

The 29th Four Peaks Race got off to a flying start in Tai Tam on Saturday, the 26th of January 2013.

Some 16 boats made up HKPN Division A, of which seven also competed in IRC A and two which subsequently reverted to the motoring division including the only multihull ATE. Another seven boats joined Division B on another course.

For the front-runners it was, for a change, a relatively swift passage to Sai Kung before the ascent of Ma On Shan (702m) with *Topsy Easy*, *Kei Lun*, *Red Kite II* and *Wicked* in the leading pack.

Conditions were such that most boats were able to discharge their runners by kayak or inflatable dinghies near the public pier adjacent to the Sai Kung Marine Police Station. Not all remained dry by the time they reached shore unlike the runners on *The Farr Side* which, helmed by ABC commodore, John Berry, skillfully came alongside the pier to disembark.

The dry and sunny conditions on Ma On Shan were ideal for relatively fast ascents and descents although obstacles including wild cows, had to be avoided. Times

varied with *Red Kite II* up and down in 1 hour 38 minutes and *Tardis* 4 hours 55 minutes.

With the breeze easing considerably, it was a slower return passage back to Hong Kong Island and Violet Hill (433m) above Repulse Bay with *Wicked* opening up a 40-minute



lead over *Red Kite II*. *Kei Lun* completed the hill in 49 minutes 25 seconds to claw back 11 minutes against *Wicked*.

Unfortunately conditions continued to deteriorate overnight with rain showers adding to the discomfort.

Arriving off Lantau for the ascent of Lantau Peak (934m), the sea was like glass when, at 2338, *Wicked* discharged its runners a mile offshore.

*Kei Lun* again managed the fastest run in 1 hour 35 minutes but by then *Wicked* had stretched its lead to three hours. *Red Kite II's* runners did their chances no good when they

initially missed the gate and had to return to recommence their climb to avoid disqualification.

The benign conditions on Sunday, the 27th of January, meant progress to Lamma was slow but facilitated for most a relatively easy discharge of runners off the southwest corner

before sailing round to the eastern end of Sok Kwu Wan (Picnic Bay) to retrieve their runners after climbing the final hill Mt Stenhouse (353m).

Unfortunately, in the case of *Whiskey Jack*, despite its runners having apparently recc'ied the route they were discharged in the wrong place and spent an abortive 1 hour and

40 minutes trying to find a route up. The sight of three figures waving from the shoreline sent the ABC's media boat in, with FH aboard. But accepting outside assistance meant *Whiskey Jack* was obliged to retire. The runners requested being dropped off in the correct location from where they continued their climb.

It was a puzzled race control back at the Aberdeen Boat Club which received the ascent time radioed in from Mt Stenhouse having already been advised that *Whiskey Jack* had retired. Their perseverance did not go unrecognised, earning skipper Nick Southward and crew the FH Spirit of the Race award (left).

With a cut off time of 1900, it was a relieved *Taxi* that finally crossed the finish line at 1810.

Numerous awards were presented at the awards

party on Friday, the 1st of February, with *Wicked*, *Kei Lun* and *Red Kite II* picking up the IRC A silverware in that order. *Wicked*, *Kei Lun* and *Darling* took 1st, 2nd and 3rd in HKPN A while *The Farr Side* and *Ate* took motoring Division A.

2013 was the year Division B came of age. Traditionally the easier option for the slower boats, this year at the front end it was a hard-raced, tough challenge on the water and in the hills. There were seven starters charging around Tai Tam Bay at the start.

Charging? That hadn't been what the forecast had suggested. But Tai Tam often springs a surprise whatever the wind may be doing elsewhere, or later.



To most, Div B was another surprise. Sure there were veterans like the multiple-winning, *No One Else*-cum-*Rhapsody* team, *GA*, a Dehler Optima, the 1962 classic HK-built Malabar Jr, *Koala*, and sail training steelie, *Spitali*, from Hebe Haven. But there were also newcomers: the ABC-owned J/80, *Javelin*, Jeanneau Sun Odyssey 43, *Scintilla Team Leighton*, and Beneteau First 31.7, *White Crane*. At the start, at 1105, Div B was wide open.

Traditionally the easier option — so was it? Shorter certainly. And without the frustrations experienced by many of the Div A boats in Port Shelter (so what's new?) But once everyone had been lulled by a perfect

Saturday afternoon run downhill under kites to Lantau, the weather quickly stopped being friendly.

The runners of the first three to arrive at Cheung Sha on the wings — *Javelin*, *No One Else*, and *GA* — passed through Lantau Gate minutes apart. But back aboard, jilling about waiting for runners, the sailors could see that the ominous forecast was turning out spot on. The wind was dying.

That's when work began. At dusk, with strong tides and the faintest

breezes round Cheung Chau Rock, Stephen Davies helming *Javelin*, cunningly got ahead of *No One Else*, whose hotshot canoeists had already showed the pace that would win them the race.

But *White Crane* and others were struggling to push ahead hours later. As skipper, Francois Najean commented, "We spent hours and hours around Cheung Chau Rock during the night, nobody spotted us but we are proud to say we made it all the way to the finish following the rules of the game in this fantastic event."

*Javelin* was first from either division to reach the top of

Stenhouse at 2115. The versatility and easy handling of the boat was already showing how suitable J/80s are for races in light to moderate conditions. But shortcomings were yet to manifest themselves . . . ever seen an inflatable Canadian canoe rush off shorewards in circles?

Old timer Div B boats, *Koala* and *Spitali*, wisely switched to the motoring division when

faced with the option of a long slog at night with rain in a moribund wind. For the runners, the rain was just an added challenge. One shore party reported, "Little waterfalls all

the way down Mt Stenhouse." On Peak 300 another team handled the same problem by sitting down and doing a bumslide. Responding flexibly to changing demands — whether canoeing, canyoning, coasteering, or switching drop-offs or pick-ups — is what a successful race is all about.

Still, getting off a small sailing boat and into a kayak at midnight off a rocky shore in

# 29th Four Peaks RACE



January is not easy. Especially when rushing into a rocky bay in the dark with a duff echosounder. Ho hum . . .

Meanwhile, back in the control room, the umpty-ninth call from the HK Police. "Hello, can anyone speak Chinese?" "Are your runners finished in Chai Wan?" Chai Wan?

"Finished at Cape d'Aguilar?" Peak 300? Do the boys in blue ever read the race instructions?

Lewis Cerne, a newcomer to the event and a new ABC member in 2012, said afterwards "It's a while since I've participated in sports and enjoyed myself this much." Lewis was the youngest skipper, sailing *Javelin*, the smallest boat. Stephen Davies, founder of the race was in the crew — youth and fitness; age and cunning. The race was founded as Lewis was born . . .

and his grandfather equivalent was in the crew.

This was the first time a J/80 had entered and it shows the way for 2014.

At 05:28:12 on Sunday morning, *No One Else*, skippered

as ably as ever by Jack Ng, finished first. *Javelin* crossed 21 minutes 33 seconds later, a critical hour lost on this year's tactically crucial Violet Hill where *No One Else's* Olympic-standard canoeists needed the flashing orange light of a jetfoil! The first Division A boat, *Wicked*, taking every other Div A boat to the cleaners by 3 hours, came in one hour later at 06:35:44.



The 2014 race will be on the 18th and 19th of January.

Mark the days. It will be the 30th anniversary — a special one to watch and take part in.