

Once Bitten, Twice Shy: Vibram 100 2015 Race Report

Last year the Vibram 100 was my first and so far only 100km race and the euphoria I got off the back of that race changed the whole course of my running last year. I finished 2014 in 17:50 and in all honesty the course lived up to the billing with bright sunny days running and no major issues from my side, to the extent that the week after, feeling like superman I ran the 50k green power hike and never looked back from that dual weekends racing. So it was with much in-trepidation that I found out the 2015 race was a ballot. I went along to the screening of "More than a Race "to see what the going rate for a guaranteed entry place was but at \$8000 was way too steep to justify that to my wife so I figured I would just have to take my chances for 2015 along with the rest. But some destiny or premonition led me to pushing back my ski holiday in January to start on the Monday after the race, even though most of my friends were turning up on the Saturday. I was that convinced that I would get in....

And so it was to be, the email confirming that meant my moved holiday wasn't in vain and I would be lining up again for the 2015 edition came as hoped. Only difference was my expectations. Coming back for seconds is always tough mentally, especially when running 100km, and the first time had been a total adventure.

Well January came around again and my lead up to the race had gone largely similar as last year, a couple 50k races October followed by faster shorter races through Nov and Dec, this year I hoped the lack of a real Christmas break would act in my favour even though in terms of time, anything under 18 hours was fine, same as 2014.

Race day I lined up with the increasing numbers, it really seemed bigger than previously and I hoped the usual jam in to the first trail would be ok. Actually it wasn't that bad and the run down to the first dam largely uneventful but allowed me to take in the spectacular views.

As I had planned to race the first half slower this time I took it easy through the beaches and in the long undulating paved sections out of Sai Kung. But overall I felt good - at that point that was all I was hoping for. The final climb in to kei ling ha (Rooster Hill) was more arduous than I remembered but apart from that I arrived at the halfway point in 7:45 a full 30mins quicker than last year which surprised me a lot. My wife met me and my spirits were high. Last year it had conflicted with a wedding and she'd prioritized that first.....

But the race is not really started until this point. The second half hills are what it's all about so setting off through the Ma On Shan hills I managed to keep my pace and take in the beautiful scenes of the city in the background as I went. As it got dark I arrived at Gilwel camp. Putting on the headlamp always changes the perspective a little but the run down Sha Tin pass and across to Beacon Hill always has enough twinkling lights to take your mind off the race. But in the back of my mind was the knowledge that my least favorite part of the course was coming up. Beacon Hill to Shing Mun reservoir and Needle Hill. Last year I didn't see much wildlife and I actually thought running at night

the animals were all in bed while we raced past. This time my fears were realized, monkeys all over the road past the dam, wild dogs, wild boars, you name ,it I saw it. Everywhere my headlamp looked, it seemed that eyes were looking back at me. I think I used up extra energy trying to keep up with a couple runners in order to have company on this stretch and this ultimately took its toll. Arriving at the Shing Mun checkpoint I was relieved to get over the animal section but at the same time I remembered the small issue of climbing Needle Hill, which awaited me. My apprehension at this seemed to get the better of me, a short way up I started vomiting uncontrollably and this is where my race started to unravel. Suddenly I became cold and progress up Needle hill was slight and slow. Energy levels dropped off the scale as I just thought of getting to the top on to the relatively less arduous Grassy hill. But my stomach had other plans, and I continued being ill all the way up. At the top I was spent, walking Grassy hill was worse because of the cold wind and getting in to Lead Mine pass I was relieved but knowing 10k over Tai Mo Shan to come left me even colder. At the checkpoint I couldn't get warm. I tried a couple warm drinks but they instantly came up again. I had no choice but to try sit in the tent for a while to warm up and get my race back on track. At this point I was 15:30 or so in to the race and well on target even with my Needle Hill issues. But the body said otherwise and two blankets in the tent did little to help over the next 30 mins. One of the volunteers put a heater in the tent and then suddenly the tent was full of people, it was like I envisaged a battleground tent, people on the floor, people sleeping in chairs, murmurs over whether to continue.....but the marshalls were doing a great job and being very helpful trying to get places for everyone on the floor and ferrying them hot drinks.

I fell asleep in my chair, woke up and looking at my watch it had been over an hour. All targets were now off the table, but I was still determined to finish. A quick drink and wait 5 mins to see how I dealt with it....very badly. It came up straight away. I sat back in the chair, wrapped my self up again from the cold. Second awakening, again another hour had passed. I no longer felt sick but I was still cold. How would I take some warm water? Badly. It came up again. Spirits were low, I never contemplating giving up, but people in the tent were now asking for the quicker way back to civilization. The Marshall said it was an hour walk down to Tai Po. I knew in my condition, the trail down to Tai Po and the trail up to Tai Mo Shan were much of a muchness. I was going to struggle on both.

Yet another snooze. Three hours later I managed to get some fluid down me. I stood up, legs stiffer from the rest and the cold. But putting my headlamp on I knew what was ahead. It was actually heartening on the way up. I was overtaking people who were going at an averagely slower pace(ie those who had better paced themselves). And this lifted me to the top where the wind howled and mist circled back in to my headlamp. The part getting on to the road over Tai Mo Shan was the turning point. Only 5km down the road, all I could hear was the finishing line announcements, but it seemed like every turn I was further away while the finishing circus rolled on in the distance. I slowly jogged all the way down, it was excruciating.

Finishing in 20:50 I was glad to get the bronze statue, as sitting in tent I had given up on all targets and was happy with just finishing. Monday I left for Niseko for a weeks skiing. Sitting in the onsen all week, all I could think was, "at least that makes it easier to run

quicker next year.....".