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Hongkong 100k (UTWT) The Ultimate Experience

I have always felt running as the way to channelize & give my super ideas wings to fly. I always think beyond being billionaire while I run & get a whole lot of crazy ideas!!! Sometimes I wonder what would I have been doing if not Running!!!

Never knew until I went to the start line of HK 100 (Hongkong 100k Ultra Trail World Tour) that there is such an exciting universe of Trail Running.....

What people has an image of Hongkong completely goes for a toss when you are here for HK 100 Ultra Trail. This is the most beautiful Hongkong one would have ever seen.....a nature lovers paradise !!! Mountains surrounded by beautiful beaches which are untouched, unspoilt, serene.....

A festive atmosphere was there as I reached the venue/start point(Pak Tam Chung) of HK 100- UTWT.About 1500 enthusiastic runners raring to go for the fourth edition of the event. Imagine the situation for similar distance in India we have 10-15 runners. A long long way to go.....

The run was flagged off at 8am sharp HK time & we were on the beautiful journey of nature lovers Hongkong. As the time passed the crowd started to dissipate & the real race began.....those who were fluent on trails took over the laggards within 45 minutes into the event. My first 11km were through in 1h:35mins(Support Point 1-East Dam).This was a scenic country trail overlooking the islands in South China sea & gradual climb of about 315 meters height gain in a distance of about 6kms.

A couple of kms on the road & we were up for the second trail...both side of roads was beautiful sea with small islands visible in near vicinity (soooo beautiful scenery). I took off for the second trail which was again a climb of about 350meters over a distance of 5kms & coming down the same distance almost. I was at CP 1(21km-Ham Tin) in about 3h:10min(my worst time for a Half Marathon).

The challenge grew more & more difficult with each passing trail as the evening set in & i was about to reach my first target of 50km. The trail was now going to be more difficult & steep(as if till now it was a cake walk...Haaa Haaa Haaa). I reached CP 5 the fifth stage of trail at about 7pm the half way point & by this time i had it enough. It was a test of mental strength & character. I was cold as a cube of ice as I set in front of a campfire at CP 5(Kei Ling Ha-52 km). The volunteers were kind enough to provide with a shawl to cover me up. All those who reached with me were like looking at each other who makes the first move from here ahead. I was hypothermic & needed some rest, a volunteer came up to me & asked if i would like to rest for a while in the tent & I was like oh my God!!! This girl (volunteer) is an Angel sent by God....I rested for 20 minutes & was asked by a volunteer if i would like to quit the race & go back to finish line in a bus??? I said what? No way I am heading out for another journey.....a difficult one as it was the cold of the night, rough terrain as worst as it could be & 13kms to go before the next CP this was the longest gap through the night & a difficult one as the height gain was too steep(about 600 meters).The ridgeline after Ma On Shan provided the most beautiful views over Sai Kung & hundreds of small islands in South China sea.

As i took off from there in the cool dark night i had my first real experience of the trail i fell flat on my knees hitting the ground & luckily my hands which were covered with gloves saved the day for me. I had bruises/bleeding on my right knee. I got up checked the damage & started back to go ahead. It was mandatory to carry your own stuff with you which included first aid too. At any given time in the race i was carrying about 3.5kgs on my back in the backpack. I saw 3 runners falling at different places during that night run 2 of them very serious injuries. I got bit scared & took each step with caution, there was a valley on one side & a mountain on other side. Even after being cautious I slipped down the valley as I was saved by the bushes as I could catch hold of them. Somehow the night passed by and there was dawn.....most of the sleep related accidents take place at dawn as this is the time when you are most uncertain.

With the trail becoming more & more difficult(interesting) the time to finish each trail got longer & longer the steep hikes were maddening, the quadriceps, the glutes & the calf muscles went for a toss, it felt like you have come specially to damage your knees. I started to lose the confidence of finishing.....after the CP 5 I was not able to take any hard food even the soup or a coffee would not remain & I puked not once but thrice during the race at different times. No hard food was able to stay in my stomach.

Normally a hill race of 100 km I would finish in about 15 hours(100km) & here I was in this race at about 65kms(CP 6-Gilwell Camp) in about 17hours!!! There was a long journey ahead.....

Under normal circumstances remaining 35kms would take about 5 hours to complete after doing 65 kms but this was getting difficult & more difficult with each passing km. I had stopped counting on time as my only hope was to finish the race in given time. All my calculation fell flat on me. No maths in the world would work in this situation, whatever you put as target time would prove wrong. Just as another runner passes by I would inquire about the distance to the next CP. As I came down at CP-7 I thought of quitting (then thought of not quitting as I had come specially to participate so long a distance from India).The route from CP-6 to CP-7 Beacon Hill provides the best views one can ever have of the city in the night. From Lion Rock you can overlook Kowloon to neon lights lit Hongkong. From there it was a sharp descent of about 10km in the early dawn into monkeyland where you will be sharing the trails & climbing with monkeys. As you leave CP-8 there are only 3 climbs left to the finish is what a fellow participant told me. There is strength sapping but majestic Needle Hill(532 meters) sharp ascent & you can see the highest peak of Hongkong Tai Mo Shan(957 meters). I was left breathless & there came another one, Grassy Hill(650 meters) followed by a sharp descent. This was my worst performance of the race (I could cover just 7 kms in about 3 & half hours) remember two peaks & a sharp descent!!!

When I reached (CP 9-Lead Mine Pass) at 90kms I almost gave up on the race even after knowing that I have done 90% of my job. I was not able to convince myself of going any further, said to myself enough is enough(Let it be a DNF=Did Not Finish) It doesn't matter much at that time as you are in a negative thought process. The co- runners around were also looking so very tired. As I was contemplating to quit a fellow runner from Malaysia said friend come on you are just 10kms away from your target, you have done 90kms just don't leave it for the last 10(This CP is inaccessible to vehicles, so it was easier to shuffle to finish). And as I gathered the courage to go for the final journey he whispered in my ears this is the most difficult one too!!! But doesn't matter we will finish.

The last 10km has a elevation gain of 930meters over a distance of 5km the steepest of all & the highest peak of Hongkong.....as I took my first step to the hike I could see the steep journey ahead & visualize what is to come ahead. Every few steps and I would stand & gather my breath back. I started this final journey at around 11am the next day & finished it just 7 minutes before 2pm. This journey of 29 H:53 M, I am going to remember for a long long time to

come before I take another mad decision of running a trail in the UTWT series. This was truly the most scenic & gruesome journey of my running career.

There is this big beautiful world of trail running for those who love to be in the nature at its best. I wish my tale of the journey through beautiful mountains & beaches of Hongkong will inspire a few to take up running & trail running in particular.