

## **Lost Dutchman Marathon in Apache Junction AZ by D. Holmen**

### **February 2012**

On February 19, 2012, I ran the Lost Dutchman Marathon in Apache Junction, AZ. I wanted to do a race over the 3-day weekend, and I kept hearing good things about this race.

My first impression of the Phoenix area was a good one. The Sky Harbor International Airport may be the most attractive airport I've seen. (Actually, it may be the only attractive airport I've seen.) As I drove through Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa, I enjoyed the artwork and landscaping that decorated the freeways and the small reddish mountains that dot the cities.

Apache Junction more like a typical suburb, except this one has cactus plants, palmetto trees and great views of the surrounding mountains. I stayed at the Best Western on Apache Trail. This was a convenient location. I was about a mile from the expo and less than three miles from the Rodeo Grounds where we could park on the morning of the race.

The race starts at the base of the Superstition Mountains. It's a remote location that's only accessible by a winding dirt road, so everyone was bussed to the start. Busses left from the Rodeo Grounds and a few local resorts.

When we arrived at the start, it was still dark and the temperature was about 48 degrees. To help us keep warm until the start, they set up dozens of campfires. Next to each campfire were two thick blankets, so we could sit comfortably. There was a bag check, so you could wear warm-up clothes until about 10 minutes before the start. The race also provided coffee, hot cocoa and snacks.

The race started just after sunrise. The first eight miles of the course followed the same winding dirt road we road on earlier. Although there were numerous small hills, the general trend was downhill, making for a fast start.

The rest of the course was a combination of highway and residential streets, but we always had views of the surrounding mountains. At first, there were aid stations every two miles, but later they became more frequent. Most of the aid stations had water and GuBrew. Some had Gu packets. A few had special treats. Near the halfway point, there was an aid station with donuts (cut into small pieces). Later, there was an aid station staffed by a Girl Scout troop that offered Girl Scout cookies.

The race finished inside Prospector Park. After getting our finisher medals, bottles of water and gear bags, we had an opportunity to pose for pictures with Prospector Pete and the other race mascots.

There was a wide variety of finish line food, and the volunteers were generous with the portions.

I came into this race with worries about my left hamstring. I had injured it three weeks earlier, but it didn't bother me during the Surf City Marathon and I assumed I would gradually heal. Five days before this race, I had a training run where everything went wrong. First I had to stop to wait for a traffic light in subfreezing temperatures. While I waited, my muscles tightened up. As soon as I started running again I felt discomfort. Later in the same run, I slipped twice on patches of ice and had to work hard to regain my balance. That was the last straw. For the rest of that run, I was running in pain. I took it easy for the rest of the week. I did a few short cross-training workouts, but no running.

By race day, I was feeling better, so I decided to start the race with a "see how it goes" approach, just like I did at Surf City. Because of the downhill start, I started somewhat fast. My leg felt fine, so I kept up the fast pace, assuming that if my hamstring started to tighten up, it would be gradual, and I

could slow down as needed. Instead, after five miles, my hamstring cramped up suddenly. After stopping more than once to massage it, I continued running at the best pace I could manage. For the first five miles I averaged 7:05. For the next five, I averaged 9:40. I was hoping I could somehow maintain a pace that would still get me to the finish within four hours, but I didn't like my chances.

Shortly after the 10 mile mark, my hamstring got worse, and it was too painful to run at all. After that I tried to walk at the best pace I could manage, even though it was still painful. I averaged about 15 minute miles. I wasn't happy about walking over half of the race, but I was determined to finish any way I could. In the last two miles, I forced myself to do a few short bouts of running. It was sort of a hopping limp.

I finished in 5:20:20. That's my second slowest marathon ever. The only one slower was Pike's Peak, but that race is up and down a mountain. Usually I'm one of the early finishers, so it felt weird to see the parking lot almost empty when I left. I'm happy to say, however, that they didn't run out of food for the slower runners, even though there were shorter races as well.

Lost Dutchman is a fun race with a scenic course. I may have to return some day and run it again when I'm healthier.