

A Deep Drop

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Backgrounds

Trailwalker 2000 is an annual fundraising walkathon event organized by Oxfam Hong Kong. Participants have to finish the trail within 48 hours (November 10 to November 12). The route is the 100-km MacLehose Trail that runs in an east-west direction through eight country parks and about 20 hills in the New Territories of Hong Kong. This year, they aim to raise HK\$14 million to help disadvantaged people in Hong Kong and poor people in Asia and Africa.

M2K is our team name, which stands for 2Ms (Man & Michael) and 2Ks (Keith & KwokChi). All of us are frequent hikers but never walk more than 30km non-stop. During our practical training, we know we are capable of completing the whole trail if we are in good health, but most likely, we need about 40 hours to reach the finish line. Our strategies to finish 100km are slow pace and avoid injury.

We have a support team consists of Caleb, Juli (Keith's wife), Miu-Lan (KwokChi's wife), Carrie (Man's wife), Mr. Ma, Ah Ming and Ah Chung. Since none of them can assist us for the whole trip, and a few cars involved, we have to plan in detail in order to get the supplies at the appropriate points. We will have four support points to get the supplies and food.

There are ten checkpoints for the whole trip. Their distances and difficulties are as follows:

| From | To | Distance (km) | Difficulty |
|-------------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Start Point | CP 1 | 16.5 | * |
| CP 1 | CP 2 | 8.2 | ** |
| CP 2 | CP 3 | 9.4 | *** |
| CP 3 | CP 4 | 13.3 | *** |
| CP 4 | CP 5 | 7.2 | ** |
| CP 5 | CP 6 | 6.5 | * |
| CP 6 | CP 7 | 8.7 | ** |
| CP 7 | CP 8 | 9.8 | ** |
| CP 8 | CP 9 | 10.6 | * |
| CP 9 | End Point | 9.8 | * |
| | | Total: 100 km | |

From Start Point to CP 1

Carrie drove us to the start point at Pak Tam Chung in the morning and we started at 10am after Yip Tung's announcement. Our team was at the last cluster of the participating teams. The walk was slow because more than 1,600 athletes were on the trail. The hard surface trail lasted about 9km before we headed over to Sai Wan Shan (314m.). The weather

was a little bit hot and sunny so someone on the line needed assistance. We saw a mountain rescue team rushing down the hill to help. Anyway, our walk was relaxing and we chatted a lot. We took lunch break at a store until we reached Sai Wan village at 2pm. We finished 16.5km in 4 hours.

My Hiking Mood Index: 5 (highest)

From CP 1 to CP 2

From the beach of Tai Long Sai Wan, we had to walk about 4 km along beaches and climbed up a valley to reach Chek Keng. Then, we had to climb up to reach the checkpoint at Pak Tam Au. We finished 8.2km in 2.5 hours because the weather was perfect and the trail was not crowd as most of the teams had passed us. We even met some teams that were started at 1pm when we were rested at Pak Tam Au at 5pm. They walked fast!

My Hiking Mood Index: 5

From CP 2 to CP 3

Darkness came quick at rural area. Scattered lights at far villages started when we continued at 6pm. Trails were filled up with torch lights and deep breaths, as we had to climb up and down a few hills, including Ngau Yee Shek Shan, Ngam Tau Shan (451m.), Wa Mei Shan (385m.), Lui Ta Shek (379m.), and Kai Kung Shan (399m.). The trails were steep and dark that I could hardly recognize the hills though I had hiked so many times in that area before. Man walked very fast because Carrie was our first and only supporter at coming checkpoint. We walked 3.25 hours and finished these 9.4km at 9:15pm that was really late for dinner. In order to give us the most convenience spot, Carrie had done a great job. She parked the car there early in the afternoon, back and forth two times and brought with lots of necessary facilities, delicious food and soup. All of us were quite exhausted so she was busy serving us. Man, you should be proud of yourself to have Carrie as your wife. It started raining heavily when we were eating. We were lucky to have a shelter, the car, to change for dry clothes and continue with our mission by 10:30pm.

My Hiking Mood Index: 4

From CP 3 to CP 4

We climbed up an extremely long and steep uphill pavement road before reached the trail to Ma On Shan (702m.). The rain accompanied us during the whole trip of passing Tai Kam Chung (536m.), Fu Yung Pit (515m.), and Tsim Mei Fung (385m.). The muddy trail was sticky and slippery that had hurt Keith twice in this section. Our pace could not be fast due to more hikers on the trail, bad vision at dark and narrow slippery trail. Luckily, the rain stopped to give us a chance to survive. It was almost time for sunrise before we reached the checkpoint. We were shock when we saw numerous participants sleeping inside blankets on the ground without shelter. They were looked like nothing better than dying homeless people. There were lines of wounded hikers waiting for one's turn to go in the Red Cross tent. Most of them had knees or feet problem. My feet had also started complaining as I had used them for almost 50km. We took an extra rest before meeting our support team at 6am. Juli, Caleb, Mr. Ma and Miu-Lan were there for hours since we had used two more hours than the schedule to complete this 13.3km section. They were so happy to meet their lovely wives after this toughest section that only made me feeling...jealous. Juli did intensive medical care to Keith's wounded elbow and KwokChi showed his concern to the condition of Miu-Lan since she was so tired after working whole day and waiting for hours. Hey, teammates,

can you share with me how and where to meet your another halves? Is that the reason you guys have recovered so quickly?

My Hiking Mood Index: 4

From CP 4 to CP 5

As light came out after darkness, we also got recharged after delicious homemade breakfast. We started at 7:30am and reached next checkpoint at 10:30am. It took us three hours to finish 7.2km because we had to walk over a lot of high steps. We also found excellent views which overlooking whole Kowloon Peninsula at Beacon Hill and took some pictures. Don't forget we had not sleeping for 24 hours by now.

My Hiking Mood Index: 4

From CP 5 to CP 6

It was the closest checkpoint of the whole trip that was only 6.5 km. Still, it took us three hours to reach there because a long portion of hard surface uphill road before the checkpoint. There were a lot of active monkeys playing and eating at both sides of the trail. KwokChi and I had to walk in an inter-defensive format in order to make sure that they wouldn't attack us. The checkpoint was quite quiet since no one will waste time here. All teams were rushed to reach Shing Mun Picnic Area to meet their support team. Keith turned on his turbo and disappeared soon with dusts behind his shoes because he knew Juli was waiting there.

My Hiking Mood Index: 4

From CP 6 to CP 7

Ah Chung, Caleb and Juli found a close picnic table and set up a comfortable temporary base for us. Caleb was so generous even provided us two sleeping mats for short term lying down. Man fell asleep in a few minutes, may be because Carrie was not there. We left at 3pm after changes for hiking shorts since sunshine came out again. We still had Needle Hill (532m.) and Grassy Hill (620m.) before us. Our morale was high since we knew our hindrances were almost all cleared. If we could reach Lead Mine Pass without injury, the upcoming trail was not difficult to be overcome. Yes!! We reached checkpoint in two hours and could not wait longer to climb up the highest mountain of Hong Kong, Tai Mo Shan (957m.).

My Hiking Mood Index: 5

From CP 7 to CP 8

The rain fell again liked applauded to our achievement. We knew that it was unfavorable to hike without sunlight especially in foggy environment. We had only one hour to climb up 4 km of muddy trail so we pushed our hiking machine to the utmost extent that we could reach. We finished 4km uphill within 45 minutes that may be the highest record of us. But, nobody knew the coming 5.8 km of hard surface road had almost killed me. I felt starving and faint when walking uphill. To put whatever eatable into my mouth was the only thing I could do to save myself. I ate my entire emergency food liked a cow. The second dangerous wave that hit me then was sleeping desire. My eyes were so heavy and I felt I had lost the hearing and speaking abilities. I talked to Keith but unable to hear what I said; Keith gave me response but I was not sure he was talking to me. This was the first time I had this

unconscious feeling while I was still on my feet. I started complaining on inappropriateness to include concrete cement road into MacLehose Trail that was really hurting hikers' feet and legs. After a tolerated 6km walk, we were happy to meet Ah Chung, Caleb, Juli, Miu-Lan and two other helpers at the checkpoint. We could have a shelter to heal legs and took dinner before the last one-fifth of the journey.

My Hiking Mood Index: 5, then dropped to 2

From CP 8 to CP 9

A last dinner often symbolized something great would be done and the food was always memorable. I could still remember the delicious chicken wings from Juli. Strong wind blew from all directions speeded up our dinnertime. I got a wrong memory that the rest journey was flat, short and easy and made the worst decision at this moment. I picked a pair of thin socks instead of my regular hiking socks to wear. We started again happily at 9pm and promised to meet our support team at the endpoint at 1:30am. It was dark on the hard surface path; still we had a good time for the first half-hour. We were happy to have Caleb added to our team to be our guide and hiking partner. At 9:30pm, the never-ending rain started pouring. We walked fast but it only hurt my feet more seriously. Every step was a pain to my feet and toes. The pain went upward from feet to my head as my hiking mood index dropped rapidly. In addition with the strike of Sleeping Devil, I even unreasonably complained Caleb of his fast pace. It was the most painful hiking experience I had ever had. I had the impulse of giving up. I yelled at my partners, "I need a place to sit and heal my poor feet, right now!" Of course, no one could find a shelter at the trail, but just kept moving closed to the coming checkpoint. Finally, we reached the checkpoint at 11:30pm and went to the first aid shelter right away.

My Hiking Mood Index: 5, then dropped to 1

From CP 9 to CP 10

All of us went into the first aid shelter for various treatments. I felt better and ready to face the challenge of last 10km. The next two hours of walk under heavy rain on a flooding trail was difficult but it made me awake because Tai Lam Chung Reservoir was on my left. I didn't want to be the first trailwalker who dropped into this reservoir. I still felt very sleepy and I had to take off my contact lens to give me a clearer screen on the muddy trail. Temperature dropped rapidly, wind blew strongly and rain fell continuously. There was a hiker required emergency food because his body temperature was too low. KwokChi twisted his waist two times during this section but still tough enough to keep going. When we reached the water catchment, we could only take a short break because it was freezing cold out there. We still had last 4km to hit the endpoint. All I could do at this moment was kept walking and cursing about the inhumanity of this event. I told myself a hundred times, "Get out of this damned trail and no second try, absolutely!" We saw some ambulances running fast towards the reservoir, that we were sure someone at the back must be in danger. Cold wind blew strongly against our face made us difficult to breathe and trembling. I thought something must be done to help those teams that still struggling on Tai Mo Shan. It was not easy to survive under such a bad weather and body conditions. Finally, the downhill steps to the finish line faded in on our left. We knew we were survivors and we had made it. The time we checked in was 3:35am, so we had stayed on the trail for 41 hours and 35 minutes. Wooooo! Miu-Lan, Juli, Carrie and Ah Ming were waiting and helping us at the endpoint. I appreciated so much of their efforts and time to make our mission turned out possible.

My Hiking Mood Index: 4, then dropped to 0 (lowest)

On the way back to Kowloon in Ming's car, I slept at KwokChi's shoulder (Sorry, Miu-Lan) in one minute. When I reached home, I used 15 seconds to spot my bed, took only 2 minutes to change clothes and dropped in deep sleep in 4.5 seconds.

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Newspaper Cuttings of November 12:

Sing Pao: 11 degree C was recorded at Shing Mun Reservoir.
20 trailwalkers was sent to hospital due to injury or sickness.
1 trailwalker was sent to hospital because of shortage of sodium.
Only 434 teams completed the whole journey as a full team out of 873.
Buses were used to retrieve the officials and hikers from Shing Mun.

Apple Daily: 13 degree C lowest temperature was recorded in New Territories.
1 trailwalker was sent to hospital by helicopter.
5 male trailwalkers were sent to hospital at the spot just a few km away from finish line.

Ming Pao: 11 degree C and heavy rainfall in New Territories last night.
200 trailwalkers had to stop the hike due to bad weather condition.
69 participants were not feeling good during the whole event.
2,500 trailwalkers finished the journey out of 3,500 participants.

Last Words after the Event:

It is the most difficult hiking event that I have ever experienced. Tired body and painful feet are two factors that I have overlooked. The experience I got this time could be used for a successful and happy hike next time.

Say, if I can have a faster pace and I can finish 100km within 36 hours, then, it is no need to stay two nights in the mountain. If I have more knowledge about foot care, my feet won't bother me like this time. If I fully understand and remember the whole trail, I won't use wrong socks. Most importantly, I need more time stay in Hong Kong on the MacLehose Trail to train with the whole team to figure out the most comfortable pace for each teammate. Our support team has done a great job in this event, but to be fair, I may need to have a wife in the team next time. ☺