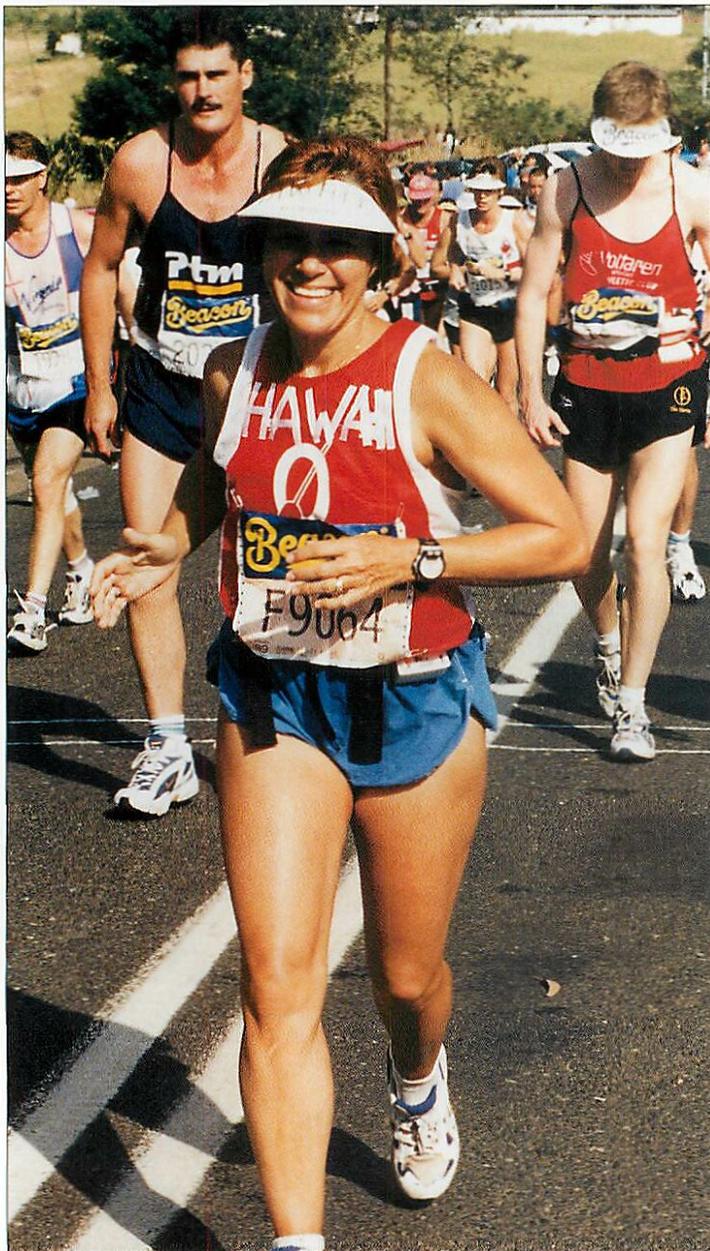


# OCC Runner Meets Ultramarathon Challenge in South Africa



JoAnne Klinke looks strong with 40km to go in ultramarathon race.

By JoAnne Klinke

*Editor's Note: JoAnne Klinke completed the 56 mile Comrades Ultramarathon in 9:50 and placed 5,000th overall. She compares this effort to running three RUN TO THE SUN events on Maui. She trained for the event by running Tantalus. Her parents were there to see her run, as well as an uncle who had run the same event in 1950.*

Running the Comrades Ultramarathon in South Africa is probably like no other race in the world. Covering a distance of 90 km (56 miles) the race attracts competitors from all over the world.

Started in 1921 by a small group of World War I veterans to honor their fallen comrades, the race has grown from a dedicated few to 14,000 registered runners in 1999. The race gained popularity in the USA when Alberto Salazar won the uphill Comrades in 1999 against all odds in a spectacular time of 5:38.

Getting signed up through the Internet proved to be the bullet proof way of getting to the starting line.

Starting the race at 6 a.m. with Vangeles' *Chariots of Fire* proved to be an emotional experience for the first timers like me who realize that 56 miles is a ridiculously long way to start an ultramarathoning career. Some runners had tears streaming down their cheeks, while others bowed their heads in a moment of prayer.

The race is between the two largest cities in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and the route is reversed every year. The course consists of undulating hills in Kwazulu, Natal with the Valley of a Thousand Hills spread out majestically to the north.

The people of Natal participate as spectators. They set up their "braaiivleis" along the road, including

picnics, music and dancing, and they cheer the runners with an enthusiasm unmatched. I had Hawaii stitched across my OCC singlet and I was delighted when the crowd would literally shout Hawaii in chorus. I responded with a broad smile and the shaka sign. Throughout the day, runners would shake my hand and welcome me to SA and inquire if I was enjoying myself. Actually, I was having the time of my life.

At Drummond, the halfway mark, thousands wait cheering. It is here that I decide to relax and enjoy myself rather than go all out. It is here that 2,000 runners are unable to make the cut-off time of five hours and their race comes to an abrupt end.

Public support for the race was totally amazing as every living citizen in Natal was out there cheering you up. There was never a dull moment from hilltop to hilltop. A special moment at Inchanga was when the Zulus sang *Shozalozza* to cheer on the runners.

After passing the 60 km mark, the runners are more spread out now, some walking, some running and some stopping. This is where the mental aspect of Comrades starts. The elite maintain that this is where their race is either lost or won.

With 30 km left, with lots of downhills and jarring of the knee joints, we look forward to the uphills for some pain relief.

At 4 km to go, I'm still feeling strong. I pick up my pace and reach Kingsmead Park Stadium cheered on enthusiastically by the large crowd. I cross the finish line in 9 hours, 50 minutes and am handed a bronze medal.

I experience a sense of sadness that this incredible race has come to an end. What a day!

If anyone is interested in doing this race with me in 2000, please call me.