

## **Napa Valley Marathon by David Holman October 6, 2011**

On March 6, 2011, I ran the Napa Valley Marathon. This race starts in Calistoga, CA and finishes in Napa, CA. For my last several races, I traveled solo, and only stayed two nights. This trip was a vacation with Deb (our first vacation together this year), so we stayed an extra night.

We flew into Sacramento the day before the race, and drove the rest of the way. We went to Napa first, to pick up my race packet and shop at the expo. The race packet included a goody bag with four energy bars, four gel packets, a dozen packets of Joint Juice mix, two packets of a protein drink mix and a sample size box of cereal. There were also lotions, pain relief gels, and other product samples. To hold all this (plus bib number and a long sleeve tech T-shirt), they give you your choice of a high-quality backpack or duffle bag. I chose the backpack, but the duffle bags also looked pretty good. Instead of the usual assortments of coupons and ads, they saved paper by providing these in the form of a pdf file you could download.

The weather forecast for the race was for upper 40s to low 50s with steady light rain. Having run in this type of weather before, I knew what type of clothes to wear. I had everything I needed, except a pair of polypro gloves. Deb spotted some polypro gloves at the Marathon & Beyond booth. They had gloves with a design commemorating their 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They also had a good deal on a one year subscription that included two back issues and a high quality running hat. I bought the gloves and also got the one year subscription. After looking through the available back issues, I chose two that featured articles that were timely.

A major sponsor of the race was Kaiser Permanente. They were offering free tastings of several varieties of wine. Although I had never developed a taste for wine in the past, I decided to expand my palate, so I could get the full Napa valley experience. I sampled a Pinot Noir, the first of six wines that I would taste over the course of the weekend.

After the expo, we continued to Calistoga, where we were staying. Along the way we drove through other small towns and past dozens of wineries. We chose to stay in Calistoga to be close to the starting line of the race, but we couldn't have picked a better place for our vacation. Calistoga is a small town that hasn't lost its charm. It's full of quaint shops and spas. I don't recall seeing any chain stores or fast food restaurants.

There were pre-race pasta dinners in both Napa and Calistoga. We went to the one in Calistoga, in part because we were staying there, but also because we knew Dick Beardsley was going to be speaking. This dinner was organized by several local inns. There were five different styles of pasta, each provided by a different inn. Other inns provided bread and cookies.

When we arrived, dinner wasn't ready to be served yet, and I had the opportunity to meet Dick Beardsley. When I first started running marathons in the early 80s, he was my local hero. In 1981, he set a course record in Grandma's Marathon that still stands. He's best known for his second place finish in the 1982 Boston Marathon where he finished two seconds behind Alberto Salazar in a race that has become known as the "Dual in the Sun."

One of the issues of Marathon & Beyond that I picked up at the expo featured an article in which Dick Beardsley recounted his experience setting the course record at Grandma's Marathon. He signed this issue for me.

In addition to the food, the pre-race dinner also featured free samples of locally produced wine and beer. I sampled a Chardonnay blend.

The race follows Silverado Trail for the first 23 miles, and then turns onto local streets through Napa to finish at Vintage High School. It was mostly two lane roads with gently rolling hills. Overall, the course trends slightly downhill, so it's a fast course.

I started at a very aggressive pace. For the first 13 miles, I was on pace for 2:58, which would have been a PR. I haven't run a time under 3:05 in the last 18 years, so I knew I was pushing my luck. Halfway through the race, I realized I was working too hard to keep up with the runners around me, so I had to let them go. After that I was continually coaxing myself to maintain the best pace I could, even though many other runners were passing me. Mostly, I wanted to beat 3:15, but I held out hope that I could still beat 3:10 if I could limit the damage.

The rain stopped about halfway through the race, but my clothes were already wet, and there was a light wind that felt cold. By the last four miles, my clothes were drying out, and I started to feel overdressed. I was able to dig deep and finish in 3:08:45. It was my fastest time in two years, despite starting too fast and blowing up.

At the finish, they had soup and hot showers, but since Deb was there to meet me, I wanted to leave quickly, so we could get back to the hotel. After I got cleaned up, we had lunch at an Italian restaurant in Calistoga. When I looked at the wine listed, I saw they had three different sampling flights. I opted for the California Reds flight, and tasted 2 oz. samples of a Gravity Hills, a Merlot and a Cabernet Sauvignon. They came with a small sheet listing where they were from and all the subtle flavors that make them distinct. I don't have a discerning enough palate to detect all the flavors, but I enjoyed each one.

Deb was also up for trying some new experiences, but wanted me to join her, so we both had mud baths at one of the local spas. The "mud" is actually made from volcanic ash. It's so dense, that it supports your weight, so you can relax every muscle in your body and just float.

After 15 minutes suspended in the hot mud, you shower and then spend 15 minutes in a whirlpool, while sipping mineral water. Next, you sit in a steam room, while continuing to sip mineral water. Finally, you lie down covered with towels and a blanket and continue to sweat. Finally, you shower and get dressed. The treatment is supposed to draw toxins out of your body. I can't say for sure whether it helped with my post-race recovery, but it was a new experience.

The next morning, we drove south to take a free tour of the Jelly Belly factory in Fairfield. The tour included a visit to their sampling bar where we could try any of the 109 Jelly Belly flavors. What sets Jelly Belly's apart from other jelly beans are their creative and realistic flavors. We also sampled a few flavors of their fudge.

After the factory tour, we drove back through the Napa valley and stopped along the way to shop in St. Helena. St. Helena is another small town with several quaint shops. This is Deb's favorite kind of shopping. Skies were mostly clear, so along the way, we got great views of the valley.

When we got back to Calistoga, we went to the Petrified Forest. The Petrified Forest has fossilized trees. The trees were covered and preserved by ash from a volcanic eruption millions of years ago. Over time, the wood was gradually replaced by minerals in the water that was seeping through them. Today, the fallen trees retain their original shape, but are made of stone. When I was young, I saw the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. The one in Calistoga isn't as impressive as the one in Arizona, but it was still cool. For Deb, it was the first time she had seen petrified wood.

For our last dinner in the Napa valley, we went to another restaurant in Calistoga. I again tried some wine with dinner. This time it was a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. I'll probably never be a wine connoisseur, but I'm started to develop a taste for it.