

Big Island International Marathon
Hilo, HI
Sunday, March 22, 2009
6:00 AM



Kamiar Kouzekanani

The Hawaiian Islands consist of Ni'ihau (forbidden island), Kaua'i (Garden Isle), O'ahu (known for Waikiki beaches), Moloka'i (known for Moloka's bread), Lana'i (known for Manele Bay), Maui (Valley Isle), Kaho'olawe (used to be a Navy firing range), and Hawai'i (the Big Island). Hawai'i became the 50th state on March 19, 1959. Hilo, the second largest city in the state (Honolulu is the largest), is located beneath Mauna Kea, the tallest peak in the Big Island. Its population is about 42,000. It is the southernmost as well as the wettest city (average annual rainfall is approximately 128 inches at the airport) in the United States. It is also vulnerable to tsunamis. Hawaiian Volcanoes National Park, 29 miles west of Hilo, and Waipio Valley, about 40 miles north of Hilo, are must-see places. I flew into Hilo on Thursday afternoon and stayed in the host hotel, Hilo Hawaiian.

At 4:30 AM, busses began transporting the runners to the start line. Temperature was in the 70s. We had access to a community center. The race started at 6:00 AM. Although there was a net drop of 500 feet between miles zero and 10, there were several hills within the first 8 miles, which was also the most scenic part of the route (waterfalls, exotic trees/plants, narrow bridges). From mile 10 to the finish was basically flat. We ran a large number of miles on slanted road shoulders which made the footing less than desirable. From shortly after miles 17 to shortly after miles 24 was out and back with our

backs to the traffic, and I am one of those who does not like to run with his back to the traffic. Fortunately, there were not too many cars on the road. There were ample water/sports drinks stations. Wet sponges after mile 18 were very much appreciated. There was hardly any crowd support but race volunteers were cheerful. There were on and off rain showers, followed by in and out sunshine, which made it immensely humid. There were more than enough recovery food items and drinks at the finish. Each finisher received a short-sleeved cotton T-shirt, medallion, and a bag of coffee. The run was not chip-timed, but individualized race time reports were available a few minutes after crossing the finish line. High humidity made this a very challenging marathon.

There were 192 marathon finishers (120 males, 72 females) in the average time of 4:38:28. The winning times were 2:50:21 (overall male), 3:23:56 (overall female), 3:00:08 (masters male), and 3:38:39 (masters female). There was also a half marathon and a 5K.

My good friends, Al and Sandy Cumming, completed their quests to run marathons in all 50 states and D.C. My goal was to run with Sandy. We ran the half in 2:03:38 (9:26 pace), talked a lot, and had a good time. By mile 17, I didn't think we could have done better than 4:10. I began to fade between miles 18 and 19. I asked Sandy not to slow down for me. Up to mile 22, I was fairly close to her. By mile 23, I had run out of fuel. I refused to walk and jogged to the finish. Sandy had finished in 4:11:11 (9:35 pace) and won her age-group. I crossed the finish line in 4:16:54 (9:48 pace). Al finished in 4:31:34 (10:21 pace). We were three exhausted, yet happy, marathoners and agreed that humidity was the overall winner! I felt dizzy for several hours after the run. For me, it started as a pleasant running experience and ended as something quite humbling indeed!

This was state #45. RI & DE in May are next.

A friend of mine and fellow runner, Rich Martucci, wrote the following poem upon my return from Hilo:

Hello Hilo
Here we go
Hope I don't fall
Into a volcano

Ok so there's no lava
But there are several hills
But nothing too tough
For a man of my skills

The scenery is pretty
Exotic trees and plants
I wish I could take a picture
But obviously I can't

I guess the Big Island
Doesn't have high regards for streets
But what they do have really high
Is the humidity and the heat

They gave me a bag of coffee
In my goodie bag which was nice
But if you run a marathon in Hawaii
I'll give you some advice

Make different travel arrangements
That's what I would do
And run that other Hawaiian Marathon
You know, the one that's on Oahu :-)