Portumna is a small town in the heart of rural Galway on the west coast of Ireland. The name comes from the Irish word Port Omna, meaning the landing place of the oak tree.

So not surprisingly, perched on the edge of the quaint little town is a magnificent coniferous woodland of Scots Pine and Norway spruce spread over 450 hectares. Portumna Forest Park is also home to a whole host of animals including fallow deer and the red squirrel. Every June the agility of the wild animals in their natural habitat is mimicked by distance runners, who migrate to the forest from throughout Ireland, and beyond. In recent years participants have come from all over the world in their quest to find the ultimate ultra marathon.

Taking part in the Portumna Forest Marathon is a spiritual experience: it tests the body physically and it soothes the mind in equal proportions. The runners, crew and marshals blend in with the environment and although there is plenty of clapping and encouragement there is a serenity about the place. People talk a little softer and smile a little wider. When those inevitable Irish rain showers put in their short but frequent appearances, everyone looks up at the raindrops through the leaves and marvels at the reflections of the rainbows in the puddles, appreciating the vital role played by the rain in providing such a luscious backdrop for the run.
There another reason that this Marathon remains one of the most popular ultra events in the country. Portumna, while rural, is also very accessible from all four corners of the country.

By the time night descends on a summer Saturday night, over a thousand competitors will have completed one of the four races on offer: 100km, 50km, marathon and half marathon. Runners of all different abilities run together and the event is a source of great motivation, where training tips and running experiences are shared en route and everyone leaves determined to move up to the next distance the following year.

Portumna has become a ‘must do’ event for those who know of its magic. One of Ireland’s best-known ultra marathoners, Gerry Duffy, who has completed 32 marathons in 32 days and 10 full distance Iron Man events in 10 consecutive days, says: ‘Part of its attraction is that it is organised by runners. Its founder, Sebastien Locteau, is a French native who lives here and runs ‘Sports Ireland’, a high performance coaching company.

Despite the length of the four different races on offer, at no time are any of the 800 runners more than two kilometres from the race headquarters. It’s a looped course, which works well with such a large group continuously running the 5km trail circuit. For half and full marathon runners, it means four or eight loops with a small addition, while the 50km runners do ten laps. A few mad souls, 31 of them, completed 20 laps to ensure they covered 100km.

From an organiser’s point of view, looped courses make obvious sense. Locteau explains that running laps means progress can be monitored both by runner and by the organisation. “It simplifies health and safety and makes refreshments and marshalling much easier to deliver, but most important is that laps are great for building camaraderie. I have seen how over the years participants support each other by a glance, a smile or a thumbs up as they pass.”

Race headquarters, which runners pass every 5km, buzzes with atmosphere, which helps to lift waning spirits. Over the course of the day relationships are built up and friendships forged, both among runners and race crew. The sell-out crowd in Portumna bears testimony to the popularity of this novel event.

If you can’t make it for the race next year on 13 June try to visit the park anyway - There are four looped trails ranging from a multi-access trail of 1km, to a long trail of over 10km for walkers and cyclists.

There is an old abbey within the Park, which dates back to the 15th century. The 17th century castle nearby, on which considerable restoration work has been carried out, was the seat of the Earl of Clanrickarde. There is also a lake – ideal for cooling the limbs after a long run. Portumna Forest Marathon has it all.

Portumna Forest Marathon

The race will be run again on June 13 2015.

For event information visit www.forestmarathon.com

Result

**MEN:**
1. John HANNON IRL 2:59:22
2. David NOONE IRL 2:59:44
3. Shane WHITTY IRL 3:01:34
4. Noel MAHER IRL 3:08:02
5. Damien McSHARRY IRL 3:09:29
7. Brendan ASPEL IRL 3:14:38
8. Ronan CAREY IRL 3:14:41
10. Garry CRIBBEN IRL 3:21:33

**WOMEN:**
1. Trish SYNOTT IRL 3:44:49
2. Jude Hickey IRL 3:45:16
3. Mary KEALY IRL 3:46:13
4. Samantha KELLY IRL 4:04:13
5. Noreena MORRISEY IRL 4:05:19
6. Sharon DEVINE IRL 4:06:30
7. Eileen FINN GRAHAM IRL 4:07:29
8. Valerie FOGARTY IRL 4:09:23
10. Catharine GUTHRIE IRL 4:15:21

50km

**MEN:**
1. Wouter DECOCK 3:14:40
2. Graham HOPKINS 3:32:49
3. Michael Curley CUNNINGHAM 3:37:50

**WOMEN:**
1. Tracy DEAN 3:54:12
2. Eilis CONNERY 4:02:50
3. Claire MORRISEY 4:23:18

100km

**MEN:**
1. Thomas KLIMAS 7:57:17
2. Maciej SAWICKI POL 8:28:14
3. Thomas BUBENDORFER GER 8:34:02

**WOMEN:**
1. Amy MASNER 10:01:36
2. Finn O’MARA 10:46:10