

General Characteristics

The Olympian race starts from the ancient Stadium of Nemea and terminates at the ancient Stadium of Olympia.

In the ancient stadium were effectuated the “Nemeia” from 573BC onwards, one of the four panellenian athletic celebrations.

“The most popular contest was the “stadium”, a foot race, of 178m long, as long as the length of the stadium. Athletes lined up in the North of the stadium along the starting post.

They all started at the same time by means of a system of ropes and stakes which fell on the ground when a person standing behind them pulled the ropes.

The ancient stadium was brought into light in 1974 when excavations started by the University of California at Berkeley, conducted by the American Professor Stephen G. Miller. His passion to make the most of Nemea’s treasures, the assistance of a large number of his compatriots and the active participation of the local people resulted in the thorough development of the ancient Nemea area”. (Stephanos Psimemos, “The Unexplored Peloponissos”, Athens 1998).

Our athletes enter the ancient stadium through a vaulted passage as in ancient times. Professor S.G. Miller conducts a visit of the stadium for them, then they proceed to the alter where the flame is burning and when their names are called out, two by two, they walk out of the stadium, and line up along the departure point for the starting of the race.

The race route runs for 180 km which have been divided into trail parts and parts on asphalt laid roads in rural areas, in nearly equal percentage.

We encounter both parts all along the race route in interchanging turns so that a balance regarding the length of each part can be kept, whether it concerns mountainous areas or flat countryside.

As a matter of fact , the athletes' physical and mental condition profits from this planning as it enables them to handle more efficiently the race route and keep under control his pace and strength: In general, the Olympian race run mostly over mountainous areas, the highest point reaching 1450m and the positive altitude variations reaching 5200m.

A great advantage of the Olympic Race lies with the loveliness and quietness of its landscapes as they stand far from any disturbing human activity.

As soon as the athlete starts running he comes across an evergreen land that keeps revolving around him till his last stride.

Along the tracks of fir-covered mount Olighyrtos and mount Menalo (altitude 1.200 – 1.400m at race level), or along some other tracks from where he can enjoy the superb view of a colorful valley or the view of a blue lake as it undulates among the surrounding hillsides, or when he crosses a gentle river or finally when he runs along the banks of another one till he gets out on the main road.

This race route is in its whole an immense picture of amazing beauty which nature has composed and which we have selected, wishing to offer our athletes a major running event, in essence and figuratively named Olympian Race.

The 19 C.P. are all located at villages along the race's route and manned by local people who volunteer to offer their services to running athletes. Distance between C.P. can be as long as 22km, as is the crossing of mount Menalo, and the second longest one of 19km is the distance between Valtessiniko and Perdikoneri. Athletes should take with them water and other foodstuff from C.P. Levidi and Valtessiniko.

Description of the Race Route

An asphalt laid road stretches over the first 20km, it presents no particular difficulties.

A first short track turns left after 2,5km for 200m. Exit again on the main road. The CP1 – 5,7km is at Nemea. Getting out of the town, you come along CP2 – 13,5km, Aidonia and you carry on till Platani, CP3 – 20,5km. You have in front of you the first hillside to climb. The race route up till now is very pleasant and gets through the famous vineyards of the area.

The track you will take to the top is rather smooth, there are some rocks and shrub, a trail track for 3km.

Once on the top there is St. Anne's chapel, from where you will enjoy an impressive view over a small valley with crops and wild flowers. The track on your way down is narrow, clung on the hillside; you always keep going on the left hand side. Once at the bottom of the track you go past Skotini, CP4 – 33,5km and at 300m further up you have to take another dirt track. It is said to be "difficult" although a short one for 2.200m. There are rocks, stones, and mud sometimes.

On your way out you are on a main road only for 400m. Again into a new mountain dirt track for 4,4km. Exit on the main road, you are on fir-covered mountain Olighyrtos, altitude 1.200m. You have reached the top of this mountain main road. You start going down, the road is large and turns easily for 7km.

You reach CP5 – 48km – Kandila. You carry on the asphalt laid road, you go past Kefalovriso, CP6 – 54km and you reach easily the village of Levidi, CP7 – 61,7km, (altitude 1000m) one of the most picturesque and lovely villages of Menalo.

Many people take to the streets to welcome the athletes, the CP is set up on the main square. All the street lights are on and there is music from the loudspeakers.

The village mayor Mr. Athanassios Kavourinos is present, ready to offer his help if needed, apart from the one he has already offered by organizing all the necessary supplies for the CP. You are now at the foot of Mount Menalo and you have to run through it for 22km without any CP. Take water and anything else you like from Levidi.

You walk towards the entrance of the mountain track.

Very tall fir trees on both sides of the track, light sticks hang on the trees to indicate the correct way, it is already dark but the track is rather smooth and friendly, some muddy areas or a fallen tree trunk somewhere. The organizers patrol the track, you reach the top of your route at 1400m. After the 10th km you turn right on a main asphalt laid road and you keep going all the way down on this road. Very easy and very pleasant but once at the end, STOP! There is a National road in front of you. Cars go fast; you have to watch very carefully before crossing over to Vitina, CP8 - 84,4km.

This is another charming village on Menalo, in the middle of a fir tree forest. You get out of the village, keep going on the right hand side of the main road till you come to a right turn to Magoulia CP 9 – 97km. This is the highest village of the Peloponnese at 1450m. It is getting cold, temperature has dropped as low as 5 – 6 oC. You may need a waterproof garment; there is hot soup on your way, pasta and hot drinks.

Out of the village you are again on a main road, always on mount Menalo, lined with fir trees on your left hand side. This is the last track on this mountain, a very lovely stretch of road of about 8km.

You get to Valtésimiko CP10 – 105,3km, warning! A few km out of the village there are sheep dogs as there is some sheep flock. Police will have asked to keep the sheep dogs far from the mountain road. Here starts the second longest mountain track but on another mountain, take again whatever you need at Valtésimiko as you have no CP for the next 19km.

After 5,6km you take a right “hairpin” turn and start climbing on a grueling track on a completely bare mountain. The track is narrow with rocks, some land slides here and there and there is a precipice on your right. However there is a very beautiful view over a blue lake down below the valley. After 12,5km on this track you are on an asphalt road which leads to Perdikoneri, CP11 –

124 km.

Out of the village you keep on the main road to Tropea, CP12 – 127km. You will also have hot food and drinks, it is night and the temperature is still low. Local people take care of the CP in the middle of the night and their service is very valuable indeed.

The Municipality has offered the supplies in all 5 CP's located at the villages of its district – Perdikoneri, Tropea, Doxa, Kalliani, Kastraki. From here a rough track leads to Doxa, CP13 – 136km, you get down to the main road, you keep on the right hand side for 800m, you cross over the main road (national road to Olympia) and you turn left to Kalliami CP14, 139km. Here you will most probably be offered home made cakes by good friends. You carry on, an easy and charming asphalt stretch for 6km and you get to Kastraki CP15 – 145km.

This is a tiny village with a few houses, still some nice people stay up at night to attend you. Just out of the village you take the track down to the river Erymanthos. You keep going along the river for 2,5km, you cross over, the water is only 50cm deep – never take off your shoes – Cross over in any way you like. Once on the other side you keep going on a track, pass over a bridge and get out on a main road, 200m further down the CP16 – 150km Koklama. After 200m you turn right on the main road (National road to Olympia). You have to go along another rather smooth track about 4km long in the country side, very green area, exit again on the main road. You keep going for 2,4 km, you pass over a bridge, follow the track for 2,3km then a stretch of asphalt road and you reach Aspra Spitia CP17 – 160km. Across from the CP starts a very green landscape, you keep going along the track for 3,7km, at the end the river Alphios flows next to you. This is a flat area with cultures here and there, it gets muddy at parts after rain. The track is not always clearly seen for there is no track at all, you keep going through the fields paying attention to the signposts. No CP here, you will be given water if you need some.

This is a trail area for about 12,5km and a trial one too as you are tired and it is getting warm. Exit on the National road to Olympia, 2,3km further down Mouria, CP 19 – 175,19 km. You keep going on the National road, always on the left hand side – you reach Olympia – 180,1km. You are at last at the end of this tough but rewarding race.

You stand at the small entrance of the Archeological site of Olympia and the famous Stadium is just there in front of you. Here you will be crowned with a wild olive tree wreath, the same as for the ancient Olympic victors and if you wish you walk into the stadium for a short tour and pictures.

No crowds here to welcome you, the area is prohibited for events of any kind. We are allowed to use this place after special authorization by the Ministry of Culture. Once at the Stadium you can figure out your step on the footprints of the very first runner and victor in the first Olympic foot race contest, Koroibos.

The Olympian race, so many long distance athletes wishing to take part in, is the major Greek foot race contest to combine trail tracks and asphalt laid roads. It is, at the same time, the race that brings forward the two ancient Stadiums, that of Nemea and Olympia, the race that respects the Olympic values and the race that rewards the victor with only a wild olive tree branch.

Let it be for all a race of rejoicings, of friendship, of fraternity, of peace of optimism and hope.