

Island Hopping

By Bob Babbitt

Over the years I have had the opportunity to participate in numerous events on Catalina. I started running the Catalina Marathon in the early 1980's, but since then they have added a half marathon, a 50 miler and the Catalina Eco Marathon so runners can abuse themselves on the island's amazing trails all year long . After so many years of running the island, why do I keep going back? Simple. It's the awesome lessons you learn along the way.

Training is Overated: Trail marathons are not like road marathons. Rather than trying to run all 26.2 miles, when there is 6,000 plus feet of climbing in a trail race, you'll see most folks walking the uphill and jogging the downhill and the flats. It's more of a Tour de Trail than a real race. So you can forget about the training log and how many miles you should be running to complete a marathon. If you feel like enjoying a wonderful day alone with your thoughts, ignore that always a pain 'I'm not really ready for this' voice and just go for it.

Little things are HUGE: When you're at mile 18 of a trail marathon, it is the little things that always bring us the greatest joy. A cold sponge, a nice breeze, a glimpse of the ocean, an ice cube or a fistful of Gummy Bears are sometimes the world's greatest gifts.

Be your own Island: Yeah, you are definitely *racing* on an island, but even better is the fact that in the back country, since there are absolutely no distractions, you get to become your own island. No phone, no e-mail, no texts, no problems. It's as pure as it gets. You, a pair of shoes and a trail that can take you wherever you want to go.

Running is Overated: This is something I learned this past November. I was 17 miles into the Catalina Eco Marathon. I am running on the right side of the trail. A group of three is *walking* next to me and I'm not gaining an inch. Our pace is exactly the same, but my heart rate is through the roof. So I decide to follow their lead. I think it was that great runner Confucius who once said 'Why run when you can walk?'

Losing is Winning: Say your best buddy trains 40 hours a month for five months getting ready for one of the marathons. Track sessions, ice baths, long weekend runs and constant pace work. You, on the other hand, decide the night before to jump into the marathon. What the heck? You ran a 10K a month ago, right? They invested 200 hours into training over five months while you invested maybe 100 hours of training over the same period. They finish in five hours and you take six. They win, right? Well, it depends how you add up the score. They spent 100 extra hours of training to beat you by one? The math seems pretty obvious to me, winner.

Finisher or Resident: Most of the races on the mainland give you an escape clause. Drop out and you can catch a bus, hitchhike or get a cab. When you're on Catalina and you drop out in the middle of nowhere you become much more than a non-finisher: you become a resident.

Don't underestimate anyone: In my early years in Catalina, I was a skinny running guy. Let's just say that the folks who run trail marathons are built from a sturdier stock and can carry a little more heft than the traditional road warriors. As I stood at the start of my first Catalina Marathon back in the day, a point-to-point affair, one of the older, seasoned runners actually read my mind as I sized up the competition. "Son," he said, "I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. A lot of that cellulite is going to kick your butt back to Avalon."

He was right and it did.