

AND THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

by Paula Ring and Josue Stephens, co-RDs

In its second year, Ultramaraton Fuego y Agua became the experience no participant would ever forget. The turnout yielded a much higher number of local runners – the buzz from last year’s race had piqued the local community’s interest, and many Nicaraguan runners stepped up to the challenge. Joining them were several seasoned runners from the United States, a handful of Costa Ricans, and a German.

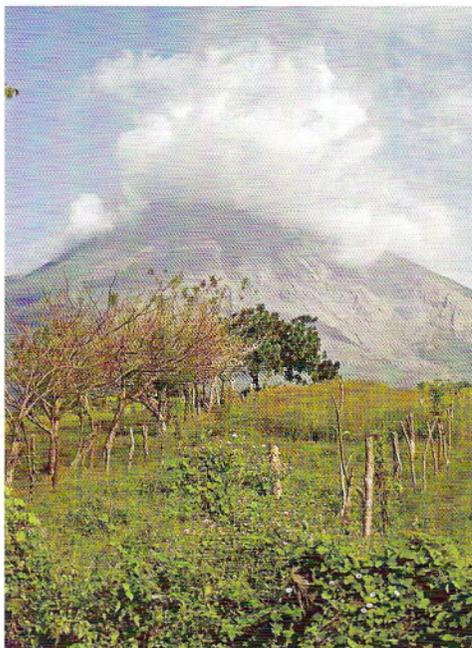
Saturday morning, 50-km and 100-km runners gathered in anticipation of the 4:00 a.m. start. The weather was cool and breezy and participants were greeted with fresh Nica coffee and an assortment of homemade cakes from the bakery across the street. An explosion of fireworks signaled the start, and the runners

were off into the dark. Several minutes later, two very confused-looking runners, Abigail Stephens and Johnson Cruz, arrived at the empty start line, and immediately tore off in pursuit of the other athletes.

Ironically enough, as the results would later show, Johnson, a local islander who had never run in a race in his life, took first place in the 50-km at 6:11. First female, and fifth overall for the 50-km was the talented Adria Owens from Colorado. Coastal Challenge champion, Costa Rican Javier Montero, broke the 2008 100-km course record by 44 minutes and took first place male in 11:08. Abigail Stephens, the other late starter, took first place female, and third overall in the 100-km in 13:18. The arduous 100-

km had an almost 50-percent drop rate, with only five finishers. Runners were challenged and inspired by the course and its beauty. Many swore afterward that Fuego y Agua was the hardest ultra they had ever run.

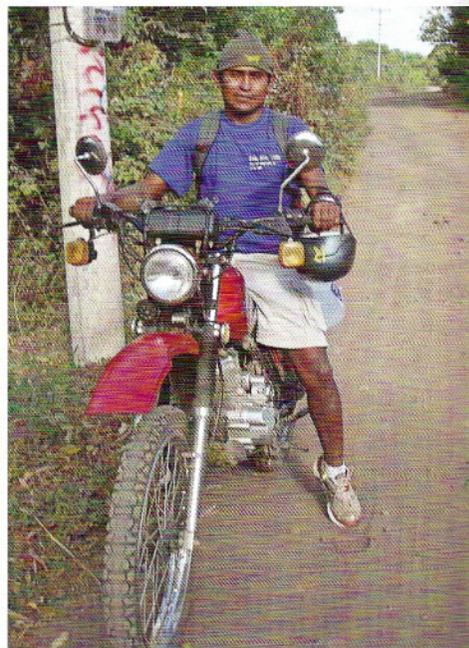
It goes without saying that this race could not have happened without the incredible support of our volunteers and sponsors. Locals and foreigners (including Peace Corps) donated their time to this race. Volunteers and runners alike were also integral in the success of our pre-race trash cleanup day, and our post-race Calzado Para Ometepe kids’ 5K. The objective of Fuego y Agua was not just to host a race, but also to help promote awareness of the island, its culture, and the forests that thrive on the volcanoes. ■



Shrouded in clouds, the volcano observes an almost 50-percent dnf rate



Jungle gym



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We ended up going three or four miles out of our way when it was all said and done. We had the choice to feel sorry for ourselves and to be a little angry, or we could accept it and enjoy the absolute beauty of the park and the weather. We chose the latter of the two.”

– Yassine Diboun, Orcas Island