

# TAHITI - THEY CALL IT PARADISE

by Jan Banens

**The 15th Oceania Masters Athletics Championships were recently held in the exotic tropical island of Tahiti. This spectacular island is dominated by two huge, jungle-covered ancient volcanoes.**

We stopped where Captain Cook observed the transit of Venus across the Sun, where the infamous Captain Bligh of mutiny on the Bounty fame survived to reach Tahiti, and where the father of Robert Louis Stephenson constructed de Pointe Vénus lighthouse.



Athletes enjoying Moorea Beach

Our stay in Tahiti also coincided with a solar eclipse on 11 July and thousands of serious eclipse watchers from all over the world had gathered for the event. I could write a travelogue about the many other sights and experiences, but we were of course in Tahiti for the athletics. Some 280 other athletes had also gathered – 98 from Australia; 82 from French Polynesia; 68 from New Zealand; 19 from the Cook Islands; 9 from New Caledonia; as well as one each from Nauru, the Czech Republic and Poland.

Experienced local officials, assisted by New Zealanders and Australians, ran the events. They had the support of many volunteers – mainly secondary school students - all attired in yellow, blue and red tee shirts. All events started on time and were competently run, with only the odd minor hiccup. The enthusiasm and efficiency continued throughout the week.

A first for the OAMA championships was that the host island nation had more athletes competing than New Zealand and nor was it that far behind Australia. Tahitians competed in most events and age-groups, and in some events the red and white Tahitian colours were completely dominant.

Performance standards were very high, with many new Oceania Championship records. In the M60 javelin throw the Oceania record was broken five times by two athletes, one from New Zealand and one from Australia, and my husband got there in the end!

The cross country and road walk events were held at Papeete's beautifully landscaped waterfront park. The half marathon, on the other hand was run on the motorway at the ungodly hour of 5.30am so as to avoid the twice daily traffic jam. Notwithstanding that some 80-90 runners, a very large percentage of which were Tahitian, finished the race.



Athletes from Tahiti, NZ and Aus in the 2k steeple

Tahiti was an outstanding success – well supported by government; well organised by the local committee; and well run by the officials and volunteers. Yes of course there were some minor glitches and shortcomings, as with all competitions, but these paled into insignificance when compared to the many positives. The organisers should be proud of the high standard they have set. The Championships not only provided a wonderful sporting competition but enabled us to experience the beauty and unique culture of French Polynesia. We are truly fortunate that we are part of the Oceania region.



Matthew Muell on his way to silver in the 60m