

KOTH Lantau – Sunday, 6 January 2019

19-20 degrees, mostly cloudy and humid.

A gift from above...

Following the disgustingly polluted conditions we experienced on Saturday, it was hard not to be apprehensive about race conditions on Sunday. But then, overnight, the weather pattern changed and the pollution readings in Tung Chung dropped from 175 to 70 – not ideal, but certainly a big improvement. Besides, the rest of the course is always more sheltered from the pollution and that proved the case today.

Full Marathon – Campbell's back

Last season's King of the Hills, Jeff Campbell, is a busy man with international race commitments that made participation in this season's KOTH unlikely. But then he decided KOTH Lantau would be a good training race for Vibram 100 in two weeks' time and the result was predictable. Jeff led from the start, slowly increased his lead and then blew the race wide open over Lantau Peak. By this time, he was 13 minutes ahead and settled into cruise mode over the final 7 km rather than trying to break his own course record. In the end, he finished in 3:44:13 to win easily, but still lose by over two minutes to 2018 Jeff Campbell.

The race for second place was less predictable and more exciting. Guy Connell held second place for much of the race before a hard charging John Ellis caught him with about 4 km to go. With no suitable summits on which to take a nap, John had no choice but to keep running and came home second (3:53:38), two minutes ahead of Guy (3:55:49). John deserves credit for the fastest split on the last section of the course and for his first podium finish in KOTH as an M40 runner to win the age group. Guy was third overall (second open), followed by Mat Leng (3:59:28), the third open runner and the last runner to crack 4 hours on the day.

Andrew Graham (4:10:57) was the second M40 finisher and 7th overall, followed by Giuseppe Mollica (4:13:30), the third M40 finisher and 8th overall.

M45 Ezra Emerson (4:16:18) finished 10th overall and first in his age group for the second consecutive race. Ezra is one those rare anomalies who is actually getting faster with age. Mathew Kennedy (4:41:36) was second in the age group, followed by Peter Bachmann (4:41:52).

Chu Ming (4:45:32) ruled the roost in the M50 age group, comfortably ahead of a struggling Michael McComb (5:00:14) and Lai Tai Shing (5:04:47).

Chan See Kau was in dominant form in the M55 category (5:06:00), with KK Choi in second (5:32:01) and Kwan Ka Po third (5:45:12).

As close as anything has been to certainty in KOTH the last few years, it has been Chris Gunns winning the M60 race and this race was no exception. Chris cruised home in 5:11:28, once again leaving his beloved as well as fellow age groupers behind. Wong Sek Fong (5:50:06) was second and Chan Chi Sin (5:51:29) third.

Chris Kwan Yee Ting ran a smart tactical race and waited until Lantau Peak to make her move, overtaking Jeanette Wang to record her first KOTH full marathon victory in 5:00:04. In doing so, Chris struck a blow for the F40s against their younger, open category, competition. In doing so, she also insured herself a long wait for her husband to finish.

Jeanette Wang (5:14:33) was second across the line and the first open category runner. Jeanette only decided this morning to switch from the half to the full marathon and definitely struck out at a bold pace.

Tsang Woon Ming (5:16:33) was close behind to finish third overall and second in the F40 age group. Third place in the age group went to Olivia Luk (5:25:29) who outsprinted female open runner Anata Zhang (5:25:41) in an exciting finish. Anata finished 5th overall and second in the open category. Rounding out the open category prize winners was Emily Woodland (5:30:31), back to KOTH after a long layoff and happy to have overcome some bumps in her trail.

Evergreen Yeung Mei Lun (5:55:13) faced stiff competition to with the F50 race, ahead of Eva Lo (5:57:27), with Cheng Wai Chung (6:58:10) rounding out the top 3.

Half Marathon – Whelan’s Way

Ryan Whelan is almost certainly the Sunset Peak Strava leader at this point in 2019 following his charge to the top. But for all the tourists on the trail, his time would almost certainly have been even faster. Ryan is quietly putting together a very strong season and followed up his previous KOTH win in December with third place in the TNF 50 and led from start to finish to claim victory in KOTH Lantau (1:25:55).

Jan Littlewood (1:27:07) was second overall in the men’s race and exhibited the benefits of being a strong downhill runner on a technical course as it was his downhill from Sunset Peak to Pak Kong Au that positioned him to finish second as well as being the the first M45 finisher. Male open runner Rudy Bottin (1:27:16) was third overall and second in the open category.

We were amazed, but shouldn’t have been amazed, when M50 Mo Develin crossed the line in 4th place overall. Mo was the last runner to break 90 minutes (1:29:59) and a constant source of cheering and encouragement to everyone else in the race.

Paul Byrne (1:31:37) finished in 5th place overall and claimed the final open prize. A number of other fast open runners worthy of mention included numbers 6-8 overall, Iain Ross, Thomas Kitwood and Richard Cowley.

9th place overall and second in the M50 category went to Michael Galligan (1:34:55). On the day, this proved to be a mercilessly competitive age group. Old friend Siegfried Verheejke, visiting this time from Chile, finished third in the age group (1:35:54) while last seasons’ age group champion, Olivier Streun, could only manage 4th (1:40:50).

Alan Zagury (1:35:20) won the M40 race, just ahead of Mark Redfearn (1:35:32) who came straight off the plane to the race after trekking in Nepal over the holiday. Andreas Nessi (1:36:50) rounded out the age group.

Returning to the M45 age group, Tim Marchant had a successful return from injury to KOTH, coming in second in 1:41:03, with Joe Wong third (1:42:44).

Wong Tsz Wan dominated the M55 race (1:38:53) to win easily. Eric To (1:45:08) was second, followed by Steve Wong (1:47:17) in third.

Tsui Pak Long (2:02:52) cruised to victory in the M60+ race. Wong Peter Chun Tong (2:06:11) was second and James Stewart (2:28:43) third.

The ladies race saw the superb return of Zein Williams, who showed no after effects of her 5th child, winning effortlessly in 1:41:24. Zein seems to be on a regular cycle of having a kid and winning all the races, having a kid and winning all the races...

Second overall went to F40 front runner Vivian Lee (1:44:56). Female open runner Suzanne Gifford (1:48:46) was third overall and second in her category despite not sleeping at all on the overnight flight back from Nepal. Emma Phipkin (1:51:51) rounded out the female open top 3.

Natalie Webster was the second female veteran finisher (2:05:49), followed by a decidedly-underage-looking Lisa Pun (2:14:45).

Fitness trainer Camilla Fernstrom captured line honors in the F50 race (2:04:14), followed closely by Ada Chan (2:06:02) and Kate Martin (2:06:27).

The KOTH Lantau Half Marathon always sees the greatest breadth of ages of any KOTH race. Once again Frank Pilkington (2:32:36) was the oldest in the race at 75 years young, while a trio of youngsters also competed. My own 10-year old daughter Kaya ran a fantastic 2:17:42. 8-year old Karson Yeung ran a terrific 2:34:02 and 7-year old Tiago Salgado a highly credible 2:40:50.

Thanks also to the Swire group of companies for their continued support (GigaSport prizes, Bonaqua and Aquarius). Thanks to Kin Hang for terrific course marking, as well as to the fore runners, marshals and sweeps, all of whom did a brilliant job as usual. The next race takes place in Taipo on 27 January. Race details have been posted to www.seyonasia.com and to Friends of KOTH Facebook page.

Happy trails.

Keith