



Trail running Taiwan

Slogging it out in Maokong

Summertime in Taiwan brings lots of rain and so it proved at the Salomon Suunto X-Trail on June 5. The conditions didn't deter the large field of more than 430 athletes though and a fiercely competitive race developed between Salomon-sponsored, six-time world mountain running champion Jonathan Wyatt (number one above), and the local hero, 45-year-old Chen Fu-Cai King (number 123).

The rain had turned sections of the 17km full course, threading through and over the hills around Maokong on the outskirts of Taipei, into a squelching morass of shoe-sucking mud. It was well outside the experience of the many road racers in the field, but no one was complaining. The steepest chutes saw runners grappling with the local flora and trying skiing or snowboarding moves to get down in one piece.

Wyatt powered away on the long uphill to the first and highest peak, Er Ger Shan (678m). This was as expected but he had said before the race that he was less strong on the downhill and local knowhow came through as he was overtaken by two Taipei-based runners.

Two further hills came and went with Wyatt slowly reeling in Wu You-Jia (175 above) before he finally eased past in the last two kilometres of the race as the course ran into mixed terrain of road, paddy field margins and temple terraces.

Still Wyatt couldn't catch Chen, who won by three minutes in a time of 1:41:14, with Wu placing third just ahead of another Salomon athlete, Jeremy Ritcey (number 2), up from Hong Kong.

Also well placed was the irrepressible eco-warrior Arthur Wang. An advocate of short trousers for all occasions to save on wasteful air-con,



he sported a natty pair of dress shorts paired with a collar and tie. If this unusual race garb encumbered him he didn't show it as he won the Men's 50-59 category and took 29th overall.

Queen of the mountain was triathlete Jamie Huang from the Curves Fitness Centre Taiwan team who fought off cramp in the middle of the race to finish in 2:27:27 Less than two minutes behind was Vicky Huang, with Chien-Wei Hsu rounding out the top three in the Women's 17km event.

"Incredible" said Hsu afterwards. "Hope this is a regular trail race as we need more races like this."

In the less hilly 9km event, Chung-Ren Chen had the fastest time of the day, finishing in 56:48.



A secret the size of a country

Here at *Action Asia* we have always been fans of Taiwan and I have even used this page before to make the case that it is hugely underrated.

Well, sorry to repeat myself, but fresh from competing in the recent Salomon Suunto X-Trail event just outside Taipei, I am reminded yet again of the staggering opportunities there are there for outdoors lovers.

The mountains start before you even leave the suburbs of Taipei – even the city's mass transit railway can get you close to forested hillsides and trails – and extend clear to the other end of the country. Few places can have a comparable percentage of mountainous land – in Asia, perhaps only Nepal, Bhutan and Hong Kong.

The Taiwanese people are beginning to understand what they have got on their doorsteps, with hiking and camping really catching on, but their tourism board seem to prefer to keep this a secret from the world.

That's your cue to go check it out before this little piece of wilderness gets more widespread attention. Besides the mountains to hike and bike, kayak through and paraglide from, there are empty east coast beaches, aboriginal tribes to

meet, Han Chinese culture arguably more intact than that on the mainland, and a chilled-out and friendly people.

If you go now, watch out for the occasional typhoons that pose a real risk and do considerable damage every year. Otherwise wait for autumn's more settled, brighter weather.

Right, enough of the plug, I've just enough space to say thanks for the replies so far to our readership survey. If you haven't filled one out yet, don't worry as there's still time to get your views in – plus have your shot at winning a prize from Patagonia into the bargain. Just fill out the questionnaire you'll find in these pages, or else go to www.actionasia.com to enter online.

All the best until next time,

Steve White
Editor-in-chief
steve@bluincmedia.com