

# Hilo to Volcano Run is Fabulous

By Don Eovino

January 17 was the 9th annual Hilo to Volcano Ultramarathon and Relay—31 miles from the Hawaii Naniloa Hotel to Cooper's Center at the Volcano.

OCC runners reconnoitered this year to test the experience for future participation. Initially, the idea of running 31 miles uphill from sea level to 4,000 feet, with temperatures ranging from 80 degrees at the start to 40 degrees at the top with stinging rain, loomed daunting enough.

Couple that with the recent rumbling eruptions of the ubiquitous lava flowing from the Kilauea Pu'u O O vent, and persistent asthma inducing vog, enticed only one OCC running team to attempt the adventure.

What a treat was in store for masters team Jon Hunter, Bob DeWitz and Don Eovino as they stretched out at 7 a.m. on historic Banyan Tree Drive (anybody wonder why they call it Banyan Tree Drive?), ready to compete with 20 some relay teams accompanied by

approximately 15 ultrarunners who would go the distance alone with the aid of their support vans.

The weather in Hilo was surprisingly warm, tropical and sunny. It hasn't rained in Hilo since New Year's Day. The entire race was blessed with clear blue skies, balmy cool breezes and even temperatures from start to finish.

As usual, OCC brings a friendly air of competition wherever it travels. The men's masters found themselves racing another masters team from Hilo, The Babooz. The race consisted of two mile legs measured by the roadside mile markers and no rotation of the three runners out of their original starting order. This translates into five handoffs per runner.

After one cycle, OCC found itself ahead of The Babooz by 45 seconds. This pattern persisted throughout the next four cycles, intermittently losing and finally gaining ground with each handoff.

With one set of handoffs remaining after four cycles, OCC was ahead by 1 1/2 minutes and was overconfident it was in the

bag to beat this team.

It was quite thrilling to compete along the way, since the dynamics of the race required you race against the same individual each leg. Also the intervals were fairly short and were marked by the mile markers on the side of the road.

The result was a mano-a-mano of each runner paired against his competitor, with the added excitement of estimating your own pace each mile. You could therefore compare your current times against your normal mile pace, and against the thrill of the same runner racing you.

Increasing the adrenalin flow was that after your first mile you could see the hand-off area with your teammates and support vehicles waiting for you to come racing in. Leg by leg you realized the painful toll of the race, the altitude and your body's fatigue as you neared the summit.

Reaching our last set of handoffs, we realized we awakened the competitive spirit of our sleepy Hilo challengers.

Two of their aged athletes were experienced Kona Ironmen finishers, and dig as deep as OCC could, we couldn't muster enough residual energy as the Hilo team caught up on the last hand off and slowly pulled away in the remaining 1,000 yards.

Saddened but otherwise ebullient, their 30 second victory over OCC still resulted in OCC's overall time being much lower than anticipated. Our finishing time of 4:02 was a seven minute and 49 second pace over 31 uphill miles. Very respectable, but intrinsically rewarding as we gave our all from start to finish.

Cheers of exhaustion erupted as each runner broke the finish line to be met with camaraderie, conversation and the challenge returning.

The Big Island race director cheerfully invited OCC to return and bring more teams next year. Proudly, OCC accepted and you better watch out Team Babooz! ☺



Don DeWitz hands off to Don Eovino at the Hilo Ultramarathon Volcano Relay at the mile marker.