

Running Along The Longest Wall in The World

Author Jochen Schmitz Published on Running Magazine in Germany

Translated by Gorge Tang and Chen Boya

Over 20000 steps along 42.195km, the Marathon over the Great Wall of China is unique, not only for its challenge, but also for its historical importance.



KRABEL GEAR: *The steps on the Great Wall are often so steep that the runners were faster on all fours. Therefore, gloves were sold at the info session.*

“What now?” Asked my friend Christian as we sat in a bar in Manhattan in the evening. He had just finished New York Marathon in Central Park a few hours earlier. What else can we do? After a lot of discussions, we got an idea: A race on the Great Wall of China!

An organized journey saves time and effort

Meanwhile, there are several runs on the incredibly long and equally old protective wall. For us Jinshanling section is more suitable since it is well restored and especially beautiful. Moreover, traveling via Beijing is easy. However, planning such a project on your own costs a lot of time because the communication takes a long time, the corresponding pages on internet are usually not in English, and the information on transportation is rather vague. We booked the organized trip from laufreisen.de.

The preparation phase was unexpected

Before the trip, our dear Chinese friend had set us required routines, which is to some extent funny. For example, when apply for a visa, one will be asked about their parents' profession. If one of them died, the profession column should be filled with "Deceased". In the data collection, the organizer was necessarily requested to provide the runner's blood type, otherwise there is no start number available for the runner. And the organizer of the Pasta Party sent weeks before a menu of eight pages, from which we choose food we would want for the party, from seagrass salad over grilled herring to French fries: everything was there.

We had to train ourselves. As experts, we knew that staircase units and long jogs are highly recommended. But the reality was unfortunately against us: Christian had very limited training time, and his tendon suffered pain again. My main focus was actually on the grip strength improvement and special training against cold temperatures since I was to participate the event of the Tough Guy Races in England.

20000 steps-There is an extra zero written by mistake?



At the pasta party not only seagrass and grilled herring was served, but also the complete race route information. The faces of the astonished listeners proved that not everyone informed themselves in advance about the circumstances. As the number of 20000 steps to climb over the race, they repeatedly asked if an extra zero had been put there by mistake. The 80% increase of steep rise of the wall was explained by the organizer by comparing a folding ladder to be climbed.

A route shared with tourists



According to the organizers, 2469 athletes gathered at the start line with the aim of tackling the different distances: marathon, half marathon, or ten km. Peng! A good two KM running after the starting shot would meet an impressive gate with a turnstile. Behind the gate the route began to ascend to the wall. It already became clear: there is no fast running here, because some tourists stood in the way or sat next to it. After these prelude hurdles, we had to take a break.

Amazingly, we stood there now with fabulous spring weather in the midst of flowering shrubs. The glorious Great Wall stretched out to the horizon in front of us with thousands of steps. How should that be done? A Chinese with safety vest called for caution but urged at the same time to continue digging. At the top of the wall, the dilemma became clear to us: here you could only run with the highest concentration. Because the levels not only varied in shape and height, but sometimes disappeared completely. It was incredibly steep, really scary steep. Then I understood why gloves were sold at the information session. They helped if preceded on all fours.

To make matters worse, there were defense towers at regular intervals, in which dark had to be managed. So, it was easy to take 20 minutes for a kilometer on the wall. Of course there are sections allow racing. along the way, one can see warning signs and pictogram of man-falling now and then.



Powered by pickled cabbage

So, I ran alone for an hour and half. Although it was all enchantingly beautiful and the experience was incredible, but on the other side of the medal stood the untold efforts. Out of nowhere, Alex from our tour group appeared in front of me. The Dusseldorf treated the whole event quite optimistic. She planned to run the full marathon and was looking forward to any expected challenge. At the next numerous refreshment points we allowed ourselves longer stop. We mashed pickled white cabbage and toasted ourselves with

energy drink for the next few miles. From then on, we wanted to do this together, scrambling, stumbling and sometimes even running. Meanwhile, it got really warm. The higher the sun rose, the worse the condition became. Which in turn signaled us that we were approaching the turning point. The length of the restored section of the wall at Jinshanling is ten kilometers, with a good three quarters of it considered our race track. But before we could run back after seven and a half kilometers, we had to get down from the wall to make a round through the area. Through small trails we arrived in a village. Here the nearby fields were newly fertilized. Then, we went through undergrowth bushes and back up to the wall! The way back demanded even more efforts. Our muscles and lungs were working in red area. After an unnoticed while, we ran out of the turnstile gate and back on the street.



Run the extension euphorically

With the rather shaking knees we ran toward the finish. But that was only for me. Alex had to pack another half through the surrounding mountains. She kept persuading me accompanying her. It was so beautiful. Okay. I made a determined decision high-spiritedly to run with her on the full marathon route. Since the full and half distance cost the same entry fee, the organizer as well as the surrounding helpers did not mind that I ran further extension. So then, we followed the arrows that stuck on the road until it was in a farming village in the mountains. From then on, small red bows navigated the trails. At the 35th kilometer point, we reached the highest point of the second half. Many participants took chance here on the rocks for a quick snoop. Good Idea! We joined them. As I looked down at the wall, gratitude overcame me: gratitude to Alex, I would never have reached this spot without her and I should never have experienced this moment; gratitude to this game

which allows such experiences.

The final kilometers we walked eloquently side by side. After seven hours, I finally done: we crossed the finish line. By the way, Christian was joined on the way by a lady who surprisingly finished half with him. His pain tendon remained calm. What an unexpectedly good turn this race for all of us! Man has just to listen to women as an old Chinese proverb says.



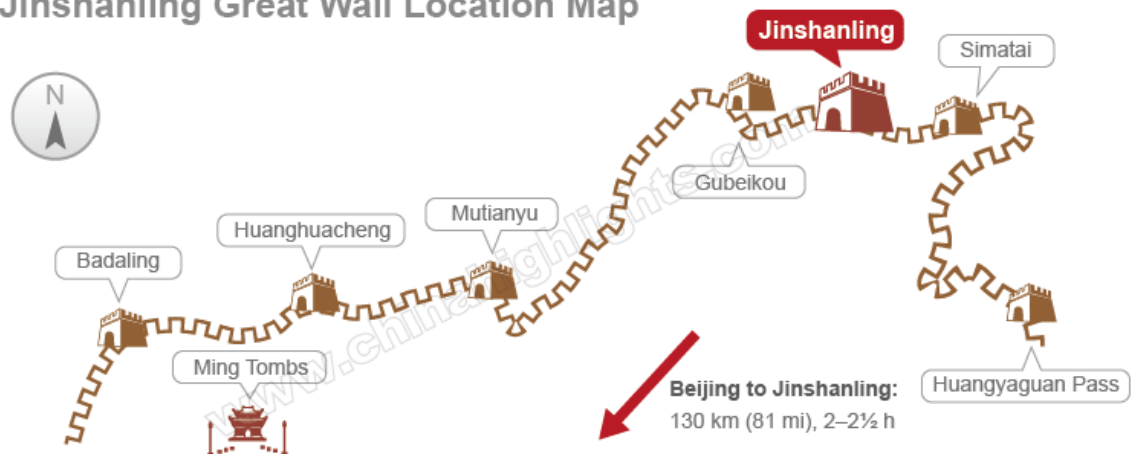
Useful information



Location:

The Great Wall of China consists many sections. It is about 22000km long. Although there are some disagreement about the length, it is certain that the 10km long at Jinshanling section is one of the best preserved. There are countless tourists visit the mountain area in Luanping county, about 120 KM northeast of Beijing. The great wall was started to build since 7th century B.C and used to protect central China from nomadic raids.

Jinshanling Great Wall Location Map



Designed by: Cullen Chen