

2015 Vibram HK100 - Race Report by Christina Yeung

Me & my little Man

Last year after completing my first ever 50km trail race, a friend jokingly said, "Run a 100km race next time"! Frankly, I didn't pay any attention to this "suggestion" at all and I said to myself, that's it, from now on, I would only run those races which are under 30km, which should take me at most 6 hours. I should be able to handle that no matter how brutal it is! I don't care what other people are racing, be it 50km, 100km or 168km. It is not a matter of whether these are achievable or not, these distances are simply out of my comfort zone.

Until one day, I came across the Facebook page of a female runner whom I have always met at races (we have similar pace). She was proudly holding a trophy with a running guy figure, then I found out it was a trophy awarded to any HK100 finishers who could complete the race below certain hours. At other races, finishers would usually only get a medal but not a trophy. The HK100 finisher trophy was way too attractive to me! I said to myself "I HAVE to get it"! Later I found out that runners will be awarded a "gold man", "silver man" or "bronze man" if their finish time is below 16 hours, 20 hours and 24 hours respectively. But I don't care what color my man is, I HAVE to get this little Man!

To get myself prepared for this race, I worked out a six-month training plan which included a number of races with two of 50km. By the end of December 2014, although I had already completed the two longer races as well as a few long distance training of over 40km each, I was still not confident in completing the 100km race as I fully understood that the world could be completely different after 50km. The idea of running 100km was still very daunting.

After a few recces, I worked out the estimated time in reaching each checkpoint and my estimated finish time is 20h10m. Well, in fact, I deliberately made it above 20 hours as I didn't want to give myself any pressure for a sub-20 finish. After all, my aim was to get the Man, so a sub-20 was not a must.

The BIG Day - I arrived at the venue at 6am and tried to do everything slowly and take my time in the final preparation. Still, anxiety kicked in, I went to the bathroom at least four times before the race. I told myself, "don't think too much... stick with your own pace.... knock out the checkpoints one by one... breathe, breathe..." Yet, the mere thought of running/walking 20+ hours non-stop was dreadful and stressful. Anyway, I said goodbye and good luck to my training buddy, and hoping to see each other again before sunrise the next day.

BANG! Off we go! I paced myself steadily and completed the first 5km of Sheung Yiu Country Trail and back to the paved Sai Kung Man Yee Road. There were some uphill on Man Yee Road and I saw many people started to walk. I told myself not to hurry but need to keep "running", be it at a walking pace of other people, as I wanted to keep the momentum. Once the road went downhill, I was overtaken by many. I told myself again, no hurry, paced yourself. Anyway I reached the water point at East Dam five minutes faster than my estimation. "Good pacing," I

told myself. I grabbed some bananas and coconut cookies and continue my journey. I felt good and arrived at CP1 (Ham Tin), 30 minutes earlier than my estimation. "Sub-20 seems possible!" I thought.

Then I started to feel exhausted even at the relatively easy Tai Tan Country Trail, the uphill part of the trail seemed never ending, which was completely different from the impression I got during recce. My previous 30-minute gain was depleting. I bumped into some friends who were hiking at Sai Kung that day. "Add oil! Add oil!" they yelled. Thanks for the cheering but it didn't quite help boosting my spirit. I looked at my watch at one point and realized I was only six hours or so into the race. What? Another 14 hours?! I didn't know if I could even make it to Kei Ling Ha!

I thought CP5 (Kei Ling Ha) was my crux. It was a convenient location for dropping out and, in any case, reaching CP5 would have broken my race distance record of 50km. I was thinking hard how to convince myself to continue when approaching CP5 as my energy level was deteriorating and my mind was flashing with all those self-doubts. Yet, as soon as I reached CP5, I was on auto pilot. I grabbed my drop bag, changed a fresh pair of socks and fuelled myself with more bananas. Then I crossed the busy Sai Sha Road. "Oh, I am still here and not on the bus!" I realized. While I had no more time gain at that moment, I was still right on my target time. But then the real challenge began.

CP5 to CP6 (Gilwell Camp) covered the longest distance amongst all legs and racers started to face some serious hill climbing. It was a physical as well as a mental challenge when darkness and coldness slowly crawled in. I carried a note with breakdown of distance and time required not only between checkpoints but some landmarks within each leg. I said to myself, if I could gain a minute or two in each section, I might be able to achieve sub-20. I tried to go faster but my legs simply didn't cooperate. At one point, I thought I was "running" but holy moly, after 10 minutes, I still couldn't catch up with a guy 30 metres ahead of me who was merely "walking"! I barely met my target from one point to another. My mind was swaying with these thoughts while running to CP6 - "a sub-24 is good enough... no, a finisher medal is not bad at all... no no no, go faster and I'll get the silver..... ordinary people being extraordinary..... ordinary people are having dinner now, what am I doing here.....oh no, it's only 7:30pm, what? 9 more hours to go!..." Finally after 3 hours or so, I arrived at CP6. Bananas and coke were my fuel. I couldn't take anything else. I drank a lot but I could not bear the least discomfort and had to go to the loo at every checkpoint from CP6 onwards.

Time passed quickly all of a sudden. I heard loud music as approaching CP7 (Beacon Hill). The sweet scouts were cheering for the runners as we ran into the checkpoint. Again my routine, bananas-coke-loo. Then I saw a group of runners, some with blankets wrapped around their shoulders, gathered around a camp fire. No one was talking. It's a big temptation but I said to myself, "stop looking and MOVE"! I told myself, "battled on to CP8 (Shing Mun Dam), from there, knock out the trio - Needle, Grass and Hat, and that would be it!"

I felt great relief after reaching CP8 as I knew I could make it to the finish even if I just walked. My legs were shaking while going down Needle Hill and I felt like a zombie while going up Grass Hill but at the same time, I also saw many other zombies around me...

After completing my bananas-coke-loo ritual at CP9 (Lead Mine Pass), I steadily passed the rolling terrain at Tai Mo Shan and reached the paved road. Yet, there was still a steep hill to climb until I could reach the "white ball" standing at the top of Tai Mo Shan. But this time, I was fearless. It was foggy and I couldn't really see anything 30 feet away but I knew there were only three short steep sections, each would take me 250 to 300 steps. Little by little, I reached the top. I ran as fast as I could with my wobbly legs down the final 4km to the finish. I crossed the finish line at 4:15am. I was in the race for 20h15m and took home the "Bronze MAN". I DID it!

I always imagined I would have tears rolling down my cheeks when dashing into the finish line. But at the very moment of crossing the finish, my mind was totally blank and I had no special emotions. All I wanted to do were to get changed and have a cup of hot chocolate. I found a seat near the finish and sat there motionlessly, awaiting the return of my training buddy. She crossed the finish two hours later. I managed to drag my body home somehow and the next moment, I woke up on Sunday afternoon. I felt strange as if I had been travelled to a place with a different time zone where I lost one whole day...

A day or two after the race, I watched a video which captured the aerial view of racers running the picturesque yet rugged trails and the beautiful beaches. I looked at my trophy and recollected my memories. Then, I started to have strong emotions. My eyes were filled with tears: tears for a hard fought finish, tears for the grueling training in the past months, tears for doing something extraordinary and tears of joy for getting the little Man now right on my shelf.

I feel sorry that I didn't say enough thank you to the volunteers who handed out the food and drinks at the checkpoints and other volunteers who supported the race. I was always in a rush when making my request, "water, water! coke coke! bananas, bananas!" Please forgive me if I forgot to say thank you. Oh, by the way, I think I had at least 18 pieces of bananas!

Janet and Steve, many many thanks for organizing such a great race. Running HK100 truly gave me an unforgettable experience!

P.S. One of my friends said my little Man was way cooler than the ones at the Oscars. I agree! Heehee ^^V