

## MILITARY WIVES HIT THE HILLS OF HONG KONG

What began as a leisure four day package holiday for Karen Mueller, Helga Lumpkin, Lori Hess, Brownny Folden, and Shannon Cutting, radically changed into the KOTH (King of the hill) half marathon on the hiking trails located in the mountains.

The event was, no doubt a challenge they were fit to handle, but some hill training was definitely needed. With just a few weeks before departure, the ladies met once a week to run up Tarague hill. Karen added a little resistance to her hill workouts by pushing her two daughters, Ingrid and Katarina in the triple stroller.

In further preparation for the trip and the run, they researched the best tourist attractions, shopping areas, the race course terrain, as well as how to get around the vast city streets of Hong Kong. After a few meetings to plan their itinerary, develop details on what they wanted to see and do and discuss a successful run; the ladies were ready to take on the Hong Kong challenge with confidence.

The KOTH run took place on Sunday January 28, 2007—it began at Repulse Bay Beach on the South end of Hong Kong.

(one of the most beautiful beaches on Hong Kong). The journey to the start line began with a train ride from Kowloon to Central Hong Kong, followed by a scenic forty minute bus ride to the beach. The atmosphere before the start was that of excitement and much anticipation with questions like, “How steep are those hills looming above?” “What will the stairs that we have to climb be like?”

During one of the planning meetings, Shannon informed the group that there are steps to climb as part of the trail. She knew this from looking at pictures on the internet.

The weather was crisp, clear and perfectly comfortable for running as opposed to the thick humid hot air of Guam. Conditions were ideal. As the group of runners exited the beach and walked about one eighth of a mile to the start line (at the bottom of a steep hill) they had no idea what was in store for them in hills that lie above them. The race director counted down from ten and hollered, “GO!” Straight up the road for about one quarter of a mile on about a 7-8% grade incline before starting the first set of many, many stairs to follow.

After climbing what seemed like 1,000 steps, the course followed a single track; mostly a rocky and rooted path, similar to what you'd find in Colorado or Northern California. The edge of the cliff was very close to the trail—we found out later that one lady took a spill off the edge, but was saved by the guys running with her.

After a few miles of forest, another set of very long stairs loomed ahead. It was difficult to pass people. The steps appeared as though they would go on forever. When looking up; all you see is a line of people, but not the top. Finally, the steps lead to a paved section of trail that was flat. This area was a good place to make up some time. The legs enjoyed the break, but it didn't last but a few miles, and the climbing began once again. The steps were challenging due to the differences in height and width that constantly changed. Climbing literally thousands of steps did have its advantages-- the view! Unfortunately there was a race to run, so time was of the essence.

When I approached the first set of “descending” steps, relief came to mind until the leg muscles screamed back with disagreement. Focus, focus. The course was nearing the half way point, known as Quarry Gap. Mt. Butler (oh dear) was around the corner. After Mt. Butler, there was a nice long stretch of road again. That was Lori's favorite part. Once the road ended, the course took on a whole new look. It crossed under a pylon and meandered its way through thick brush that was so overgrown, the trail was practically hidden. Thank goodness the trail was well marked. The trail was a sandy and rutted descent of single track for about two miles which lead to a stream. Crossing the stream was fun to navigate over and around the big boulders. The fun ended too soon when the path led to more stairs going up! Cramping was not an option anymore, since there were only a handful of miles to go. Through the thick woods, past a picnic area, skirting the reservoir than doubling back to the trail that started the adventure--then finally, a small set of stairs that led down to the road. Great, the beach is less than a kilometer away. Only problem is, the downhill running hurts more than the uphill. “Ouch!” As we all made it to the finish on the sandy shores of Repulse Bay where the journey began, the ladies of Andersen completed their run with many personal lessons and laughs.

Shannon won the female over forty division. Helga charged in shortly thereafter, followed by Lori, Karen and Brownny running together. It's obvious we made the most out of our visit to Hong Kong. Good run ladies, well done.