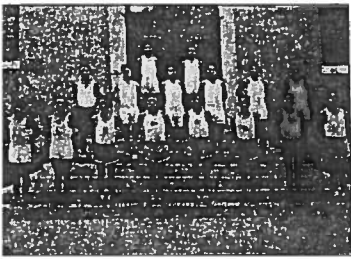
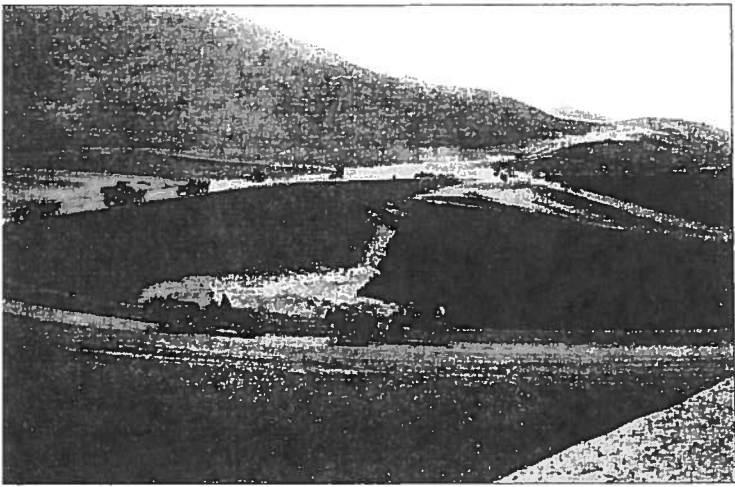


PENINSULA PAST



Above, Granvia La Costa Road, circa 1923, was the site of the first Palos Verdes marathon. The road was later renamed Palos Verdes Drive West. (Photo courtesy of the Local History Room.) Left, Harry Chaca, the winner of the first marathon, is pictured in the front row, fourth from the left in this photo of the 1928 Sherman Institute cross-country team. (Photo courtesy of the Sherman Indian Museum.)

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The forgotten marathon

By Dennis Piotrowski and Monique Sugimoto
Special to the News

The 1920s were a period of great change, excitement and many firsts for the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Rum smugglers dodged authorities at Portuguese Bend. Thousands of automobiles rumbled down the new coastal highway. But one of the most unique and forgotten events of Palos Verdes history was its first formal marathon.

On June 24, 1928, Harry T. Chaca, a Hopi Native American running for the Los Angeles Athletic Club, defeated a handful of participants and won the inaugural 26.2-mile endurance foot race that took place in Palos Verdes Estates.

His time of three hours and 28 minutes was fast enough to defeat his accomplished competitors that included a veteran of the 1912 Stockholm Olympic tryouts. The challenging Palos Verdes race was described as a "grind."

Chaca was one of a group of highly successful long distance runners coached by Bert Jamison of the Sherman Institute, a boarding school for Native Americans in Riverside. Jamison boasted at the time: "When these boys are right, they are absolutely unbeatable." He added that they "run 10 miles every morning and 10 miles before supper for exercise alone."

Chaca won the Palos Verdes race by a solid mile and a half. He received much praise for his come-from-behind victory and for his "refusal to take seriously the early stages of the race." One of Chaca's teammates had held a solid lead at the halfway mark but then faded and had to be pulled from the race by officials.

The challenging course started in front of the Palos Verdes Golf Club and followed the Granvia La Costa Road. This road later became known as Palos Verdes Drive West.

The Los Angeles Athletic Club sponsored this first of what was supposed to be an annual marathon held in Palos Verdes. The goal for the 1928 marathon was to give Southern California runners a shot at making the Olympic team for the games at Amsterdam that opened about a month later and to stimulate interest in marathon running for the upcoming 1932 Olympics hosted by Los Angeles.

Although records do not show that Chaca participated in the Amsterdam or Los Angeles games, his running success did not start or end in Palos Verdes.

He was called "one of the best endurance runners of the world" and reportedly had already placed second in marathons at San Francisco and Kansas prior to winning the Palos Verdes race.

Two of Chaca's greatest post-Palos Verdes marathon wins were at the first annual *Los Angeles Times*' pre-Olympic Marathon in June 1929 and at Vallejo about six months later. In the *Times*' marathon that was slightly more than 27 miles, Chaca beat celebrated East Coast runner Clarence DeMar, U.S. Olympian and seven-time victor of the Boston Marathon.

At Vallejo, with nearly 50,000 spectators lining the roadway, Chaca surged to the lead from his 10th and 11th place position within about five miles from the finish to win with a sizzling time of two hours, 41 minutes and 25 seconds.

Chaca's success continued after his running career. He returned to his village of Polacca in northeastern Arizona where he served as a member of the Hopi Tribal Council. Records from the National Archives also verify that Chaca served as chief judge at the Hopi Agency and as a postmaster in his home state.

Palos Verdes did ultimately get an annual marathon nearly 40 years after Chaca's victory. On Aug. 19, 1967, Robert Deines defeated almost 100 runners to win what was then referred to as the first 26-mile marathon on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. His winning time was two hours, 48 minutes and 16 seconds.

The race, sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club, started at the Peninsula Shopping Center in Rolling Hills Estates. The route followed Hawthorne Boulevard to Crest Road, then into Rolling Hills, eventually winding its way to Miraleste and Portuguese Bend before ending at Malaga Cove School.

According to an article in the *Palos Verdes Peninsula News* from May 1971, the updated version of the Palos Verdes Marathon had a unique genesis. Terry Wallace, track coach at Palos Verdes High School, was sitting in a chair of dentist, Dr. Lawrence E. Jessup, an act member of Kiwanis. Jessup mentioned that the club was looking for a project. The rest is history.

The "modern" Palos Verdes Marathon grew throughout the ensuing decades until it became one of the oldest marathons in the country. It transitioned to half-marathon in 2012.

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