

# ULTRA-TRAIL

AUSTRALIA

UTA951 - Terry Wong

“I’m the first in UTA 2016!”

Such a wonderful moment in my trail running experience or even in my life. No joking, not until my friends far in Hong Kong shared me the screen capture of the Facebook UTA official page I realized that I was the first guy to cross the finish line this year.

The fact is that it was not a planned outcome at all. The story should begin with race entry. I was pondering whether I should visit the Blue Mountains again in 5 months’ time for my first foreign 100km trail running, and then it was full when I tried to register in the system. While just leaving a mail queuing for the waiting list with disappointment, it was so thankful that a place was available for me at last!

A few weeks before the race, I started checking through the UTA website to familiarize myself with the race course and all other arrangements. I discovered the UTA951, which was not a long-distance trail running race that would be mutually exclusive with my registered UTA100. Actually it added more fun to my trip participating in a different kind of time-trial race in the iconic Furber Steps, at the same time serving as a warm up and reece for the 100km race. Without second thought I registered the race through the website.

Thursday was my only choice as it took time for me to recover and stay tuned for the 100km on Saturday. I arrived Katoomba before noon on Thursday. Quickly settled down at my homestay, I headed to the KCC for race check-in. As anticipated, little hiccups were encountered but I managed to get the certificate at the end. Then I decided to head for the Scenic World for my UTA951. The reason behind was not planning to be the first starter – but to finish the race earlier so that I would have more time shopping around in the Expo!

Taking the steepest incline railway in the world did not frighten me, as it was already my second time after my first ride on the New Year day this year, therefore I was psychologically prepared for the steepness. Anyway, it was fun seeing other tourists screaming during the journey, as this reflected some sense of superiority to the calm me. The train station at the bottom was the starting point of the race. I was asked to be the first runner of the race, starting at 4pm, and in the next 15-minute time before start I was so busy for stretching, warming up, fixing the bib, and not to mention – selfie!

With sound of gunfire, I sprinted to the bottom of the Furber Steps and started my climbing. Though registering the race only a few weeks before, I did do some step-climbing training in Hong Kong, just in my residential block for most of the time. It is always easy to find steps in Hong Kong, not only in the countryside but also in the residential blocks that everyone is living in. Therefore in just like 30 minutes I would climb up to 20 or 30 storeys then take a lift down to the ground floor. Five times. Or six times. I would call it “Staircase interval” similar to my training in the field.

Frankly speaking, fighting with the Furber Steps was quite a different thing compared to my training. It was all good at the start with my prudent approach to climb slowly, admiring the surrounding and the occasional gorgeous scenery. But then the climb went on and seemed never end. Worrying that I would be caught by my successor who started 1 minute after me, I tried to put more effort among the steps. I saw a staff showing me the direction, and I could not help asking before losing my breath, “Halfway?”

“Nearly,” it was the most frustrating reply I had ever received. But trail runners would understand, there was no use (and no way) grumbling or having a lazy mind under this situation. “Keep on going Terry, keep on.” I told myself. “No matter how tall is the hill, how many steps are ahead, once you keep on, you will reach the top at the end.” So with the encouraging crowd and the ringing bell (till now I am still wondering if it was an official one or just tourists making some fun) I passed through the wooden walkway and saw the finish portal, so admiring that I could still dash towards it with my full-of-lactic-acid thigh and calf. My lungs felt like bursting and I could taste some bloody smell while swallowing. But, I! Did! It! Not a very fascinating result, yet I was more than contented. Not only because of the pride of becoming the first in UTA 2016 and being published in the official page, but I knew that I had exert my limited best and achieve the goal that would never been reached by those who hadn’t tried it.

The UTA 951 also helped a lot in my UTA100 two days later as well, by familiarizing in advance the “Big Boss” that I needed to beat before completion.