

# LAKE BAIKAL INTERNATIONAL ICE MARATHON

**BELOW** Competitors are monitored with the aid of a hovercraft.

THE LAKE BAIKAL International Ice Marathon offers competitors the unique opportunity to race across the frozen ice surface of the largest and deepest fresh water lake in the world. The event takes place in an extraordinarily isolated part of Russia. It is based in the small town of Listvyanka, 65km south of Irkutsk (a stopover on the Trans-Siberian route).



## KEY DATA

<b>RACE</b>	Lake Baikal International Ice Marathon
<b>LOCATION</b>	Lake Baikal (Listvyanka, Russia)
<b>DISTANCE</b>	42.2km (26 miles), single stage
<b>DATE</b>	March
<b>TOTAL ASCENT</b>	Negligible
<b>TOTAL DESCENT</b>	Negligible
<b>KEY CHARACTERISTICS</b>	Marathon on frozen surface of world's largest and deepest fresh-water lake
<b>RACE RECORDS</b>	Male 3:08, Female: 3:54
<b>FIELD (APPROX)</b>	30
<b>CLIMATE</b>	-5°C to 2°C (23°F to 35°F)
<b>FINISHERS</b>	75-80% of starters
<b>RACE DIRECTOR</b>	Andreas Kiefer
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<b>WEB</b>	www.baikal-marathon.de

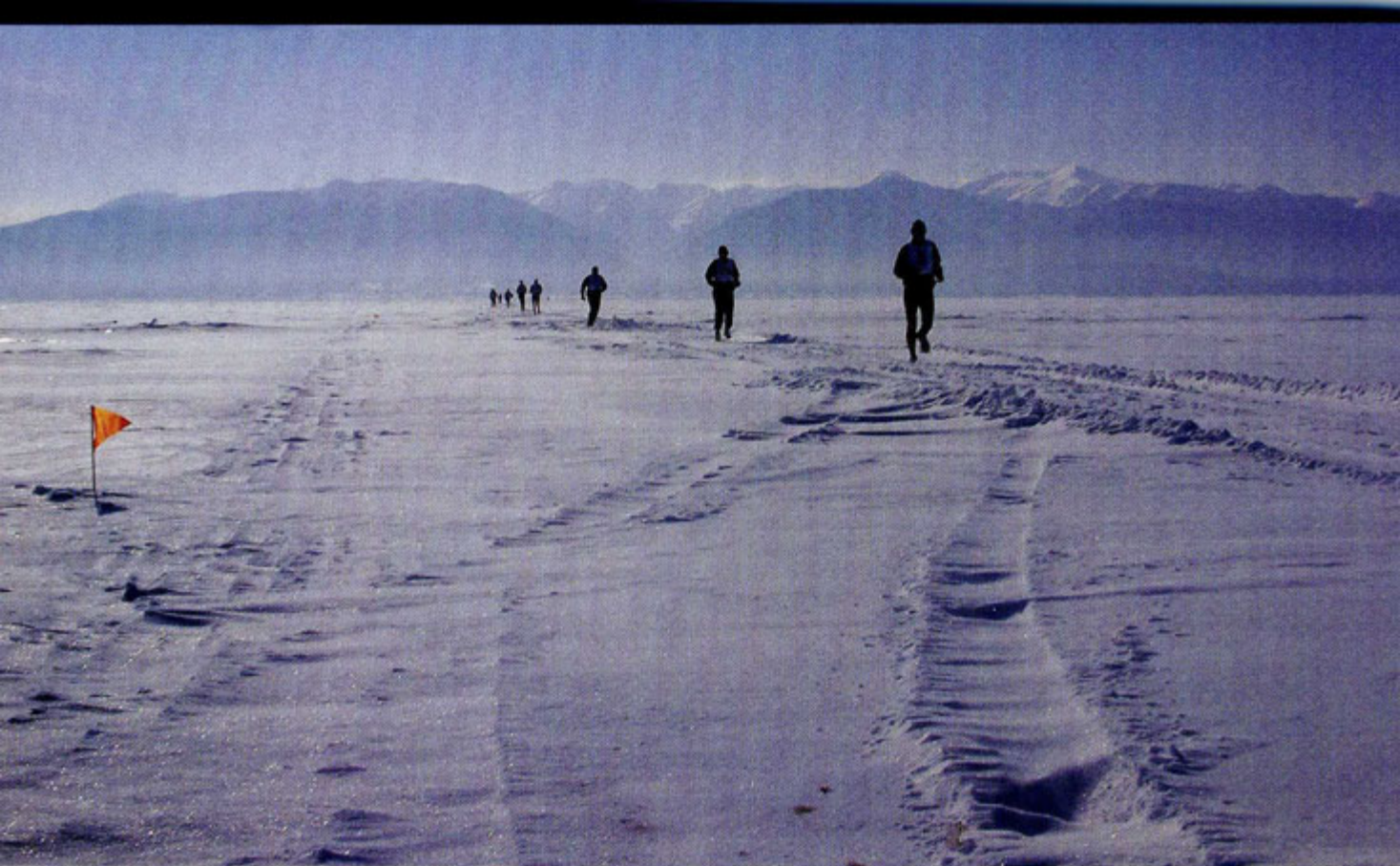
The Marathon is just a small part of a larger winter games festival, the 'Winteriada', which includes a swimming race in the frozen lake.

Lake Baikal is vast – at 636km by 70km – and extraordinarily deep at 1,637m. It is the repository of a fifth of the world's unfrozen fresh water. It is estimated that the lake holds sufficient water to supply drinking water for every human for a period of 50 years.

The surface of the frozen lake is covered in fields of 'hummocks', small hills of ice rubble. Beneath the ice surface, geothermic springs and seismic activity cause localized melting that weakens the ice to form holes. The race 'Ice Captain' and his team of volunteers have the task of plotting a safe course. They do so the day immediately preceding the race, otherwise movements in the ice would render their effort redundant.

On race day itself, competitors are ferried by van from Listvyanka to Tankhoy train station, located on the opposite shore of Lake Baikal. Prior to the start of the race, competitors are required to partake in the precautionary ritual of 'vodka sprinkling', in order to pacify the spirits of the Lake (introducing the novel element of starting a marathon with a shot of vodka).

The course is predominantly flat, but the surface is



hard and uneven. Although it is mostly covered in a soft layer of snow, there are areas of highly polished ice that create conditions similar to an ice-rink. Strong winds add to the already biting cold temperature and provide serious resistance to progress across the Lake.

The utterly featureless landscape gives little or no sense of perspective to competitors. The finish line at the port of Listvyanka can be seen almost from the start line. It is a long, cold, lonely 42.2km trail across the barren white landscape, where progress is marked only by checkpoints positioned at 5km intervals (with hot drinks, food and, for the brave, more vodka).

The far reaches of Siberia may not be a first choice destination for many endurance athletes, who may prefer instead the warmer, and more glamorous, climes. But for those that brave the Russian winter, the reward is a fantastic race, in an area of outstanding natural beauty, on a one-off running surface.

**'There are only a few places in the world where you can run a marathon on ice. On Lake Baikal it was harder than on Yukon in Canada.'**

**Udo Möller (6th place finisher, 2005)**

**ABOVE** Running across the width of the world's largest and deepest fresh-water lake.

