

Welcome to my blog posts from partlycloudy.co.uk, the travel journal I wrote when living in Singapore from 2012-2017. Not wanting to do away with website content, I've made PDFs of some of the posts and uploaded them here, to keep the adventures alive.

## First Mud

Jan 31 2016

The boys go on a hash run every fortnight, through the jungly areas of Singapore on alternate Sundays. This is keeping it in the family for Mr Partly Cloudy, whose parents met through a hash run in Ipoh, Malaysia in the 1960s. He's been enjoying a local kids' version with Jonah and now then want me to come along too. "If you can do Bukit Brown\*," Mr PC says, "it's not that much harder."

Famous last words. My post-hash trainers are on the deck, being deep-cleaned, and I've got vine splinters. Talk about a baptism of fire, or water.

You jungle-doubters, there is thick foliage here in Singapore. A great way to experience it is to join the Sunday hash run, following a planned route that's been set out in advance. These willing explorers trek through the undergrowth, tying hankies around trees and roping steep slopes so that runners like us can crash through a few hours later. The prize at the end is a back-of-the-van meal for kids and a beer tent for adults. Great plan.

I know why the boys want me to join but I've not been tempted. This week, though, after Mr PC knocked his ribs in a game of football and seemed unusually wheezy, I decided to make sure he didn't overdo it, and the only way to do that was to join him. Little did we know that my first ever hash would coincide with a monsoon storm.

Let's take some time here to think about how we conduct ourselves when marching through jungle. We don't stray off the path, we keep our eyes out for bugs. We don't touch the tree trunks unless we know what's perched on them or creeping around them. We'd never grab a spiky vine or slide on our back down mud slopes, or brush up against potentially poisonous leaves, would we? That's what I always thought.

When wet weather conspired against us and turned the course into a slipway, we did all those thing and more. As cautious drops turned into the biggest downpour we'd seen in a long while, it was impossible to avoid manhandling jungle to get through it.

We fell, slipped, tumbled, tore our trousers, flicked mud over each other, caught hairs on thorny vines. To begin with, under a light shower, it was fun whacking through vines like Sylvester Stallone in First Blood, and Starskying across fallen trees. An hour later, comedy buckets of rain and mud meant the course was wrecked. I could only



limp and mew, crashing over trunks like a shot elk, pushing the bottom of the stranger in front as she hauled up an incline and being pushed up in turn.

Time crawled, like us – it was all taking longer than planned. My specs fogged with rain. Mr PC pointed out the clouds of steam puffing up from our bodies any time we paused. I began to wonder what would happen if it got dark. Our boy, at first a buoyant and proud guide showing me the ropes, lost his bravado and fretted while Mr PC darted between us, cajoling us up and down steep banks. Fun for all the family.

All the normal people had taken the short route, but somehow we took a wrong turn, digging a path through thick jungle soup. Just as I wondered for the 5th time when the helicopters would start circling, we heard hoots of chatter up ahead, and out we popped onto the Green Corridor, a local former rail track and running trail. Tiger Beer never tasted so good.

I apologise to all the children I pushed out of the way as we crashed from jungle to clearing. I apologise to my friend, and also to Mr PC, for having a right strop at the tricky slippy bits. Most of all I'm sorry to my bottom for giving it such a hard time when all it really wanted was to park itself on the sofa all afternoon.

Our grand total of 2.4 miles took two hours. How to get home? We didn't dare walk as it was rainy and dark. Plus: aches. We didn't dare call a cab because of the mud. So we limped to a bus stop and travelled eight weary stops, wilting in the standing space, stinking slightly of mulch. As I hung on to the ceiling strap, a tiny caterpillar crawled out of my vest, and bits of foliage dropped from our skin with every bump.

I might go back but I'll have to think about it. I like the crowd, the theory, the beer. I admit to feeling great at the very end (after the beer, I mean). And I did enjoy that pleasing muscle ache you get when you've done something virtuously fit. Most of all I loved the chance to see proper jungle; the route-setters do an amazing job. So I may come back if the rain holds out, otherwise you know where to find me: #sofa

EDIT: I did not go back. Sorry.

\* A walk around Bukit Brown, Singapore's famously green and sprawling cemetery.