

Penang International 12-Hour Walk 2007 Report

Last Year

Having fared terribly in last year's edition, I signed up early for this year's walk, hoping that it will give me a chance to redeem for last year's failure.

During that fateful 2006 edition, I covered only a measly 32K over 6 hours before the mind and body gave up. No longer able to walk a step more, I was sent packing to the rest area to reflect on my foolhardiness and wallow in self-pity and shame. I believe that the cause of my downfall was the silly power-walking routine that I employed then, hoping to cover as many laps as possible in the shortest possible time. You see, I'm and never was a race walker.

So I set myself a few targets for walk of redemption. First goal is to cover more than 32K (my last year's limit). Should I manage that, the second goal is to hit the marathon distance of 42K. If I hit that one as well, then the final goal is to hit 50K. Why 50? It seems like a nice round number - half a century mark and what many would consider to be an "ultra" distance. Anything above 32K would be a challenge to the mental and physical persistence and endurance, so any of my goals would not be easy to achieve, at least for a person with limited athletic ability as myself.

Travelling Up The Day Before

After enduring a marathon 8-hour drive up to Penang thanks to the jam in KL, road works all the way on the highway and after-office rush hour (normal smooth drive takes 3.5 to 4 hours), I was suitably pooped and irritable. Not having run a step over the week due to various deadlines, I was certainly not in the right frame of mind to attempt such an endurance event. Sleep that night was OK but not deep.

Race Day

After eating normally in the morning, I decided to pile it on with a heavy lunch. Nearby was a Roadhouse Grill and I didn't regret the order of Fettuccine Funghi with a side order of 3 large scoops of mashed potatoes. All washed down with a small jug of ice lemon tea. The result? The beached whale effect. Stumbled home and managed 40 minutes of nap which was one of the wisest thing I ever did. Chin was kind enough to pick me up. I'd a packed Subway roasted chicken wrap (delicious!) and a Cappuccino to bring to the Esplanade.

Race Evening

The traffic cops allowed us participants to park right next to the staging area, which was great. A short while later we'd picked up our race bibs and the entry pack. As I ate my dinner, we looked around to spot familiar faces and got re-acquainted with some walkers from last year. I lubed the toes and feet with BodyGlide, pulled on my thin socks (I'd briefly considered the Thorlos but opted for the thin Nikes), laced up the timing chip and the Supernova Cushion. My slim pouch contained 1 large bar of Mars, iPod shuffle clipped to the belt, eye drops, some loose change, toilet paper in a plastic wrap. Then it was waiting time while the music and gathering crowd rendered the atmosphere more and more exciting. The City Council building was once again beautifully lit.

We were let off a couple of minutes early - 7:58pm. The weather was fantastic. Though the afternoon was blazing hot, the cool sea breeze kept things cool and refreshing. The number of walkers this year was much smaller since there wasn't any team category this time around. Nevertheless, there were participants from Hong Kong, Belgium and a few other countries. Chin, Tan and I kept things really easy. My plan called for "window-shopping" walking pace. I kept reminding myself that this is race of attrition and not speed. Of course for the elites, speed is important, but I'm no elite. Whoever covers the most distance within 12 hours wins. Patience and persistence win the day.

Early Stages

Surprisingly, Chin and I were logging 9:30 to 9:45 per K laps. They certainly didn't seem sub-10. To me everything felt really easy, so much so I was concerned that the pace would burn us out. Tan was having some stomach problems and dropped out of pace while Chin and I continued together for the first 10K. Results were posted every 2 hours and my position was 48 the first 2 hours. At our pace, we were averaging about 5.5 laps every hour - a lap around the Fort Cornwallis-Esplanade square measured approximately 1.04K. To qualify for the participation medal, men had to cover a minimum of 24K while the women 18K. All quite easily achieved but for most, it wasn't to do the minimum that brought them out that night.



Chin and I chatted on a variety of things to while time away, from how crazy we were to attempt this walk again and how our effort pales in comparison to those who do the Western States 100 or Badwater. All the while we were passed repeatedly by the elites. Then Chin had to stop to attend to a blister while I continued on. I mentioned about the physical part of this event but the mental part of a person was being challenged continuously. Imagine covering lap after lap to no end (this being a time-based format as opposed to a fixed distance one). After awhile it becomes tedious, boring and when sleepiness, fatigue and pain strike, things will go downhill faster than you can shout "I Give Up!"

Strategy

The way I approached the walk was to monitor my body every 4 hours, and when that became too long, every 2 hours. And when that too became too tedious, every lap and every step. The key was to break it down to manageable blocks. I found the "every step" approach helpful as I knew I was covering distance no matter how slow I would eventually become.

Hydration and fueling stations set up served coffee, tea, isotonic sports drinks, bananas, tomatoes, a variety of cakes, noodles, rice, sweet soup desserts, Powerbar bites, buns and more. We were well taken care off. Boy scouts manned the stations with other volunteers and did a good job. The only downer was the

coffee was made available only up to 12am which made no sense. It's after midnight that caffeine would be most helpful. Chin and I made sure that we drank enough, every 2 laps to be precise. By the time the coffee truck withdrew, we were already pretty stoked with caffeine! We drank sports drinks every alternate laps. Every 3 laps or so, I took 20-second breaks to squat, massage and stretch.

As my arms weren't in power-walking position, every now and then I would shake my hands to relieve the tension around the fingers.

After Midnight

The street vendors and folks enjoying the seafront breeze were still around. Some anglers had turned up as well with their fishing rods. The cool sea breeze continued blowing and provided much appreciated relief.

My position had been elevated to 38 as I had not stopped for rest. I'd been walking for 4 hours. The legs were OK, though the back of the left knee felt a little tight. I kept the discomfort manageable by massaging the spot every 2 laps. The pressure applied to the spot relieved the pain. I was already walking solo, even though many were still covering the laps. I bumped into Chin and Tan several times and they too were still in the game. So were 2 over-80 gentlemen. Needless to say, these 2 golden oldies got the most cheers at the checkpoint. Amazing athletes!

Passing Time

Here were some of the things I did to while the time away:

1. Observing the changing position of the full moon
2. Looking out for cockroaches (spotted 2)
3. Trying to make out the song that a fellow walker was singing. She had her MP3 player on and was singing along aloud
4. Figuring out the shoes worn by fellow walkers. From my observation, the worst off the shoes you're wearing the better walker you are. There were some nasty shoes out there that night (on top of the brandless ones) that literally had no more outsole. All that remained were the white midsoles!
5. People watching: On top of the shoe observation, I was checking out walkers in bermudas, trackpants, shorts, shorts over tights, shorts over shiny white leotards, sandals, slippers.
6. Joking with Chin about how much money we'd make if we setup massage stations and charge 2 bucks for a foot massage

6 Hours

At the 6 hour mark, I was definitely experiencing some pain. Both legs especially along the outer shins and ankles, back of the left knee, soles of the feet, the heels. I tried to see the brighter side of things by thinking

how these can contribute to my marathon training. The stresses that I put on the lower legs and mind will certainly strengthen them for the marathon. Making it to 6 hours and surpassing my last year's threshold lessened the discomfort too. My position had climbed to 28 as an increasing number of walkers have stopped for breaks. Some newbies had called it a night and slept in makeshift tents, or in the nearby buildings or just on the chairs. The elites were still hammering the laps, stopping only periodically for massages by their support team. Yup, they had support teams to hand out special fluids and food. For the most time, they slowed down just enough to grab the cups and food.

8 Hours

I was definitely hurting, in particular in the sole and heel areas. I thought, "I'm definitely not going to be able to walk tomorrow!" but still persisted to get to the 42K mark. A while later I didn't know that I'd got to 45K until I decided to sit down for an hour. Chin too joined me as we put up our legs. After 10 minutes of sitting, my butt began to hurt too. After discussing some options with the guys, I decided to go for 5 more laps to hit 50K. When I got up, the pain was really bad, almost like last year. My back and shoulder were sore and everywhere else hurt. But as I waddled on, things loosened up little by little. Confidence returned as I began to pass each lap, knowing that I was accumulating more laps than those already given up.

Slightly more than an hour later, I completed the 5 additional laps and told Chin that I'd better counted correctly as having to do more would be the last thing on my mind.

Calling It A Day

If pressed I could've covered a few more laps to make it 60K but there just wasn't any motivation left to push myself. The pain was bad but I felt I was still able to move. So that was that. The volunteers brought out the nasi lemak and porridge but I couldn't eat any of that. Fatigue was settling in and I just wanted to go home, shower and hit the sack. After returning our timing chips and received our medals, we changed and gave our lucky draw tickets away. Some of the prizes while well-intended, were quite ridiculous – trampolines, exercise balls, manual treadmills, weight benches, dumbbells. Chin and I wondered how winners were going to cart them away. When I reached home, I thought I could sleep but I had to look after C2 while the whole household went to the market. You couldn't imagine how difficult staying awake was with all the bodily aches and fatigue. I finally managed to go to bed at 11am. Woke up at 4pm and wolfed down a packet of noodles and home-brewed soup. Later in the evening,

For those of you who think walking is easy, I invite you to try this event. Schedule permitting, I will return next year to attempt hitting the 60K mark.



The finishing area



Chin and I changed and ready to go home for well-deserved sleep



After further wearing out his Dad, Carbokid 2 enjoys his siesta

Results (due to technicalities, my position wasn't published in the official results. I've obtained confirmation that the certificate will be sent out)

Distance: 50.6K (47 laps)

Position: 20

Timing: 9 hours 8 minutes

Acknowledgment: Photo of Chin and I walking courtesy of [Ming Han](#).