

So you like scenery? Your mind with boggle at the Swiss Alpine Marathon

SWISS ALPINE MARATHON

WHEN: 28 JULY, 2007

Words and Images by Rob Preston (Member of the NSW Ultramax Stingers Orienteering Team)

THE festival culminates with 9 separate races on the same day, all finishing in the Davos sports stadium. The premier event is the K78 (78.5km, 2320m climb), which is the biggest alpine ultramarathon in the world. The K42 (42.2km, 1890m climb) is the highest marathon in Europe, and this course contains most of the good bits of the K78, less sealed road and awesome mountain trails. Then there is C42 (an easier, less mountainous marathon) and the K28, and the K21 for beginners wanting to experience Alpine Davos without a long day on their feet. There are also walking categories, and a team or individual multisport race, involving mountain biking, inline skating and running. In 2006 over 4000 athletes descended upon Davos, with over 900 runners attempting the K78 race.

TRAVEL

Included in the race entry are two free travel passes. The Swiss pass gives free travel on trains from your home in Switzerland, or in our case to and from Zurich airport (normally costing about \$110). The Regio ticket offers free local train, bus and chairlift pass for the 9 days of the carnival, allowing plenty of pre-race training or sightseeing. Extra passes are also available for family members and companions.

ACCOMMODATION

There is plenty of accommodation in Davos, but since it is a ski resort in Switzerland, none of it is cheap. The local tourism website has plenty of good information (www.davos.ch/home-001-00-en.htm).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The K78 race starts in Davos, and the first 36km are mostly downhill and on a predominantly sealed road or well formed trails. All the other courses catch trains and buses to their respective starts. The K42 starts with a very scenic 70 minute ride on the train to Bergun. The K42 begins with almost continuous uphill for 15.8km from 1365m to 2632m in altitude. The K78 follows the same path, but after summiting at Keschhutt, it splits off onto a smaller path that contours around the edge of the valley. For the K42 there is rocky descent for 5.4km before a 2nd tough climb. It was only 2.6km, but much steeper than the first climb. The last 14km are almost all downhill but not as easy as it sounds, as the trail zigzags steeply for 4.3km before becoming a gentle downhill along the valley floor for the final 10km.

There are many water and food stations along the way, however, it is recommended to take your own race food (gels etc.) since the food supplied can be somewhat unappetizing and difficult to eat.

ATMOSPHERE

The friendly atmosphere of this race was like no other race I have completed. Even though we were running through mountain wilderness, there was an almost constant stream of walkers and well wishers giving encouragement. Your race number has your

The Swiss Alpine Marathon, or Alpine Davos, is part of a 9 day long summer festival of running. But there is far more to do in the Davos region than just run. The region is a popular winter ski resort, with cable cars and chairlifts climbing most of the surrounding mountains.



The Matterhorn: Words can't describe

WHEN: 28 JULY, 2007
WHERE: DAVOS, SWITZERLAND
HOW TO GET THERE: FLY TO ZURICH, TRAIN TO DAVOS
ENTRY FEE: 78KM - \$170; 42KM - \$140

first name in big text so the spectators can give a more personal touch to their support.

HOW DOES IT COMPARE?

It is like running the Six Foot Track (plus a few more runners) and having 8 other races all finishing in Jenolan. I love the Blue Mountains, but they just don't compare to the Swiss Alps. The track is steeper in parts than Six Foot, both up and down. Some of the track is well formed dirt road, but there's also plenty of narrow, rocky trail to keep the mountain goats happy. A pure road runner might struggle in parts, but a typical off-road runner will love it. Your time from Six Foot should be pretty equivalent to the K42. If you have never raced at altitude before, it might be worth spending a bit of time acclimatizing. The Swiss Orienteering week was held two weeks prior at altitudes up to 3000m, and I found this very beneficial!!



The scenery is breathtaking
Image by Andrew Connolly

ANACONDA LORNE ADVENTURE RACE - RUN LEG

WHEN: DECEMBER 10, 2006

RUNNING and being outdoors go hand in hand. And perhaps because most of our races are on bitumen, given a choice, I for one would prefer to head out onto dirt trails as far away from the suburbs as I can. When my brother asked me last year whether I wanted to do an Adventure Race with him, my immediate response was "No way"; in my mind I was picturing some multi-day suffer-fest involving lots of disciplines that would put me way outside my comfort zone.

But then he explained to me that the new Anaconda Adventure Race Series caters to specialist runners like me because you have the choice of doing just the run leg in a relay team. When I found out that the run leg in the race at Lorne in Victoria was only 11.2km, I changed my answer to a "Yes", thinking it would be pretty straightforward.

Little did I know that the Anaconda Lorne Adventure Race run leg would redefine the meaning of the word running. It had everything: flat; hills; soft sand; compacted sand; small rocks; large boulders; ocean; steps; bush track; river crossings; and more. It was frustrating, hard, technical, treacherous, beautiful and exhilarating. I would never have imagined that 11.2km could take so long to run! I hated it...and loved it.

If you're contemplating doing this type of race, the best advice I could give is to go for a run over the actual course well before race day. Familiarising yourself with the terrain and physical obstacles will prove invaluable. If you can't make it to the area to do this, then you could: a) head to the nearest coast (or similarly rocky terrain) and practise rock hopping on rocks ranging from basketball size to small car size (and make sure they're wet), also b) head to the nearest mountains and run up and down walking trails, including steps.

Other tips would be to make sure that your laces are done up very tightly, and concentrate on foot placement, because if you don't you'll trip on rocks, tree roots etc.

Oh and if you're doing the Lorne Anaconda run leg, prepare yourself to get very wet towards the end of the run leg, as you will be forced to wade/swim across a creek, fully clothed of course!!

Make sure you are ready for something different
Image by Andrew Connolly



Interestingly, it wasn't the accomplished road runners who excelled at the Anaconda race at Lorne, it was the off-road specialists who can bound across variable surfaces like mountain goats. A super-high level of fitness isn't as important as sound technical ability off-road, and 36 minute 10km runners were beating 30 minute 10km road runners over this course.

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