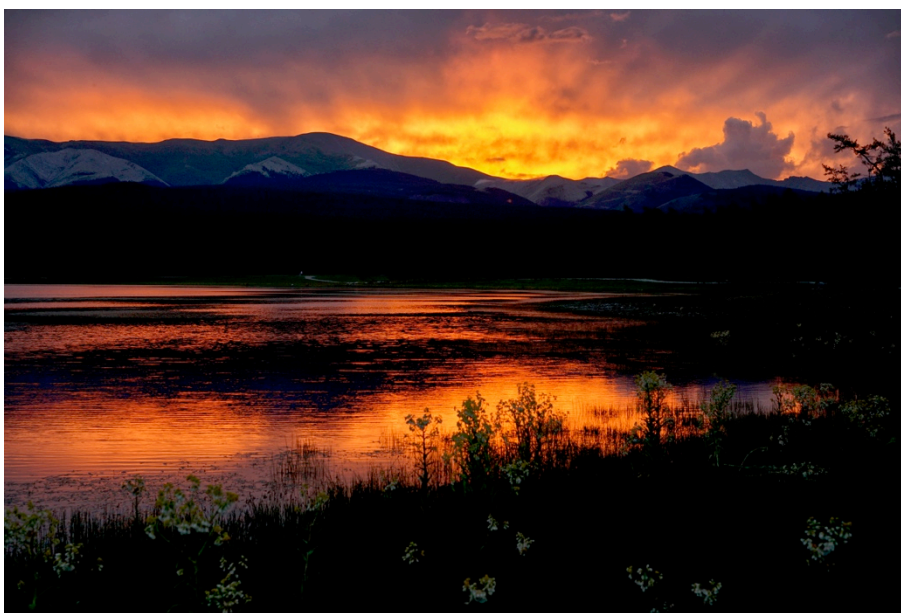




Race report: 18th annual Mongolia Sunrise to Sunset Trail Ultra Marathon

8 August 2016

Magical Mongolia! Wide open spaces, untamed wilderness and raw natural beauty. A land, at least outside of the capital Ulaanbaatar, that is seemingly unaffected by the modern world. A unique nature wonderland with amazingly wide horizons. Even today, nomads and other locals often choose the horseback to travel through the vast steppes and over barren mountains. Through the eyes of a tourist, Mongolia is a unique adventure: A trip to the land of Genghis Khan is a journey back in time where the nomadic way of life is perfectly in tune with the rhythms of the landscape, and the local people are renowned for their hospitality and warmth. From the perspective of an ultra-runner, the landscape in Northern Mongolia offers the perfect setting for an unforgettable run: windblown lowlands, pristine forests, seas of wildflowers, a crystal-clear lake and impressive mountain trails. In its 18th year already, the Mongolia Sunrise to Sunset took place on 3 August 2016.



Runners from all around the world, from no less than 21 different countries, gathered at the International Chinggis Khaan Airport in Ulaanbaatar on Saturday 30th of July to fly together to Murun in the North of Mongolia, the closest city to the race camp. After having crossed 600 km of the country by plane and 150 km with jeeps, the participants of this 18th edition of MS2S discovered the second largest fresh water lake in the world, the beautiful Hovsgol lake. Locals call the mighty lake the “Deep Blue Pearl of Mongolia”. Directly at the lakeshore is the picturesque Toilogt camps, with traditional, cozy Mongolian gers and tipis, accommodating runners, volunteers and family members for one week.

The days before and after the race, the participants enjoyed this beautiful place with various sports activities: kayaking on Lake Hovsgol, going for a horse trek with the local’s horsemen’s escort, or mountain biking. Runners were of course quite curious and ran on the first or last kilometers of the race course, in order to adjust to the difference of altitude (Camp Toilogt is on 1600m above sea level), and to test the really muddy and “juicy” course. Some of the runners also took the opportunity to get used to running between wild horses and yaks. The few summer months this year were really hot and the water of the Lake was not as cold as in previous years: swimming was a perfect way to recover the muscles and relax the tired legs and feet after the training. Another good complement for the runners were the well-attended daily yoga lessons offered by our great teacher Julia both during the race week and the pre-race week.



Indeed, because one week in this paradise is not enough, MS2S again hosted an additional pre-race week for interested runners. To acclimatize better, get familiar with the race track or simply to enjoy the environment of this unique place at the lakeshore, we had nine participants in the pre-race week program this year. Time was spent on refreshing course markings on the whole 100k track, mountain hike together, daily yoga sessions with Julia and individual kayaking, mountain biking and extensive horse riding. This year, the flowers have been particularly abundant; on the 42k loop purple orchids in particular, and on the rest, fields full of Edelweiss. No other place in the world to run like this!?

Another way to enjoy the North of Mongolia is to do a Horse trek. Nurkan, Chalotte, Steen, Nicolas and Micha rode horses during two weeks, between the hills full of wild flowers and the Hovsgol Lake. The travelled far enough to meet the famous reindeer herders of Northern Mongolia – a unique experience.



We also had a presentation of Chalotte's charity efforts, the Khovsgol Dairy Project which is making good progress. [See more about it on the website](#). The ecoLeap Foundation is also continuing to distribute all garbage bags at the park, and to encourage the locals and tourists to not litter in order to keep the Hovsgol National Park clean. [See more about ecoLeap Foundation](#).

Participants enjoyed the sun and fun activities but they didn't forget their objective: to achieve the 42 or 100k, both on a very demanding course. After the medical check made by our legendary (and Himalaya experienced) Doctor Ben, all runners were declared to be able to run the race.

Race-day. 3:00AM

The sweet melody of a Mongolian flute mingles with the sound of raindrops falling on the roofs of the Gers. Despite the early hour it doesn't seem hard for the runners to get out of their beds. It's the wake-up call for the race. Adrenaline kicks in!



After a quick breakfast and the bag check, the 67 runners of the 42k and 100k set off at 4:00 AM under a light rain, running into the darkness. The course begins with a narrow trail in the dark forest, which is one of the most “dangerous” parts of the course due to the darkness and many roots, branches, and fallen trees.

It was perfect weather for a running race: not so hot with a cloudy sky. Only 4:34 hours after the start, the Mongolian Tuguldur Tselmegsaikhan was the first runner to cross the finish line of the 42k race, followed 2 minutes later by another local runner, Daramaa Unurjargal. Bold-erdene Davaadorg arrived only 12 minutes later. In the veteran’s category, the French Jean-Yves Sévin won with a great time of 6:41 hours. Our Viking Steen took second place with a time of 7:13, followed by the Bahamian David Warren 10 minutes later.

And the women? The Mongolian Purevchuluun Narmandakh was the first one to cross the 42km finish line in 6:27 hours, followed by Annapurna Slavman, an American living in Mongolia, who finished in exactly 7 hours. The Australian Xiaoqing Zou completes the podium with a bit more than 9 hours of effort. In the veteran’s category, we find a Swiss on the first step of the 42km podium: Pia Margrit accomplished the race in 9:58 hours. We then find two Japanese who wanted to do the 100k but stopped a bit before. Masae Horie stopped at kilometer 65 after 11:47 hours of effort and Marie Maruyama at kilometer 42 after having ran during 12:50 hours.



A few hours later the crowd at the finish line in Toilogt Camp got even louder: The winner of the 100k, the incredible and super friendly Brazilian runner Cicero Souza, crossed the finish line in an amazing time of 12:59 hours! The Japanese Tetsuya Kamatani took second place in 14:40 hours, and Chinese Xiaobin Qiu arrived about one hour later. In the veteran’s category, the winner is the Swiss Hans-Jörg Hegner in a great time of 15:50 hours, followed by the Mongolian Enkhtur Nuuree in 17:00 hours. Our third veteran is none other than our race founder Nicolas, who crossed once again the finish line with a sprint.

The race also offered many remarkable and funny episodes: Swiss veteran Peter got off track in the darkness just a few kilometers into the race and ended up in a waterhole at the lakeshore, hips-deep in the cold water. He practiced aqua jogging in his race preparations, he later joked. Zvoni, who

showed his skills in yak bull rodeo riding a day earlier, came to Peter's rescue (Baywatch Hovsgol). Not much later, Zvoni had another rescue operation when a few runners didn't find the course markings and made use of their emergency whistles. A remarkable finish in the 100k category came by the German runner Holger and the Austrian runner Bernhard, both in their first 100k race: 10k before the finish line, a stray dog accompanied the two exhausted runners and followed them all the way to the finish line. The loyal dog, later named "Boris", went to sleep in the race tent a little later.

We do not list all runners by name in the report. Nevertheless, every runner who completed this tough course did an amazing job! Except for some stomach problems, it seems that everybody finished the race with a big smile, which is the most important thing. So congratulations to you all, YOU ROCK!

There are so many things to remember: the traditional Mongolian folk music show, the sunrises and sunsets over the lake and the mountains, to be woken up by the horses around the gers, the well-deserved beers along the lake, the big fire and dinner on Thursday evening... The Mongolia Sunrise to Sunset is a challenging race, but it's also a unique event that gathers people from all around the world, who then become friends and share their experiences and their love for running in unspoiled nature. The organizers hope that all participants will keep this adventure race a beautiful and unforgettable souvenir and that quite a few will be back!

