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For the traveler and the long-distance runner it's not the finish, it's getting there

RUNNING THE SEVEN CONTINENTS: Tales of Travel and the Marathon By Clint Morrison Inkwater Press
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By Bill Andrus
Northwest books

For many, travel is about the journey as much as the arrival. Oregonian Morrison writes about his journeys around Marathon courses around the world, his journeys to reach those places and his journey through life.

There are finish lines on all those journeys, but it's the descriptions of the places, people and emotions encountered along the way that make this book worth reading. Morrison is a strong travel writer. He's multilingual, which adds an important dimension to the places he visits and inhabits in his stories of Marathons run over a period of 19 years.

Morrison was living in Japan, teaching English, when he acquired his first Marathon outside North America in 1983. A year later he was living in Australia and a finish in the Victoria State Championship Marathon in Melbourne gave him another chunk of the world.

Morrison isn't a champion, but he's certainly a serious runner. In 1997, he ran a Marathon at Russia's Bellinghausen Base on King George Island, Antarctica and the possibility of running on every continent was within reach.

An ultra-Marathon in South Africa followed in 1999. He chose to include a finish in the Yukon River Trail Marathon in 2001 as his North American entry. A trip to Athens the same year for a race on route of the original Marathon gave him Europe.

Now in his 50s, with age and its accompanying decline in physical prowess creeping up, Morrison headed to Brazil for what he figures is his last chance to finish a Marathon on every continent.

Each entry is a travel essay. Morrison offers insights on the landscapes, people, food, customs and history he encounter and punctuates it with an account of the run. He makes a valiant attempt to explain his desire, his need to run, and it probably makes sense to fellow runners.

There are so many variables - weather, terrain, organization, the competition - each race is unique. A run in the icy summer of Antarctica bears little resemblance to the challenges of a hot November day in Athens.

The only constant seems to be the distance, more than 26 miles; the inevitable pain and fatigue; and the satisfaction of finishing.

Morrison writes: "The moment of the finish is personal, for some a short sprint and an exclamation of joy, for others just a quiet arrival at a point in space and time and an inward sigh of relief."

Getting there is sometimes as challenging as the race. Morrison travels to the Yukon by ferry through the Inland passage and returns by bus. The journey to Antarctica is an Odyssey of travel by plane and ship.

Morrison's journeys are as solitary as a Marathon in the end must be for each runner. We learn he has a wife and children, but each of his journeys is taken alone. It's a commentary, perhaps, on the journey we all take through life, essentially alone.

Observing, talking to fellow travelers, reading fill his travel agenda. A nice touch at the end of each chapter is list of books chosen to accompany each adventure.

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