



On The Run



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2016 in Review
Installment 2



Harare Athletics Club



Comrades 2016 - My First Down Run

Rosie Mitchell
Photos SJ Nott, Rosie Mitchell & Action Photos

I ran the Comrades Marathon for the first time in 2015.....

Quite commonly, on crossing the finish line after a gruelling average 11 to 12 hours pounding the tarmac through terrain that is anything but flat, runners are heard to utter in somewhat agonised tone, 'never again'.

Some stick to that, and continue running, but take on less extreme distances. For others, the sentiment lasts a few minutes to a few hours, or possibly till the following morning.

Whichever it is, their minds rapidly change, and the plan to repeat the experience is soon announced to fellow runners, friends and family. The runners who witness this swift mind-changing are never very surprised. Family and friends, however, more often than not, roll their eyes, shake their heads in disbelief at such madness, and groan out loud.

Memories of pain fade fast, it seems. What remain are the other memories – and as an overall life experience, running the Comrades and finishing it, is very hard to beat, if you are the kind of person who actively seeks out seemingly insurmountable challenges, to test yourself beyond your normal limits, surpass them, and find out if you can triumph over self-doubt. And that's not everyone, by any stretch! There's a certain amount of masochism involved in endurance sports. Why would anyone willingly choose the undeniable pain and suffering of taking on the Comrades challenge? Why would they repeat it, year after year? Evidently, the type of person who considers such an undertaking is willing to push past the physical pain, using mind over matter, for the greater rewards they experience – even if those rewards may not be at all obvious to the (clearly more sane and sensible) observer. Call it madness, call it masochism, but there must surely be some reason why there are so many people who come back to the Comrades, year after year after year!

I finished my first Comrades with 7 minutes to spare before the 12 hour cut-off. It was tight - thus rather nerve-wracking towards the end. I was thrilled beyond description to make it within the allotted time – putting me in the good company of the annual average 60% of the entire field of entrants who finish this daunting race in its last hour. We are the plodders, the novices, and the ordinary, average recreational runners, across all adult age groups from our 20s to our 70s, even 80s, who for thousands of different and very personal reasons, at some stage, for some reason, in some mad moment, or by some spark of sudden inspiration, stop looking at the Comrades as a goal entirely beyond our grasp or capability. In 2016, over a third of the entire field (7000 runners) were novices – a new Comrades record. Comrades is becoming more and more famous, more and more sought after as the pinnacle of achievement towards which runners across the globe aspire. There are even a fair number of entrants annually who literally go from zero running, to successfully running the Comrades – in the space of just one year. Yes, this can be done, with the right training and the right amount of discipline and focus.

I started running in 2004, and entering races in 2008 (in my late 40s) and found that I loved the whole experience – the training and preparation, the excitement of the start, the shared energy and camaraderie amongst the runners, the support along the route, the satisfaction and joy of successfully finishing a race. For 6 years, as I built up my experience of half marathons, 21 to 25 km trail runs, twenty miler road races and ultimately, full marathons, my answer to 'When will you run the Comrades?' remained 'Never. It's too far, too hard, and would take too much time to train for'.

But when I discovered that Comrades 2015 would be the 90th Anniversary of this iconic 90km race with such a long and extraordinary history, I paused for a moment. I went to the website. I cruised around there. I began to open my mind. Curious as to whether the training load would be entirely impractical, as I'd always assumed, I downloaded the novice Finisher's (sub 12 hours) and Bronze (sub 11 hours) Training Programmes prepared by official Comrades online coach Lindsey Parry. I studied these. I was pleasantly surprised. These were time-based, rather than mileage-based programmes, and the necessary hours spent running were not a huge amount more than those I was already very happily spending. I've never found running training a chore, in any case. I run mostly in the bush. It is always a really pleasurable experience. The scenery is great, the landscapes constantly changing. It's never dull or repetitive.

The sorts of runners I'd chatted to in the past about the Comrades had often described gruelling amounts of mileage being necessary, and basically, not being able to 'have a life', beyond working, and training for this race! But most of these were really fast, talented runners – the type who can finish the Comrades in 9 hours or less. If you want a Silver medal (sub 7½ hours), or a Bill Rowan medal (sub 9, named after the winner of the first Comrades in 1921) you really do have to put in huge mileage and have almost no life - if you are also working - not retired or a professional runner. If you are a more ordinary runner, as I am, and would be thrilled to bits simply to finish by the 12 hour cut off, or to get a sub 11 hour bronze medal, it appeared not to be so, after all...





So I began to mull it over. It didn't take long. Suddenly, it no longer seemed mad, or beyond my ability, and what was the worst that could happen? Not finishing in 12 hours. Sure, that would be disappointing, but it would not be the end of the world. At least I would have tried!

So, my tummy fluttering with excitement, I registered online. The deed was done, and I was committed. In 2016 I would take on my first two ultra marathons – the 56km Two Oceans in Cape Town, owing its origin some 47 years ago, as a training run for Comrades hopefuls - and the Comrades 'Up Run' (90 km from Durban to Pietermaritzburg). Did I know for sure, that I could finish either race? I did not. But I followed the training programme that had originally persuaded me this was something I could at any rate try. Having seen that from a practical standpoint, preparation could indeed be squeezed into an already super-full and hectic lifestyle (it proved challenging, but certainly not impossible), stepping into the unknown world of ultra-running, I embraced various easily accessible, free information resources to complement the downloaded training programme; the short, frequent, super-useful 'Ask Coach Parry' podcasts and 'Old Mutual Live' podcasts, broadcast out of South Africa via the web; the 'Runners Connect' podcasts, which come via the USA, with an enchanting young British show host called Tina Muir, now resident in Kentucky, a self-effacing elite runner.

I entered the requisite local races to get my qualifying marathon time for both races, and build some more really long distance experience. I upped my training hours by the necessary amount, and did not find it too taxing. I enjoyed it all, and I enjoyed the podcasts, through which I learned a great deal about running and training. I enjoyed the build-up to the races, and the friendships formed through the HAC and Run/Walk for Life.

I could never have imagined how hard the Comrades would be. No one can. You have to do it, to know what determination is involved and how much pain you need to be able to tolerate. But I was one of those who announced I would 'do it again next year' - within 20 minutes of finishing Comrades 2015. There is something very special indeed about this race. There is its incredibly long history; its birth in 1921, as a deliberately gruelling race, in memory of those who suffered and fell in the First World War, that their suffering and sacrifice might never be forgotten; its evolution into the phenomenal event it is today, with around 20 000 entrants annually, from all corners of the earth; its reputation as a race with the most amazing level of spectator support throughout, and a true sense of bonding and fellowship amongst the runners themselves; the moving, emotional start, as excitement, anticipation and not a little fear build up to the climactic starter's canon, with its historical sequence of SA national anthem, Ndebele song Shosholozza ('go forward!'), the always stirring Chariots of Fire film theme tune, then the iconic recording of Max Trimbourne's famous cockerel crow imitation, then 'boom' the canon fires, and the race has begun; the indescribable elation when one crosses the finish, and the immense pride, in knowing just what an achievement that really is, because only by running it can one possibly know just how much this race really taxes your body and your mind. In the end, it is only the power of your mind that gets you through to the end, because your body has spent at least 40 km sending signals to your mind which translate to, 'are you entirely mad?' and, over and over, 'STOP already'; there is the confidence and empowerment and kudos that come with having managed to push through all that pain and finish; the enhanced level of physical strength and endurance that are the legacy of the training and the race, in the coming year; the memories to be carried forever of the whole experience as a composite; not to mention, the hard-earned, cherished medal, badge, shirt, and other memorabilia picked up at the pre-race Expo, used and worn with a great deal of pride! It is an all-round, 'feel good', the Comrades, for supporters and runners alike (extreme pain and difficulty notwithstanding!), so it is, all things considered, not so surprising after all, that people keep repeating it, regardless of how hard it is!

So, to my first Down Run! For my second Comrades, I set my sights on the 'Back to Back' medal, introduced in 2005, for those who run their first and second Comrades consecutively, and on a Bronze – for finishing in under 11 hours. By late 2015, I'd acquired a few ground-breaking books by authors who'd been interviewed on the running podcasts I'd been following (to prepare for Comrades) for over a year. I'd learned a lot more about training smarter, not just running big mileage. When the Coach Parry Online Community launched in January this year, I signed up right away. For a small monthly fee this gave me privileged access to webinars, Q and A sessions, and to the coach, who answers member's questions directly - plus a private Facebook group for members who can then interact and compare notes and share information, stories and humour. This all proved very helpful and informative indeed.

HAC COMRADES FINISHERS 2016

WOMEN

Monica Kativhu	7.05
Paulette Resink Jarvis	9.01
Miriam Choga	9.10
Rosie Mitchell	10.59
Nikki Kershaw	11.27

MEN

Gerald Madziyire	7.29
Stuart Gemmill	7.35
Batsirayi Nyamugama	8.16
Simon Fox	8.45
Rob Currie	8.45
Colin Colgrave	8.51
Dereck Sigauke	9.32
Andrew Edmondson	10.23
Simon Hammond	10.39
Tonderayi Murimwa	11.59



The Comrades Wall of Honour

My confidence that I could achieve a Bronze grew immensely in the months before the race, as I put into practice so many tips and concepts I'd picked up via all these resources and the books I'd read. I improved my qualifying marathon time, putting myself into the G seeding for the Comrades, shaved 43 minutes off my Two Oceans ultra, and was fully psyched for Comrades number 2! I had been warned by various experienced Comrades runners to expect the Down Run to be harder than the Up, which sounds somewhat counter-intuitive, and I wasn't sure what to expect.

This year, we went along to the Comrades International Fun Run, three days prior to race day, an easy 5 km trot along the beach front in Durban and a chance to meet and mingle with other people from foreign parts. There were runners from all over the globe and it was fun, social and interesting. From there, it was off to Registration and the Expo, and a reminder of just how well-oiled a machine, the Comrades Marathon really is. With the volumes of runners from South Africa and around our continent and the rest of the world who enter this race annually these days - it would have to be! Organising this event is a year round job for a hard working team of people, and thousands of volunteers too, especially on race day itself. The Expo at huge events like Two Oceans and Comrades is always exciting and fun, with stands offering the latest of everything from gear to footwear to race food and more, that a runner or outdoor enthusiast could ever want, plus a bunch of other interesting stands besides, that are less runner-orientated - remembering that most runners are accompanied by their families too. As at the Two Oceans Expo, I went in search of Brad Brown, the South Africa radio presenter and online podcast interviewer on both South African podcasts I'd been following, and Lindsey Parry the Comrades online coach, who had encouraged members of the Coach Parry Community to come and meet them. I'd succeeded in meeting Lindsey at Two Oceans, but failed to find Brad, who'd been out of the Old Mutual Live Radio booth at the time. This time, I tracked down both of them.

I enjoyed an animated chat with Brad in the radio booth from where the Old Mutual Live Digital Radio team were broadcasting live online and around the Expo (and throughout the race as well) while they took a short break. Not long afterwards, one of their team came and found me, asking if I would come and be interviewed on Old Mutual Live! This really tickled me as I had been listening to their podcasts - all of which are interviews with runners and other people of interest in the running world, from the very famous to the unknown recreational - into which category I fell! - for the past 18 months. I thoroughly enjoyed my 11 minutes being streamed live round the Expo and on the internet, chatting about Comrades and my love of running. This new experience added another dimension to my enjoyment of registration and

Expo day, and my interview is there for posterity online at Old Mutual Live!

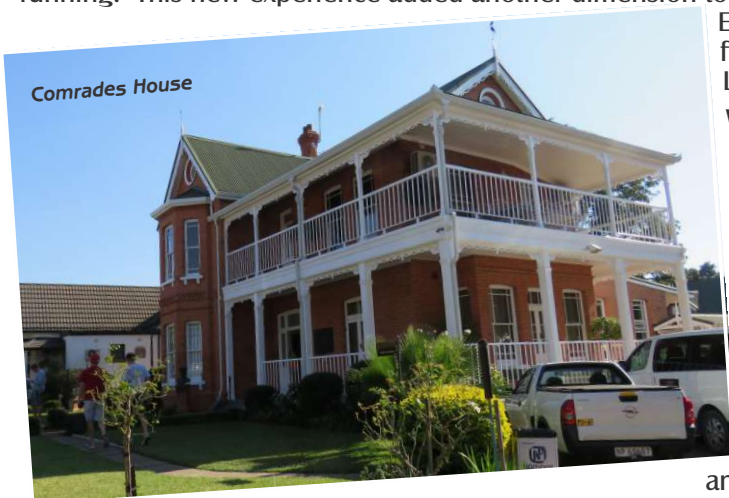
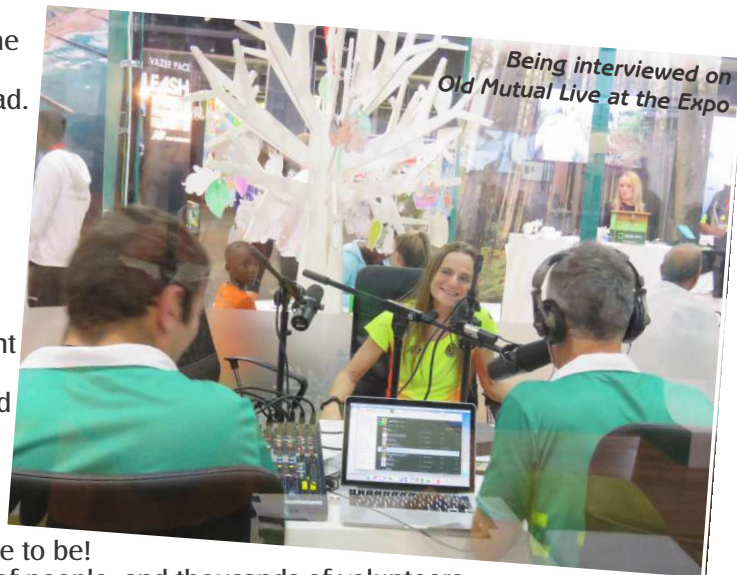
We popped along that evening to the International 'Meet and Greet'.

We were shown an inspiring documentary, recently made, about the race and its history. If the international runners weren't already fully psyched up for the race, they certainly were afterwards! Amongst well-known speakers at the event was Bruce Fordyce, the famous 9 times winner of this race (8 of those, consecutive!), an excellent, amusing presenter.

We spent the two nights before race day in a charming self-catering cottage about 25 minutes' drive outside Pietermaritzburg near Howick, and wished we had longer to explore this beautiful forested area, popular with hikers and mountain bikers. The day before

race day, we visited the race Start by City Hall, and Comrades House, home of the Comrades Museum about which I'd heard on an Old Mutual Live podcast. Registrations were also taking place here, though the vast majority of runners register at the Expo in Durban. The Museum was well worth the visit, with displays taking visitors through the entire history of the race in a 30 to 45 minute visit, in an interesting and accessible way. We then drove the part of the race route that we had not driven the year previously, again finishing our drive at the Comrades Wall of Honour, which is set in the hillside roughly half way and displays shields commemorating many famous Comrades winners and runners across the decades of the race. You don't have to be famous to have a shield here however - any runner who completes the race can buy a spot if they wish!

At last, Race Day came! Sarah, the Ultimate Supporter of what is referred to as 'The Ultimate Human Race' - with the very apt tag line, 'It will Humble You' (and that it assuredly does!) cooked the porridge at 3am, while I donned my carefully laid out kit, after what inevitably is a mostly sleepless night! Race jitters take their toll, and suddenly the alarming Reality that you have been preparing for, for the past 6 to 9 months, is upon you! Today, you run approximately 90 km. Can you actually do it? Only time beating up on your legs, relentlessly pounding tar, and grit determination, will tell! Thankfully the traffic from that side of Pietermaritzburg was kind to us and we were at the Start an hour early, as is recommended; 4.30 am. Already the spot-lit area was a bustling hive of activity and excited and nervous anticipation, runners streaming into their starting pens, from A (elite runners, including potential winners and gold medalists (top 10), Wally Hayward



(sub 6 hours, named for seven times medallist with five wins, three of them record-breaking and still the oldest person ever to finish the race) and Silver medalists (sub 7½ hours) to H (recreational runners and novices with marathon qualifying times between 4 hours 40 mins and 4 hours 59 mins 59 secs). Pens B to D and F to G comprise runners with progressively slower marathon times as specified in the various pen qualifying times set by Comrades. Pen E comprises those with a hallowed 'Green Number' – a permanent Comrades Number in recognition of that runner having completed ten Comrades Marathons. There are significant numbers of runners with Double and Triple Green Numbers for completing twenty and thirty, and last year, one man actually got his Quadruple Green Number after completing his fortieth! Pen CC is for those running to raise money for an official Comrades Charity. You can actually 'buy' a place here by contributing at least the specified minimum amount to one of these designated charities yourself - or by raising it (and more, one hopes!) from donations.



Sarah managed to bag herself a place right on the side-line barrier beyond the Start line, and so could see, hear and enjoy all the drama and excitement of the Start which is a truly magnificent and emotional experience for runners and spectator alike. It was really cold – way colder than the Durban start – and primary Comrades sponsor Bonitas had donated branded 'body warmers' made of disposable biodegradable material this year. Bin liners with holes cut for the arms, used by runners to keep warm at a cold early morning start in many races, were had been banned for safety and environmental reasons (these sometimes trip runners up at the Start of a very big race after being discarded in their path).

Qualified for G batch this year, I was a bit nearer the Start. I loved the fanfare, music, exciting vibe and atmosphere of the race start just as much as I did last year, and more - as I discovered after the canon fired, that not only did a G seeding mean I started to shuffle sooner, but that I had actually begun to jog upon reaching the Start line, which took 6 minutes – way less than if I'd been in H batch, and I was moving faster, sooner, too (Comrades is a 'gun to gun' race, so this lost time is never regained). I even spotted and hailed Ultimate Supporter Sarah, who actually saw me setting off on this long and challenging journey!



When you start running in races, you tend to go out too fast and burn out too soon. It's a failing of so many runners, myself included. One fights the urge, but all the buzz and excitement tend to cause an overly fast beginning. Pacing correctly is probably never as important in any race as it is in Comrades, so notoriously hard, as it is all run on tar and undulates a great deal throughout. Down Run or not, there were plenty of tough hills to climb up, as well as to run down. In fact the first half of the Down Run is

actually a lot more Up than Down! By the time the long downhill sections come, you are already extremely tired and your legs have taken a hell of a pounding. So the trick is to conserve some energy for that second half. I managed this far better than I think I ever have in any race, in Comrades number two, and enjoyed the race experience a great deal, extreme pain notwithstanding. Pain in the legs is inevitable and it is a question of remaining determined to keep running and finish and to try to distract oneself from it, as it increases, with every step, in the second half! The support along the way from tens of thousands of stalwart spectators lining the route, was fantastic, and Sarah even managed to find me twice. Supporting this race is a huge feat in itself as the road closures cause traffic jams, and places you can drive to and park, to try to spot loved ones, are few and far between. As a runner, such support lifts ones spirits phenomenally, and I reckon can make the difference between finishing this gruelling race, and not finishing!

The kindness of strangers can also be immensely uplifting. In the last third of my race, when I really felt broken and the pain was taking a heavy toll on my morale, I was suddenly also overcome with extreme thirst. It would be a while before I reached the next water point. I dazedly took in the presence of a family under a small gazebo, out for the day to cheer the runners, on my left, and noticed their little girl offering exhausted runners a drink in a paper cup. Manna from heaven! 'Apple for you!' she said chirpily. The first gulp of this ice cold apple juice in a cup filled with ice cubes was the best thing I ever drank!

As I crossed each cut-off mat (there are six of these to cross by a specified time or be removed, as the deadline is reached, from the race) I was thrilled to find myself an hour or more ahead of that time in each case, and my confidence grew, that I might actually achieve the Bronze I so wished for. The final ten kilometres, however, were truly torturous, and three kays from the Finish, I became anxious I would miss the under 11 hour target narrowly. Those three kays were monumentally painful and difficult and actually brought with them, after we'd been pounding down so many hills and truly annihilated our legs, some steep uphills!

However – I'd boldly declared my intent on broadcast podcast radio to get that Bronze! So get it, I must, the pain be damned! At last, I saw the metal race barriers lining the road ahead that signified we were now really close to the stadium and heard the cheering Durban crowds lining the route. I forgot all about the pain, put on a fast sprint, and suddenly, was running round the stadium in the finishing chute with all its flags and banners and the thousands of cheering supporters – a truly wonderful moment, that along the way in this race, especially in the last 30 km or so, seems like it will just never come!

I made my Bronze with just 57 seconds to spare, was handed my medal and special embroidered Comrades badge (these are collected and proudly sewn onto tracksuit tops and the like!), shortly afterwards received my Back to Back medal as well, then limped my way to the International tent and found Sarah and various friends. I now concur with those who say the Down Run is harder. It is way, way more painful! Unlike in 2015 when I hardly sat down after my race, and flitted around the tent socialising, in 2016, as soon as I could, I lay down on the grass, oblivious of passers-by, my legs on fire with pain. Getting to the car later involved climbing down a staircase, and it was funny watching the runners, myself included, attempting this! It was so excruciating it could really only be achieved backwards or sideways, with much wincing and groaning!

Going down stairs remained painful for a couple more days for me, but by day three, post-race, I was thankfully pain free, and aside from the two toenails I later lost, remarkably unscathed! In the last 3 days of the race, I recall thinking that I could not possibly put myself through this again. That sentiment remained for a while in the International tent. But by the time I was gingerly tottering my way to the car, I was ready to commit to Comrades number 3 in 2017! That's what this race does. It gets into your system and the good memories so thoroughly outweigh the memories of the pain and the struggle, that you want to do it again – and again. And let's face it, a large part of what makes Comrades great, is that it IS such a struggle. Being able to overcome the inevitable desire to quit when it gets really, really hard out there, is why one feels so proud to finish.



Comrades Dream - Monica and Peter

by Coach Aaron T.C Whyte

"All men dream, but dangerous are those who dream with their eyes wide open..."

I am a firm believer in dreams - hence "My dream is to see dreams coming true".

Monica and Peter have been running road races for the past decade or so and have never been employed in any other sector. They have run for their livelihood. While Peter has run the Comrades six times previously, Monica has not completed the BIG C in her two attempts. Both have taken part in some of the toughest Ultras, including The Legends 68, Loskop, Matopos and City to City. They have taken part in standard marathons including, Mandela, Soweto, Lesotho and Vic Falls.

Monica has previously won Vic Falls twice, Nongoma Ultra twice and made the Mandela Marathon Top 10 thrice. Peter won Chatsworth Marathon in 2014 and has represented Zimbabwe at the World Cross Country Championships twice. One goal,

one dream, one aspiration they have in common, is to make the Top Ten at Comrades. It is this common goal that brought us together.

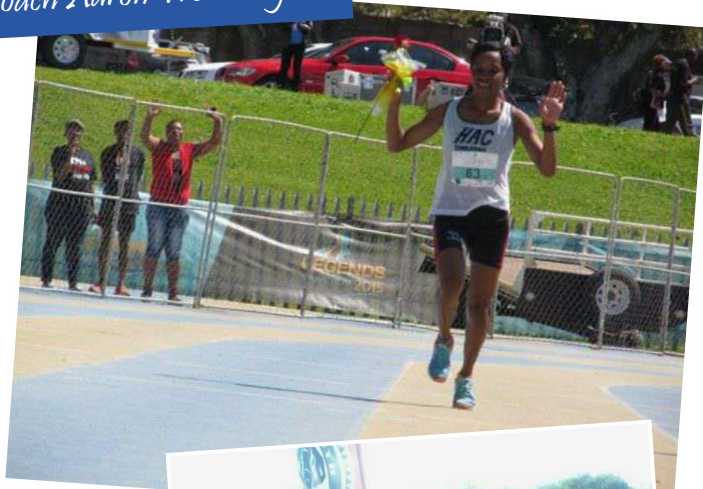
I have always wanted to see a Zimbabwean lady making Comrades Top Ten and also see someone wearing local club colours, making Comrades Top Ten: That's making history! We have had male Zim athletes making Comrades Top 10, but no one in local club colours. We believe it's time to re-write history books.

Thanks to Old Mutual for sponsoring the two athletes to train and compete under HAC. Without the support from

Old Mutual and HAC it would not have been possible to execute our training programme which we started in September 2015, when we started our conditioning and base training. As part of our programme, Monica participated in the Legends Marathon (68km) where she placed a highly creditable 2nd, then the Lesotho Marathon, where she placed 5th.

Our long runs intensified in December 2015, as we prepared to take part in our next major training race, Nongoma 56km in Zululand, South Africa: A true test of their fitness, the two did well with Monica placing 2nd Lady and Peter 3rd Man, both being the first Zimbabweans to cross the line. Buoyed by this feat, we intensified our training, targeting our final training race, The Matopos 56, where Monica came First in 4 hrs 02 while Peter placed 8th in 3 hrs 42.

Having done all our preparations we thank God who has taken us this far, Old Mutual, HAC and all club members who have been rallying behind us, giving us support and encouragement. Without all this support we would not be talking of any Comrades dreams. To the Chairman, Committee, Club Members and our sponsors, Old Mutual, we would like to say we will do our best and history shall be re-written. Keep praying and keep supporting us....Ebenezer, thus far the LORD has taken us.



HAC Cross Country Series 2016

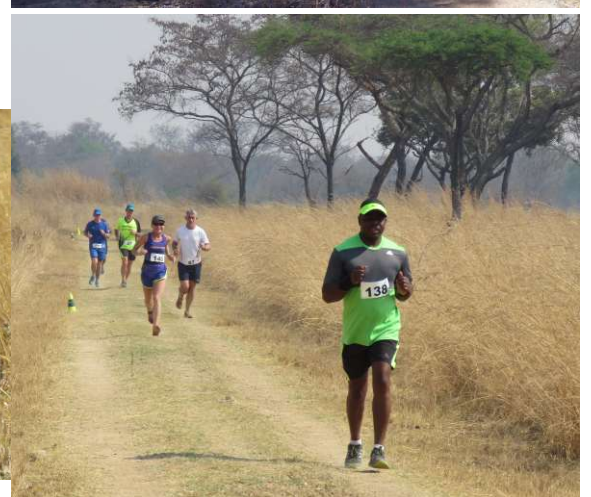
Rosie Mitchell
Photos SJ Nott, Rosie Mitchell, Sean Quinlan



The 2016 Cross Country Series was once again very popular. New in the series was the first event – the Big Sky Run held at Mukuvisi Woodlands, where a run/walk/cycle is offered every Sunday morning, year-round. Sean Quinlan of Big Sky is a regular runner at Mukuvisi and through this event, shared the enjoyment of this lovely place with HAC members. 159 runners turned out and the weather was perfect. This was a wonderful social occasion!



The next three events were the traditional Fuch Lubricants Pomona Quarry/Art Farm Run, the Beatrice Jijima culminating in the annual volleyball match against the local farmers, and the Komani Estates Runs. All were very well attended and enjoyable. The series once again culminated at the beautiful Irvines Game Park, where



everyone enjoyed running through the lovely scenery and spotting game along their way, plus Irvines hospitality with delicious chicken burgers and drinks at the end. A big thanks to all sponsors of the Cross Country Series.



The 2016 Rooney's High 5 and Extreme 15



What an amazing turnout at the annual Rooney's High 5 and Extreme 15 2016 - with a fabulous 329 results! There were lots of children participating and a very festive atmosphere all round! The Rooneys long sleeved grey T shirts were a big hit again, and most people stayed for breakfast and to socialise for some hours at Borrowdale Country Club, the usual start and end point for this popular annual fun run.

Thank you to Rooneys and Europcar for sponsoring this run again – it is always such an enjoyable day!



As has become tradition, Niall Rooney requested that we donate 50% of the race income to Environment Africa and their Save the Rhino Fund. A payment of \$1450 was made to this very worthy cause – well done everybody!



The Umfurudzi Trail Run 2016

Rosie Mitchell

pics Rosie Mitchell, SJ Nott

Inaugurated in 2015 through the efforts of ultra runner Ben Burr, the 2016 Umfurudzi Trail Run was expanded to include a 50km ultra marathon. In addition, instead of offering the 25km route as both an individual and relay race, this distance remained, but as an individual challenge, along with a 7.5km and 12.5km trail run.

Ben's goal is to establish trail running as a better-known genre in Zimbabwe. It is all the rage in South Africa and globally, but in its infancy here. I for one am delighted. This is my favourite type of running and I do most of my training on trail in any case! Our country boasts so many scenic areas and so much wildlife that the potential for superb trail running events is vast.

The primary 2016 sponsor of the Umfurudzi event was again Unifreight, which went into a joint venture with National Parks here in 2010. Since then an extremely well-equipped rest camp has been built and the game park well re-stocked, following the tragic loss of vast numbers of animals to poaching. Fences have been refurbished and visitor numbers have much increased. The lovely Rest Camp boasts a swimming pool, bar and restaurant.

This beautiful game park encompasses 760 square kilometres of pristine bush in undulating landscape which includes mountainous terrain. In addition to the National Parks Rest Camp, Hippo Pools Camp about 12 kilometres away, built by conservationist Iain Jarvis 34 years ago, continues to this day, with his network of marked hiking trails. Combined, these incorporate a distance of almost 300km, through some truly gorgeous landscapes. Less than 3 hours' drive from Harare, Umfurudzi is well worth a visit, whether for a day, a weekend or much longer.

Last year's event drew a sizeable crowd of runners keen to experience the adventure of the trail, many of them trying out this type of running for the first time. As regularly happens in trail races worldwide, a fair number of those tackling the 25km race went astray, adding extra mileage. It is easy to miss a trail marker when one is very hot and tired, and the temperature, both last year and this, was truly extreme – reaching 39°C. Accordingly the 25km route was very well marked this year!

The four events attracted an even bigger crowd, including most who were at last year's event, and plenty more besides!



It was a great excuse for a lovely family weekend away in a really beautiful game park.

A small group of runners decided to tackle the 50km ultra marathon, a very challenging distance on road, even more so on trail.

Whilst trail running is a bit gentler on joints and muscles in terms of impact, it is much more strenuous and demanding in terms of strength and endurance.

In addition, this race had the added challenge of extremely high temperatures, which inevitably makes a race much harder.

Some of us had got together for some training runs prior to the event. We had a lot of fun, practising using the compulsory GPS to navigate, and getting some experience of running long distances off road, and carrying hydration packs.

I enjoyed sharing my regular trails with this group – most of whom train on tar and had not known such scenic places were so close to home!



On race day at the briefing, we were assured the route was very well-marked and the GPS merely a precaution, with all junctions clearly marked by several red ribbons.

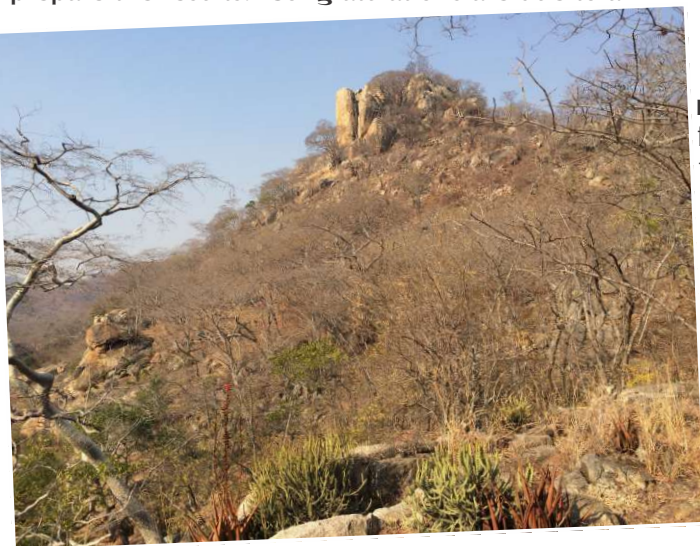
Most of us took this literally and did not even turn our devices on at race start. This proved to be a major tactical blunder! All but two runners – the fastest, who left the rest of us for dust – missed the somewhat obscure, single marker, for probably the most important junction in the 50 kay race – a sharp right turn into the bush!

This left 90% of the field erroneously following the 25km route, with its extremely prominently marked sharp left turn about 3 km from there! Convinced this was the correct route, several of us added over 7km to our race at this early point in the proceedings.

By race end, some had increased that to almost 13 extra kays! Those who self-corrected earlier added 3. No matter – because really, this race was much more about the experience than about winning! Several of us who had added a lot of extra distance eventually bailed, the only sensible thing to do, succumbing to heat exhaustion.

We had a fine time, most of the time, nonetheless, enjoying the camaraderie for which this sport is well known! The heat made the race extremely taxing, as it was truly off the scale, but the scenery, as you can see, was absolutely awesome throughout, making it all worthwhile! And the moral of this story is – we will rely 100% on our GPS track next year – forget the markers!

Our group made a lovely Umfurudzi weekend of it again, staying in one of the superb chalets in the rest camp, and our niece Carly, aged just 11, ran the 12.5km route for a second year - what an achievement, especially in such extreme heat. Sarah Nott and Rob Swinton enjoyed the 7.5km run, then pitched in to record the times and prepare the results. Congratulations are due to all



runners for tackling these races in extreme heat and to Ben and the rest of the crew for organising this super event.



The average person reading this would think it was crazy but most of you as runners will understand when I say George and I had a fabulous running holiday in Australia. In total we ran 19 official timed runs in 10 weeks, 8 weeks in New South Wales and Queensland and 2 weeks in Perth Western Australia.

Seven Park Runs

(Parkrun (styled as parkrun) is the name given to a collection of five-kilometre running events that take place every Saturday morning in fourteen countries across five continents). We ran in Lisamore,



Yamba (New South Wales) and Busselton (Western Australia). These runs are very social and we met many interesting Aussies and tourists like ourselves. This is more my level of running as there are no expectations and you can just enjoy. I ran in parks, along the side of a river and along the beach front - all scenic, beautiful runs.

Three 10k Fun Runs

At the Coff's Harbour Running Festival, George did 21k and I did 10k. We won the Gold in our age groups and his grand-daughter won Silver in hers!

The annual Fun Run in the town near where the family live was our next outing. Very well organised - but the Aussies don't know how to do water points! Entries are extremely expensive, averaging about Aus\$50, and you get warm water and something they call "Hydrate" - no colour, and I think, sugar free. If you want anything else, you have to provide it, and leave it on a special table, signed and sealed. We never quite got this right!

Five 21k Runs

We travelled 1000 km to Yeppon in Queensland to meet up with past HAC members Bernice Wilde and George Elcombe, where we all ran the 'Yeppon Official' and spent a fabulous weekend reminding each other of days gone by at HAC. We stopped in Toowoomba to have lunch with Des Chalmers who many will remember.

During the week we travelled to the nearest town 50k away and to the village 15k away to run in the parks and on the fantastic Run/Walk ways which criss-cross every town and village in Australia. We stayed in many villages and small towns on our travels and we never found one that did not have running track.

The purpose of all this running was preparation for the ultimate goal - The World Masters Athletics Championships in Perth, 26 October to 6 November. Over 4000 athletes ranging in age from 35 years to 96 years took part. The Opening Ceremony was held on the banks of the Swan River in central Perth at sunset, very beautiful.. The Zimbabwe Team consisted of George and I marching between the United States and Australia, both with over 200 athletes, coaches, physios, medical staff and managers! We were a novelty to them as they tried to comprehend that George trained with his dog on the farm and twice a week with other social runners at a running club.

Our first event was the 8k Cross Country; 4 laps through a beautiful wooded park. George finished 7th in this event. At this point I must be honest and say I take part to enjoy and finish the event, and also so I don't have to stand on the sideline and watch George all the time. This means I am usually under-rained and have no expectations!

I opted not to run the 10k event which was around the 400m track (25 laps) and in hindsight George wishes he had never run it either! It was one of the hottest days in Perth with the recorded temperature reaching 36° degrees. They ran at 10.45am on a bright blue track which reflected the heat back. Seven competitors did not finish. George finished severely dehydrated. Unlike in Africa where they put you on a drip and it is almost instant recovery, in Australia the medics are reluctant to do anything but the basics, for fear of being sued. So we were left to try and re-hydrate and recover in the 3 days leading up to the big event the 21k.



We went down the coast in the hope that he could recover and get some of his strength and fitness back. He recovered well, but not enough to run his best time at the event. Needless to say he was very disappointed with his finish time of 1 Hour 59 mins which was minutes slower than his time at the first 21k at Coffs Harbour.

I managed to finish the 21k and received a finisher's medal, which was all I wanted as proof that I had participated at the Games. I enjoyed chatting to the many ex Zimbos who were out cheering along the course, (you realise how many homesick Africans there are out there, they seem to seek us out as they just want to talk about HOME) and seeing the ducks and black swans along the river.

Feeling disappointed, eager to get to the WACCA to watch South Africa play Australia at cricket and convinced that the medal ceremony for his age group had already been held, George was insistent that we leave.

As we were walking out of the area I heard the announcer calling for the Zimbabwean Athlete please to present himself at the podium for the medal ceremony! He took a bit of convincing, that as there were only 2 athletes from Zimbabwe and it definitely wasn't me, it had to be him, before he agreed to go back, to discover he had won the Bronze Medal for the Men's 75-79 year age category.

A great reward for many hours of lonely, determined training and a fabulous ending to our running holiday.

The next Master Athletics Championships will be held in Malaga, Spain in September 2018. George and I will be there - so why not join us? It would be great to have a Zim Team of more than two! All you need is to be over 35 years and want to run 10k, (10k events at the next games will be run on the road and not the track), 21k or a marathon. For more info check out the World Masters Athletics Website and Facebook page.



The first PPC Msasa Marathon

*Rosie Mitchell
pics Tinashe Chapepuka*

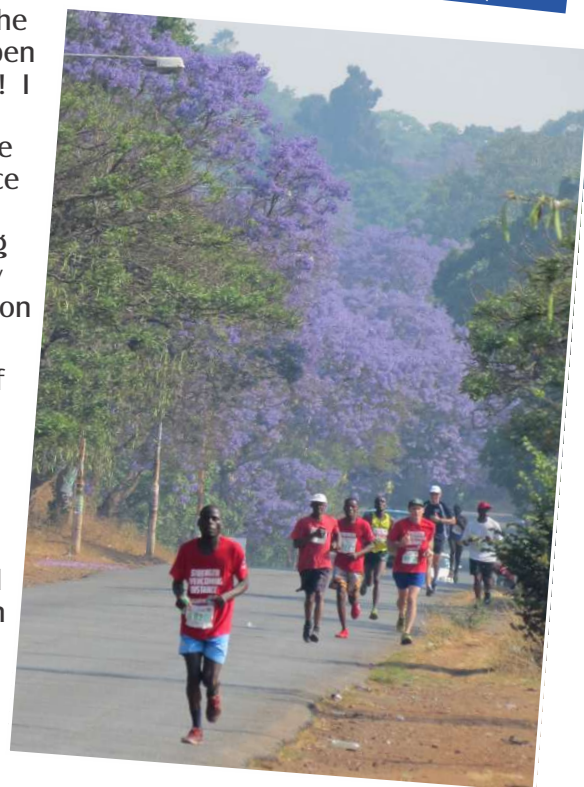
It's always fun to try a new race! So the advertising for the launch of the PPC Msasa Marathon immediately caught my eye. Not just for the novelty, but also because I'd watched this brand new cement factory going up literally before my eyes, earlier in the year. It happens now to occupy, indeed dominate, part of the lovely big, open sky line I see in the distance regularly whilst training, as is my wont, on trail! I had no idea what it was that I could observe, growing taller and taller each couple of weeks, while running down the Haka Game Park fence, and to the Donnybrook area and edge of Mabvuku. Eventually, not long before the race was announced, I worked it out, and decided to go see it up close and personal for myself by registering for the marathon there. What an amazing sight! It's incredible how fast this was built! At night, since I'm often on my return bush run after dark, it truly looks like a magical fairy castle out there on the inky horizon - lights twinkling from top to bottom, outlining its shape.

There was a half marathon and a fun run too, and the event attracted lots of interest, both being new, and offering prize money. I was still carrying the Umfurudzi Trail Run in my legs but decided to give it a bash anyway!

The route itself attracted me, starting as it did, right in my own 'hood', then for the most part following Harare Drive, for almost its entire length! It finished at Old Hararians in Milton Park. I rather enjoy driving Harare Drive as one can enjoy beautiful big African skies once past Borrowdale Road and moving towards Pomona, there is Art Farm with its resident reedbuck, which I regularly spot while driving by, and there is the massive vlei that I have spent many happy hours exploring, as my family used to live on a property on the Domboshawa road, and it ended right at the edge of this vlei. As teenagers, we just went on out there and had a great time exploring and picnicking. Very sadly, that beautiful former 'playground' of ours is now completely restricted from access by a massive, imposing fence which must have cost a fortune - I can't imagine why this should be necessary to protect the tiny part of it where there is some kind of state owned communication equipment (or so I am given to understand at any rate!) and this recent occurrence thoroughly irked me.

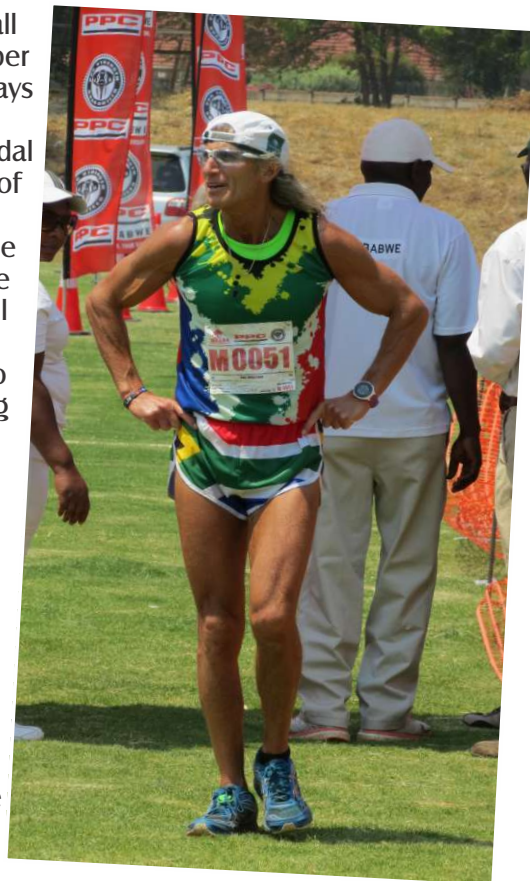
I made arrangements to leave a car at the Start at the new PPC cement factory and be picked up at the Finish. Buses were laid on from Old Hararians, but it seemed a bit silly to go all the way there, then come all the way back, when PPC is less than 15 minutes' drive from our home!

At the Start, I met just a very few familiar faces, and one strange one, who stood out a mile. An outrageously fit looking guy with long flowing grey hair and superb, South African flag-branded running kit. This person, I just had to meet! Had he really come all the way from SA for this race??



Well yes – indeed he had! He explained that he is drawn to new, relatively small events, and that he'd heard about this one in SA, as PPC sponsors quite a number of races there. And he was one very interesting guy! In fact I ran the first 20 kays with him, swapping running tales, though it would be very tough to match his exploits! Introducing himself only as 'Jules', here was a 24 times Comrades medal holder (double Green Number!) who runs a marathon – every single weekend of the year! Some weekends he runs two marathons back to back, and on one weekend he runs three – because there is a night marathon in between the one on Saturday and the one on Sunday (which Sunday marathon happens to be the Johnson Crane in Jo'burg)! He has run all kinds of truly crazy ultra marathons all over the world and it was inspiring to hear him chat about his interesting experiences. What's more, he was my age (mid 50s) – and stated absolutely no intention of cutting down on his running, nor indeed, any sign that it was doing him anything but good!

By a process of cunning online elimination, I am almost certain his name must be Julian Karp – having consulted the Comrades Green Number Roll of Honour list, since he did tell me of his 24 medals. Being one of those people who loathes social media, he cannot be tracked down by such means, and I never asked for his surname! He seems to be quite a big running cheese (not surprising with those credentials!) and has been interviewed by Runners' World magazine. Well, with company like this to regale me with fabulous running tales, those 20 kays flew by, in spite of the seriously excessive heat, which was not helped by the fact the race started really late since the transport buses bearing the majority of participants to the start, arrived very late... After that, I couldn't quite keep up with Jules, so I was out there on my own for most of the rest of it – which doesn't bother me at all, I just soaked in the scenery, and



began to register the toll the heat was taking on me, as this route had practically no shade at all throughout, and the temperature was phenomenally high. There were thankfully lots of friendly water points, however, from which I grabbed two bottles each time, throwing the contents of one over my head and gulping down the other as I ran!

I enjoyed my run a lot, the inferno-style heat notwithstanding (nothing can ever be quite as hot as the Umfurudzi Run, after all!) and powered to the end in a perfectly respectable 4 hours 34. The Finish, however, was truly a damp squib – for me and for large numbers of other runners, both ahead and behind me!

Bizarrely, the organisers had simply stopped timing anyone, and walked away, only 4 hours and 10 minutes after the race was SUPPOSED to have started – a ridiculous time limit for a marathon in any case, but even more ridiculous considering the race had begun so late!

This meant that most of the older runners could not hope to win prizes or acclaim – regardless of the fact the race had been publicised as one offering prize money all the way to Grand Masters category. I wrote to

PPC about this, as it caused widespread disappointment and dismay – and have been assured that the more standard 5½ to 6 hours will next year be allotted for finishing the marathon! The Half on the other hand, was allocated the normal 3 hour cut-off, and the fun run by all accounts was thoroughly enjoyed by all participants.



Never mind – it was good training, and I enjoyed myself (when don't I?). Our very own Portpher Dombojena won the men's marathon and Lizzie Chokore, the women's. 2nd and 3rd men were Lyno Muchena and Jonathan Chinyoka. 2nd and 3rd women



were Samukeliso Moyo and Monica Kativhu.

Provided they assure us of a more normal realistic cut-off time in 2017 - I'll do this one again!

Far and Wide Sky Run Zimbabwe 2016

Rosie Mitchell
pics Rosie Mitchell and SJ Nott

In 2015, I entered the Sky Run almost the moment its inauguration was publicised, thrilled to find a second trail running adventure to tackle in our country, following the launch earlier that year of the Umfurudzi Train Run. Alas, it was not to be. A car accident, whiplash injury and stern medical warnings on that score, prevented my participation.

So in 2016 I was determined nothing would come between me and this challenge! The race covers approximately 53 km through the Nyanga mountains and gorges, starting at Far and Wide's Juilasdale headquarters and ending on the golf course at Aberfoyle estate, using part of the Turaco Trail. It includes the ascent of our country's highest mountain, Nyangani.

By all accounts of the inaugural edition, this was definitely not an event for the faint-hearted. It had defeated some of our most hard-core, experienced ultra runners. Well over half the field did not finish the race. Several who did, arrived at Aberfoyle long after dark, well-broken!

Reducing the incredible Sky Run Experience to mere words is almost impossible. So - if you have a lot of stamina, can handle a lot of pain, have an adventurous spirit, love beautiful scenery and enjoy exploring on your own - best you sign up for the 2017 edition, and try it for yourself!

There's a critical cut-off point at about 23km. Participants have 5½ hours to get there. Arrive later and you are out of the race. Make the cut-off, and you are cautioned that from that point it is all or nothing. You have to finish. There are no ways in, to rescue you!

I knew it would be very tough, without a doubt, but I was fairly gung-ho. I do the vast majority of my training in the bush and hills of Chikurubi and Chishawasha. After Umfurudzi in September, I had squeezed in the inaugural PPC Msasa Marathon, plenty of long trail training runs, and the preceding weekend, the CIMAS 20 Miler. Then I rested up, till race day.

Sarah came along as the champion supporter and seconder that she is - along with a handful of other long-suffering partners of mad ultra runners - who had plenty of opportunities at Sky Run to bond and commiserate with one another! It's a very long day, for runners and supporters alike. It starts with a 3.30 am alarm, and ends after dinner and prize-giving! For the supporters, there were challenges too. Just to reach the 23km cut-off point took hours of driving through very tough terrain, with careful navigation!

The characteristics of this event that enticed me to it, were also what made it so phenomenally tough; the extremely mountainous terrain provides incredible pristine natural beauty, vistas and views, rock formations, waterfalls, forests, wildflowers, and scenic variety to die for; your legs nearly do die for it, too!

The tremendously steep ups and downs on rough, skiddy surfaces throughout the entire course tax the muscles, and the mind for that matter, beyond any normal limits. Then there is the altitude itself, the reduced oxygen, of course, having some effect on one's lungs and thus, running ability. There's the solitude, too. 42 people entered, 32 started, 14 finished. Over that distance and in that terrain, you are out there for many, many hours, absolutely alone - unless running deliberately with buddies, as one trio of Danish men did. The level of pain, already veering towards extreme on arrival at the 23 km food and drink station, is completely off the scale in the last, gruelling, mostly very steeply downhill sections, as one descends to Aberfoyle.

At that stage, expletives fly into the air, addressed to no-one in particular - but thankfully I had some intermittent company and could share in the suffering a little! I never mind running alone, in fact, I prefer it - but after 10, then 11, then 12 hours out there solo, and with ever-increasing pain in the legs, most particularly the quads, from the steep, slippery, muddy, rocky downhills that seemed never to end, it was good to share some of those kays, some of the time, with the Danes, and with Roberto!



Arriving the day before at Far and Wide, we had been greeted by organiser Chris Cragg at registration. Enquiring as to my readiness to take on the Sky Run, I advised him I'd trained pretty well in the bush in hills and on trails, and had run the Comrades twice, including this year. How hard could this 52 kay race be, by comparison, I silently asked myself?

"This is twice as tough as Comrades," he said, poker-faced. I was simultaneously alarmed - and if I'm honest - a little disbelieving. The Comrades is 90 kays, in the heat, on tar, with lots of hills. Could this really be harder?

Towards dusk the next day, after a 4.45am race start, almost in despair of ever reaching the end, and wondering if my typical ultra runner's overly-developed, well-practiced pain threshold and mental tricks to distract myself from that pain can hold out for even one more step - suddenly, in the distance, I think I can hear the sound of drumming. Could this possibly mean the end is soon to be in sight? Dare I hope?

The drumming gets louder. I keep running, and running and running, along the little track through the forest, every step hurting like I could never have imagined, almost desperate to stop! Suddenly - after another truly tortuous steep downhill section - the forest ends! The rolling green lawns of the Aberfoyle golf course stretch out ahead! I sigh and grit my teeth, realising it's now (yet another) uphill section, all the way, probably another kay, to where the supporters, the drummers and the Finish line await. But the drumming and the cheering keeps me running - even though I'd rather crawl!

Once over the line, I collapse onto the grass. It has taken me 12 hours, 43 minutes. Sarah shoots video of me gasping, 'Never, Ever Again!' Onlookers laugh out loud. They've heard it all before - from me, and from others, who chose to take on these mad, crazy, fantastic races that demand your everything, break your body, and almost - not quite - break your will. Chris Cragg is there. I call out to him, "You're right! MUCH, much harder than the Comrades!"

Don't get me wrong, however! Did I love the Sky Run? Assuredly, I did! Pain and suffering and runny gut (from which almost every other finisher also suffered) notwithstanding, this was an extraordinary adventure, challenge, experience and privilege. The stunning scenery completely took my breath away from start to finish. It was a trip to Paradise. What a country we have the joy to live in, and appreciate! I was absolutely in my element - and conquering a challenge this tough, is, in itself,

extraordinarily satisfying!

Running, since I took it up 12 years ago, has for me always been about soaking up and enjoying my surroundings above all else, which is why I train primarily in the bush. It washes away my stress and clears my mind, enabling me to be absorbed in the moment completely. I absolutely love events, too, especially the huge ones like the Two Oceans and Comrades; the vibe, camaraderie and public support are incredible.

I don't really enjoy training on tar in the suburbs, I get bored. When you train on trails the scenery constantly changes, there is wildlife to watch for and enjoy, and you never run exactly the same route twice. There are the seasonal changes too, so it never feels dull, repetitive or like a chore. It can be tinder dry, with the long, gorgeous straw coloured grass that turns golden at sunset, or in the rains, lush, green, muddy and waterlogged, with marshes, streams and rivers to wade. It's like being a kid again, going off as a lone, intrepid explorer on an exciting adventure into the unknown. The Sky Run ticked all these boxes and more.

Was it hard? By golly - it was far and away the hardest event I ever tackled by a long shot! Three crazy ladies and 11 crazy men finished Sky Run 2016. You have to be a bit crazy to do this sort of event! There are many, many sections that simply can't be run, at all. There are rocks to climb, engaging all four limbs - streams and rivers to wade, mud to squelch through, rocks to trip on, scree to skid down. There is simply NO flat ground. Either, you are scrambling steeply upwards or you are skidding precipitously downwards.

I could not walk downstairs for a week. Instead, I limped down them backwards, and slowly. And hobbled about generally - a new experience for me. Even my two Comrades to date had not rendered me so damaged. The day after Comrades Up Run, I was not stiff at all. After the Down, I struggled a bit with stairs for two days, then was fine. Sky Run inflicts the sort of muscle micro-

tears that will probably take months to heal completely - though in the end, of course, those little injuries will make your legs that much stronger - ready for the next one.....

because:

Will I do it again?

YOU BET I WILL!

