

A mid-west Adventure- The Garmin Marathon in the Land of Oz

After a few months layoff, mainly dictated by the fact that we have ticked off most of the southern States where winters are usually mild, we headed off to Kansas to resume our 50-State marathon quest. Kansas lies on the Great Plains right in the middle of the USA, is part of the US Grain Belt, and experiences a high incidence of tornadoes. Agriculture occupies 90% of the land which produces corn, soybeans, and 40% of the nation's wheat, so we were expecting a flat course. April weather is usually mild, the week leading up to the event had been ideal for running but the temperature went over the cliff on Thursday and we arrived here after a 2 hour flight to near freezing conditions with 25 mph winds gusting to 35. The forecast was for the same on Friday and Saturday (the day of the race). We spent Thursday evening and Friday in Kansas City which wasn't very inspiring, but I did buy a woolly hat to add to my limited wardrobe of cold weather gear which amounts to 2 long sleeved shirts, but no long bottoms. KC is famous for barbeque, we tried some for dinner but it wasn't really different to anywhere else.

Luckily the wind had dropped to around 10mph by Saturday although the temp was still only 1 degree at the race start. The run is in its 17th year and was previously called the "Oz Marathon" as the event is themed around the book and film "The Wizard of Oz". The link with Kansas seems only to be that Dorothy wanted to return home to Kansas when she was in the Land of Oz. Some of the runners and spectators dress up as the characters; there were several Dorothys, Tin Men (and women), witches and scarecrows which all added to the atmosphere. 2019 is the year of the scarecrow, and this is reflected in the race shirt and medal.



Garmin, located in Olathe about 30 miles SE of Kansas City, became the major sponsor a few years ago and thus added their name into the title, the marathon actually started and finished at their corporate headquarters. There were roughly 500 runners in the grown-up's race and about 1,000 in the half and we all lined up together in the half-light of dawn for the start at 6:45am. The course turned out to be hillier than we had expected but had quite a bit of variety which was good since there was not much crowd support. There was a mixture of short sharp hills, long gentle drags on main roads, an out-and-back along a tree lined asphalt trail alongside a small river from mile 7 to 15, several spells in modern middle class neighborhoods, another 4

mile stretch along a picturesque trail from mile 21 to 24, and a brief period in the city streets of central Olathe, which is not so big. It was sunny throughout and the temperature had warmed up to about 8 degrees by the end, enough to shed 2 layers but not enough to get down to the YTRRC singlet.



Organization was excellent and there was unlimited free beer and barbeque at the finish. So that's Kansas done, next stop Kentucky.