

The VIBRAM 100HK 2014

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After having read Hong Kong's Dominic Rigby account of the Vibram 100HK, I felt compelled to give my version of the event from the other end of the spectrum.

Having started running full marathons since 2006 I was looking for something different from just running on the road. I had read a Blog by RIPLEY from Singapore when she wrote about running the inaugural Vibram HK100 in 2011. In late 2011 when the on-line registration opened for the 2012 edition, I was still hesitating a month after the registration started. I finally decided to do it but did not tell anyone for fear of getting laughed at (You must be crazy, You are too old, You've never done this before, and so on). I had completed 13 full Marathons by the end of 2011. My average time? About 5hours 30minutes.

Now there are not many hills in Kuala Lumpur where I live. Looking back at my training dairy in the second half of 2011 I now realised that I was just running around the steeper parts of KL around the Lake Gardens and not a single trail run. Some of my fellow runners would run up the 270+ steps at Batu Caves, where a Hindu Temple is sited, just outside of KL.

Came Saturday 18 February 2012, I was in Hong Kong for the Vibram 100HK 2012 edition. I told my HK relatives to expect me for lunch on Sunday as I would finish in about 24 hours. I reached the Finish line at 3.15pm Sunday afternoon, in a time of 31hours 13 minutes, position 506 out of 511 Finishers. The battery in my HK phone was dead and I had frantic calls (unanswered and unknown to me) from HK and Melbourne, all wondering whether I fell asleep, fell down the ravine, had a heart attack along the way or just quit. Still, I was quite pleased with myself for having completed the course. I was disappointed that there was no Finisher medal so I duly wrote to Janet and Steve about this.

In January 2013 for the 3rd edition of the Vibram HK100 I was a little wiser, older and thought I was better prepared after doing some uphill runs / walks with weights. This time I didn't hesitate and the registration was full in 3 days. Quite a few Malaysians heard about me doing the 2012 edition and they must have felt inspired that if this guy can do it, they can as well.

There hasn't been any volcanic activity in Malaysia for the past few thousand years or so, and there were still no steep hills in KL. My running diary did not show me at any trail runs. I had run 4 full Marathons in 2012, including the Great Ocean Road Marathon in Australia (which prepared me for the view and the chilly temperature in HK) after the 2012 HK100 and that was the extent of my preparation – and the carbo-loading the night before at Tung Po on the top floor of Northpoint Municipal Market.

I improved on my time in Vibram 100HK 2013 – 30hours 39minutes. An improvement of 34 minutes. I did not make any lunch appointment and no frantic phone calls this time round. I was really pleased to get a Finisher medal this time, for which I had requested for in 2012. I was position 840 out of 854 Finishers. Well, I'm out of the last 10 positions.

So what's different in 2014? Well, first when the registration opened in September 2013 it went viral and was full in 3 hours. I dropped my weight down from 74-75 kg to 69 kg. I bought a lighter back pack and a water bladder with drinking tube, which I didn't have in 2012/13. I dropped a lot of unnecessary stuff – I even had a compass and extra trousers in 2012. I decided to ignore Janet's exhortations to bring sufficient warm clothing, warning us that the main reason for hospitalisation was hypothermia. I heard of some runner getting hypothermia at Needle Hill – I was puzzled, it wasn't that cold when I was up there, I said. The reply was that they were there at 2 am and I, through no fault of mine, was there only at 10 am!

I also ignored the fact that I did not finish the TMBT 100km in Sabah in September and the TNF HK 100 in HK in December 2013, stopping at the 50 km mark at both events. This, I told myself, was due to the heavy rain making it dangerous for me to continue

The Journey to Pak Tam Chung

At 0600 at Northpoint MTR station outside Entrance/Exit A1, I met this person in full hiking gear. He turned out to be **Riichiro Abe (bib 101)** from Japan. He was getting his air supply from a cigarette. I felt *malu* (Malay: ashamed, embarrassed) to ask for one as we had just met. I heard that elite runners would use bibs 001 to 100, so he must be just outside the bunch. He was waiting for **Sekiguchi Miki** san (1123) whom we would meet many times along the way.

At Hang Hau MTR station I took a stand-up breakfast at 7-11 and a toilet break. This would be the last clean toilet for the day and its amazing how many times one can go before a race. I had seen runners get in mini bus 101M earlier so I duly got into one. Half way through I asked to be dropped off at Pak Tam Chung and was duly berated by the driver that I had to change bus at Sai Kung town. I decided not to chance it and took a green Cab at Sai Kung.

There was the mandatory photo session around the Jalur Gemilang (Malaysian national Flag) with the 84 other Malaysians and a sprinkling of Singaporeans. I realised I left my cap in the 50km drop bag – no way were the volunteers able to find my bag again. Oh well, a bit of sun along the way.

Start to East Dam (Support Point) to CP 1 (Ham Tin by the beach)

I started fast on the road as I wanted to avoid the bottle neck on the right turn to the trail. I was behind **Ng Seow Kong (1027)**, the elite Malaysian runner who has ran on every continent. That was the last I saw of him in HK. A few hundred runners also saw the last of me when they ran past me. Met another elite Malaysian runner Allan Lee who acted as a volunteer at East Dam (and many other CPs).

It was hot walking along the beach without my cap but I was ahead of my 2013 time. I missed the girls in shark costume who were there in 2013.

In 2012, a volunteer at Ham Tin said to us: “people come all the way for the fried rice and Udon mee, please eat up”. The fried rice and noodles really tasted good in 2012 and it would be the last cooked meal for the day. In 2014, I was on a mission and I just had half a plate (honest!) of Udon mee – hey, how many plates can I stuff in the 9 minutes I was there and I had to fuel up for the day ahead. It was 1155 when I climbed up the trail using the ropes.

We passed by small villages that their names escape me but there was a place just before CP 1 where I was recommended by **Tey Eng Tiong (1244)**, Photo-journalist, to stop for their Tau fu fah (sweet bean curd jelly). I was sorely tempted but didn't.

CP 1 to CP 2 (Wong Shek)

The Start to CP1 to CP 2 were probably the most scenic spots and another Malaysian volunteer **Chan Wai Yee** was on hand near the beach to guide us and take our photos. On and on I went being careful not to go down hill too fast and turn in my ankle – that would be the end of my 2014 edition. I was there for a fun trip, not to injure myself or to make the South China Morning Post news for the wrong reasons. Somewhere down the steps **Woo Weng Kwong (1405)** overtook me without so much as a Hi and a Bye. I could see he was intent on finishing below 24 hours.

At every stop till CP 5, **Vivian** was there to take our photos and tell us to get off our butt and not stop too long. There were cute volunteers in wolves' cap at CP 2, including **Sue Ling Wong**, another formidable runner who decided to volunteer.

CP 2 to CP 3 (Hoi Ha) to CP 4 (Yong Shue O) to CP 5(Kei Ling Ha)

The coastline could still be seen on the way to Hoi Ha and I struggled along, getting hot under the sun. They were a bunch of enthusiastic volunteers who cheered each participant who passed by. Passed by a lot of old and abandoned houses along the way and I wondered who were these people who lived here and why did they move away. Huge isolated Chinese graveyards, old war bunkers also caught my eyes as were the earthenware urns that held cremated

human remains. Unfortunately I was in a race otherwise it would have been interesting to explore further. The feral cows got in our way and one had to shoo them aside and be careful not to step on their droppings.

Three years in a row I passed by this village (Pak Sha O, I think) and there would be this group of people having a picnic sitting on a long garden table, with a barbeque fire at the side. I shouted out that that I see them every year and I was invited to have a beer. I thought better of it, being inebriated may be a cause for disqualification.

On a down hill rocky stretch I passed by a Malaysian woman who was sitting by the side with her friends beside her. She was having knee pain on the downhill stretch and had difficulty continuing. I offered her my anti-inflammatory medications and suggested she lead with her painful leg downhill and her good leg uphill (bad leg to Hell, good leg to Heaven was something I learned). I always used a pair of hiking poles to take the weight off my knees when I am going down hill.

At Yong Shue O I was getting hungry but decided not to stop too long as I wanted to make full use of the remaining daylight. It was 5.40pm when I left the tented area and I put on my head light. I had wanted to make it to CP 5 in daylight but I knew I was not going to make it. On the way to CP 5 we could see the saddle shaped Ma On Shan and head lights at the peak.

I reached Kei Ling Ha, the half way point at 7.40pm, when my projected arrival time was 6.00pm, in the light, if I was to finish below 24 hours. I was disappointed to say the least. I was there at the same time as **Yap Eng Hui** (1478) and we were waiting for the hot water to boil to get some noodles. There was this rather fierce sounding Supervisor in charge of his young Scouts and Guides. When he ran out of spoons, he told them to rummage in the trash can for used spoons and forks. You could hear the “yucks!!!” and the “yechhs!!!” as they gingerly picked through the rubbish.

I had a bottle of Chicken Essence, highly recommended by my Mother for easing tiredness. I changed onto a warm shirt, fresh socks and re-greased myself. I made sure I had enough water (in fact I had too much, about 1.5 litre, which made my bag heavier) but it is difficult to judge how much water there is in a bladder.

CP 5 to CP 6 (Gilwell Camp)

This would be the longest (13 km) section that was the killer stretch. I remembered running out of water in 2013 when I thought one litre was sufficient. I left the CP at 8.40pm and the traffic marshals guided me across the road and then it was a long stretch up a tar road. Most people would go this stretch in a group but I was quite happy to walk alone in the dark. If I could see how steep and long the hill was, it might not do my morale much good. I had my spare headlight, extra battery, spare glasses, sufficient water, space blanket, cellular phone (with spare battery), whistle, bandages and food. I could sit it out all night if I had to.

The trudge up Ma On Shan was unending. This was the section that a group of us took more than 5 hours to negotiate in 2013. I felt stronger this year probably due to my lighter weight and backpack but it still took me nearly 4 ½ hours to reach CP 6 at 1.06 am. I remember Gilwell Camp situated on a gentle slope. The chairs kept falling to the left when we sat down on it.

CP 6 to CP 7 (Beacon Hill) to CP 8 (Shing Mun Dam)

After a 20 minute rest, it was on to Beacon Hill. I do not recall much along the way. It was encouraging to hear the loud rock music from Beacon Hill long before we reached it. It was getting cold and I was shivering in my wind-breaker. The open fire, blanket and mushroom soup were very welcomed. Not so pleasant was using the portable toilets after 900 people have gone through them. After changing the batteries in my head light it was time to move on.

Leaving CP 7 there was a bit of commotion due to some wild pigs, probably looking for some scraps. It was a long stone stairs down hill and this was where some participants got lost by going on the road. I got through the stairs and came out at Eagle Nest Gate, then across the road. The monkeys were just waking up and were not much of a bother as I walked up the long hill. The smell of their faecal droppings also helped keep me awake!

Dominic Rigby talked about reaching Shing Mun Dam in daylight. I had no problem doing that just that I reached it on Sunday morning rather than Saturday evening!

CP 8 to CP 9 (Lead Mine Pass) to Finish (Rotary Club Park)

I left CP 8 at 7.40am, way behind my hoped-for sub 24 hour finish. A run across the dam, then up some stairs to reach Needle Hill. The scenery was just too good to miss taking some photos for remembrance. Everyone talked about how tough this was but its really not too difficult if you don't look at the peak and just keep stepping up. Another photo opportunity at the peak and the long winding road ahead could be seen through the mist. A series of steep steps down and down took us to the road up to Grassy Hill. This was another one of the road that always made you think: its going to end the next turn ahead but the there'll be another turn all the way to the top where I found two cows trying to chew through the VIBRAM 100HK sign in the plastic bag. This route would take me down a green path to CP 9. At this point, Yap Eng Hui caught up with me. He was a bit upset at getting lost for an hour and a half from CP 7 to CP 8.

Everyone was a bit upbeat at this point as it was the final stretch, no matter than this was the highest peak in HK. I left CP 9 at 10.35am together with an experienced HK man who said he had done this same trail on the OXFAM

Trail walker for the past 15 years or more. I knew that this was a 3 km uphill stretch and a 6 km down hill stretch so it was a matter of time before we reached the peak. There was still a steep inclined road to negotiate before the winding road all the way to the Finish line. I did a slow run down the last stretch remembering the last two years when I made many new friends including a Malaysian physiotherapist working in HK.

It was a feeling of elation to reach the Finish line to be treated as if I won the race. The run up the ramp, the cheering, the photographs – my two minutes of fame! My fellow Malaysians were there at the Finish and Riichiro Abe finished a few minutes after me.

It took me 29 hours 27 minutes, an improvement of an hour from 2013. Well I did say at the beginning that this is written at the opposite spectrum from that of Dominic Rigby.

At this rate of improvement it might be in the year 2020 before I can get under 24 hours! No matter, I now have a black, blue and grey HK100 hoodie from 2012, 2013 and 2014. It may be a coincidence but I believe the Organisers have a wicked sense of humour as they sort of represent the colours of my toe nails.

Will I be back in 2015? Having my photo taken with Janet Ng and having wanton noodles (with additional beef tendons and brisket) at Mak's Noodles at Wellington Street would be good enough reasons to come back to Hong Kong.

I wonder what colour hoodie will be given in 2015?

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