

First blood to Crambo



Runners begin their circuit of northern Europe's largest man-made lake

Supermiler Steve Cram organised the first-ever 26-mile event at Kielder Water last weekend and also ran through the pain barrier to complete the race himself

Report: Jason Henderson
Pictures: North News

STEVE CRAM did not know whether to laugh or cry at the end of the inaugural Kielder Marathon. For one, he had the satisfaction of seeing his idea for a 26-mile race around Kielder Water come to fruition. Yet the feeling of delight was masked by the pain of having limped the entire distance when common sense had warned him it would be wiser to drop out at halfway.

"I've only run a handful of times in recent months and had no intention of running it all," he grimaced. "So my legs are going to pay for it now, I think!"

As the inspiration and brainchild of the event, Cram felt obliged to lead by example. He set the 1000-strong field on its way at shortly after 10am on Sunday before then joining in the race itself. To



Zac Kihara: dipped inside 2:30 on undulating course

finish all 26 miles, though, was surely beyond the call of duty. He was limping after about 10km, too, but completed the distance in a respectable 3:47.

That kind of time (if you read it as minutes and seconds as opposed to hours and minutes) would have been a great time for a mile during his heyday. Instead it made a fine marathon mark for the injury-stricken veteran. Amusingly, his race number – 1600 – was only nine numbers short of the official mile distance, too.

What's more, the Jarrow Arrow had only arrived in the UK on Friday night following the Commonwealth Games in Delhi and he went straight to Kielder to help at the duathlon on Saturday that preceded Sunday's marathon.

"It was really good to enjoy people's comments during the race, although there wasn't much chatter from about 18 miles on!" he said. "Everything I was hoping for happened – the weather was great, the atmosphere was good, the views were nice. So I was very happy.

"Also, when you run the

pain barrier to finish, he added: "I haven't been able to run for the past five or six months due to Achilles and calf trouble mainly. But my legs were feeling okay and I got to 13 miles and thought 'okay, maybe I can do it'. But from Kielder Dam I started to have trouble a bit."

Cram had unveiled the idea for the race in February and hoped to mark his 50th birthday by taking part in what he believes is Britain's most beautiful marathon. The middle-distance legend and BBC commentator lives nearby and has trained – both on foot and on a mountain bike – around Kielder Water in recent years. The largest man-made lake in northern Europe is also



Steve Cram: led by example

first event you get a real feel for what the event is really about. Bren ran the first Great North Run, after all."

On his decision to battle through the



Around 1000 runners took part



The huge forests were one of the course's best features

exactly 26 miles all the way around, too, which makes it a beautifully natural off-road marathon course.

The ground surface is never badly rutted or stony. There are no huge hills either. But the course is nevertheless testing, to say the least, with the trail constantly undulating like a mini-rollercoaster. Best guesstimates believe it makes the course about 15 minutes slower than a road marathon.

This was certainly proved at the sharp end, as some truly world-class athletes struggled to clock fast times. Zac Kihara of Kenya, a former winner of the Edinburgh and Loch Ness marathons, won the men's race in 2:29:10. Lizzy Hawker, a past winner of the world 100km title and the North Face Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc event, took the women's crown in 2:58:25.

Kihara, who runs for Birchfield Harriers, broke away from Bartek Mazerski of Poland 5km from the finish to win by 46 seconds. Julius Kimtai, also of Kenya and a member of Tipton Harriers, was a further minute-and-a-half adrift in third,

although he was only drafted in at the last moment after former Great North Run winner John Mutai had to pull out.

First Briton was Darran Bilton of Leeds City, who clocked 2:34:33 in fourth.

Second place in the women's race was Cathy Mutwa of Kenya and Birchfield Harriers, who finished in 3:00:56.

Hawker, meanwhile, was a last-minute entry the weekend before the event and she used it as a training race for the World 100km Championships on November 7. "With it being so last minute, I wasn't really 'focused' or 'tapered' for Kielder, and didn't feel very fresh!" she said. "So I was happy just to run the best I could on the day. I really enjoyed the course – the trail is the perfect surface to run on – and I hope the race will be successful in years to come. It has great potential."

Hawker, who lives in the French Alps, is as well placed as anybody to judge the beauty of the course and she added: "There are a lot of hills which made it a real challenge. The course is really picturesque, though. There's no traffic and you're not surrounded by concrete."

The only concrete perhaps was at the 18-mile mark when athletes ran alongside the huge Kielder Dam – just one of several splendid sights during a picture perfect marathon.



Running rival? Eden Marathon also boasts great scenery

England's most scenic marathon

ON Sunday I jogged around the Kielder Marathon in just outside four hours, whereas seven days earlier I had enjoyed a training run in Cornwall during the second staging of the Eden Marathon. So hopefully that is a relatively unique position from which to pass comment on the battle to become England's most picturesque 26-miler.

First of all I would be keen to stress that I am talking about England only. If this unofficial contest was UK-wide, then Scottish events like Loch Ness and Edinburgh, plus rugged marathons such as Snowdonia would have a great case.

But this is England alone and the inaugural Kielder Marathon has set down the marker by boldly declaring itself as the "most picturesque".

Eden, on the other hand, is a little more modest. It starts and finishes next to the biomes of the world famous

Eden Project and uses a course that skirts around the nearby china clay country – or 'Cornish Alps' as they are known – through wooded areas, and also enjoys sea views. Yet it makes no claims to be Britain's best.

So which race took place on the most mouth-watering course in my view? It is a very tough call and, I guess, boils down to the weather on the day.

Even on that score, though, the two races in Eden and Kielder were evenly matched this month, as Eden was blessed with warm late-summer temperatures, while Kielder saw crisp, bright conditions – great for running.

My verdict? A draw after the first year, I reckon. And with similarly sized fields it will be interesting to see which one grows fastest in years to come. Although Kielder has got off to a flying start, with 3000 entries in its first year, of which 1500 were accepted and 1000 turned up.



Lizzy Hawker: women's winner used race as warm up for world 100km event

RESULTS

Men

1 Z Kihara (KEN/Birch) 2:29:10; 2 B Mazerski (POL) 2:29:56; 3 J Kimtai (KEN/Tip) 2:31:31; 4 D Bilton (Leeds C) 2:34:33; 5 M Pierson (Holm) 2:36:22; 6 J Buis (Heat) 2:40:05; 7 M Scotney (Dumf) 2:42:32; 8 D Purvis (Birt) 2:44:16; 9 H Jensen (Denmark) 2:45:21; 10 C Franks (Gates) 2:47:12; 11 G Hetherington (Sedge) 2:52:05; 12 K Robertshaw (C-le-St) 2:53:38; 13 P Redman (Sund) 2:57:01; 14 C Mattocks (Woot) 2:57:39; 15 M Hall (Walls) 2:59:32; 16 P Coulson (C-le-St) 3:00:16; 17 M Tillotson (Bolt)

3:00:36; 18 A Green (Serp) 3:03:06; 19 I Ellis (Ells) 3:05:34; 20 R Parker (Unatt) 3:06:05.

Women

1 L Hawker (RR Club) 2:58:25; 2 C Mutwa (KEN/Birch) 3:00:56; 3 L Custance (Clap Ch) 3:04:14; 4 S Shepeleva (MOL) 3:14:12; 5 K Jenkins (Hunts BT) 3:15:22; 6 C Watt (Unatt) 3:18:09; 7 C McManus (NSP) 3:28:46; 8 J Carruthers (unatt) 3:28:58; 9 L Noble (Darl) 3:30:50; 10 C Jackson (AllenValSt) 3:32:10.