

## Jan McGriff Starts Ultrarunning Career on the Right Foot

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In her first three races as an ultrarunner, Jan McGriff logged more than 100 miles, running 36 miles to the top of a volcano, crossing mountains in Oahu during a 54-mile race, and finishing an off-road half marathon in a little more than two hours. The determination and discipline she brings to her running are also keys to the strong support she provides to her coworkers in Hawaii.

A runner for nearly 20 years, McGriff decided to try ultrarunning — races longer than 26.2 miles, generally on challenging, off-road courses — a couple of years ago after taking up trail running.

She joined the Hawaii Ultra Run Team (or HURT, as it’s appropriately called), and trained with the team on its trail runs. She was surprised to find out how much she enjoyed trail running, and the support of her HURT teammates inspired her to consider longer distances.

“A few years earlier, I’d looked at longer races and thought I’d never be able to complete one. But with their support, I decided to give ultras a try,” said McGriff.

### Races Include Mountains and a Volcano

McGriff ran her first ultra in March, finishing Maui’s 36.2-mile Run to the Sun in 9 hours and 6 minutes. The course starts at sea level and climbs roughly 10,000 feet to the summit of Haleakala, a dormant volcano.

“Because it was my first race, I had no idea what to expect. I told myself, ‘just keep moving,’ and I had some great support from the other runners. Crossing the finish line was an amazing feeling,” she said.

In October, McGriff completed the Peacock 54, held on Oahu’s North Shore and considered one of the most challenging ultra races in the United States. McGriff was one of 19 runners to finish the race, covering a course through the Waianae Mountains in 17:41.



SAIC's Jan McGriff (right) and fellow ultrarunner Julie Ng climb one of the many hills in the Peacock 54, an ultramarathon held in October on the North Shore of Oahu. (Photo courtesy of Rob Lahoe)

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More than half of the 40 people who entered the race didn't complete it, and McGriff conceded that the last 10 miles of the race were difficult.

"I had some doubts that I'd finish before the 18-hour cut-off, but I tried to put that aside, and focus on doing whatever was necessary to get to the finish line. I was amazed by what I could accomplish when I pushed myself beyond what I thought was possible."

### **Reward of Finishing Offsets Challenges**

Pushing beyond perceived limits is one of the biggest challenges in ultrarunning, McGriff noted. "There's definitely a mental component to the sport. You have to learn how to put aside the pain and discomfort and push yourself beyond what you think you can handle."

Time constraints and the physical demands of the sport can also be challenging. "One of the most important things I learned from HURT veterans was that I couldn't rush into ultrarunning. It takes a long time and a lot of conditioning for the body to adapt to running long distances."

But all those challenges are offset by the reward that finishing a race brings, McGriff said. "There's a tremendous amount of satisfaction in finishing a race, in seeing all that hard work pay off. I think that's what keeps ultrarunners going."

### **Future Plans Include 100K and Marathon**

Based on the success in her previous events, McGriff decided to enter the XTerra Trail Running World Championship, held in Oahu in November. "Compared to my previous races, the 13.1-mile course seemed like a quick sprint," she noted.

She finished in 2:21, third in her age group. "That finish was an unexpected bonus," said McGriff, "and a great way to cap off the season."

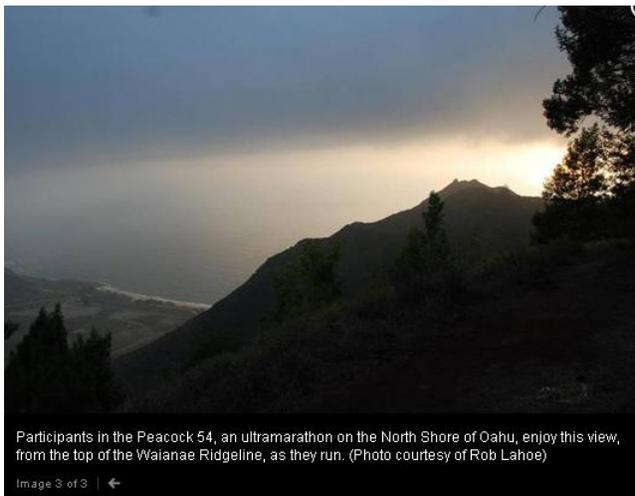
McGriff's next race is January's HURT 100, where she'll "pace" — or run alongside — a friend, but not compete. The HURT 100 consists of five loops around a 20-mile course, and McGriff will run with her friend for at least one loop during the race's overnight hours.

Her race calendar for 2010 includes the same 36- and 54-milers she completed in 2009, the International Marathon in Hilo, Hawaii, and the HURT trail race series, which are monthly races that get longer and more difficult with each event. She's hoping to be accepted into California's Miwok 100K Trail Race in California and is also considering the Kauai Marathon in September.

"Hopefully the success I've had so far will continue into this year's racing season," McGriff said.

## Commitment Equals Success

McGriff joined Science Applications Internal Corporation (SAIC) two years ago, and manages system administration, training, and data quality assurance for an SAIC-designed data management system.



McGriff's day usually begins with an early morning run before getting to her desk.

"I enjoy those training sessions out on the trails," she said. "They give me the opportunity to relax and really think through a lot of things."

Weekends include longer runs — anywhere from six to 10 hours and 20 to 30 miles —

with other HURT members.

"When you spend that kind of time with other runners on the trail, you really learn to support one another. I think that's one aspect of ultrarunning that comes into play at work: the importance of supporting the people around you."

She added, "A big part of running is commitment, and I think that's another aspect that plays into the work I do. All of the people I work with are committed to supporting each other and to supporting our client. That commitment is what makes SAIC a great place to work."

"There are a lot of people here who think Jan's crazy," noted SAIC Project Manager Steve Kane, "and there are a lot of people who admire her grit, determination, and stamina. Those traits make her a great ultrarunner, and they also make her a great person to work with."

Written by Sue Follett

