

Mt. Rinjani Ultra – Running for Water

Early 2014 in what must have been a momentary lapse of reason I signed up for the 52km Mt. Rinjani Ultra Marathon. I had been talking about a 100km run for a little over 25 years and figured this could be a stepping stone towards that. Little did I know.....

So how do you train for an event that covers 5200m up and down hill in Singapore? I didn't fancy going up and down the stairs in some high rise building and decided to stick to long, slow runs along the Green Corridor into Bukit Timah National Park and MacRitchie Reservoir. If I couldn't get long up and downhill sections at least I got many shorter ones. When we were in Spain for a few weeks in June I managed to find some great trails in the mountains above Mijas, finally some testing hour long uphill runs pushing me to my limits. But back in Singapore with about a month to go I still wasn't sure I had built up enough stamina to get me up and down Rinjani. I switched to doing 1½ hour runs 2 times a week, a longer one on the weekends and plenty of rest in between. I finished my training with a 4½ hour run 2 weeks before the event.

In the mean time I started my fundraising efforts for the water project in Munduk Lumbang. It was something that had been in the back of my mind ever since I visited the Organic Farm Bali in November. They have a problem, I have the engineering skills (or at least the right contacts) and with this epic run I might be able to get enough sponsorship to implement a sustainable solution. I contacted the Organic Farm Bali, told them about my idea and set up the IndieGoGo crowdfunding site in the space of a couple of days. It's been a rollercoaster ride ever since and I've been overwhelmed by the support the project has received since day one.

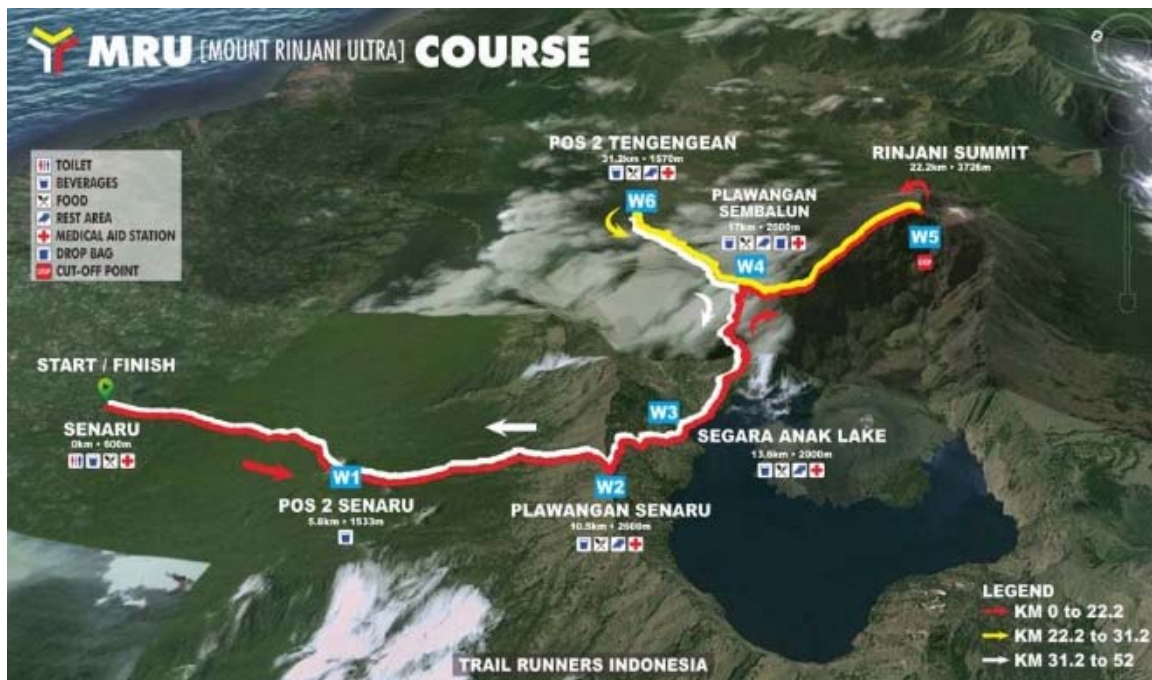
I visited the village about a week ago to check out the problems with current system and find out a bit more about the history. The system was first installed about 2 years ago with the support of a big donation. 31 Households joined the scheme and paid 1.5 million rupiah (about 150 US\$, several months income) upfront to be connected. They have a water meter and a single tap on their



property and pay between 6000 and 15000 rupiah a month based on the meter reading towards maintenance of the system. But pumping the water from the spring to the collection tanks in the village, 850m away and 56m higher, isn't an easy task. With no electricity anywhere nearby a gravity pump, using water to pump water, is one of the few options available. Although a gravity pump is of a simple construction with few moving parts and is often used in rural

locations where electricity is not present the forces to generate the required 6-7 bar pressure to pump the water to the tanks result in frequent failure of the system. The pump has been replaced 2 times, the pipe between the feedwater tank and the pump once and is damaged beyond repair again at the moment. I'm currently looking into different methods and pumping systems and hope to come up with a solution shortly.

On the Friday morning before the run we took a taxi from Sengigi on the west coast of Lombok to Senaru on the northern slopes of Mt. Rinjani. I was just in time for the technical race meeting, beat the queue to get my start number and chip and watch the queues grow as more and more of the 500 contestants for the 21km and 52km events arrived for the meeting. Back in Sengigi for a late lunch followed by packing my running pack and getting everything ready for the midnight start that evening. I managed to get a few hours sleep before making the 2 hour taxi ride for a second time that day and arrived at the start with 45 minutes to spare. Found a flat spot, had another nap and focused on the enormous task ahead.



The start was chaotic, 250 runners sharing a 2 meter wide concrete path all at once just doesn't make a pretty scene. But it soon thinned out as the course got steeper, the path narrower and turned into a steep uphill trail covered in tree roots. Ten minutes into the race I managed to turn my brand new headlamp into red light mode and had to change to my backup, not a good start. I teamed up with a small group, running where we could and hiking fast where the path was too steep. At 2:45 I arrived at checkpoint 2 on the rim of the volcano, the first 10km climbing 2000m were behind me. Next was 600m steep down into the crater, a couple of km relatively flat along the lake and 600m steep up to the rim on the other side.

I arrive at checkpoint 4 at 5:00, 17km done. The climb to the top is next, climbing steep up in loose gravel, the best part of the race. I don my fleece, gloves and woolly hat, top up my water and quickly get going. Sunrise on the ridge was amazing, looking up I thought I was nearly there but the top just didn't come any closer. The first runner came flying past on his way down already a long way ahead of number two. The altitude was getting to me, my 100 steps – rest rhythm turned into 20 and then 10 steps. By now the top was getting closer and before I realised it I was there. Too cold and windy to be hanging around too long, just enough time for a quick photo with one of the other competitors, a nibble and a few sips of water before starting the descent. It's 7:40 and now I'm flying down the ridge. What was a 2½ hour uphill struggle proved to be an hour of downhill fun.

Breakfast back at checkpoint 4, just over half way and some of the hardest climbing done. Next stage, 4½ km downhill descending a little over 1000m on the wrong side of the volcano. Hard on the mind when you know that every step down you have to go up again later on. Down to checkpoint 6 took an hour, back up exactly double that. Back at checkpoint 4 at 11:50, time for a quick bite of muesli for lunch. Happy I was here for the last time and finally on the way to the finish, unhappy when I found out they ran out of water. But we were told not to worry, there was water at checkpoint 3 at the bottom of the hill. I started the 17km return leg with a small bottle of water.

No water at checkpoint 3, we just carried on. I finished my water half way up the final steep climb and by the time I reached checkpoint 2 started to feel the first signs of dehydration. No water at checkpoint 2, no reason to stop and I started the final 10km descent at 14:15. I made quick progress down the sandy trail that was so much hard work on the way up, but I knew that wouldn't last long. A bit further down the trail entered the rain forest where the tree roots and the wet and slippery soil slowed my pace. My shoes had filled up with sand and while I was sitting down to empty them the 2 runners I had left behind on the climb up to checkpoint 2 passed me. Tired and dehydrated I plodded on, trying not to trip over the many roots.

Halfway down at checkpoint 1 there was a little bit of water left. I gulped down a bottle, thought of taking another but decided to leave some for the competitors behind me. Only 5km to go now, the slippery trail never seemed to end. I heard a cockerel, the first sign of civilisation since starting 16 hours before, but it was another half hour before I finally left the forest behind me. With about a kilometre to go I was passed by another runner. I tried to keep up but just didn't have the energy or the willpower left. Suddenly the finish line, I could see Alison, camera ready to fire. I was there, I made it.....



I crossed the line in 16:40:31 and finished 14th overall, only 49 of the 260 competitors completed the race.