

STUNT 100
(Sibbesser Tag und Nacht Trail, Day and Night trail of Sibbesse)

Dear friends,

I guess it has nearly become a tradition that I give you an update about my “run of the year”. Of course after having run successfully since 1997 an 100+ mile ultra nearly every year, the excitement and worries aren’t quite as big as during the first ones, where not-finishing was a realistic option, the feeling crossing the finish line however, has never lost any of its appeal!

So what is to report about this year’s event? For a long time I had wanted to run Wasatch, one of the hardest 100 milers in the US. The timing doesn’t fit well in my holiday schedule so I had postponed an application from year to year. This year I finally applied – and did not get in. Only $\frac{3}{4}$ of the applicants were selected in a lottery. – Bad luck. So I contemplated for a while what to do and without really deciding I just opted for a smaller run: The Traunsee Bergmarathon (70k, 13500ft. of climb). Also for the second time in my running career I had some knee pain (1st time was 25 years ago, new shoes were the solution) and wasn’t too eager to commit to anything really big.

Well, time went by, the pain gradually receded and doctors & MRI couldn’t find anything seriously wrong about my knee. Then I ran the Traunsee Race (3rd time for me) and finished in the top 10 with a P.B. of 9:00 hours, feeling pretty good. So I was game for a long race again. The following week I was busy organizing the CHIEMGAUER 100 race, which I host, but then, after a very successful event, I applied for the Sibbesser 100 mile invitational race to which the R.D. had invited me earlier this year and fortunately could still enter.

Sibbesse, the “world renowned” trail running center is situated south of Hanover, where Germany sports its first hills south of the North Sea. Hansi Koehler organizes here an invitational run for the small German ultra community in a very personal low-key atmosphere. It comprises of 3 different loops and a final out and back stretch. Generally I prefer single loop, or A to B courses, but this one doesn’t give you the impression of actually repeating anything. Of course as a “mountain man” it is hard to take the hills in Northern Germany seriously, but an overall climb of some 12000ft is not accomplished without effort and the frequent changes between climbs and descents, good and overgrown trail might pose a serious task.

I considered the course to be somewhat similar to Massanutten, my first 100 miler, which I had completed in just over 22 hours. This year I felt strong, but did not have many training miles, so anything beyond 10 hours might become a serious challenge. Course record in Sibbesse 22:18, which I estimated to be within reach. Sub 24 hours was my goal and sub 20 hours is my longtime dream for a 100 miler.

So these were my objectives: stay sub 24 whilst attempting to come as close as possible to 20 hrs.

Since public transport is very limited in that rural area, I gave up my idea of traveling by train. So I traveled by car with a stopover night at a friends halfway on the way. It took a long time due to several accidents and pre-holiday traffic jams.

I have made it a habit to prepare well for those races. Not only do I bring equipment and food for different weather situations and quality of aid stations, but most importantly I try to familiarize myself very well with the course. First at home I analyze

the maps and try to remember key directions. Then on site I try to see as much of the course as possible. So I checked out loop 1 and 2 wherever you could access the course by car and then went to the start for having lunch. The sports grounds of Sibbesse still lay deserted, when a sole runner stopped by and presented himself as Hansi Koehler, race director! He gave me some more information and I headed out to more thoroughly investigate the parts I would run at nighttime. I had brought my bike with me so it was fairly easy to check out the critical points. With a fairly good knowledge of the course I returned to Sibbesse around 5pm.

Here I met with the other runners, some of them very seasoned and experienced, like Werner Selch and Franz Häusler, participants of my Chiemgauer 100k, just a fortnight before, others just attempting their 1st 100 miler like Dorothe or Andree. A very small crowd, but distinctively more than the previous years. A few cancelled on short notice so that 22 of us would start the next morning. After the race briefing pre-race dinner was served. Bold enough, I was one of the first at the excellent buffet, and lucky since the organizers had severely underestimated our appetite. However no one had to go to bed hungry, after cooking 3 or 4 times more noodles eventually everybody had been cared for. This was the overall impression of the event: The organizers would do everything to care for anything you might need or ask for. Not like some big events, where you don't even get what you paid for, let alone personal service. Well fed I meticulously packed my drop bags and went to sleep in my car.

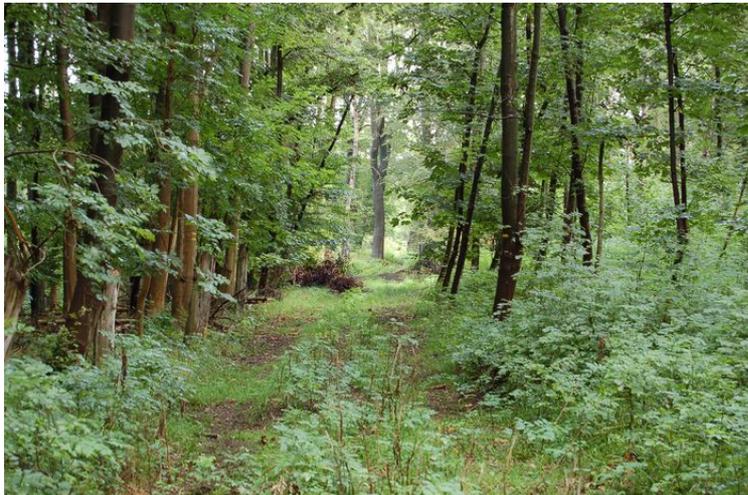
Unexpected heavy rain woke me up the next morning. I revised my clothing and drop bag strategy and dressed in long tights and rain jacket. Start is at 8am, which is nice since you have all the time in the world to get ready and to enjoy the breakfast the organizers had prepared for us.

8 o'clock sharp Hansi sent us on the trail. I ran a few fast steps for the spectators (indeed, a few had come despite of the heavy rain) and was way ahead of the crowd. Immediately I slowed down, not to be alone for orienteering. However no one closed up on me. Bad luck, I would have to figure out the way myself. The course is marked with white dots and small arrows on pavement, rocks, trees, signposts or wherever Hansi found a useful location. Of course at the beginning you don't have enough experience to know where to look for the signs and feel uneasy about navigating. A biker with a camera passed me and served me as an indicator for the right way. After a km or so the course leaves the paved agricultural road and follows a makeshift trail through the fields. At first uncertain about this turn I discovered the photographer way ahead and knew I was right about interpreting the markings.



Had there still been a dry spot on my legs they would have been drenched by now by the high grass I ran through. Soon the trail entered a forest with a bad road becoming gradually steeper. I decided to walk to the end of this first about 600 ft high climb. On top of that climb I could see one person following me in the distance, the rest was already far behind.

Getting more and more comfortable about seeing and understanding all trail markers correctly I followed forestry roads down to a little village and across the River Leine to the first aid station at k11.7. Very helpful aid station personnel was trying offering me their big selections and was disappointed to see me just stop briefly for a banana, a bar and a refill of my bottle. Leaving the aid station you need to negotiate a gated railroad Xing, which is always closed when you arrive (Murphy's law applies to trail runners, also). I managed to sneak through the closing gates and continued to the wildest section of the course: Duinger Berg and Kulf. These are two parallel hill ridges which you follow on something vaguely related to a trail, but definitely full of brushes and prickly things and very muddy. A true joy for a hasher! I indeed enjoyed this section of the trail and made a lot of time on the folks behind me.



In the meantime the rain had stopped but it was still overcast and the ground very wet. The course returns to the railroad Xing where - could it be different? – I had to wait for a long train to pass. Then you backtrack your steps from the morning up the Wettenser Schlei. Yes, some of these hills are steep and long enough to make you walk. After 5:12 I returned to the start, having finished the first 50k in good shape and humour.

After a short break, fortified with mashed potatoes and soup I went out for the next 50k loop. The first climb is identical to the first loop and I tried to get as far as possible before the fellow runners would arrive on their first loop from the opposite side. Climbing went smoothly and 45 min after running down I got to the bifurcation of loop 1 and 2 without meeting any oncoming runners. Good I thought I am far enough ahead not to encourage any of the followers to try to catch me. Moral and tactics is an important factor in these ultras and you try to show your fellow runners that you are strong, even if you don't feel like it.

On the beginning of the so called Rennstiege trail marking dots were sometimes a bit sparse and I wasn't sure if we were to follow the well marked Rennstiege in this location or not. On two occasions I back-tracked some 100 yards to make sure the STUNT markers were there. Once they were, the other time they weren't but nevertheless I decided that I was on the most sensible way as compared to the course map which I had taken with me, sealed in plastic to withstand any kind of weather. For the first time I was feeling a little weak now. The "short" loop seemingly stretched forever Southwards. But the white dots were there, I had to continue South. Eventually I made it to aid station at k 60, the bottom of the loop. I took a quick drink, filled my bottle and continued leisurely over the hillside to the village of Everode. Villages usually are the most difficult to navigate since there are so many varied optical impressions, that the marking dots don't stand out very well. It also was one of the few towns I had not checked out beforehand. I found the turn off the main road all right, but on the following two intersections I didn't find any more markers, not even at the end of town signpost. The more tired you are the more unsecure you get about your way and the fewer tolerance you have to risk a wrong turn. Therefore I unpacked my cell phone from the two Ziploc bags which had effectively protected it from the wet weather and I called the race director for directions. He confirmed that I was on trail. As soon as I closed the lid of my phone I saw a marking dot next to where I was standing. I should have looked better! Moreover only 50 yards ahead after a corner the next aid station was waiting for me. In the meantime I had enough of ultra bars and other space food and was all too happy to be offered a slice of bread by the aid station volunteer.

Soon my cell phone rang. It was the race director telling me that I was too fast for their schedule and probably the next aid station wouldn't be there yet. Good thing that I had called him and he knew where I was! We arranged for a volunteer to meet me at a parking lot with at least some water a little ways down from the planned aid. This was right at the bottom of the toughest climb of the course. It leads more or less pathless up a steep forest aisle. Knowing that I might be too fast for the aid station I took it easy and was surprised how quickly I was on top of the ridge. I guess frequent searching for trails in the Alps was an asset other runners could not match and helped me gain more time on them. After more beautiful running along the ridge and forest edges some people waved me down to their yellow van. It were the aid station people who had just arrived. So they did beat me to the aid station by a few minutes and I could feed from the whole big selection of fruits drink and carbs.

The trail now descends to the Leine valley and follows the river downstream on a mostly paved bicycle trail. Perfect running terrain. I had slowed down somewhat

compared to the 1st loop, which was 1700 m of climb while the second loop was only 1000 m. Therefore I had planned to run 1st and 2nd loop in the same time. And for this I lay behind. Time to speed up. On the other hand I had been warned that this flat stretch can be very hot and had made many people give up in the previous years. So I tried to run smoothly without pushing too much. Occasionally the sun would show between the clouds but overall temperatures were quite good. Aid station at k80 with my drop bag came up and I decided not to change to my shorts, but to continue in my long tights, since it was already 4 pm and temperatures manageable.

Of course as soon as I had left the aid station the sun broke through the clouds and it was getting uncomfortably warm, fortunately not hot. I can imagine how people must have felt here the previous year on a scorching hot summers day. Nevertheless I barely could keep up a 9 km / h average in the flat and even less on the subsequent hills and wished I had changed to shorts. At this moment I was afraid I might have to pay tribute to the high speed of the first loop and might clearly miss the 20 hour mark. The second 50 k loop I finished in 5:47 by 7 pm. I had some soup, noodles a sip of beer and other goodies and tried to replenish lost liquids. I also received to emails from friends congratulating me to my so far very good performance. Sepp recommended "bleib locker" – stay relaxed: I tried to follow his advice and left the aid station after this short break.

On loop no. 3 you run across open fields, but the sun was already so low and the wind cool that temperatures felt perfect to me. Indeed I recovered from my mental and physical low of km 80-100 and kept an easy pace towards Diekholzen the big aid station of loop3. Night was really cool, I suppose somewhere above 10°C, 50°F. I was happy about my long tights and wore a light jacket on the downhill stretches. I received a warm welcome in a cosy tent but quickly left before being tempted to enjoy the pleasures of good food too much, but gave an order for noodles for 1.5 hours later when I would return to this aid station on my way back to Sibbesse. A few yards out of the aid station I fortunately remembered that night was falling and my good headlight was in the Diekholzen drop bag. So I turned around and took my lamp with me. Whenever I do a run through the night I carry a mini-Led light with me all the way to be 100% sure to have an emergency light. This would be enough to bring me somehow through the night and make me stay on trail, even though the light would not be enough for any fast paced motion. The climb to Tosmarberg hill is long and gradually steepening but a good forestry road. It should be runnable all the way to the top but the last quarter I had to walk. A short stop at the aid station and then the course descends on the other side of the mountain, eventually leaving the forestry road on a few surprising turns onto narrow hiking trails. This was fun again, I was very happy about my strong light in this section and moved forward pretty quickly. In Diekholzen I had my plate of pasta and continued on the out and back stretch towards Sibbesse. On the way back I met several other runners, still on their way out. Suddenly I realized that I would clearly stay below 20 hrs run time, possibly I could even achieve 19 hrs.

So when I reached Sibbesse after this 3rd loop I didn't stay long and pushed forward on this last 17k out and back stretch to the familiar aid station in Diekholzen. Slowly the legs were getting heavier but apart from a few steps of walking – with the excuse of slowing down for drinking (earlier on I would drink on mainly on the downhills not have to walk the uphill) I ran all the uphill to Diekholzen. Several turns which I did not see in my map confused me, but the marking was so clear that I decided to follow it even though I could not quite reproduce my way on the map. I reached Diekholzen just before some runners on their 3rd loop. I guess I must have been like a ghost for them. Some drink and crackers and I left for my way back. This side seemed to be a

bit steeper, I walked a few steps more than on the way out, but overall I kept running to beat the 19hrs mark with an average speed of close to 8 km/h, which is not too bad for the end of a 100 miler. Tired but still fairly easy I reached the finish line shortly before 3 am, in an overall time of 18:48, where Hansi Koehler and his team welcomed me - as puzzled as myself about this fantastic new course record. This time is more than 3 hours faster than my so far fastest 100 miler!



I had a beer some food, calmed down and went to sleep in my car. After some sleep daylight awoke me and after some more hours of rest I got up and had a shower together with the 2nd and 3rd placed runners who had just come to the finish! It seems that many of the fast people got lost during the night time (maybe 100 miles wasn't enough for them?) and so I had an enormous lead on everybody else. Since I had a long way home. We had a little celebration for the winners at noon and then I left for the long drive home, while some just started for the last out and back stretch.





Norbert Ebbert (2nd), Hansi Köhler (R.D.), Giselher Schneider(1st), Karl Gerlach (also 2nd)

The run is on a very enjoyable course, most of it is indeed runnable, even the cross country stretches if you have some experience on nearly non-existing trails. Weather was perfectly cool for me and all the volunteers were very helpful and would cater for anything you might ask for. The only thing I needed out of my drop bags was headlight and maps. Thanks a lot to all of you, I could never have run as good without your personal support. I hope Hansi will continue to host this race in a very similar fashion for a long time and offer other runners this great experience in the future. I'd love to come back, but there are so many other ultras I want to learn to know. Let's see what the future brings.

In the meantime I am really proud of my European 100 mile running record: I participated in 2 of the 3 German 100 mile runs (known to me) and now hold course records on both of them (Chiemgauer, STUNT). On the first Ultra trail du Mont Blanc (nearly 100 miles) I finished 4th and best European runner. I finally also accomplished my sub 20 hrs goal for a 100 miler (and on a tough course). Mont Blanc and even more Sibbesse are the runs I personally feel as being my best runs ever. So I have accomplished in ultrarunning more than I ever dreamt of and can look for new challenges or just continue to run ultras for fun?
.... I 'll keep you updated.

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