

SundayTravel

M

WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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Steeling themselves

Where better than in a Pacific island paradise to make iron of mere flesh

HAWAII

Camp founder Thad Calciolari runs on the beach.

Swimming to a buoy on an IRONMAN championship route in Kona

The author pedals uphill to a lookout over Waipio Valley.

PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; THAD CALCIOLARI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (RIGHT)

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BIG ISLAND — More than a dozen of us swam through the aquamarine waters off Kailua-Kona, arms spinning as we headed toward a buoy anchored just over half a mile away. The coral reef beneath us teemed with parrot fish and other colorful creatures.

“We saw dolphins out here last time,” said Lesley Cens-McDowell, 67, an 11-time age group IRONMAN winner who knew this route well.

We were swimming the first 1.2 miles of the famous IRONMAN world championship course, where Cens-McDowell and a group of locals meet several times a week to swim.

“Any advice for getting through a triathlon swim?” I asked the 5-foot-1-inch veteran as we treaded water by the buoy.

“You have to figure out how to avoid getting [mentally] twisted before the swim and during the swim,” she said. “I just go to the left so I can use people to sight and so I don’t drift right too much, and I stay there. It may add 100 yards, but that’s no big deal to me.”

I joined the swim group one morning last summer while attending the Mauna Lani Triathlon Camp on the west coast of the Big Island.

I signed up for the four-day camp to prepare for my first-ever triathlon season, which included the challenging new IRONMAN Canada race in Whistler. I wanted to work on swim and bike technique, learn about race strategy, and train in a place where I could wear a bathing suit instead of a wet suit, run on beaches instead of asphalt, bike through lava fields instead

TRIATHLON, Page M2

WANNABE TRIATHLETE?



HELP YOURSELF (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT):

Power meter for bike crank arm; cycle computer with force vector display; products to remove chlorine, prevent chafing; cycle computer; aero bars; travel case for your bike; buoyancy aid. Gear info on Page M2.

Swim, bike, run . . . longer

►TRIATHLON
Continued from Page M1

of damp forests, and learn from someone with 30 years of racing experience.

Thad Calciolari, 53, who started doing triathlons in 1980 and has completed three IRONMAN world championships, started his cycling and triathlon camps four years ago and recently relocated them to the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel and Bungalows on the island's Kohala Coast, where he is director of the sports club and spa. The triathlon camp includes swim-stroke analysis, beach runs, bike fits, yoga, and instructional bike rides along the IRONMAN route and around the surrounding volcanoes. Add to that talks on race nutrition, transitions, and creating a training plan and it's a full schedule.

Camps run year-round, and Calciolari customizes each one to match the needs, skill levels, and desires of participants. Spring camps are popular to prepare for summer races, but fall camps that coincide with the triathlon world championship race are popular too.

The camp drew mostly locals the week I attended, including Susan Nixon, who had completed a multiday Ultraman and several IRONMAN races; Cassidy Landes, who didn't know how to swim when she signed up for an iron-distance race five years earlier and had since completed five; a man named Bruce who had been in a horrible cycling accident in Europe and had recently gotten back into biking; and a man everyone called Mr. Blue because he had a blue bike and head-to-toe blue cycling clothes.

I flew in a couple of days early to explore the island. I swam laps over the coral reef in Anaeho'omalu Bay by the Waikoloa Beach Marriott property, biked over to see the ancient Hawaiian petroglyphs carved into the lava rocks near the Fairmont Orchid hotel, and played in the surf at Hapuna Beach State Park, which has one of the is-



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

land's largest white sand beaches.

The absolute highlight was the two-hour helicopter tour over Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park on the southeast side of the island and the impressive sea cliffs in the north. The chopper flew over vent holes where red-hot lava bubbled up and quickly hardened, forming black ripples across the landscape. We swooped down near sea level to watch lava spilling into the ocean from Kilauea, the world's most active volcano, which has been erupting continuously since 1983. Up north, we flew into sacred Waipio Valley and past 1,200-foot plunging waterfalls.

Camp started after a big breakfast and a bike fitting the next day. We cycled south of Mauna Lani down the famous Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway, following the bike route of the Kona race. We could see the ocean and even as far as Maui on that clear day. Mauna Kea rose up thousands of feet off to our left. The notoriously open and windy road cuts through lava fields occasionally dotted by



bougainvillea.

"The lava rock gets so hot it can melt the soles of your shoes if you walk on it," said Calciolari.

Temperatures hit 98 degrees that day, yet we passed dozens of other cyclists out training. Our sag wagon carried coolers filled with water, Gatorade, and Hawaiian soft drinks, plus bars, chews, GU shots, salt tablets, Aleve, and chilled lavender-scented hand towels — an awesome touch.

As we rode, Calciolari talked about body position, pedal stroke, pacing, and aerodynamics.

"Drag is proportional to the velocity squared, so the faster you go in a set position on the bike, the more drag you create," explained Calciolari, who has a degree in aerospace engineering and a master's in physiology and biomechanics. "Upright at 20 mph creates about the same drag as an aerodynamic position at 25 mph, so it's a huge advantage to get as aerodynamic as you can. You want to get down to eliminate the parachute effect."

What I took from this discussion was that getting new

Break time as triathlon campers park their bikes and enjoy the beach at Kua Bay on Hawaii's Kohala Coast. Another break took the author on a two-hour helicopter tour of the island, over volcanoes on the southern side, along these sheer cliffs on the north.

gear — aero bars, hydration systems, and maybe even fancy deep dish wheels — would be beneficial.

"You can totally buy speed," Calciolari said.

We jumped into an outdoor pool after our ride to cool off and for a quick swim-stroke analysis.

"You want to keep a high elbow through your stroke, and scoop the water as if you're reaching over a big ball and pulling yourself over it," said Calciolari.

We finished the day with a lactate threshold test on the treadmill, using heart rate and rate of perceived exertion to de-

termine our optimal heart-rate zones for running.

We gathered the next morning for the annual Hapuna Rough Water Swim, a 1-mile race on the Kohala Coast that draws people from across the islands, and that would be my first-ever ocean race. Before the airhorn went off, Calciolari said, "Remember, the idea is to get on someone's feet and hold on as long as you can. By drafting, you can gain 30 percent energy savings in the water."

I tried to stick with Landes, but she eventually pulled away and then I got distracted by a majestic manta ray skimming along the seabed beneath me.

"Great job!" said Calciolari, as we ran up on shore to the finish line.

We then dashed off to join Nixon, Mr. Blue, and a few other riders for a 51-mile, 4,700-foot climb up the Kohala Coast to Hawi (pronounced Havi) along the IRONMAN course, and then up into the Kohala Mountains. The first part of the route followed the wide-shouldered Akoni Pule Highway, where grassy fields led down to the Pacific. We tackled a tough climb with a 15-percent grade

IF YOU GO . . .

- Mauna Lani Triathlon Camp**
808-896-8326
www.bigislandtrainingcampahawaii.com
Rates from \$2,200 for a four-day camp, includes airport transfers, lodging, meals, vehicle support, and all instruction.
- Blue Hawaiian Helicopters**
800-745-2583
www.bluehawaiian.com
The Big Island Spectacular goes out of Waikoloa and covers most of the island. Flights from \$396 if purchased online at least five days in advance; otherwise \$450.
- Bike Works**
808-326-2453
www.bikeworkskona.com
Kailua-Kona and Waikoloa Bike rentals and services, and lots of triathlon gear.
- Other camps**
- Mark Allen's Boulder Triathlon Camp**
Boulder, Colo.
303-974-0471
www.markallenonline.com
May 30-June 1, June 27-29, from \$495.
- The Cycling House**
Tucson
406-219-1318
www.thecyclinghouse.com
April 1-6, and 9-14; from \$1,495.
- Information USA Triathlon**
www.usatriathlon.org
Resource on triathlon coaches, clubs, and events.

out of Hawi, eventually reaching a pastoral area with a big ranch and cooler temperatures, and sweeping views. Then we enjoyed a high-speed descent.

We ended the day with a 3-mile run from Hapuna Beach north along the ancient Shoreline Trail.

"We'll have an easier day today," said Calciolari the next morning. "We did a lot of climbing yesterday. If you're always grinding, you're beating up your legs. You need to let them recover."

That day's ride took us from the inland town of Waimea down through farmland, past lava caves, and through Honoka'a, a former sugar plantation town with a historic district that had an old theater and one-of-a-kind cafes and shops. The 20-mile descent deposited us at the lookout for stunning Waipio Valley on the Hamakua Coast.

We pedaled back up to Waimea, stopping at Tex Drive-In in Honoka'a for its famous malasadas, homemade Portuguese sweet bread donuts. Nixon told me about her experiences completing a local Ultraman, a multiday race with a 6.2-mile ocean swim, 261.4-mile bike ride, and 52.4-mile run, and Calciolari talked about mental preparation and race stress.

"You expend a lot of energy when you worry, and everything can go south fast," he said. "Remember, it shouldn't be a nerve-racking thing, it should be fun and exciting."

I ended the week with an open-air massage in a hale, or thatched-roof hut, at the Mauna Lani Spa, a gentle ocean breeze rustling the palm trees overhead and tickling my back.

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Triathlon training aids

Good equipment can make a big difference in your comfort level and performance, whether you are a new triathlete or a seasoned pro. As you train for your next triathlon or prepare for an upcoming camp, here are some products to consider.

SWIM WITH PEACE OF MIND

Olympic gold medalist in swimming and world-champion triathlete Sheila Taormina brings a SaferSwimmer Float on her open-water swims, and believes "every single triathlete should have one of these." The bright-orange swim buoy, like an inflatable dry bag, makes you more visible to boaters and other water craft, gives you something to hold onto if you experience cramping or anxiety, and provides a

place to stash your car keys and other valuables. It buckles around your waist with an adjustable strap, then floats behind you without causing drag. Bruce Wigo, president and CEO of the International Swimming Hall of Fame, launched the float three years ago after being nearly run over by a boat while swimming on Switzerland's Lake Zurich. \$39.95-\$49.95. 954-462-6536, www.saferswimmer.com

PROTECT YOUR BODY

TRISLIDE tops my list as one of the most essential triathlon products. Apply the nongreasy spray anywhere you experience chafing or hot spots, such as on your neck from a wet suit, between your toes, or even under your heart-rate monitor strap. Spray it on your wet suit to help it slip on and off more

easily. California-based SBR Sports also makes TRISWIM hair and body products that are specifically formulated to wash away saltwater and chlorine and then rehydrate and moisturize. \$14.95 (TRISLIDE); \$5.50-\$80 (2-64-ounce TRISWIM). 800-620-4094, www.sbrsportsinc.com

BOOST COMFORT AND SPEED

If you're transitioning from an upright to the aerodynamic triathlon position, get a set of clip-on aero bars that offer plenty of adjustment options. "The fit should feel comfortable enough to stay there all day," says master bike fitter Ed Sassler of Belmont Wheelworks. Profile Design's latest T4 Plus Carbon aero bars have a relaxed ski-bend shape, and the company's new thickly padded F-35 armrests for a

Continued on next page