

English Translation of Antoine Guillon's Blog

Here is the story of our first WAA venture of 2015: 96k/4900 m+ of the HK100:

Hong Kong 100 Ultra Marathon

Nothing like an ultra to start the year, it allows you to keep your hand, or rather your feet, in, and it launches the season. In fact, I have no impression of having finished one or started another as, since I joined the WAAMis, successive ultras have lead me from country to country. Our course was set for Hong Kong at the beginning of January where, after a journey that I would describe as “long”, we arrived, Christophe, Cyril, Anne and myself, in the district of Wan Chai.

As soon as the bags were placed in the apartment, we explored the busy alleyways to immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the shops. Here polystyrene boxes were full of water and live fish, crabs, shrimps and prawns of all sizes. Some leap and land on the pavement in the general indifference, while their unhappy fellows are decapitated one by one to order. This game of “chopper”, this game of “elbow”, this vaunting of the quality of the merchandise, in short, introduces us into an incredible world, a few blocks away from luxury boutiques where watches and jewellery cost tens of thousands of euros.

These few days before the race will allow us to discover these riches and the runnable surroundings, while sampling the local dishes. Up to now, I wonder again what might be swimming in certain soups, or why the pork of a recipe was presented in transparent and viscous strips. Experience, experience, this is the watchword of WAAboys.

All this put us into excellent spirits for the HK100, while not forgetting that for success in ultra, there is the crucial contribution of training and the mental component. With Christophe and Cyril, one almost forgot that there is a little race on the schedule.

Saturday, 17th January: get up at 5 am, taxi at 6, arrived on site at 6.45 am. Cool: we have one and a quarter hours to wait. We stay relaxed to talk with the runners then we scamper around to warm up. I can't stop thinking of last year when I warmed up in the same place, handicapped by two cracked ribs. I am confident of achieving a good race: I expected 10 hours 35 against 11 hours 17 in 2014, with a very slow start which would protect my muscles for the second half of the race.

We are there, in the first and second lines, modest Europeans in the midst of Asians with a staggering list of achievements over 100 k or the marathon. Two runners with 6h 33 and 6h 44 for 100k, a Chinese runner with 2h 15 for the marathon and many others. In short, we

know that for 60k of the course they will be unbeatable. It will entirely depend, then, on the final 40k to make the difference.

Shi, jiu, ba, qi, liu, wu, si, san, er, yi, we're off! As I have not understood the countdown, I am already behind at the start. I will learn to count for next time.

The runners attack the route at great speed. The kangaroo-esque strides around me testify to practice on tarmac. I make myself comfortable at a low pace while biding my time, which has the immediate effect of a progressive decline in my relative position. A first path appears, a little narrow for overtaking, characterised by steps of wood or stone and hairpin bends. It climbs briefly, then descends suddenly. I like this alternation. The sides are riddled with species of gum trees and other evergreen shrubs, sometimes interspersed with stunted conifers. We are in a cold period, 15 degrees at the coolest, and it is not uncommon then to see several beefwoods on the shoreline, coniferous trees typical of sub-tropical environments. It is not yet time for sunbathing, far from it, the guys have the air of having a jaguar at their backs, and yet ours, the national jaguar Cricri [*Editor's note: Christophe Le Saux of the WAA team*], prances already in the lead, and surprisingly it is he who shows them his backside. What a spectacle! I have already caught up with some runners, happily, but there are at least 35 ahead of me.

I come out onto the path which leads to the barrage of East Dam. I do not see the leader of the race on the clear 500 metre stretch, they are quick, including my WAAmis. Sébastien Nain runs with me, we chat, truly cool at the start: I am very comfortable but I keep my promise, calm and relaxed.

I arrive at the barrage in 56 minutes in 27th place, 3 minutes slower than in 2014. Anne and Marie of WAA encourage me, I refill my water bottle which gets wedged into my Ultra Bag Pro 3L sac and I head for the hills. I have done well to take it easy, the legs are responding wonderfully to this first hill. I immediately overtake some runners and easily tackle several hundred concrete steps.

I elected to run in Hoka Huaka, which incorporate a supplementary shock absorber on the front of the foot, ideal for the strains imposed by the descent of the steps. Moreover, I will not feel any discomfort in my legs after the race, being able to run again two days later.

I am crossing a beach of fine sand. The sea is beautiful, glistening from the reflection of the rising sun. At the end I climb a section of rocky hill marked as trail. I overtake a group of Nepalese and Chinese runners, 7 or 8 together: my cadence is much higher and no one tries to hang on, a very good sign! Sébastien is still with me on the next section of concrete and

steps. The landscape changes, the view shows many wooded hill, the sea always on our right. A second beach: I think of the Marathon des Sables in which I will soon take part, but not of the tart this time! [*Editor's note: "sables" as well as meaning "sands" in French are also French butter cookies like jammy dodgers!*]

The return of concrete, and this time, for now, in a bend, a climb, in all directions. Vive the cement-mixers! Sébastien has switched off and I catch up again. The temperature climbs steadily.

CP2, 28k, 2h35, 15th place. I learn that Christophe and Cyril are ahead. In the shake-out they are going to ruffle a few feathers, as usual, I am delighted to say. They are brutal, these two. Real kamikwaazes!

It is time to speed up. I benefit from the flat hard ground to open up. The cliff to the left and the dense vegetation on the right limit the visibility on rounding the bend. I constantly fear crashing into the unceasing ramblers. Cries of "Sorry!" burst forth, but people are so slow in their delivery that I regularly skim them or scrape the bushes. Hardly anyone is interested in the race; they are chatting without looking ahead.

CP4, 45k, 4h11, 11th place. From now on the course profile climbs more markedly. At once I climb a steep trail and this makes me feel good because running continuously is not my cup of tea. This will be the warmest place in the race, sheltered from the wind. In the distance, the sky-scrapers of Hong Kong line up against the backdrop of a hazy sky. China and its pollution are only a few kilometres away. After about 400metres I catch up with two runners almost at a standstill, struggling at the start of the technical descent where I leap in the style of the Caroux, the wild mountain sheep. For once the rocks and the ochre sandy soil give me the chance to benefit from all my technical work. The next climb is again chaotic, long and pitted with channels. I see the yellow jersey of Coincoin [*Editor's note: Cyril Cointre of the WAA team*], the short-sleeved ultra carrier that all three of us are wearing. He runs with company and disappears on the ledge. I climb rapidly and immediately boost my stride. On the descent it is not one but two Ultra Carriers that I can see. Cricri is here! Carried away by my enthusiasm, I do not stay level with them, but I encourage them vigorously. They are suffering from cramp. They are temporarily in WAarning mode. I arrive shortly at check-point 5.

CP5, 52k, 5h00, 6th position. My friends rejoin me there and we immortalise the moment with a photo. It is not trivial to be in such a trio on an event of the UTWT after five hours of effort!

The Japanese, Hara-san, winner of the UTMF in 2013, completes his refuelling 30 seconds before me. I did not know that he was so close.

Express stop, I leave before Christophe and Cyril in pursuit of Hara san. The track climbs between 7 and 10%, and Hara-san walks. I maintain a small efficient trot until I catch up with him. I invite him to follow me and we exchange a few words in English. He is finding the steps hard on his muscles, which handicaps him in lengthening his stride. He drops back little by little. The mere fact of running gently on this hill lets me catch up with two more runners: now I am in third place! I cannot get over it; what form, the same as in the Transmartinique six weeks earlier [*Editor's note: Antoine won the Transmartinique 2014*]. A succession of short bumps on the road and the paths takes me to the Shing Mun dam.

CP8, 83k, 8h21, 3rd position: The refreshment stop is again overseen by Anne who manages with taxis to follow our progress. Janet and Steve, the organisers, will have greatly helped us with our logistics. A big 'thank you' to them.

Shing Mun is the paradise for macaques. These malicious little monkeys take advantage of HK100 to do their groceries. They steal our refreshments. For Marie and Anne there is a panic when a macaque carries off all my supplies, even the nougat. He taunts them in posing on a barrier to undo the wrapping carefully. Another monkey goes off from the refreshment station with my big frontal head-lamp. Marie runs after him. Greedy, he prefers to release the lamp. Phew!

When I arrive all is in good order, the WAAssistance was 'on the ball'. I continue on the asphalt. The environment is wild, valleys covered with trees, sometimes sparse when the soil is too rocky, and macaques everywhere. It becomes disturbing. Groups of tens, little ones on their mothers' backs, the adults quarrelling for no apparent reason. They cross the trail at any moment. They intimidate you in showing their long incisors. Do not look at them, do not eat, do not frighten them, tread carefully when running. I admit not to be proud, above all when passing near to small ones isolated from the group. Finally I reach the check-point of Lead Mine Pass without incident.

10 kilometres to go. By my watch I am 45 seconds ahead of my schedule, not bad after 90k. I am still going to be accused of being "the metronome" after this performance.

In the lead, the Chinese runner, Yan Long-Fei has broken away from the Norwegian, Sondre Amdahl, but both are without doubt too far ahead for me. I continue to maintain a good rhythm, you never can tell, and as the finishing time is important for calculating points for UTWT it is in my interest. I love this typical mountain trail. It climbs well, scattered with stones, and comprises several tracts of all techniques. In the distance I can see the

observatories perched at the top of the peak. I have to reach them before toppling down the final descent. The contour dominates the land. The eyes alight on the towns, where the towers already assume their nocturnal lighting. Night falls rapidly here. A small descent follows, rising again on the way to the summit from where I could see no one in pursuit. At last I let the legs go free in the descent. What pleasure to run in such good form. I switch on my head-lamp, more for fear of missing the markers than for necessity, when I come out onto the finish after rounding a last bend. I did not expect to be here so early, posing in the col in the middle of nowhere. 10 h 30, a little faster than expected, and above all in good shape: that is reassuring for the future.

I am welcomed by Janet and Steve who will also have followed a large part of the race. There is not a large crowd, we are far from the city, but the enthusiasm is great, and I enjoy with Anne and Marie the end of this Hong Kong adventure. I have the opportunity to talk with Sondre, who arrived 30 minutes before me. He has been living for a year in the Canaries and will, for sure, be the firm favourite for the TransGranCanaria, where we promise each other a big friendly fight.

I do not have time to swallow some soup as I have already been called for the prize-giving. My friend Coincoin turns up, out of the blue, in full ceremony, accompanied by the Spaniard Jordi Gamito Baus. Christophe completes the fine result for the team, despite his repeated cramps. Mission accomplished!

Thanks to WAA Ultra Equipment for all your help and support, to Hoka OneOne for the superb performance of their shoes, to Laboratoire Effinov for the perfect electrolyte balance that they gave me with energy drinks, to Green Magma & Celnat and LT Labo for my balanced diet. Thanks to GranTrail for the photos, to Sébastien Henri for the Hoka special insoles.

Antoine, 3rd; Cyril, 4th, Christophe, 16th.

Next WAAventure, the North Face TransGranCanaria at the beginning of March: dunes, mountains, cactus and, above all, good spirits freely shared.

WAArmly yours,

Antoine.