

Two Oceans Ultra Marathon 2014



Two Oceans Marathon

We arrived in Cape Town almost a week before the race to do some sightseeing and soak up the atmosphere. It was absolutely fantastic! We saw wildlife, toured wineries, and gazed at the end of the continent. I won't pretend I got much running in, but I did a lot of walking and early mornings.

Race day was so exciting! The runners at the start sang popular folk songs and they took cell phone pictures in the dark. The vast majority of runners were South African, yet they were just as excited to be there as I was. Finally, the whole group fell silent before belting out their national anthem. I have been brought to tears many times at race starts from singing my own national anthem, (yes, I am a patriotic mush,) but it was no less moving to hear the South Africans raise their voices in song. If anything, it was more powerful knowing their own freedom is so recently won!



I always hang back at the start of a race because warming up is very important with my rheumatoid arthritis. Knowing I would be finishing close to the end of the time limit, I kept an eye on how many runners were behind me. At first, there were not many and I was spooked into picking up my pace, but within a couple of miles I made myself relax and ran the pace I had planned.



The first 18 miles were kind of a blur. We ran through cities and farms, waving at spectators, and getting our early miles in at a brisk pace. There was an occasional slight incline or decline, but no hint of the hills that lie ahead.

One of the really fun things about this race were the bibs. Each runner had one in the front and on the back. Along with the number were the runners first name, how many times they had completed the race before, (half or full), and if they were over 30, their age group. I don't think I have ever been in the company of so many 40 year olds at once, LOL.



This was Johns 29th ultra run!



I did meet a barefoot runner on the course. He was from Amsterdam and this was his first time going over 50k barefoot. I was a little worried about him when we hit a patch of older pavement. He seemed to have a hard time with it, but I saw him again many times on the course and that seemed to be the only time he struggled.

The water packets were a bit of a surprise. When I heard the description of them, I thought they would be like the ones I have seen in England, but these were much smaller and simpler. Each one had about 2 ounces of water in it and the bag had no designated opening. To get the water out, you had to rip into it with your teeth and hope that, in the process, you did not lose most of the water. I did not mind getting covered in half a baggie of water when I blew it opening the bag. I did not even mind all that much when a runner next to me would squirt half of it on me opening his own bag, or even when someone stepped on a full one and it sprayed 3 or 4 runners since it was hot and the water was generally cool and refreshing. The baggies of Powerade were another story. That stuff made everything it got near sticky!



Water baggies

We dipped down and made our pass along the Indian Ocean enjoying a cool breeze off the water and watching the beach goers relaxing in the autumn weather. It was lovely and I was enjoying myself while keeping an eye on my pace. Up to that point I was exactly on track. To finish the race before the course closed, 7 hours after the gun, I needed to maintain a 12 mpm average across the whole race. Giving myself 11 mpm in the first half and 13 for the hilly second half was shaping up to be a good plan.



Slogging up Chapman's Peak

I could live with the bags of water, but there was an understandable issue with the litter they created. Since they did not want baggies all over the national park, they decided to use water trucks and

biodegradable cups. This sounds like a great idea, but did not go as smoothly as planned. They did not count on the number of runners that would take more than one cup to drink or dump over their head. They also could not fill them very far ahead of time without the cups disintegrating. This resulted in a lot of people trying to get water from a hose that was dribbling it out of the truck. People desperate for water are pushy and aggressive, but I only saw one person being outright rude. The official word was that they did not run out of water, but really, if you can't get the water out to the runners, you might as well be bone dry. That was my only complaint about the race though. Thankfully I was carrying a couple of bottles and was able to snag some ice cubes at one stop and follow a couple of other runners to a spigot a little ways off the course so I was okay. I feel bad for the people behind me though as I am sure the situation got progressively worse rather than better.



Awesome spectator!



The views were so spectacular!



Add caption



The little black dots on the beach are horses



Approaching The Sentinel





The sun was intense





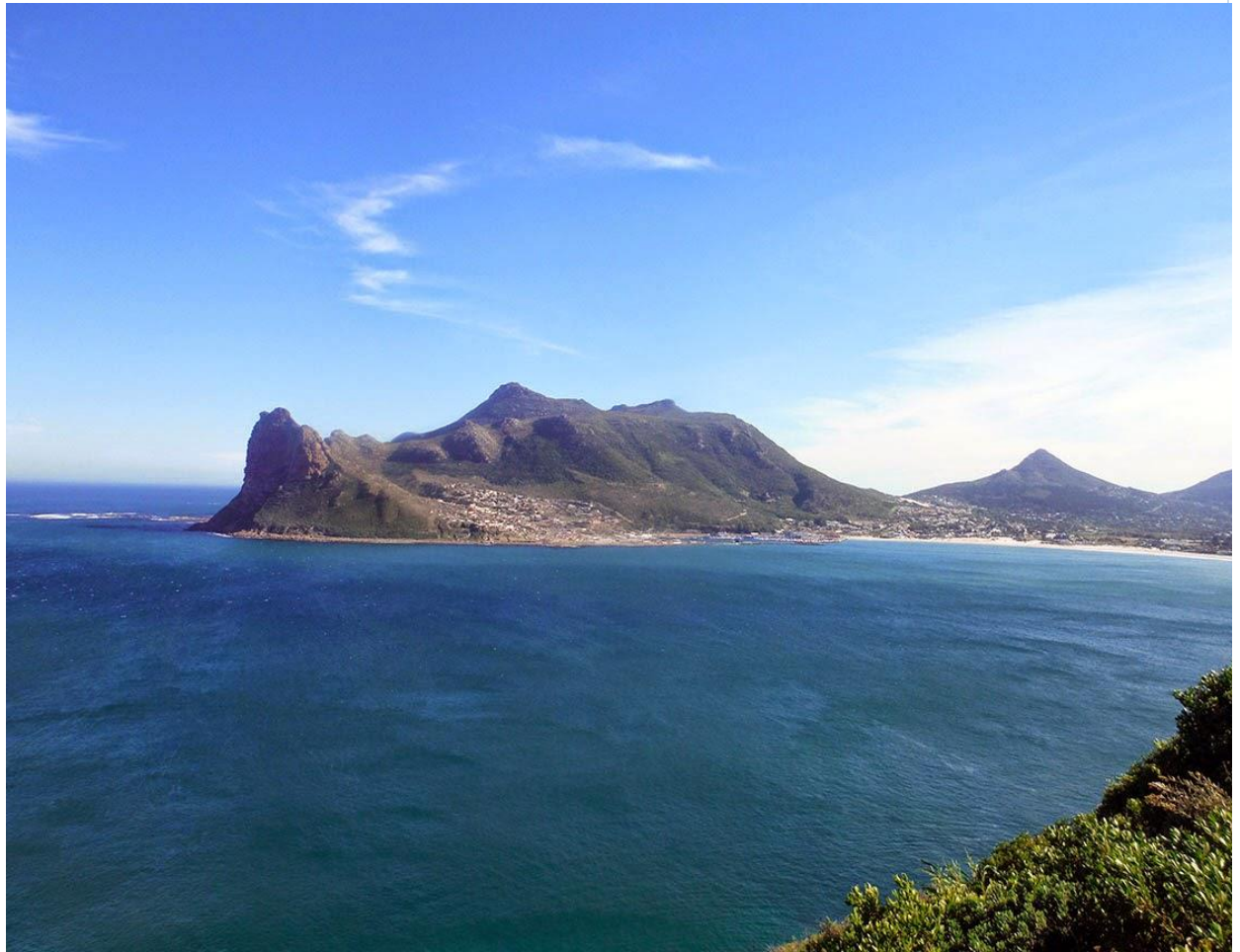
Coming up on our first water stop without water



Same as above from a different vantage point. I was shocked to see runners stretched out so far behind me!



Fun band in the middle of nowhere



The Sentinal, Haut Bay



Despite the water shortage, Chapman's Peak was absolutely breathtaking! The views of the ocean were amazing. There were even bands and supporters far up the mountain who had to have hiked there on their own. One lady was standing in the brush on the side of the road playing the violin for us! We had lots of time to enjoy the view since everyone around me was reduced to a walk. No matter, we had made good time to the hill, we could take our time going up.

After Chapman's peak we picked up the pace back down to the Atlantic Ocean. A short bit of flat was a reprieve before the next climb up Constantia neck. The population of spectators was really picking up. People were cheering, kids were running along collecting the foam visors we had been given in our swag bags and they were thrilled when I stopped for a picture. It was turning into a real party atmosphere just when we needed it the most. There was lots of music, live and recorded, and drink stops were coming about one per mile. Constantia neck was much more wooded so we had wonderful shade to go with the great entertainment. Finally, we crested the top with great fanfare before heading down. Other than one short uphill bit, it was all downhill to the finish.



Down hill time!

The feeling of finally hitting the 50K mark and having an hour left on the clock was fantastic! The runners around me discussed the fact that we could walk the rest of the way if we had to and still finish. I love that moment in a race ☺ I had no intention of just walking, but I admit, I did more than necessary simply because I was going to be happy to finish.



The kids were so thrilled a runner stopped for them :-)



Yay! Shade!



Notice the collection of foam visors. He actually asked for my hat, LOL. I told him I still needed it.



I laughed out loud :-)

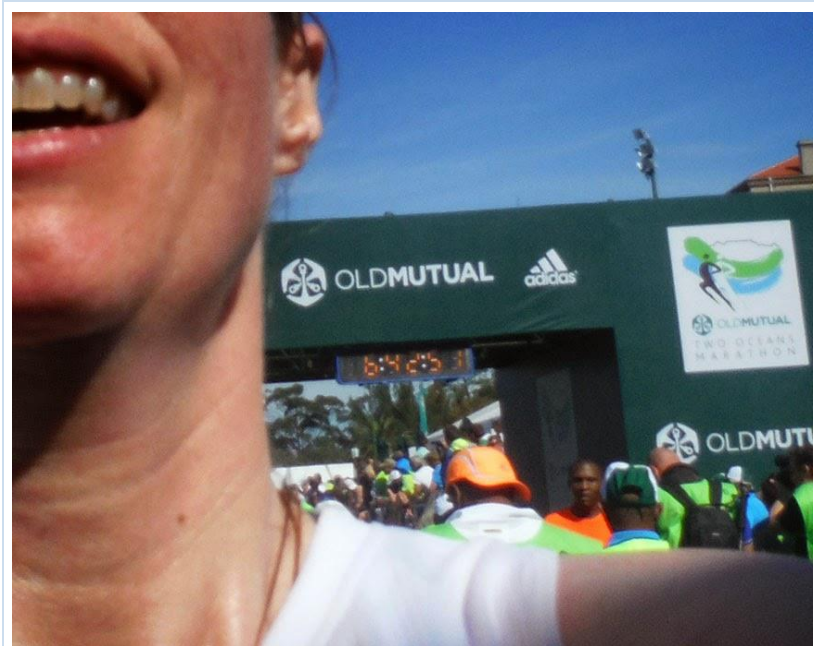


Cresting the top of Constantia Nek

Coming into the final stretch I managed to have enough left in the tank for a good running finish. It was done. My first ultra that was not a “24-hour run what you can”, this was a run to beat the clock or lose. Wandering around the finish area I heard the announce shout, “5 minutes left and there are still 800-1,000 runners left on the course!” I found a place to watch the last few minutes of the race, with anguished runners making their last gasp at the finish line. My heart broke for all the runners still on the course, including a fellow Marathon Maniac that had succumbed to the South African sun, her winter training in Michigan being no match for the warmth we faced.



Beautiful sight! The most welcome view on the course



I couldn't believe I actually caught the clock in an over-the-shoulder shot!



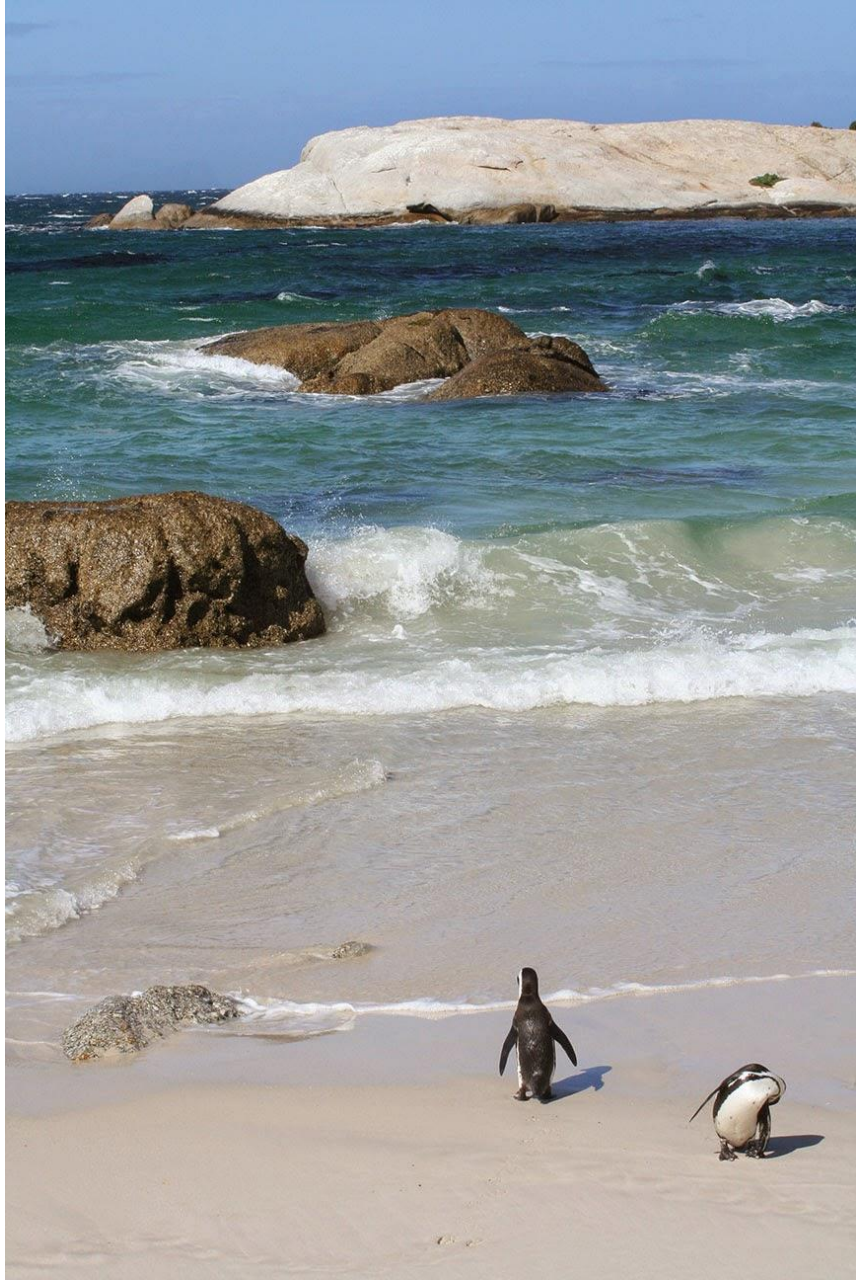
Runners scrambling to get through the finish arch as the crowd counted down the last 10 seconds.

The day after the race we took the cable car up Table Mountain. It was a gorgeous day and the light hiking around the top washed away the soreness from the previous day. I felt so calm and thrilled at the same time. I had a new love for South Africa, its people, its history, and its great strength. I can't wait to go back!



From the top of Table Mountain with Robben Island in the background











I asked to take her pictures, she said, "Only if you are in it with me," and then hugged me tight :-)