



# URBAN SWARAS RUNNING CLUB

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

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Hello Swaras,

Happy 10th Anniversary!

We are thrilled to bring you the 10th year anniversary issue of the club's newsletter.

Our appreciation goes to Ndung'u Kahihu, Jael Amara, Loice Mbogo and Lucy Thuo for tracing the club's interesting history.

This issue goes on record as having the highest number of Swaras contributing to it. Thank you Claire, Elvis, Kiplimo, Carol, Dessale, Avani, Mwasaru, Peter, Loice, Ruth, Rio, Muthoni, Saxo, Wanjiru and Richie for your submissions.

And finally, special thanks to Charles Kungu aka CK for graciously covering the anniversary run and sharing amazing photos, most of which feature heavily in this publication.

Today we toast to our collective well-being - here's to many more years of running together!

Your feedback and running related stories are welcome at [usrc.editor@gmail.com](mailto:usrc.editor@gmail.com).

Jerusha

Acting Editor,  
USRC Newsletter

## CONTENTS

- 1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF URBAN SWARAS RUNNING CLUB**  
Ndung'u Kahihu traces the founding members of the club for a fascinating history of the club.
- 4. GOING DOWN MEMORY LANE**  
Loice, Lucy and Jael share their fond memories of the club at its inception.
- 8. AMAZING TRANSFORMATIONS**
- 10. MEET SOME SWARAS**
- 19. THE 10TH YEAR OF SWARAS**  
Claire on how the anniversary run unfolded.
- 32. OLD MOSES CLASSIC RUN**  
Wachira Nderitu gives a highlight of the 3rd Edition of this annual run. Did they manage to run the 21 km distance in under 2 hours? Read on to find out.





# URBAN SWARAS RUNNING CLUB A BRIEF HISTORY

by Ndung'u KAHIHU

There is a popular saying up Mt Kenya that goes, (*gutiri kiega kiumaga heega*) 'auspicious outcomes do not always start with auspicious beginnings.' It must have been coined by a Swaras sage.

We are now used to taking pride in the Urban Swaras as a premier running club, the unrecognised inspiration for the boom in recreational running in Kenya. But the start was humble enough.

*"Runs were done from my house in Lavington, then Westlands at Mutua's and in Karen at the Patron's (Wahome)." This is how our Chairman, Ajaa Olubayi, remembers it.*

The signs of what was to become a national running phenomenon were nowhere in sight then. But it should not have been too hard to find them, if only one knew where to look, for the evolution of the recreational running sector in Kenya was an event waiting for a trigger. I should know, I was a part of it.

Many of us trail enthusiasts take our vibrant running scene today as a given. We have a large choice of runs and running groups, a huge following of recreational running devotees and no

limit of trails and events to pick from. And then we have Karura Forest, the shrine of recreational running if there ever was one.

It is hard to imagine a time when things were very different. When we would run in the streets with our heads down, pretending not to hear the many snide remarks thrown our way by locals about 'people with nothing better to do.' When daring to run in Karura, as some of us did, was considered the height of madness. Yet it is not too long ago. The emergence of the Urban Swaras running club is, in fact, a parallel story of how this situation changed and brought a generational transformation

to the question of physical fitness and how Kenyans should spend their free time.

You see in the 1990s the only running game in town if you were not an aspiring elite, was the Hash House Harriers. Started as a social haunt of expatriates, by 1995, the locals had taken over the Hash with a vengeance, to the point that sometime in 1999, the club had to be split three ways for safety reasons. But for true fitness enthusiasts, the Hash was always suspect, its preference for socialization over running betrayed by its, tongue in cheek, tag line: 'The drinking club with a running problem.' For many of us to



whom drinking was not enough, it was simply a matter of time before someone decided to do something about it. Someone did.

Cue the Urban Swaras: or rather the idea, for the name did not even exist at the start. But the genesis of the club in the Hash is unmistakable. At least five of the original founders of the Club were all Hashers: Haja Kubwa, Road Runner, Viceroy, Don Bother, Antelope, you know yourselves. In fact, Shiku Waitthaka, one of the founding mothers recalls it even more prosaically:

*“Original Founders met during Saturday runs up Ngong Hills. Wanjohi, who was organizing the runs connected Ngong Hills runners with Ajaa. At Ajaa’s we met this guy called Viceroy, who we were told is a Hasher.”*

Apparently meeting Ajaa and Viceroy changed everything. The range and quality of runs increased and the organization was much more improved when the first Trail Fox (Ajaa himself) was appointed. The journey towards formalizing the group was set in motion. The rest, as they say, is history. And a lot of Geography too as the Urban Swaras have bestrode the running landscape in Kenya as no other club has. For instance, in 2018 I recall a casual conversation with a Swara where we tried to find a major running event globally that has not involved one Swara or more. We could not name any. From Marathon majors to local events to being a force in such distance feats as the Comrades, Two Oceans and our own Mt Kenya Ultra Marathons, the Swaras are there.

But where did the name Urban Swaras come from? Appropriately enough for a founding myth, there are many versions. Ajaa says that Shiku Waitthaka, came up with the name Urban Swaras. Jael insists that Upin, an early Swara coined the name. Lucy Thuo says not ‘Sunny Vikram got it.’ Antelope once told me it was inspired by his Hash moniker. Shiku herself is more modest, saying only that members sent in potential names by email and one was chosen. Should it matter? I think not.



Founding mothers?: Nadine, Jael, Loice, Francesca and Shiku Waitthaka

Success has many owners and rightfully so. Let us leave historical accuracy to future anthropologists.

My own theory is that the clubs name was decided at one of the famous post run parties Mutua used to organize. Mutua was well known for his inexhaustible wine and whisky cellar and even more inexhaustible generosity. Rumor has it that it was during one of these drink lubricated parties that inspiration struck and voila, the Urban Swaras Running Club was born.

From humble beginnings the club has grown by leaps and bounds, chalking up more running firsts in ten years than any of us had reason to expect. But when asked to name the most important highlights, the Chairman does not name running first. Instead, he lists some of the many charity events the Urban Swaras have become known for. Some of these have included helping a child to get lifesaving surgery and sponsoring many poor children and some club members through education. In fact, this association of the club with giving back to society has become so strongly



One of the early runs at Kona baridi in Ngong



Ready to run. Saturday morning at 7 am. What a better way to start a weekend?

entwined with our running mandate that many a time when a new event is announced, members will ask to be told: "what we are running for." As if running is no longer enough reason for being out on a cold Saturday morning. Maybe it is not.

Only after showing off our charity credentials does the Chairman then list a few running achievements: the fact that the club has inspired at least two Kenyan elite runners who now compete at international level, namely: Dennis Lopua from Nakuru and Margaret

Nyairera from Nyeri, whose running career was sparked by one of the Mt Kenya Ultras. In fact, the Swaras serve as a fountain of inspiration at many different levels. For instance, the club has become the inspiration for many spin-offs despite its short ten year lifetime: The Mt Kenya Blazers, The Mbuni Runners, Medal Hunters, Jasho to name just a few.

But then inspiration could be used as the second name of the club. Though rarely celebrated, it is a quality experienced by almost every new

member who often joins with a limited sense of their potential to run, only to be proven wrong when the club inspires them to scale heights hitherto undreamed of.

Many of the club members believe that the Club will one day equal the Boston running club; with many international branches, a huge membership, branded merchandise, dedicated events, its own clubhouses and training grounds. While I have no doubt that all this will be achieved, I believe the greatest impact of the Urban Swaras will come through the positive changes we inspire in ourselves and in others.

The arrival of the Ultra distance running phenomenon in Kenya is one indicator of this potential to change society for the better. Some of the Swaras casually running 100Km today once swore they could not survive a 10K. The fact that I no longer feel alone or embarrassed when I do runs in the city is yet another. In fact, sometimes it feels like we runners are now a majority in the population.

The impact of Club is proof of the quote by Margaret Mead: ***"Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have."*** <sup>US</sup>



1st Mt. Kenya Ultra Marathon...as if 42 km was not long enough.

# GOING DOWN MEMORY LANE

Some of the club's founding members shared with us some history about its inception as they recalled it.

## LOICE MBOGO had this to say:

It was around 2005, towards the end of the year, when different runners met at Catherine Ndereba marathon in Nyeri - Ajaa, Wahome, Loice Mbogo and Ivy and decided to be running together. Wahome was running with a group of friends from Nairobi and Ajaa with his.

Coincidentally, the two groups met one Saturday during their respective runs at Ngong'. After that, we started alternating runs from Wahome to Ajaas and Ngong and during mid-week at Arboretum. In one run at Wahome's, we decided to come up with a name and a constitution since we already had our first Coordinator- Shiku and Chairman- Ajaa. The members requested Ajaa as a lawyer to draft the constitution which was circulated to members for review.

As for the club's name, in 2007 members were asked to come up with one. And over some Amarula, Viceroy and great wine, the name 'Swara', which was Shiku's suggestion, took the day and Urban Swara was born.

The longest distance we used to do was 12 km at Ngong hills—6 km up to past the picnic site to the first sharp hill and back to the police station. During the rainy season, it was a no-go zone because it was difficult to run uphill.

Ajaa, Wahome, Jael and Ivy had done 1 or 2 full marathons by 2006 so the rest used to look at them as icons and also wondering how one could run 42 km. By then many had done Half marathon in Lewa, Stanchart, Kili, Mwea classic to mention a few. In 2007, some Swaras (Loice Mbogo, Joyce Nduku and Wanjohi) attempted their maiden full marathon. The first-year anniversary was done in Tigoni and by then the number had grown.



Loice handing out medals at the 10th anniversary run in Tigoni





Some 'Pacesetters' after finishing the Lewa marathon

**LUCY THUO** also graciously shared her fond memories with us as follows:

The first group run was on 9th August 2008. It was made up of individuals and small groups that had met and decided to run together. In that group were Jael, Lucy, Mercy and Nadine who had been running since 2006, Nduku who had met Wanjohi, Shiku, Loice Mbogo and Jon Juu at a random race and Ajaa and Katwa who knew each other as individual runners. On that day the run was in Ngong. There used to be two runs Wednesdays for those self employed and Saturday for everyone. Typically we would run from either Ajaa's, Mutua's house or Ngong because Wanjohi lived close by. In the group was also Marcel who owned a shop at Yaya and Ivy who hosted several Wednesday runs.

Jael was the madam coordinator and on 26 Feb 2009 the group entered their first out of country race Kilimanjaro marathon. They had been advised by the Shell runners comprising of Gerald Masese, Lena and Sheila to go for it. There were 12 members in tow.

It was in 2009 that the group started picking up more members and in June 2009 as an entry to Lewa they called themselves "The Pacesetters". That year, the Christmas party had 15 people at Sheeben in Upper Hill. We had a great time. I forgot to mention Francesca was also an original member back in 2008. Can't remember how she joined mmmh..

On 1 September 2010 a call for a name was announced. The members were about 25. Two ladies Selin from Turkey and Josephine from Australia were our first foreigners and Eric the Cameroonian. Anyway names were floated - Wakimbizi, Wakimbiciji, Uzima running club and then Sunny Vikram who worked with Lucy and had been a member for 2 months had a Eureka moment- Urban Swaras. There was a long argument on whether the name running club should included. I remember Jael saying if we leave it out people will think it's a clothing line ..Haha

Munyao our web-master quickly created the group and there and then the group was formed.

The club has come a long way, we did a lot in those years when I reminisce about the friends we have made, the places we have been, the charities we have supported and that we still keep running.

We had a lot of connections then, we run with Hashers but they spared us the down downs. We went for runs that have long been cancelled like the Maasai Mara marathon, we met people from different countries and appreciated diversity. I hope everyone in the club gets that fulfilment in being a part of it.

Four years ago **JAEI AMARA** wrote a brilliantly summarised history of the club and with her permission, we have shared it with you as she wrote it.

As August comes to a close I remember that September was the month when we got the name Urban Swaras. I feel like we have to have a birthday party because I do love parties. Today I will risk sounding like Babyface in the song 'simple days'. Before we became Swaras we were something else. Many may not know how we came together but it was very simple.

In those days few people ran. During a morning run, you would only meet one person running. We were few recreational runners. Our coming together was a mere coincidence. Ajaa, Nduku and Ivy seem to have been running together. From the history books, I got to know that Nduku and Ajaa met Ivy in the Catherine Ndereba road race in Nyeri. Mercy, Nadine, Lucy and I were running together. We had a trainer named Zablon who almost died in Lewa, he quit. Lucy had a friend called Masese and he was running with a few other people in Ngong. One day they invited us to run in Ngong. We were late and did not find them but after 20 minutes of running up the hills, we thought this was too hard and came back to Nairobi. Lewa of 2008 was the next weekend.

Nadine and I loved running in the Arboretum and this is where we met Wanjohi who in turn introduced us to Ajaa. At least we had a CV to our names as we were introduced as the girls who are going to do the Kigali peace marathon. The invite for running in Ngong came again from Wanjohi. This time round we went and met the other group. We formed a happy running group. We were not more than 10 people. We decided to have a secretary and I took up the role. I did not like the title secretary and so I chose to be called the Madam Coordinator. The mailing list then had no more than 10 names. Our default running ground was Ngong. We went there every Saturday. We knew all the hills. We gave them names according to the incidences that happened. There was the 'Nadine hill' and the 'tantrum route'. We also had the hardest of the runs named 'hydrate or die'. This one would get you on all your fours at some part. After all runs, we took tea in a café in Ngong town.



Jael running the Paris Marathon

Our route marker was called 'Antelope'. He was fast. The distances were never really accurate. But we did not mind. We did not have gadgets that measured distance. We just ran the routes as we already knew the distances from the elites. Magadi road to Police station was 42Kms. Measuring time was enough. Antelope always told us that 'it was training and not a race'. I think he knew how harsh Ngong was. Nadine, Mutua, Ajaa and I trained for the Stanchart marathon in Ngong every Saturday. We would reach a point where only the sound of our feet could be heard. Every Wednesday the twins, Mutua, Nadine and I got together to do our mid-week run of 20Kms. It was a fast run. All we did was chase the boys. For as long as we could see their back, all was well.

As a group, we struggled to get a name. We were once called the 'Pacesetters'. And there was a name before that which I cannot even remember. Each person within the group volunteered to bring something for after the run. The volunteers brought melon or oranges. I remember when Fiona was leaving Kenya to go back to the UK she sponsored the oranges for that run and we were delighted. We were never in a hurry. We started runs at 7.30am depending on how we felt. Sometimes it was 8 am. A typical email looked like this:

*Hope that you are all keeping well.*

*This weekend the run is at Ngong. We meet at Ngong Police station at 7.15 to begin running at 7.30 am.*


*We shall run the Kahara route. Distances include 10, 15, 21 and 27 Kms*

*See you there.*

Our invite to Tigoni came from Mukuria and his lawyer friend. We met this duo at the Arboretum and invited them to run with us. They came and in turn, invited us to run with them. When we went to Tigoni, we behaved like guests. We agreed to run alongside our hosts but this was not to be. Soon after the run began Ajaa and Mutua took off and asked me to take care of the guests. Within 30 minutes I had also left the guests and dashed off. We enjoyed Tigoni so much it became a part of our Saturday running routes.

As the years went by we grew in number. We had a big mailing list of about 30 people and we got to have the same faces come again and again. I remember Marcel, Wahome, Loise, Shiku, Wachira, John Juu, Katwa, Lena, Kanyarati, Kibet, Fran, Molly, Loketo, Ameet as the commoners. Kibet was our 'elite'. He once got airlifted with a chopper from Lewa. It reminded us that we needed to continue training. The Cameroonians joined us. Eric Sile became a regular and invited his countrymen who have continued to run with us. The Australians and the British came and left. Now we have the Swedes and Indians too.

It was in 2010 that we got registered officially. As I left Kenya for further studies, I handed over the baton to Lucy. There was a suggestion that we need to have a name and the name search was floated to the member. Upin who has since disappeared suggested the name Urban Swaras. He explained that we were fast and running in the city thus the name. We quickly adopted it and our webmaster Munyao designed a logo for us.

Indeed we have grown. Members have come and left. We have invited our friends to run. Some came and stayed and others rejected us. Some fell along the way and never came back. But it has mostly been exciting. We have become a diverse group. And as we get into the month of September, we will be 7 years if we count from when we started operating as a group. Officially we shall be 4 years. Let's celebrate us. 

# AMAZING TRANSFORMATIONS

**W**hy do we run? Why do we wake up every Saturday morning for long runs peppered with a hearty serving of beautiful trails and hills? Why do we log miles upon miles of training, more often than not powering through injuries of all sorts? A common question usually posed to most runners is “When and why did you start running?”

People start running for a variety of reasons. Some run because they want to improve their health, lose weight, get physically fit, become fast etc. Others just want to try something new, use it as a form of stress reliever or run for a cause/charity.


Swaras are not any different. Quite a number joined the club for all those

reasons and probably more. One thing is certain though, since taking up running, most of them have transformed their lives. Some have managed to ward off lifestyle diseases, while others have lost a tremendous amount of weight to graduate to tougher and leaner forms, a far cry from their former selves.

A good number have since graduated from a ‘huffed and puffed’ up 5 km runs to countless half-marathons, marathons and unimaginable ultra distances. Only a Swara can wake up and randomly run 45 km as an easy long run.

Over the years, the club has produced runners who have soared to greater heights. Some have gone on to achieve goals they had probably not envisioned. We have runners who have successfully

completed the 6 star Abbott World Marathon Majors and others well on their way to completing them. Others have severally completed the Ultimate Human race - Comrades, exhibiting just how resilient Swaras are. Of course not forgetting our super-humans of the Ultra tribe who are not afraid to push boundaries in matters running - running round lakes, up and down mountains, traversing all by-passes in and around Nairobi, among other crazy runs.

It is amazing that one is guaranteed to find Swaras representing the club in most international races. 

## RUNNING IS LIVING!



Jack Ndegwa



Muthoni wa Maina



Daisy Ajima



Shem Yator



Ken Waichigo



33yrs Old



43yrs Old

Nyokabi Kamotho

# MEET SOME **SWARAS**

A few runners shared how and when they got to join the club as well as some of their most memorable club runs.

## Elvis Abonyo

**Entry into the club:** I was introduced to Swaras in 2012. I had struggled to complete a full marathon course for 4 years in vain and never fell short of excuses—always blaming the marathon organisers. I remember there was a time I wanted to get a medal, claiming I was a Marathon finisher. I couldn't outsmart the organisers who sent me back to complete the course. They must have noticed that I was a regular DNF casualty.

It is not an easy ride to be crowned a hero in the Abonyo family. We have champions in other disciplines, but no one had carried the marathoner title, and I was keen on it.

As luck would have it, one time during my none-programmed evening runs, I bumped into this tall guy (who at one time was described as 'wind assisted' in races)—Sam Nyingi. He told me about the club and invited me to one run. Thanks to him, I became a marathoner!

**Most memorable run:** I will never forget two Swara runs.

The first one was my maiden Swara run at CITAM Karen. I ran a distance of 27 km (though Susan had announced 25 km during the briefing. Haha!). The run was flagged off at 7 am and I completed it at 2.30 pm! Good, Lord!! To my shock, the two Swara Susans were still waiting for me. In their company were also two other beautiful ladies who I later came to learn were Liz Kanini and Lyma. Ladies, I wish you many years of running!

The other run I am not likely to forget in a long time is the Masai Eco Lodge run. Dusk was falling, it was gloomy and cold and I was all alone in the jungle. The worst part of all this was that the arrow markings kept leading away from civilization! Before I even realised it, I was shedding tears uncontrollably. A full-grown man... me, with my muscles crying! Ah!

Thanks Swaras, keep running!





## Daniel Kiplimo

**Entry into the club:** I joined USRC through James Wahome and Victor Wesonga around 2015 - 2016 (I'm not too sure). They found me in Ngong' during one of my speed training sessions as they were looking for someone to sort out Wesonga's injury - which I did. Thereafter, they invited me to join the club.

**Most memorable run:** I will never forget my first run with Swaras - the Muguga run - for two reasons: first, it was a very tough course for me (38 km). At some point I was scared of bumping into random wild animals. And, two, I sold my 1st pair of running shoes to Swaras.



## Carol Mungai

**Entry into the club:** I joined the club in November 2015 through an invite by a Swara member.

**Most memorable run:** Mt. Kenya Ultra Run in 2017. It was my first ever 35 km, and I thought I would die in the hills and ridges of Nyeri that day. I had only attempted a half marathon before. I later learned that the 35 km does not count as an ultra. I attempted to do this run because supposedly, one could run the whole day, and that is what I did!



## Dessale Teceleab

**Entry into the club:** I started to run with Swaras 5 years ago after being introduced to the club by an American diplomat who had come to my office to apply for a tourist visa to Eritrea.

**Most memorable run:** For me, all out-of-town runs are the best. I can't pick any. This is one reason I have asked my government (twice) to renew my stay in Kenya. At the moment, I have lodged another request for an extended stay, and I hope they will grant it! I owe this club a lot, were it not for it, and considering my love for the good life, I would have added a lot of weight and possibly be unable to move as swiftly as a Swara.





## Avani Patel

**Entry into the club:** Jael and Nadine used to gym with Niraj when we met them at Standard Chartered marathon in 2009. They invited us to join them for a run in Ngong' which I declined fearing their running speeds. Later, Nadine intrigued me when she informed me that they usually take part in the Kilimanjaro Marathon.

The following year, I bumped into her and she told me about the Urban Swaras. I got onto the club's website and contacted Lucy Thuo who was the MC. My first run with the Swaras was the 2010 Kilimanjaro Marathon—I met Loice Mbogo and Tata on the bus. In those days, we could not fill up one bus to Moshi, unlike these days where we have 3 to 4 shuttles ferrying Swaras to Moshi!

From then on, I had to coordinate all my Saturday runs with my kids' activities. Sometimes, I had challenges accommodating both, but somehow I managed to. Soon, I will clock 10 years as a Swara. In that time I have completed the Abbott World Marathon Majors, Victoria Falls half-marathon, Two Oceans among many others.

When I moved back to Kenya in 2000, I did not have any Kenyan friends. The welcoming and friendly nature of Swaras to all and sundry irrespective of age, race, speed was very heartwarming, it still is.



## Anthony Mwasaru

**Entry into the club:** I was introduced to Urban Swaras in 2016 by Joshua Cheruiyot.

**Most memorable run:** My most memorable run is the Voi run.



## Peter Muita

**Entry into the club:** I joined the club in 2017 after an introduction by Masika.

**Most memorable run:** Voi, which was my first ultra.



## Loice Mbogo

**Entry into the club:** I am one of the pioneer members of the club.

**Most memorable run:** Magadi Chairman's run remains etched in my mind. It was an extremely hot day and I did 30 km. The hills humbled me.



## Ruth Macharia

**Entry into the club:** I joined Swaras through a special friend. I was a naïve runner from Henry Wanyoike running club. One day I was running in Parklands Sports club where I met a tall, bearded, fast runner - Thomas Bond. He later took me for a Swara run at Classic Villa, Lower Kabete. I have been hooked ever since.

**Most memorable run:** At the moment Ndeiya and the Tigoni anniversary run rank high on my list. The former because it was my maiden 35 km run while the latter is because of the high altitude, much higher than I am used to.



## Rio

**Entry into the club:** I joined in February 2017 just before the Kilimanjaro Marathon, courtesy of Pauline Wanjiku and Ameet.

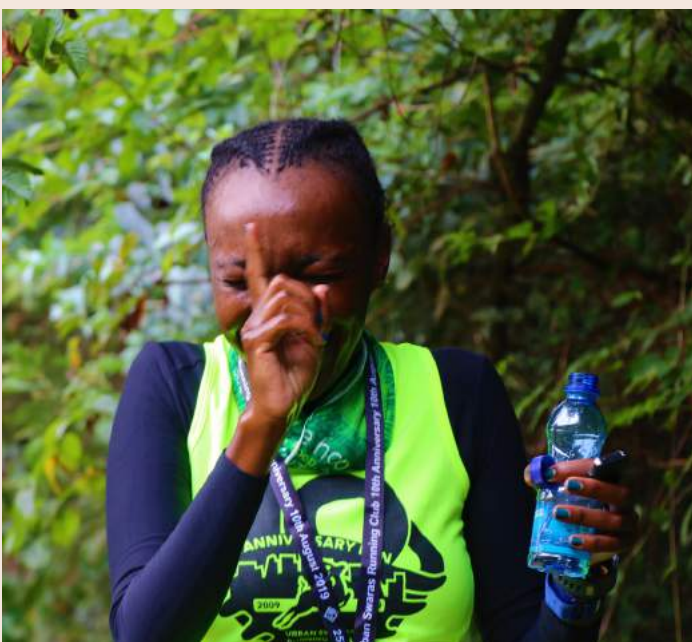
**Most memorable run:** Doing 46 km during the Tigoni 10 years anniversary run 2019. The Trail Fox (aka Benja) made sure we had visited ALL the hills in and about Tigoni.



## Muthoni Wa Maina

**Entry into the club:** I reluctantly started running in 2016 and joined USRC in 2018 on my journey to lose weight and for wellness. I lost 20 kgs once I incorporated running as part of my routine exercise and I have never looked back! My hubby Maina Ngatia aka the 'Villager' introduced me to the club. The most interesting thing about my running is that our kids have joined the bandwagon and my friends think I am paid for running.

**Most memorable run:** The 2019 Voi run with beautiful iconic views where I ran 60 km, the longest distance I have ever run. The Tigoni 10th Anniversary run was fun! The camaraderie by other running clubs in the beautiful Tigoni hills made my day. Running with other clubs was great. The interaction with other clubs 'demystified' who we are! Both runs had such beautiful medals!



## J Nzemi

**Entry into the club:** I joined the club in January 2017 upon the insistence of Masika and Rose Limo.

**Most memorable run:** I have successfully avoided the toughest Swara runs to-date (or so I think). But, Oh boy! The Chairman's Magadi road run ranks high on my 'tough runs' list. In 2017, it was the longest, hottest and terribly hilly 25 km run I had ever done. I swore never to attempt it again! Seems I forgot the torture I went through and trooped back for the run this year for what I hoped would be a 'not-so-bad' 15 km. Well, it turned out to be the longest, coldest, wettest and still hilly 15 km to-date. So, between being literally roasted and being drenched to the bone, I can't decide which experience was better. I guess I'll break the tie next year.



## Jack 'Saxo' Njagi

**Entry into the club:** Through the Nairobi Hash Harriers weekly trash / critique of the previous runs. Lucy Thuo who was the MC at the time welcomed me.

**Most memorable run:** Chairman's Run at Magadi Road. We arrived late and decided to run down a 15 km then back up the remaining 15. All I managed was a 20 km, 15 km down and 5 km up. LOL!

The ascent of the run is crazy!



## Richard Muriithi aka Richie Mr. Shepherd

**Entry into the club:** On our descent of Mt. Meru, Tanzania, I found myself between two Swaras bantering away along the enchanted forested trail. "I am free that weekend so I can come and keep you company" the Villager replied to Shem pertaining to the latter's intention to run the Southern Bypass to Kikuyu.

\*Cue bewildered eyes\*.

A fortnight later, 15th June 2019 I tried out with the Urban Swaras and took home 17 km having never gone beyond 10 km.

\*Cue endorphins dependency since\*.

**Most memorable run:** So far, the 10th Anniversary run in Tigoni. The anticipation to meet other club members, the start line enthusiasm, the unity of purpose as we encountered ourselves on the varying terrain, the scenery, and of course the after party! Tigoni blended all these ingredients and served up a gourmet run.

## Wanjiru Macharia

**Entry into the club:** I learnt about Swaras on Facebook and as soon as I made my enquiry, I got a swift response. I admired the teamwork. It's evidently clear even from far.

**Most memorable run:** My first Swara run was on the 13th of October 2018 at the Legend restaurant. Interestingly, I didn't know the gig/thread, so I got lost and found myself alone. However, that didn't deter me because I met encouraging members of Swaras upon my return to Legend, who explained the drill to me. I made friends on day one!

Thereafter, I had some members who would call me faithfully every Thursday or Friday to update me and encourage me to join in the Saturday runs.

**Running profile:** I don't have a running profile, as I have always run for fun and was never consistent. I'm hoping to build one with Swaras. I have however done the basic charity walks and runs e.g. Dettol Heart run, Stanchart Marathon, a few runs with Nairobi Hash House Harriers and at my gym.

**Running goals:** It is the only cardio I enjoy. So first for my health, secondly for networking, thirdly I love travelling plus meeting new people and lastly it's a great experience and I get to know my country better.

I am happy to be part of this club.







# THE 10TH YEAR OF SWARAS

by Claire BAKER

In the run-up to this event, I widely publicized (meaning on Whatsapp, which is the window to the world as we all know) the 10 days of Swaras. This was a means to highlight the number 10 (which always makes me think of my Prime Minister, at number 10 Downing Street, and of my own 10th birthday, where I reached double digits and by some magic found a whole box of eggs with DOUBLE YOLKS...I'm not yolkling). It was also a way to drum up interest in this run.

I now realize there was no need. The world and his wife (all his wives in fact) and neighbours and cousins were already interested and made this what I can only assume to be the most successful Swara run ever but because I'm stubborn I'm going to stick to the whole '10' theme.

## 1 Anniversary run

This is the first time there has been such an event. It was, therefore, an unknown, an innovation, and a big excitement for everyone involved. When was the last time a Swara run had a poster? And when was the last time our TTT (Truly Terrifying/Tremendous/Tantalizing Treasurer) extended a deadline? All this clearly indicates this was a big deal, and indeed, there's only ever one 10th anniversary for anything or anyone, and very few movements or clubs get to such a ripe old pre-pubescent age.

## 2 Weeks to get everything ready

Now, I'm privy to some insider info, having been invited to a CRE meeting as a volunteer that was volunteered by someone else (is that still a volunteer)? Fear not CRE, I won't give away any trade secrets, except to praise you all for setting all systems a-go-go two weeks ahead of the big day to make sure everyone was involved in making the event a success and getting their hands dirty. Everything that happened, from emails to certificates, to parking arrangements, were carefully plotted and planned before or during this time, and we have one heck of a dedicated CRE to thank for this.

## 3 Meals

Now, I'm an eater. And a feeder. I believe you have to be a semi-decent runner, and just generally decent and interesting human. So I was very much looking forward to all the food I had been promised. 70% of the poster was occupied with information about what food awaited us, and boy we weren't disappointed.



The very able MT Loise finalising last minute logistics.

Once everyone got back from the trail, at whatever time they finished, whether 8.30 am or 4 pm, there was a sumptuous buffet breakfast including sausages AND samosa, not one or the other, and even juice AND hot drinks. Luxury. Then mbuzi, then lunch then mbuzi, then mbuzi, then mbuzi, ad nauseum (perhaps literally in some cases). Some of this mbuzi was the spoils of our Alliance Classic Run club

victory, which was topped up by the CRE. I don't think I'm the only one that felt like we were demolishing an entire herd of goats, and there were no complaints in the house. There was of course also the cash bar, manned (or distinguished gentle-manned) by Joe Gatonye and Martin Mburu, with bowtie-wearing waiters with perfect refill timing. The recipe for a great, full day.





## 4 Trails

Often, we have 10 different distances which can vary between completely accurate and way off base. This time we had four. Damage control, you could say. From 15 to 45 km, impeccably marked, caressing the hills like a wandering hand, trailing after tender tea leaves and snaking their way across the landscape that wouldn't stop surprising and charming, the four trails were marvellous, save for a few scraped knees and foreheads that tried to tarnish their pristine appearance...



## 5 Myths

I just want to touch on something. Many people spoke about the origins of the Swaras but I've heard different versions of how the Swaras got their name. And how the Swaras came about. I call them 'myths' because it seems more magical that way, and also means we can perhaps invent our own to add to the tally...e.g. One day, as Ajaa was running across the Lavington roads of his 'hood, a baby Swara appeared in front of him and whispered to him 'follow me', and he did, until this every day. Perhaps that why he wasn't there for Saturday's run...



## 6 Hrs of debauchery

Who's really counting? Well, I tried. And lost count, so I went home as soon as that happened to avoid any further 'losses'. Others, I hear, carried on late into the evening, watching the sunset over the hills and dancing to DJ Ranu's bangin' choons.

## 7 Victims

No fatalities, but certainly victims. Of bees. Not the birds AND the bees, sadly; just the bees. Ouch. Sorry to all that succumbed (I believe mostly men, perhaps a warning to not try and be too sweet).





## 8 pm cut-off time

Unlike Cinderella, we only got up until 6 pm originally, but the gracious owners extended our curfew to 8 pm. A tremendous thank you to them for letting us not only use but positively invade the rustic, quaint Waterfalls Inn, the site of the original Swara run following the promulgation of the constitution. I hear our self-proclaimed 'token Muhindi' felt right at home and indeed found her way into the owners' home somehow...

## 9 Founding members

The club would be nothing without the people that make it, and who better to celebrate than the original people that made the club way back when. The 9 (or so) founding members were all presented with beautifully crafted certificates, and a number made some humbling and entertaining speeches whilst applauding all members of the club, old and new, for their achievements and their future successes (watch this space...)

## 10 More years

And so that brings my '10 days of Swaras', to a close, putting a full stop to this 10th anniversary celebration. But is it really a full stop? Swaras don't stop! Swaras barely have time for commas, they just keep on going, and so here's to the next 10, 20, 30 + years of running camaraderie, celebrations, blood sweat and tears...and undoubtedly more mbuzi, I hear there are leftovers to last us a lifetime. <sup>US</sup>



Founder member Wanjohi receiving a certificate of appreciation from Wahome - the club's patron.



Trail Queen Ferrah being feted.



Alliance High School old boys appreciating the club for supporting them during their annual Alliance Classic Run held in May.

# ...IN PICTURES

## 10TH ANNIVERSARY RUN

WATERFALLS INN, TIGONI, AUGUST 10, 2019





Claire doing a fabulous job at emceeing



Past club's patron Surinder Dhadiala aka MK



DJ Ranu



The guest of honour - Henry Wanyoike (left) who flagged off the runners.

















# BREAKING 2? OLD MOSES CLASSIC RUN

by Wachira NDERITU

The 3rd Edition of Old Moses Classic was the most anticipated. There was high expectation and rightly so, that the strong Swara entry will break the sub 2 jinx this time round. What with the likes of Jackson Ndegwa, Victor Kamau, Joshua Cheruiyot, Thomas Bond, Wanjau Muriu and Peter Mwita donning the Swara T-shirts and going for broke?

On the ladies category, we had Ruth Macharia teaming with Claire Baker to challenge 2.30.

The run was flagged off by our very able host, Captain Wanjohi Macharia of Mount Kenya Blazers. Their best bet to hunt the Swaras, George Kamunya, was ready to give chase.

12 mins and 3 km later, the pattern had formed. Eight Swaras and one blazer had broken ranks with the entire team and were pacing aggressively as they hit the Sirimon route, 18 km from Old Moses. The warm temperatures for the first 10 km contrasted to the heavy rains that greeted the finishers at Old Moses.

From my cat walk pace, I could sense the energy and the synergy generated by the camaraderie that Swaras bring to a run. I was very optimistic that there

will emerge a surprise sub 2 Victor. Even among the FRS, there was some deep suspicion of an unknown factor hijacking the prize; a gentleman by the name of Charlie Pennington. With Ruth Macharia in the mix, Claire knew her job was well cut. Unfortunately an injury along the rosewoods of sirimon towards the approach of the park gate sealed Ruth's fate, leaving Claire alone to battle sub 2.30

Further back, the Blazers and Swaras hugged the rising trail step by step focusing more on survival than a contest of any kind. A very improved Martin Mungai passed yours truly at 9 km before mellowing down at 16 km. Carol Mungai had opted for the 15 km and you could tell from Marto's sweat that he was determined to overtake Carol at all costs, which he did at 17 km.

To call Old Mosses Classic the toughest half marathon trail in Kenya today is indeed an understatement. Even with the purpose, running poise and panacea demonstrated by the FRS, they were denied sub 2 by Old Moses. Kudos to Victor who clocked 2.02 in his second quest followed by Jackson Ndegwa at 2.10. A nagging injury proved too much for Ndegwa this time as he finished 2nd and Joshua was 3rd at 2.11. Victor shaved 17 minutes

from last years' time and still has more shaving to do.

Claire Baker claimed the top ladies prize at 2.23, shedding 16 minutes from her last years' time. Felicitia came 2nd at 3.25. This forced the organizers to raise the ladies bar to 2.15 next year from 2.30. Yours truly shed 1 minute from the identical 3.11 posted in 1st and 2nd edition to finish at 3.10.

It was one of the most beautiful running outings in the outskirts of this resort city of Nanyuki. Well supported, very interactive and going by the feedback received, very seductive.

To crown it, the dinner and presentations were excellent at the Old House. Thereafter the party moved to The Grand Moran Lounge in town for the ultimate showstopper; dancing as a post-run stretch until late morning!!

To the organizers of the 3rd Edition, a very big thank you for creating a very exciting Lewa option, the Old Moses Classic!

As we await the 4th edition, the question begs; Will Victor emerge victorious next year? Can he shave the 2 mins he was denied? **US**



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