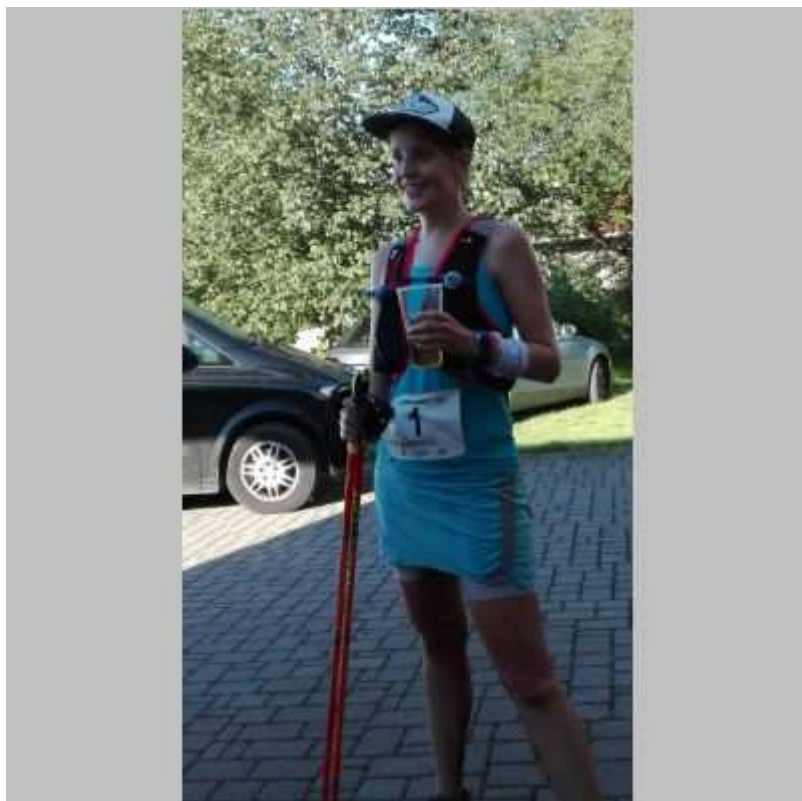


Chiemgauer 100 - Race Report

8/4/2016

0 Comments



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“Everything you want is on the other side of fear”

Chiemgauer100 – Race Report

After the fun times I had at the Bilstein Ultramarathon and Rennsteiglauf earlier this year, it was time to tackle my biggest race yet – the Chiemgauer100 – 100 km through the Alps in the beautiful Chiemgau region in Southern Bavaria.

Initially, I had picked another race for my first attempt at 100km, the Thüringen Ultra, which would have been a bit easier, I guess. But sometimes, things happen for a reason.

I thought that I had signed up for the Thüringen Ultra but somehow my registration did not go through... I then talked to a friend who had done the Chiemgauer100 two times before and somehow planted the idea in my head that I should give this race a try instead. I gave it a week

to consider and finally signed up for it. I'm easy to convince apparently :) Thanks Paul W. !

Training went quite well, with the exception of a completely unexpected DNF at Würzburg Marathon in June, where I stopped after the half marathon mark, having enough of running on tarmac.

Two weeks before the Chiemgauer100, I did my final long run, a 50km training run on the flat asphalt bike path along the river, with Dany accompanying me on the bike. It went really well, I managed to run at a relatively relaxed pace and was pleased with the outcome.

I don't know if it was “taperitis” or a real issue but, typically, the week before the race, I experienced a weird pain in my left upper leg / hip area that did not go away, so I was forced to rest in the days leading up to the race, hoping that it would sort itself out. I tried not to worry too much about it but it was still noticeable when I was walking.

My journey started on Friday morning, with a relaxed and uneventful 4.5 hour train ride to Ruhpolding. It is a typical idyllic Bavarian village surrounded by beautiful mountains, which is particularly famous for winter sports like biathlon and bob sleigh. There, I checked into the hotel and tried to relax a bit.

In the late afternoon, I walked the 2km to the stadium which was the start and finish point and the headquarters of the race. It was a nice place, outside of town and in the shadow of an impressive mountain. Not many people were there, the race registration was a simple bench and table with two friendly women handing out the bibs and everyone seemed pretty relaxed. The friendly, familiar atmosphere of the race was already noticeable here.

The first real challenge of the weekend was the race map. There was a huge poster with the race course on the wall and we were told to copy it into our own respective maps. It wasn't as easy as it sounds and a friendly gentleman, who was part of the organisation team, tried to help me but I was a quite hopeless case. I gave up and hoped that I wouldn't need it.

The pasta party started at 5.30 p.m. and it felt more like a family dinner than the pasta parties I have experienced before. I didn't know anyone but was soon surrounded by other runners, all more or less nervously chatting about the upcoming race. Shoes, poles, food, the race course etc

Then the race briefing started, which didn't hold any big surprises. The organiser explained the race course, check points, general rules of behaviour etc. and then wished us all the best.

After the briefing, I was eager to return to the hotel quickly, to get as much rest as possible because the next day would call for an early start. I bought some snacks and water at Aldi and then spend the rest of the evening in bed.

The night was over at 3.00 a.m. I had managed a few hours of good sleep and didn't feel tired at all. I had a quick breakfast with instant coffee and bread rolls and then got dressed, prepared my race kit and drop bags and was ready to go.

A took a taxi to the stadium because I didn't feel like walking the 2km in the dark. A good decision, as it turned out – there was a spot on the street marked with colour spray and the taxi driver told me that somebody had been fatally hit by a car on that spot only few hours before...

Surprisingly, there was hardly anyone there when I arrived at the stadium. I saw another guy in race kit filling his water bottles at the water tap and assumed he was a fellow 100km racer - before he turned around and set off again into the dark. A 100 mile runner apparently, who had just passed the stadium checkpoint. He still looked very fresh.

I sat down on a bench until the guy who had helped me with the map the evening before appeared and told me to go inside as it was warmer there. I didn't feel cold but obeyed and went into the small stadium bistro. I had another cup of coffee and a wee chat with two other runners before it was time to hand over my drop bags and move to the start line.

The start was very relaxed and very unspectacular. No music, no shouting, just a little countdown and off we went. I have never been so calm at a race start, it was almost surreal. I switched on my headlamp as we ran over the tartan track for the first couple of metres before heading out of the stadium and onto a gravel path.

I don't remember much about the first few kilometres. My left upper leg still felt tight and the pain was still there when running, despite all the rest. It was bearable though and I hoped that it wouldn't get any worse throughout the race. I just tried not to think too much about it.

As always, it took a while until I found a rhythm and my position in the race. With less than 100 runners in total, the field soon split up and I was running alone, with a few others still in sight. It was beautiful – the sun was rising while the fields were still covered in fog and few sleepy cows watched us pass. Humidity was quite high at this point, too.

There were a few spectacular views already but I didn't have time to stop and admire them or even take photographs. After about 10km I realized that I didn't notice my leg at all anymore – the pain was gone!

We soon headed into the forest. Here, one section which I had dreaded quite a bit started – a narrow path covered with rocks and roots, with the mountain on one side and big slope on the other side. Did I mention that I am not a fan of heights? One false step and I would be sailing down that slope. Luckily, there was an iron rope on the worst sections and I had to concentrate so much on placing every step that I didn't have much time to think about what could happen. Whenever I heard another runner approaching me from behind, I let them pass on the next possible location.

This was where I met Paddy from England. We started to chat a bit about England and the races we had done before and it helped me a lot to get through this terrible section. It seemed to take forever but eventually, the path got broader again. Unfortunately, I suddenly felt dizzy and had to slow down a bit for some water and a piece of cereal bar until I felt better.

Next came some climbing, and soon we were finally running down a broad gravel forest road again. It went really well. My legs were fresh, I passed a few people, and just enjoyed being out there. Until the two guys who were a few metres in front of me suddenly stopped. It was a dead end, the path just stopped in the middle of the forest with no markings or anything to indicate that we were still on the race course.... And there were no runners behind us anymore. Gritting our teeth, we turned around and climbed up again, until we found the arrow on the ground that indicated where we should have turned left. A kilometre added and a few places lost but nothing too bad.

After 26 kilometres, we were back in the stadium. I refilled my water bottles at the aid station there, ate some food and then headed back out again. I was only around 20 minutes within the time limit and I didn't want to waste any more time there.

Another runner had told me before that this was where the race really started. I ran out of the stadium, crossed the street and soon found myself on another steep climb up a cow pasture. The sun was burning quite merciless already. I hit a little low point here... and promptly took a wrong turn again. It took a while until I realized that I was no longer on

stadium and these must have passed me while I got lost. Ugh. I was in a bad mood. The extremely steep climb up a ski slope that followed didn't help much. I looked up and saw a few runners further up. Very much further up. All the way up there? This was the first but not the last time in this race that I thought this...

I somehow managed to scramble up the ski slope and was able to run again for a while. I passed another runner, Oliver, before heading further up and into a forest. There was another muddy, steep and difficult section here and after a while, I began to wonder I was still on the right path, as it seemed to be a dead end with only a weird-looking path going up. I hadn't seen any course markers for a while, so I turned around again, assuming that I had managed to get lost again. After a while, however, Oliver came down the same path and he assured me that it was still the right one. We indeed had to go up that weird path. We ran together for a while. I moaned a bit about the trail being terrible with all the rocks and roots and mud – he laughed and said that this was an "Autobahn" compared to the descent from the Hörndlwand. I didn't want to hear that for sure ;)

He had done the race before and gave me the precious advice to refill my water bottles at a well because the next aid station would be on top of the Hörndlwand – the biggest climb, which we had to make in the blazing sun. It started moderately through the forest, where we passed two Australian guys, with whom we chatted a bit. We were soon out of the forest again, slowly making our way upwards, over rocks and gravel. I didn't dare to look down but the area around me was breath-taking. The Hörndlwand in front of me looked majestic in the bright summer sun.

Many hikers were coming down our way and they all had a friendly smile and a few words of encouragement for me. Many commented on my BIB number (#1) and how fresh I looked. Hahaha ;)

Oliver was soon out of sight but I passed three more runners on the way up, all of them sitting on a rock and looking down. I asked each of them if they were ok and they all assured me that they were fine.

Finally, I reached the top. A couple of brave volunteers had carried canisters full of water and sports drink up there, only for us. I was deeply grateful for the water I got there. I was still within the time limit but with only a few minutes to spare now and I had already realized that finishing the 100km was out of question. Finishing the 80km seemed quite a challenge already, with the tight cut-off times and the rest of the course ahead of us. I was pretty convinced that I wouldn't make the next cut-off, which was an hour later and only a few kilometres away but down in the valley, with the monstrous descent in between. I was hoping that I would make it somehow.

And now, the descent started. In my race report of the Allgäu Panorama Ultratrail last year, I wrote that the climb up the last mountain was the most gruelling thing that I had ever done in my running career. Well, the climb UP Hörndlwand had been a whole new level of gruelling. And nothing compared to the way DOWN.

It was ok at first, you had to be cautious not trip over a stone, and I rolled my ankle quite a few times there but it was still ok. I thought that it wasn't too bad after all. Soon, I was down on tree level again. This was where the fun started. There was no real path anymore, just rocks and trees. I had to think about every step. I put down my poles first, then followed with one foot and then with another. It was painfully slow. The sweat was running down my face. One false step and I would break my neck. I had to get down on all fours and slide over a rock on my butt a few times and also fell on my butt twice. The Australian guys passed me again but they had problems, too. One guy kept falling down and I felt really sorry for them. Soon, two other runners were behind me but they didn't want to pass and assured me that they were fine following my lead. Hahaha. It took forever. More than an hour for this short section, it was insane.

But then, eventually, we were down on even ground again. I was beyond relief. And also beyond the time limit. Shit, shit, shit... The next cut-off / aid station was 1 km away and I knew that I wouldn't make it until 1.30 p.m.... Was this the end of the race for me? One of the guys commented that there was an easy 13 km way back to Ruhpolding. Or maybe the volunteers would take us there with the bus. On the one hand, I couldn't believe that the race was probably over for me after 43 km already. On the other hand, I was relieved that it was over. I could sit back and relax and then go back to the hotel and have a shower. And lie down... but I wanted the finisher shirt! I didn't want to disappoint all the people thinking of me....

I was four minutes beyond the cut-off when I reached the aid station. I anxiously asked the lady there if I had to stop. She laughed and said no, they surely weren't that strict. But did I really want to carry on? The two guys behind me sat down and quit. One of them said that there was another awful climb coming up. But I had made up my mind. I wanted to carry on. I asked the others to come with me but they said that they needed some rest first and would then decide.

hilarious... until I realized that I had forgotten to refill my water bottles but luckily, the next aid station was only an hour away.

I managed to run a bigger part of the moderate uphill section that followed, until it got steeper and steeper and I was soon climbing up a pasture again. The next aid station came and I got some water and food. The ladies there also told me that I wasn't last, five others were still behind me. Apparently, the cut-off times were not that strict now. Phew.

I climbed further up, over a cow pasture, and was in a very good mood. Now I was sure that I would finish the 80 km at least. I was finally starting to have a bit of fun.

On top of that climb, I passed another runner whom I hadn't met before. He commented something and his dialect sounded familiar. A fellow Franconian, as it turned out. We chatted a bit about races and cars... until he got an electric shock from a fence and that killed the mood a bit ... ;))

He told me to carry on and so I did. I spotted Oliver down in the distance and also Margit, the woman who had been sitting on my table during the pasta party the night before. I waved and she waved back but was too far away for me to reach her. Until she jumped out of the bushes a while later... Together we ran down a very smooth and runnable downhill section, exchanging our experience in the race so far. We both agreed that the Hörndlwand had been the most brutal thing that we had ever done.

I let her go a few kilometres after that because I needed to stop and eat something from my backpack, unaware that the next aid station at 51 kilometres was just around the corner. When I got there, Margit and Oliver were waiting there, together with a few others who looked like they had dropped out. A very friendly guy helped me fill up my water bottles. I also got some coke and my first alcohol-free beer of the day, I didn't really have any desire for food here. My drop bag containing my rain jacket and my Hoka Speedgoats was also waiting at this aid station but I couldn't be bothered to sit down and change shoes. Instead, I only grabbed the can of coke and my ultra sports gel chips and soon left with Oliver and Margit.

After a couple of metres, I found myself facing another steep climb. I let the others pass since I knew it was going to take me a while to get up there. It was also a ski slope, it didn't look too long but was almost vertical, and in the blazing sun. Temperatures must have been around 25 – 30 degrees and this was the first spot where I really started to suffer from the heat a bit. Sweat was running down my face and it seemed to last forever. I think I experienced my first proper hallucination from running there. When I was almost on top, I saw a black folding chair standing in the grass right on top of the climb. I thought that I would probably sit down and rest there for a while. But when I looked up next, it wasn't there anymore...

I was pretty much wiped out when I reached the top but luckily, the route led into the nice and cool shadowy forest now, still going upwards but only moderately. To my surprise, Oliver was sitting on a log on the side of the road there. He was just as wiped out as I was. I sat down next to him and opened my can of coke. It was pure bliss ;)

We then caught up with Margit again and ran together for a while, passed another aid station, and chatted about races and such. The worst was over, and now it was only about reaching the finish line. Oliver fell behind and soon it was only Margit and me running, with about 20 km to go.

It still got pretty technical in some places and there were still quite a few hills to climb but we managed to keep up a good pace on these last kilometres, alternating between walking and running, while chatting about anything and everything. The time and kilometres passed really quickly!

We managed to pass a few people on this last section, too. I was feeling considerably good and jokingly suggested that we should finish the 100km by running laps on the track in the stadium ;)

Shortly before the very last aid station at 75km, things turned a bit to the worse though. My right upper leg started to cramp a bit and being on the move for almost 16 hours now took its toll on me. Even the coke and the friendly people at the aid station didn't help much. The woman there promised that it was only downhill now. No more climbs. Yippie!

Ha! We left the aid station and took a sharp turn to the left – right into the forest. Here, another very mean, very steep and slippery climb down awaited us. It was unbelievable. If I had been alone, I would probably have cried a bit. Or cursed. Or both. Margit must have felt the same but we both didn't want to be weak in front of the other at this point.

Then, it was only four kilometres to go... only three... Margit kept pushing and I forgot to feel sorry about myself. 2.. 1.. then the stadium appeared to our right. Almost there now!

Then it was our time to cross the finish line. It was quite unspectacular compared to other races where I had finished in tears or been close to a collapse. It was just as relaxed as the start had been :)

And then it was done! I think I hugged a few people there, ate some water melon and talked to a few more people: Margit, her friend Gerd, who had had to drop out of the race and waited for her to finish, Miriam, Paddy, Oliver.

It was all a bit of a blur. My legs started to hurt quite a bit as I was standing around and I got cold too. Luckily, Gerd and his wife agreed to give us a lift to the town so I didn't have to walk the 2km back to the hotel.

After an ultra race, even the simplest tasks become quite difficult. Walking up the stairs, getting your clothes off, getting in the shower, brushing your teeth... I was glad when I was finally able to lie in bed.

Sadly, I missed the prize giving ceremony the next morning. For some reason, my oxygen-deprived brain thought it was at 12.00 but it started at 10.00 a.m. already. So I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Margit and thank her for her support once again, which was a bit sad. I saw a few others again though, managed to collect my drop bag and headed back.

I met Paddy again at the train station and we had a lovely chat while waiting for the train and on the train ride to Traunstein... which ended a bit chaotic, as someone had apparently killed themselves on the track and caused a massive delay in all the trains there. My brain was still not functioning properly and I had a hard time to comprehend what was going on... which didn't help much. I made it home in the end though ;)

Two days have passed since. As usual, initially, I was absolutely sure that I would neither run this race nor any other race in the Alps ever again. Oh well. Maybe, if I don't get a place in the WHW race next year... :)

It was a wonderful event. I am not disappointed at all, I'm more than happy with having finished the 80km! I learned so much during and from this race, it was a fantastic experience. The race organisation was excellent, the whole atmosphere was nice and relaxed. It is a race made by an ultra runner for ultra runners and that fact was noticeable in every aspect. It felt like a big family gathering. I now understand why people come back every year to do this race. I might become one of them ;)

I didn't know anyone when I arrived, I was nervous, I was scared... and I met so many wonderful people and had such a great time, it was totally worth every step. Sometimes you need to step out of your comfort zone to experience the extraordinary, I guess J

A big thank you to everyone who has supported me during the last few months, especially to my coach Paul G. without whom this wouldn't have been possible, to Dany for accompanying me on the bike and the motivation, to my real-life running friends Ute, Anja, Irmi, Anja, Moni... for running up and down Schwanberg hill with me without ever getting tired, my DM friends, and, last but not least, Paul W. and Lena S. for making sure that I signed up for this race! J

Emma, Stella, Stacy, Deirdre and Leah, this is for you! <3

All the love

Dani

0 Comments

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