

## **Tobacco Road Marathon by David Holman**

### **March 20, 2011**

On March 20, 2011, I ran the Tobacco Road Marathon in Cary, NC (near Raleigh). This race is run mostly on the American Tobacco Trail, a rails to trails project. This type of trail makes a great running surface.

I stayed at the Embassy Suites in Cary, which was the host hotel. Many of the other runners were staying there too. This is an excellent hotel, and they had a discounted rate for people doing the marathon or half marathon.

When I entered this race, I paid an extra five dollars to get a parking pass, so I could park right at the start/finish area. Other options included parking in a remote area and taking a shuttle or taking a shuttle from the Embassy Suites. I heard that there were problems with the shuttles, so I think the five dollars was well spent. I shared a ride with fellow Marathon Maniacs Diane Bolton and Kathy Kass.

We arrived early, so we could join other Maniacs for a group photo. We couldn't find the runners who organized the group photo, so we took our own group photo with a few other Maniacs that we met at the start. After the photo, we went back to the car to stay warm until it was time to line up.

There was a half marathon that started 15 minutes before the marathon. With 1900 runners in the half marathon and 1300 in the marathon, we were a little concerned that this would lead to congestion on the trails, but this was never a problem.

The first two miles were on roads. When the faster runners in the marathon caught up to the back of the pack of the half marathon, but there was still plenty of room to pass. When we reached the trail, half marathoners turned right and marathoners turned left, so there still wasn't any problem with congestion. After doing an out and back section, we reached the area where the half marathoners had turned right. By then, everyone was spread out pretty good. This section of the trail was paved on one side and gravel on the other side, so you could pick whichever surface you preferred.

Eventually, the half marathoners turned around and full marathoners kept going straight, until we reached another turnaround at about 19 miles. At about 23 miles, we left the trail for roads that took us back to where we started. Except for the road sections at the beginning and end, the course was very flat and went through heavily wooded areas.

My intention was to run the first half of the race in about 1:35, and pick up the pace in the second half if I felt good. This plan went out the window when the downhill first mile caused me to start too fast. I backed off a little, but ended up running the first half a few minutes faster than I planned. After that, I tried to hang on as best I could. I slowed down a little, but held on to finish in 3:07:18. This was my fastest time in two years and my fourth fastest ever.

The finisher medal had a design that looked like a railroad crossing. After finishing, I found out I won my age group. My age group award was a large glass mug. It had the race logo and said 1<sup>st</sup> place age group.

This is a race I would recommend. Although the shuttle busses were a bit of a fiasco, every other aspect of the race was well run. The Raleigh area is beautiful. There are trees everywhere. There were cherry trees in bloom right outside the hotel.

I've been to the Raleigh area before, so I didn't do much sightseeing. Instead, I spent most of the weekend at the Embassy Suites, hanging out with other runners. There was a large group of runners

from Augusta, GA, who travel to races together. I met a few of them in the lounge the day before the race, and met more of them the next day.

My cousin Bill and his wife Ruth live in Raleigh. The morning after the race we had breakfast together and went shopping.