

AFRICAN CAMPAIGN – MARCH to MAY 2013 (Now also the road to the 2013 Comrades Marathon)

HIGH ALTITUDE TRAINING CAMP BASED IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Report by Garth Calder aka “Licka”

INTRODUCTION

As I have now been in Jozi (Johannesburg), South Africa for more than three months, I thought that it was time for an update for those back in Australia on my African campaign that has now become the Road to 2013 Comrades Marathon as well.

So far 2013 has been somewhat of a year of the unexpected for me.

If you told me at the start of this year that I would be based in Jozi working on a project initially for 6 weeks and now pushed out to nearly 4 months to mid-June, if you told me that I would be running marathons and half marathons in South Africa, if you told me I would be spending time with my family in Cape Town including my son Dilan who is based in Cape town for a year, if you told me that I would be celebrating my birthday with all my Jozi friends around the corner from my last home before we left SA, if you told me I would be doing training runs on my old routes around the Joburg zoo with a cheetah pacing me on the inside of the fence..... I would have said no way!

If you also told me that I would be lining up for the start of the 2013 Comrades Marathon I would have said that is totally impossible and you must definitely be dreaming!!!

.....and I could go on with the list of improbabilities. What has begun as a year of the unexpected and unlikely has also become a year with a wealth of opportunities that has allowed me to share great times with friends and family and also taken on some fresh running challenges as well.

HIGHVELD CAMPAIGN TRAINING STARTS

Flying 13 hours in a plane from Sydney to Joburg is never something to look forward to even in business class, so when I arrived at OR Tambo airport in Jozi on 25 February in the late afternoon, I was eager to get out and stretch my legs.

It always feels great to step out into the crisp Highveld air (Joburg is at 1753m above sea level – Mt Buller is at 1805m). Arriving at about 4.30pm even although it was still late summer, the evening cooled very rapidly as it does at altitude and I had only being on the ground for about 2 hours after checking in at the hotel when I headed out for my first run, an easy 8.8km around the local suburbs.

Well it was like rediscovering the old ‘hood’, staying in a hotel a few blocks from old home and only a block away from my primary school. This brought back some really old memories going back to my childhood and within a few days I had all my old routes scouted out including the Golf course run, Zoo (cheetah) run), Munro drive (steep hill near my high school), Denbigh road (400m hillsprint) and a long run called Northcliff with a King of the Mountain’s section.

Initially the going felt a bit tough and sucking on the thin air made me feel quickly out of breath but the lungs slowly adjusted as I acclimatised to the altitude and it was only a matter of time before I no longer felt like I was in permanent oxygen deficit.

After a week of running including a solid 26km Sunday run up Northcliff hill taking in the King of the Mountain and some awesome views, I felt that I was ready to take on a Tuesday night time trial, a weekly club run ritual that is part and parcel of the running scene in Joburg.

I arrived at Pirates running club expecting to run the usual 8km time trial only to find instead that a 5km interclub team event run on a hilly, undulating golf course was scheduled. A fast start and 2km into the first lap of the event running at just under 4min per km, it felt like my lungs were about to burst and I was extremely glad that they had scheduled a 5km run and not the normal 8km time trial. I hung in and pushed through in a reasonable time of 19:33 finishing 1st in the over 50s only to be told that they hadn't heard of the Melbourne Midday Milers and that I would need to find at least another 3 MMM runners to get a team result!

Anyway I am not going to bore you with my day to day training run details. Suffice is to say that it became clear after a few weeks that that my stay was going to be extended way past 6 weeks and ultimately to about 4 months. This inevitably shifted my mind set into racing mode and some I was already contemplating what races I could work into this now longer stay.

On the racing front the race calendar for the Central Gauteng province where Joburg is located and the neighbouring Gauteng North means a choice of at least 2 significant races each weekend and even a back to back Sat and Sun race if you really want to pump up the mileage. It has meant that with so much racing on offer I have probably made some less than sensible choices on my part like doing 3 half marathons in 4 weeks but as I said earlier it has been a strange year and I have been driven in most instances by the thought that I might never have these opportunities again or most certainly not for a very long time.

Below is a short report on each of the races taken on during my African adventure so far.

OM DIE DAM (pronounced Om Dee Dum) HALF MARATHON – 16 March 2013

Distance - 21.1kms, Time - 01:29:27, Overall position – 120th, Age position (Masters) - 5th

With my last half marathon run being the 1:35:00 pacer for last year's Melbourne half and having not raced a half marathon for more than 3 years prior to that, it was probably a very challenging half to choose as the 1st half marathon race of my African campaign.

It is a very undulating, hilly course that loops around the beautiful Hartbeespoort Dam nestling up against the Magaliesberg mountains less than an hour's drive from Joburg. The Om Die Dam 50km has been on my bucket list for a long time and as I was too late to get into the pre-entry for the ultra, I had to settle for an entry into the 21km on the day.

The fast, slightly downhill start had me feeling fairly comfortable at sub 4min for the first few kms but as it was my first race at altitude I was a bit worried about going out too hard and running out of lungs, especially without any real knowledge of the course.

I settled into a fairly even pace on the undulating course going through 5 and 10 kms at very even splits but then hit a few sharp rises at 13 and 14kms with the pace dropping right back to 4:30s. This was followed by a few quick downhill sub 4:00 kms before I ran into the 2.5 km hill near the end.

It was a really hard grind to the finish and although I slowed to nearly 5:00 kms, I was still passing plenty who had gone and too hard and were paying for it now. Pushing through I was pleased to still finish sub 1:30 on a tough but very enjoyable course. This was fantastic as a 1st outing and I rate it as an excellent, very well organised event for an entry fee of R70 (about \$7.50) can you believe it and if I had pre-entered even the half marathon the entry would have included a T-shirt as well!!!

Splits were as follows for those interested:

Split	Time	Distance	Avg Pace	5km Splits
1	03:55.3	1	03:55	
2	03:55.3	1	03:55	
3	04:12.9	1	04:13	
4	04:10.1	1	04:10	
5	04:06.9	1	04:07	20:20
6	04:13.9	1	04:14	
7	03:54.8	1	03:55	
8	04:10.8	1	04:11	
9	04:07.1	1	04:07	
10	04:02.5	1	04:02	20:29
11	04:01.6	1	04:02	
12	04:02.0	1	04:02	
13	04:25.6	1	04:26	
14	04:28.3	1	04:28	
15	03:56.3	1	03:56	20:54
16	03:59.0	1	03:59	
17	04:12.1	1	04:12	
18	04:08.6	1	04:09	
19	04:13.1	1	04:13	
20	04:29.9	1	04:30	21:03
21	04:54.1	1	04:54	
22	01:47.0	0.44	04:05	
Total	01:29:27	21.44		

TWO OCEANS HALF MARATHON, CAPE TOWN – 30 March 2013

Distance - 21.1kms, Time - 01:27:24, Overall position – 120th, Age position (Masters) - 5th

Point to point, hilly course - Elevation gain 365m, elevation loss 308m

I had planned early on in my trip to get down to Cape Town for the Easter weekend to spend time with the family as those that remain in South Africa all live there and the opportunity to run this race was really a long shot. I knew that the Two Oceans 56km Ultra marathon was not going to happen as it is a pre-entry event that had closed in January and I was even too late for the runner substitution period.

To my dismay when I checked, I found out that even the half marathon was a pre-entry and already also closed. I had all but given up on running “the most beautiful marathon in the world” as it is also known and it is not often that one wants to benefit from a member of your family’s misfortune but when my brother-in-law called a few days before the race to tell me he was sick and could not run the half marathon, I very readily said to him that I would happily be Donald for a day.

It was too late to transfer the entry into my name, so this is one event that I have literally had to go the distance for the family. I will admit that I very willingly became Donald and Donald really enjoyed improving his half marathon PB by more than 1 hour, getting a silver medal and finishing 5th in the Masters age category. The only problem he now faces is that he will now be seeded in the A batch start for next year and will have to explain to his mates his lack of form or feign injury!

To the race itself, it was a bit of a challenge starting in E batch 10 minutes after the start with the only plus being that I had about 3kms of clear road at the front of the batch along with about half a dozen other ringer who had also changed their name for the day.

It was only about 2 kms into the race when we hit the tail end of batches A to D and couldn’t have timed it worse as it was at the bottom of a 1.5km hill and with a field of 18,000 runners it was really like hitting the wall. Donald had dropped me off at the start and was waiting on the bend at the bottom of the hill with a coffee in hand and Ollie the Jack Russell on a lead trying to chase after me up the hill. His parting words as I head off were “looking strong Donald, push it up the hill”!!!

The long incline combined with runner traffic translated into a very slow, nearly 5min pace as I had to run on the sidewalk dodging spectators and weaving around slow runners all the way up the hill.

Some quick kms followed, including my quickest of the race as we travelled down the back of the hill and space started opening up with many slower runners left behind on the hill. Settled in to a more steady pace through past halfway and then pushed into the 2nd big 2km hill at about 12kms with the knowledge that it was mostly downhill from the 14km mark.

The 5km stretch from 15 to 20kms was a really enjoyable with great crowd support all along the Rhodes drive through some stunning scenery along the back side of Table Mountain and past Kirstenbosch gardens.

The flowing downhill and steady progress through the earlier seeded batches prompted a solid lift in pace and some surges especially picking off A batch runners. This quick section delivered a time of 19:29 for this 5km split and some good momentum into the last little hump to the finish.

Finish feeling strong and executed the customary heel click over the line in much the same way that Donald would have done. The race official at the finish handed me a bronze medal and I had my work cut out to convince her that I had run sub 1:30 as I was in E batch that had started 10 minutes after the main start.

She was finally convinced and duly handed over the silver medal before I headed off for some much needed rehydration and my agreed rendezvous with Donald. I thought I would surprise him with the sub 1:30 time but was beaten to the punch by the SMS that was activated when I crossed the line. Don was nevertheless very pleased when I handed over the silver medal and I had the great pleasure of being Donald for a day to run the most beautiful marathon in the world.

Splits were as follows for those interested:

Split	Time	Distance	Avg Pace	5km Splits
1	04:14.7	1	04:15	
2	04:16.8	1	04:17	
3	04:50.3	1	04:50	
4	04:10.0	1	04:10	
5	03:37.1	1	03:37	21:09
6	03:52.9	1	03:53	
7	04:10.5	1	04:11	
8	04:14.0	1	04:14	
9	04:06.4	1	04:06	
10	04:04.5	1	04:04	20:28
11	04:13.6	1	04:14	
12	04:39.3	1	04:39	
13	04:44.2	1	04:44	
14	03:49.9	1	03:50	
15	04:12.7	1	04:13	21:40
16	03:53.1	1	03:53	
17	03:38.1	1	03:38	
18	03:49.9	1	03:50	
19	04:08.8	1	04:09	
20	03:58.6	1	03:59	19:29
21	04:05.6	1	04:06	
22	01:03.1	0.28	03:43	
Total	01:27:54	21.28		

MAZDA HALF MARATHON, SILVERTON, PRETORIA – 06 April 2013

Distance - 21.1kms, Time - 01:27:55, Overall position – 80th, Age position (Masters) – 2nd

Out and back, flat course - Elevation gain 137m, elevation loss 136m

This race was only a week after the Two Oceans Half but I got talked into it by one my mates on the comeback after some health issues and time off running. He was up for the 10km race and figured that I could run the half marathon and finish by the time he had recovered from his 10km race!

It has been not only a year of unexpected events but also of firsts. This was certainly the first time that I have ever raced 3 half marathon in 4 weeks and while I did learn that you can adapt to racing hard more often over this distance, I don't believe that it would be of benefit to extend this theory into longer distances.

As my first time on this half marathon course, I found it to be an excellent, very flat and fast course and it would almost certainly have translated into a PB if I had been on fresh legs.

Started out the early part of the race pretty hard, passing the 5km mark in 19 and kept up the sub 4min kms past the 10km mark. However the cumulative effect of hard training and racing 3 half marathon in 4 weeks caught up with me and after about 16 kms the fatigue was clearly well set into my legs.

While the last 3 of 5km splits were very even, the 1km splits clearly show that I died in the arse over the last 2kms.

Splits were as follows for those interested:

Split	Time	Distance	Avg Pace	5km Splits
1	03:49.5	1	03:50	
2	03:52.3	1	03:52	
3	04:01.7	1	04:02	
4	04:00.9	1	04:01	
5	04:21.0	1	04:21	20:06
6	04:14.7	1	04:15	
7	04:35.6	1	04:36	
8	04:16.7	1	04:17	
9	04:22.7	1	04:23	
10	03:58.5	1	03:59	21:30
11	04:25.0	1	04:25	
12	04:15.5	1	04:15	
13	04:10.0	1	04:10	
14	04:02.5	1	04:02	
15	04:14.5	1	04:15	21:07
16	04:06.0	1	04:06	
17	04:01.3	1	04:01	
18	04:09.5	1	04:09	
19	04:21.8	1	04:22	
20	04:24.7	1	04:25	21:03
21	04:11.4	1	04:12	
Summary	01:27:56	21		

POSSIBILITY OF RUNNING COMRADES MARATHON

Having enjoyed racing 3 half marathons, I knew it was time to get my focus back onto some longer distance training and races. Early in April after the Two Oceans marathon, I got in touch with Bruce Fordyce, a Comrades legend, to see if there was any way he could pull a few strings to organise an entry into the Comrades Marathon for an old friend.

This was a real long shot and I was not very hopeful as running Comrades is not something that you undertake less than two months before race day on 2 June. It needs some planning long in advance with entries opening on 1 September and closing on 30 November in the year before the race date but this did not put me off and I did not give up entirely as this had already proved to be a year of the unexpected.

Bruce unfortunately came back with the news that the entry process was very tightly controlled and that even he could not use his influence to secure me a start on 2 June. I was very disappointed that this plan had not come together although I always knew there was a strong chance that it would not get off the ground.

He did also say that there was a new substitution process open for the month of April for runners who were injured or did not qualify in time. My eyes lit up but that only until he told that I would have to find an entry that was substitutable in the same entry category i.e. find an overseas entry or organise a legitimate SA running club membership!!! This was not an easy job but by now I knew that there was a way for me to get onto the start line and my mind was working overtime.

A few calls to my old canoe club Dabulamanzi (Dabs) had me signed up as a country member. Dabs has a running section and I had run my last Comrades in 2000 in Dabs club colours. The rest seemed to just fall into place as if it was meant to be and on 29 April, 1 day before the cut off for substitution I submitted all the required documents and within 1 week had a confirmed entry.

You could not wipe the smile off my face even although most of my friends and family that I told of my Comrades entry shot back comments like “you must be crazy”, “rather you than me” or “why run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg when you can drive”!!!

For Comrades you have to complete a qualifying race with a distance anywhere from a full marathon through to an ultra with differing time allowances. Once I had a sniff of a possible Comrades entry I had targeted the Loskop Dam Ultra and a short report on this race follows below.

LOSKOP DAM ULTRA MARATHON, MIDDELBURG, MPUMALANGA - 20 April 2013

Distance - 50kms, Time - 03:48:51, Overall position – 142nd, Age position (Masters) – 6th

Point to point, net downhill route - Elevation gain 436m, elevation loss 899m

This race was not a first as I had done this awesome race once before more than 20 years ago in 1991 as part of my training for the 1991 Comrades. It starts in a coal mining town called Middelburg on the edge of the ‘Highveld’ where it starts to drop down to into the ‘Lowveld’ to a resort at the Loskop (literal translation Loosehead!) Dam.

It is really picturesque bushveld countryside that makes for a really enjoyable run and it is often used as a ‘training race’ for the down run version of the Comrades as it fairly closely simulates the drop in elevation, just over a shorter distance.

This was one of only a few limited options for me to complete as a qualifier by the 6 May cut-off date and I was very keen to push into ultra-distance territory to test my level of endurance rather than run a standard marathon.

Race conditions were perfect with rain during the night before race day stopping about half an hour before the start making for nice cool race conditions. With a field of about 4,000 runners there was no seeding and I managed to squeeze in near the front to get a clean start.

My pre-race strategy was to run it in just under 5min kms to try and finish as close to 4 hours as possible but got a bit carried away off the line with a 4min 1st km along with the TV sprinters and backed off quickly as I knew it was going to be a fairly long day at the office.

I quickly settled into a steady pace and felt comfortable at 4:30s, so I decided to see how it all held together although this was a fair bit quicker than my planned pace. For the first 20kms the 5km splits were almost dead even within about 15 seconds each side of the 22:30 mark required to maintain a 4:30 pace average and I was really enjoying the flat to slightly uphill section through to the highest point at the Post Office Tower just after 20kms.

The next 10 kms was more down than up and I picked up the pace with a solid section from 23 to 28kms at about 4:15 pace without pushing too hard - some of my downhill training was paying off and I had two very even 5 km splits to 25 and 30kms.

I pressed on through for the next 5kms back at my steady 4:30 pace before hitting Bugger's Hill at 36kms and getting wound right back to 5:30s for what is a fairly short, sharp 1km hill. Then it was a stunning drop through the mist into the valley below for an awesome 3km downhill section at under 4:15s flattening out back into the 4:30 groove until I hit the full marathon mark in a time of 3:08 much to my surprise.

What remained was to grit it out past the mental barrier of the full marathon into the final 8km undulating section with Varaday's Hill lurking just before the end. Varaday's is a very nasty 2.5km hill starting in a dip over a bridge and winding up a blind corner that seems to go on forever at a stage of the race when you really don't need it.

When you finally do get around the corner it has a long straight that gets even steeper and for many walking becomes the logical option but I was determined not to walk and kept reminding myself that this was great Comrades up run training and pushed on until I finally reached the top.

Varaday's slowed me right down to 6:00 min plus for at least 2kms but once I was over the hill it left just an easy 1.5km gentle slope down to the finish followed by the ritual heel click across the line to celebrate a fantastic race. Finishing in 3:48:52, more than 20 minutes ahead of my planned time was an added bonus to round out a great day.

5km splits were as follows:

Split	Time	5km Splits
5	04:51.0	22:23.0
10	04:32.9	22:16.8
15	04:36.6	22:43.1
20	04:31.9	22:42.8
25	04:15.0	21:44.5
30	04:20.8	21:43.6
35	04:45.6	22:33.4
40	04:15.9	22:43.8
45	04:49.0	23:44.9
50	04:26.8	26:16.1
Total	03:48:52	

THE TAPER AND FINAL PREPARATION

Following the Loskop ultra my recovery was much better than expected and although I dropped the mileage down to rest the legs, I still managed a solid 26km long Sunday run a week after the race to give me a total of 56kms for the week.

I then ramped up the distance a little further over the next week before beginning my 3 weeks of taper ahead of race day with the mileage over the last 4 weeks as follows:

- 88kms - 29 April to 5 May, including a back to back 25kms on Sat and 26kms on Sun
- 70kms - 6 May to 12 May
- 57kms - 13 May to 19 May
- 37kms – 20 May to 26 May

Today is Wednesday 29 May and I have just finish my last pre-Comrades run which is always a really good feeling. Yesterday I just did an easy 8km tempo run and today's final session was a warm up followed by 4kms of 500m on/500m off at 3:45 on and 4:45 off.

FINAL THOUGHTS AHEAD OF THE BIG DAY

I am very excited and hope I can sleep on Saturday night!

I will be flying down to Durban on Friday night, going to register/collect my number on Saturday and also taking in the running exhibition which runs for 3 days and is massive.

I am in a great frame of mind, well prepared and very relaxed after of 3 physio massage sessions that have really loosened me up.

My build up has been solid with some good quality training and racing but in a few words I would sum up my current form for Comrades as "slightly undertrained and slightly overweight" which according to Bruce Fordyce is exactly where you should be.

While I am quietly confident of a solid performance, I know that this is a race that can come back to bite you if you do not give it the respect it is due.

Finishing time expectations are very hard to predict on a race of this nature but I will put it out there that my target is 9 hours and anything under this time will be a bonus. On the day I am just going to listen to my body closely and enjoy the ride!