Haile set a new world record at Berlin in September but this is the story of Leonora Stovell and Sarah Hean.

THE BERLIN MARATHON 2007

The Berlin Marathon or the Real Berlin Marathon as it is officially known, was a long time coming, it started as a Christmas email joke, so Sarah and I had nine long months to consider, plan and train for it. Thank you to Terry for all the help in training and to those Hardley runners who joined us on our Saturday runs.

When the time came to leave it seemed to soon and at the same time not soon enough. (Nerves!) Berlin as a city could not be easier to travel to or to navigate around. Arriving at Schoneberg airport we wheeled our suit cases out of the airport and straight into the railway station and after one change were at Helensee station which was about one and a half minutes from the Kronprinz Hotel where we stayed with many other runners.

On Friday evening only five minutes after arriving we were sitting in the bar drinking with Sarah's family and friends, some of who are German and one couple actually live in Berlin which turned out to be very handy. We piled into a couple of cars and started our search for a pasta meal to eat, unfortunately so was every other runner that night in Berlin. We eventually got a table in a restaurant (actually in a marquee, with a beautifully draped ceiling and a gigantic chandelier) We think that we may have jumped a queue but were grateful for our tables, we could not all sit together .Our meal was vegetarian pasta downed with water, the pasta cost less than 5 euros and could not have tasted better.

Collecting our numbers was easily done on Saturday. The numbers came with chips, a sponge, and an official orange nap sac bag a little like a shoe bag. It was the only bag you could use at the baggage area and it had your race number printed on it. The chip had to be taken to another queue where using the bar code on the envelope it became your personal race chip containing all your information. The envelope containing your number, chip, sponge and orange bag became very precious and were not to be lost before Sunday's marathon. After collecting the necessary bits we were free to look around at the merchandise, shop, try sports drinks and to be told about marathons around the world. There was free beer (just help yourself to bottles) and free on tap mineral water and a pasta meal (not free). When we saw an unruly queue we joined it. When we asked what we were lining up for, it turned out to be a free technical T shirt advertising the Be'ing 2008 Olympics and was to be given only to runners who could produce their numbers, all our details were put on computer and during the race if you wore the T shirt and were photographed you could win a trip to the 2008 Olympics in Be'ing and one lucky person would be chosen as a torch bearer! What a prize! Nevertheless I did not see many of the T-shirts being worn by runners at the marathon. Addidas gave everyone a free yellow plastic bib to wear at the start of the race, so the bin bags could be taken home!

The other thing we had to do on Saturday was buy a banana or two which in Berlin should have been easy as every street corner and station had a fruit seller, but not one banana could be found. Never mind we would do without.

Sunday came quickly, the hotel served breakfast early at 6 am. Breakfast was typically European; cereal, yoghurt, cheeses, cold meats, hot breakfast of eggs and sausages, and a fruit bowl. That day the fruit bowl was piled high with bananas. Sarah had bought porridge with her to eat on the race day and I had my weetabix.

Finding the way to the start, we could not fail, as you only had to follow those orange bags, we quickly spotted the first group of orange bags on the famous Kur'dam street at Halensee railway station. From there it was easy wherever the orange bags went we went and the crowd just got bigger and bigger. Arriving at the runners area, the big queues as usual were for the toilets, this was the only negative part of the trip – queues were about normal (that is too long- especially for women)- the toilets were the non flushing sort and I will say no more about them other than it was in and out as quickly as you could.

As the finish area was at the start the baggage area was stationary and you handed your orange bag to a youngster who hung it on your peg for you and this was where you returned for it at the end.

Anyone who had not previously run a marathon or who expected a time of more than four hours had to gather at H block at 9 am. There were three staggered starts one after the other but we were unaware of the gun going off waiting in our position amongst a good hearted mass of excited runners, we passed the start I thought at 9.25 but with chips your time starts as you pass over the start mats. The weather was a perfect cool and we were off. The chip times were every 5 km, the crowds were huge, loud and a fantastic support. Music came continually on route, drums being the favourite instrument, there was also a Scotsman playing the bag pipes –the music tended to be jazz, rock and samba, it had a very bohemian feel. The crowds were very enthusiastic for every runner! The drinks were often and alternated between tables of plain water in cups and tables of personalised drinks (I was put off the idea of supplying my own by my running accomplice who laughed at the idea as she told me how many bottles there could be (up to 40,000) and to find one could be a nightmare. I did think of putting lucozade with a go gel taped to it on the table, actually you would have to hand them in on the Saturday, it would have saved me carrying them, but I didn't) running past these tables I could only see about 15-20 bottles at most each time with ingenious flags and ribbons for quick identification, after this came a German sports drink then hot (yes hot!!) lemon tea, then bowls to dip your sponge into if it had not already been lost (mine was before we even started, but I decided to pick up one of the many fallen sponges off the ground, I was lucky enough to pick up a perfectly clean unused one, most were filthy after so many pairs of feet had run over them, I manage to hang on to this one til 40 km). Then there was the fruit of quartered apples and half bananas which were also being given out by latex gloved marshals. Showers on route were provided by the fire department who trained their hosepipes in the air over half the road now and again. Somewhere in the second half there was an area that looked like an open-air hospital ward and it was full of male runners waiting for a massage. On and on went the 26.2 long miles of running, unfortunately for me a niggle in my foot got worse and worse but I managed to complete the marathon running through the Brandenburg Gate a little after Ethiopian, Haile Gebrslelassie who ran a world breaking 2h .04mins 26 secs! He is quoted as saying the rest of us (40,215 runners) were his tailwind and for that we are all world record breakers too.

After a visit to the medical tent for advice and ice, I was given my medal and a bag with a drink, a banana (this was where all of Berlin's bananas went) and two small biscuits in it, I gave in my chip, collected my bag, then there were two free bars one of beer and one of red bull!! After changing and finding Sarah we returned to the hotel for baths, feet up time and a well-earned rest. Our pack contained an invitation to a party in the evening where we were told 4-5000 people would celebrate. But we celebrated with Sarah's friends and family eating in a lovely Thai restaurant. It was easy to spot other runners out celebrating, as they all seemed to wear their medals.

Although most runners went straight home, a sizeable number could be spotted enjoying Berlin on the Monday and Tuesday. The wearing of the medal created an instant bond. Going home on Tuesday we were still following the odd orange bag through the airport that in itself had turned into a symbol of recognition (another Berlin marathoner!).