

FRANCE ADVENTURE RACING

Losing cookies, gaining face

THE NORTH FACE ADVENTURE TEAM, based in Hong Kong, placed 11th in the Adventure Race World Championships on the French island of Réunion in November 2018, a race that many others – even past winners – were unable to finish.

The course covered 600km of jungles, mountains, and water, all of which had to be navigated by trekking and running, mountain biking, kayaking, packrafting and abseiling. A maximum of eight days were given to co-ed teams of four to complete, with four-five days being the expected finish time for the winners. All

teammates were required to be within 100m of each other at all times and to complete all sections.

The TNF team – consisting of leader Ryan Blair from Hong Kong, Jantaraboon ‘Jay’ Kiangchaipaiphana from Thailand, and Guilherme Pahl Siqueira Silva and Camila De Araujo Nicolau from Brazil – slept just eight hours over the six days they took to finish the race, climbing a total of 17,000m over Réunion’s forbiddingly steep and rugged terrain. Being a strong cycling team, one of their biggest disappointments was needing to carry their bikes so often.

Not only was the race a test of endurance, but violent downpours led to a surge of water on a cliff trail that could easily have been deadly, according to Blair. Other low points included navigation mistakes, dozing off while biking, Blair’s heat exhaustion, and rough seas that had Jay vomiting repeatedly. According to an interview with *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), they all linked up their kayaks and let Jay sleep while they continued paddling.

There were also highlights too, such as catching up to and passing last year’s world champions at one point. At another point, they spotted two fins in the water around them, a sign of utmost danger in waters with the world’s highest ratio of shark attacks, but they turned out to be dolphins.

Being able to witness the gorges and waterfalls, and sunrise at the top of an active volcano, were as much a part of the adventure as pushing the limits of their bodies. Although in the end they were left soaked, shredded and spent, Blair told SCMP that it made him, “appreciate the simple things in life, like a comfortable bed or a hot meal.”

