

MOVING MOUNTAINS

When president of the International Marathon Fellowship of Rotarians, Kester Baines, suggested Queenstown as the destination for the Fellowship's next annual run, friends all thought he'd run a marathon too many... and it turns out they might have been right!

By Kester Baines, President 2016-18, IMFR, Rotary Club of Kardinia, Vic

"DON'T you know what the mountains around Queenstown are like?"

Such was the reaction of friends when I told them I was thinking of the mountainous resort town in New Zealand's South Island as the venue for the annual run of the International Marathon Fellowship of Rotarians (IMFR) for 2018.

"But I've looked at the route profile and it's quite a flat course," I protested. "They start you up the valley and you finish up around the shore of the lake. It can't be that bad."

As 2016-18 IMFR president, I thought it would be great to bring our members to the Southern Hemisphere for a change, as we usually meet somewhere in Europe. Let our Rotary running friends experience some real jetlag, just like we have to most years!

With great recollections of the Townsville Marathon and our tour of Eastern Australia in 2011, the board

agreed, and Queenstown got the nod. Being such a long way for our mostly continental members to come, we organised a 20-day tour of New Zealand's North and South islands, to make crossing the distance feel worthwhile, and especially memorable.

And memorable it was. Starting in Auckland on November 2, 25 members and friends from Germany, France, US and Australia travelled by coach to the Bay of Islands, Cape Reinga, Rotorua with its famous geysers and Maori cultural experiences. Then it was off to tour Napier, Wellington, from where we caught the ferry to Picton.

Back in the coach we set off to Nelson, Greymouth, Franz Josef, and then to the site of our running focus: beautiful Queenstown. Here we met up with another dozen members and friends of the Fellowship. Russell McGrouther, president of the Rotary Club of Queenstown, kindly helped arrange venues for a pre-race pasta party, with district governor Andrew

Hamilton driving up from Dunedin to join in.

Race day dawned with perfect running conditions – cool, fine, very little wind, and a mix of overcast and sunny. We were taken by bus to the start of the 10km, half marathon and full marathon events, the latter starting in historic Arrowtown, east of Queenstown.

And away we went – then, soon after setting off, encountered a hill? Must be just an aberration, I thought. But soon enough, there was another...

And going down was worse than going up – rubble, roots, and, curse that dodgy knee! Reality dawned – that "flat" course had dozens of short, steep hills, with as much down as up so they didn't register on a 42.2 km small-scale profile.

But the scenery compensated for any discomfort, with superb mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, even a boardwalk across a swamp part of the route. The sights, alongside the



IMFR runners gather at the marathon start area in Arrowtown – a foretaste of beauty to come.

camaraderie of runners, made for a fantastic experience for all.

Finally, the finish line came within reach (three kilometres to go, now two, now just one – the legs don't want to work, but, hang in there, legs! You can do it!). At last, the roar of the crowd was heard, and medals placed around our necks.

At the post-race dinner, I handed over the presidency of IMFR to Lutz Bachmann of Norway, who has announced that our next meeting will be in Reykjavik, Iceland, for the marathon and shorter events, in August 2019.

The day following the marathon, we travelled to Milford Sound for an overnight cruise to enjoy sights of the magnificent Fiordland wilderness. After visiting Dunedin and Twizel and

seeing the magnificent views from Aoraki/Mt Cook, the highest peak in New Zealand, our tour finished in Christchurch, where we gained an appreciation of the heartbreak and hard work following the catastrophic earthquakes of 2010-11.

Aotearora/New Zealand is a beautiful country, its people so friendly, down-to-earth and resourceful. We had a fantastic journey and gathering. Best of all was the establishment and renewal of friendships with our fellow Rotarians and friends whose interests in both Rotary and distance running give us all a common bond. As usual, a donation to The Rotary Foundation *End Polio Now* program was made on behalf of those participating.

We would love to have more IMFR members from Australia, New

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Zealand, and the South Pacific – there must be more Rotarians out there who have an interest in distance running. If you would like to meet up, in Iceland or before, visit our website at www.rotarianrun.org or contact me via kesnsuz@ncable.net.au. •