Saturday and Sunday for the benefit of any runners who wanted to run two or three marathons on the same weekend. There were 43 runners doing the triple. (Yes, there are actually that many runners who don't think that's crazy.)

A few of the runners doing the triple were runners I had met before at other races. I got to know others over the weekend. I also recognized several other runners who were doing the individual races. The whole weekend was like a family reunion.

On Saturday, I ran the Stars and Stripes Marathon in Beaverton, OR. This race was run on paved paths in Greenway Park. We did 10 laps on a 2.62 mile loop. It was a bright sunny day, so it felt hot by the end of the race.

Common sense would have suggested that I should go easy in this race, since I had to save something for the next two days. Instead, I decided to run fast enough to break 3:30. I try to do this in as many races as possible, and if I wanted to break 3:30 in any of these races, I needed to do it when I still had fresh legs (or so I thought). I found myself having to work hard to stay on this pace. I ended up finishing in 3:26:43, but it was pretty close to an all-out effort, so I was worried about the next two days.

On Sunday, I ran the Freedom Marathon in Gresham, OR. This race was an out-and-back on Springwater Trail that we ran twice. It was a nice flat course and it was cloudy, so it felt much more comfortable than the first race. The start/finish was in a city park, and we had a barbeque after the race.

I expected to have sore muscles, but when I started running, the soreness was minimal. I set an aggressive pace, and didn't slow down until the last few miles. I finished in 3:22:53, which was almost 4 minutes faster than the first race.

On Monday, I ran the Foot Traffic Flat Marathon on Sauvie Island (a.k.a. The Flat). I ran this race last year, so I was already familiar with the course. Sauvie Island is home to many farms (including several that grow different kinds of berries.) The race starts and finishes at the Pumpkin Patch Market, which is sort of a country store / farmer's market. Post-race refreshments include strawberry shortcake. For anyone interested in running a marathon in the Portland area, this is a race I highly recommend. A lot of Marathon Maniacs did this race, and I saw several runners I knew. A few of them were runners I met at the same race in 2010.

I discovered on the morning of this race that I was in the lead for combined time in the triple. This was a big surprise because Chuck Engle won the first two races by huge margins, and I thought he was going to run the third race as well. My legs were sore as soon as I started running, but I started fast anyway and ran a 7:30 pace for the first 19 miles. I couldn't believe I was running this fast, but I was pumped up, knowing I could win the triple. I slowed down a little in the last 7 miles, but finished in 3:18:10. It was my fastest race of the weekend. As soon as I finished, Steve gave me the award for overall male winner in the triple marathon.

Most runners from out of town stayed in downtown hotels. I knew from experience that I could get a much better rate at the Extended Stay in Beaverton. This hotel is about the same distance from Sauvie Island as the downtown hotels. Since the Stars & Stripes marathon was also in Beaverton, it was a convenient location for two of the three races.