



Back to the Future for ASB Christchurch's Marathon

In 2021 the ASB Christchurch Marathon will step back in order to move forward. For the first time since the earthquakes, participants will run on the traditional two lap course, and for the first time ever, the event moves to the earlier date of April 11th.

This is a continuation of the ASB Christchurch Marathon's personal rebuild following the earthquakes. In 2011, the event was forced out of the central city event to the outskirts of Christchurch, first to Lincoln and then to Christchurch Airport. In 2015 the organisers brought the event back into the central city, basing it at Cathedral Square. In 2017 ASB Bank came on board as the principal sponsor, and in 2019 the event returned to its traditional race base at the Christchurch Town Hall.

In 2020, of course, everything including the ASB Christchurch Marathon was interrupted by Covid-19. "That was a big hit financially for the event," says race director, Chris Cox, "But it also gave us some time to consider the future."

Since returning to the central city, Cox and his crew had been working with local authorities to reclaim the traditional course. It took some time, but in 2019 the event returned to its Town Hall race base, and now in 2021 they finally return to the pre-earthquake race route.

"The course concept is very important," says Cox. "Parts of it still run on the historic 1974 Commonwealth Games route, which was the inspiration for this event. That route is widely accepted as the fastest in New Zealand, but it is also very scenic and takes in iconic Christchurch areas such as Hagley Park, the Avon River, Oxford Terrace and the Town Hall. So it has everything!"

The only thing the ASB Christchurch Marathon hasn't had, in fact, is good weather. The past four years have all seen bitter wind and rain. But that too is about to change.

"The ASB Christchurch Marathon has always been Queen's Birthday Weekend, but terrible weather in recent years has really impacted participation. The numbers just have not built back to those pre-earthquake levels, so we decided the event needed to be at a nicer time of the year. So 2021's 40th anniversary will be on April 11th."

"With the traditional course but a new date, it really is a case of back to the future," laughs Cox. "Taking that further, we're really pleased to have ASB returning for its fifth year as the naming sponsor, and to announce a new charity partner in Trees That Count."

Trees That Count is a nationwide native tree planting initiative established by the Project Crimson Trust.

CEO Adele Fitzpatrick says "Our breath-taking forests are part of the New Zealand experience, highly valued by Kiwis. From the Great Walks to our local reserves they provide us with places to exercise in, spend time with our families or simply to marvel at. We're thrilled to be the charity partner for Christchurch Marathon and funds raised will enable us to extend our support to planting groups in the Canterbury region."

Since it came on board as naming sponsor of the marathon, ASB has contributed each year to the local community through various initiatives. This includes its 2017 initiative 'Run back the Tracks' where the distance run by race entrants correlated to funding from ASB to help rebuild running tracks through the Port Hills, following fire damage earlier in the year.

ASB head of Community and Sponsorship Mark Graham says partnering with Trees that Count was a perfect fit.

“We’re incredibly proud to be the major partner of such an iconic Christchurch event, and to be able to give back to the community by working with Trees that Count to replant areas of Christchurch.

“Trees donated will be used to help restore the Avoca Valley in the Port Hills. The Valley is on the doorstep of Christchurch City and borders Rāpaki Track which has more than one million visitors a year. The reserve will include a range of tracks for the community, which we hope will be used for those wanting to train for future running events,” says Graham.

Race day for the 2021 ASB Christchurch Marathon is Sunday 11th April. Entries are open now at www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz