



Fit for a king

By Hisham Ibrahim

Above: Red Pyramid at Dahshur

Back in 1977 Egyptian Egyptologist Ahmed Moussa discovered a piece of rock inscribed with hieroglyphics which told the story of Pharaonic soldiers running a 100km race. This race took place in 690–665 B.C, during the reign of King Taharka.

The King needed a strong army to defend Egypt against the Assyrians. He focused his mind on how to forge a strong well-trained army. He observed their training in the desert of Memphis and found that their good health was largely a result of running training.

He decided to encourage this by laying down rules for a run from Sakkara, Memphis, through Dahshur, Lisht, Meidum to end at the Pyramid of Hawara in the Fayyum Oasis. The run was about 100km in length and passed by the pyramids of Sakkara, Dahshur, Elleshet and Kefren to end at the Hawara Pyramid. The King himself participated in part of the race to show his interest in the sport. The surprise in the translation of the hieroglyphic script is that the winner completed the race in only eight hours.

The rediscovery of this ancient event happened less than a year after the first groundbreaking Five-Borough New York City Marathon on the occasion of the American Bicentennial that is generally recognized as the start of the running boom. In the following decade or more existing running events burgeoned and new ones were created as the popularity of marathon running grew all over the world, and it turned into a mass participation sport. This first took place in countries of North America

Result			
MEN:			
1	Mahamoud DEHIS	EGY	8:28:00
2	Raymond BARKMAN	NED	10:32:00
3	Victor ILIE	ROM	10:34:00
4	Thomas DORNBERG	GER	10:41:01
WOMEN:			
1	Zilma DE RODRIGUES	BRA	10:31:11
TEAMS (of 5):			
1	EGY		6:48:20
2	EGY		7:21:00
3	GBR/USA		7:36:00
4	EGY		9:14:02
5	USA/CAN/NZL		9:36:01



Kings. The first race took place in 1995 and the 18th edition will be held on 27 January 2012.

and Europe, but over time the enthusiastic new adherents of the sport began looking for events in new and different places in which they could take part.

Egypt had a long history of attracting tourists to major historical and archaeological sites within the country, and these could provide a sensational backdrop for the new "runner tourists". The director of an Egyptian travel company, Gasser Riad, realized this and planned the first "Egyptian Marathon" in Luxor, with a route that started and finished at the Temple of Hatshepsut and passed by the Colossi of Memnon and the Valley of the

Riad's company, Event Sports, gained the support of the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Youth, and before long embarked on a further venture to re-establish the historic "Pharaonic" race first founded by King Taharka 2700 years ago – only slightly less ancient in origin than the Olympic Games themselves. The revived race uses the same start and finish points and takes almost the same route between them. It was first run in 2001 and in 2011 celebrated its 11th edition.

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Pharaonic 100km



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"I am very glad that we renew the Pharaoh's glory each year and make the same run that happened so long ago," said Riad. "It is amazing to unearth this history. I believe that everyone should remember this story and a copy of that stone should be given to the winner of the race."

The 100km race was first staged on a southbound course, from Sakkara to Faiyum, but this year, to simplify the logistics, it was run in the opposite direction. The event now attracts runners from 23 countries. There are individual and 5-person relay

competitions, although relay teams with fewer runners can participate. The stages are 10km in length, so that relay runners can switch at any of these points.

The Hawara Pyramid was built of mudbrick around a core of limestone passages and burial chambers, and faced with limestone. Today the pyramid is little more than an eroded, vaguely pyramidal mountain of mud brick marking the archaeological site. The pyramid was built by Amenemhet III, the last ruler of the 12th Dynasty who had earlier built the "Black Pyramid" at Dahshur where it is believed he was buried. Setting off from Fayium, runners pass by the Kafren Pyramid after 30km, the El-Iesht

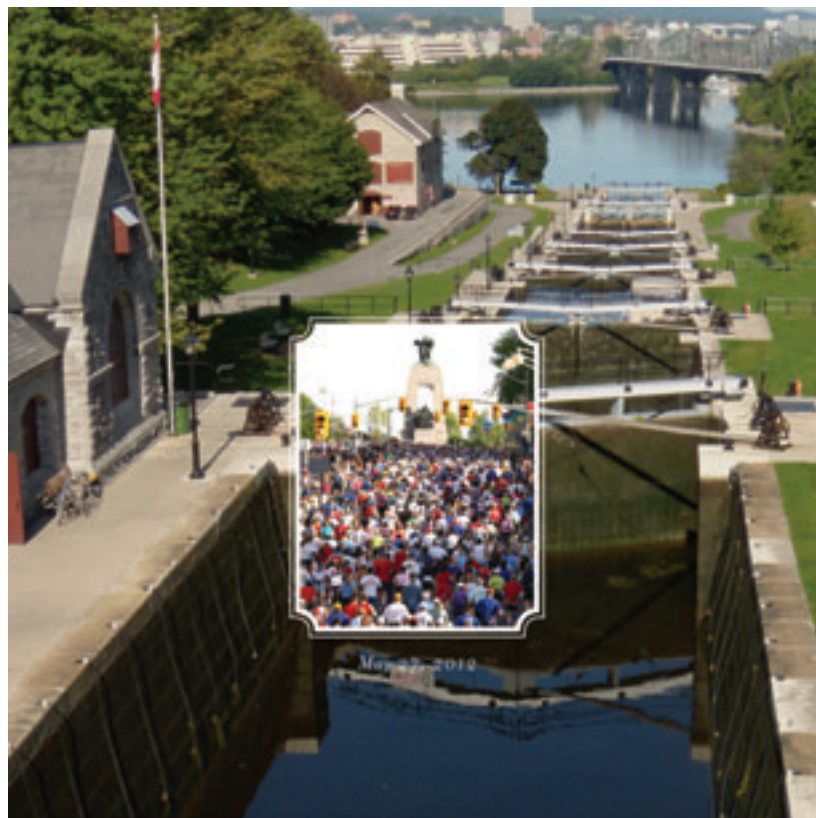
Pyramid after a further 26km and reach the Dahshur Pyramids with 85km elapsed.

The Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid were constructed during the reign of Pharaoh Snofu (2613–258). The Bent Pyramid is a unique transitional form with the profile of a mansard roof, while the Red Pyramid was the world's first smooth-sided pyramid.

In the early stages there are a few short stretches of unpaved road, but mostly the surface is good asphalt. It is increasingly flat as the course runs alongside an irrigation channel in the latter stages.

The final kilometre or so enters the Sakkara Pyramids site. It is a huge ancient burial ground which was the necropolis for the Ancient Egyptian capital, Memphis, and is about 30km south of the modern-day Egyptian capital, Cairo. Saqqara has several pyramids, including the famous Step pyramid of Djoser, which is the oldest complete stone building complex anywhere. It was built during the third dynasty and another 16 Egyptian kings built pyramids at Sakkara, which now lie in various states of preservation or neglect. High officials added their own private monuments to the necropolis for 3000 years – during the entire pharaonic period and beyond into Ptolemaic and Roman times.

The site covers an area of about 7km by 1.5km and runners must struggle up one final climb to the finish in the centre of the site, at the very heart of the ancient world. King Taharka would have been proud of you.



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