

A 17-day ultra run across Germany, called “Deutschland-Lauf 2005”

<http://www.deutschlandlauf.com/deutschlandlauf/index.php>

This is the official web site of the race.

http://www.deutschlandlauf.com/deutschlandlauf/english/short_info.pdf

This is an English synopsis of the race by Ingo Schulze, translated by Jurgen Ankenbrand

Race-summary of a three week adventure run experienced and narrated by:

Ultra runner and photojournalist Jurgen Ankenbrand, aka Ultra Kraut.

What is this event about?

The 2005 Deutschland Lauf was the brainchild of race director Ingo Schulze who had run this event solo several years ago on his own and directed it once in 1998.

Where did it take place?

The idea was to cross Germany at its longest distance from the northern most point at Kap Arkona on the island of Ruegen to the Southern most point in the small Baden Wuertemberg town of Loerrach, near the Swiss border. The route would cross seven German states and go mostly through small towns and villages avoiding the heavier traffic areas as much as possible. Once the route was set a department of traffic for the entire country had to approve all routing, possibly making small changes due to changed traffic conditions such as road closures or constructions. The entire route was to be about 1,200 km or roughly 750 or so miles. Once this was done Ingo would drive the entire distance by car speaking into his tape recorder, noting distances and reference points for the later to be developed daily routing schedules. Translated by Jurgen from German into English.

Who has the time, energy and patience to organize such an event?

Ingo Schulze has successfully organized other long-distance running events, notably the 2003 Trans Europe Foot Race from Lisbon to Moscow, a distance of 5,100 kilometers over 64 days. The Spree Lauf is another event he has hosted several times, a seven day run through Northern Germany, which is very popular.

In addition Ingo is an accomplished ultra runner in his own rights and understands runners needs.

Why have such an extreme run?

Currently the Trans Goal run in France is the only longer multi-day running event in Europe and Ingo wanted to offer one in his home country of Germany and revived the DL across Germany run for 2005 after hosting it once in 1998. The initial limit of planned participants of 50 was quickly reached and more and more applications rolled in so that the eventual starting roster had 68 starters from nine countries including two runners from Colorado, USA, namely Peter Bakwin and Stephanie Ehret, both accomplished ultra runners in their own rights.

Why would any one want to run 1,200 kilometers in 17 days?

This is the 64-million dollar question, which is always asked by “regular” people who have a difficult time understanding that any one can do it, let alone would want to do it.

The simple answer in a nutshell is this:

It's there and some runners think they can do it. It's the ultimate challenge for an ultra runner (an ultra run is any distance longer than the “normal” marathon distance of 42 kilometers or 26.2 miles. This may not sound too logical but this is the answer in a nutshell).

Ever wondered how the marathon became to be 26.2 miles, a rather odd number? At one time it used to be an even 25 miles, run in England. The event ended short of the queen's residence and

she could not see the finish. She asked that the distance be changed so the finish was where she could observe the event from her balcony and here we have 26.2 miles ever since. When you are the queen, almost anything is possible.

Organization:

Needless to say, to get seventy runners, about 15 to 20 volunteers at any given time and a column of around ten vehicles all the way across Germany, a 1,200-kilometer distance, is no small feat and requires very detailed planning. It took well over one year of preparation including driving the entire distance by car. Having a full time job at Mercedes Benz meant that Ingo spent much of his vacation and free time working on this project.

Logistical considerations:

1. Sponsors for financial support:

The entry fee of Euro 60 per day per runner does not cover all expenses and without some financial and other support such an event could not take place.

2. Route to prepare daily schedule:

Once the route had been established and permits from the proper authorities were secured Ingo drove the distance and set the daily route schedule.

3. Support vehicles to carry crews and supplies to the aid stations:

Volunteers had to bring to the aid stations and the baggage had to be brought to the new quarters every day requiring a large van.

4. Volunteers, since no running event can take place without them:

As all runners should know, no running event can take place without volunteers.

Those are the selfless soles that offer freely of their time, standing often hours at aid stations waiting for runners to have food and beverages served to them. The average daily stage was about 60 kilometers and often the time between the 1st and last runners coming through an aid station could be as long as four hours, a long wait indeed. Especially in inclement weather.

5. Route marker to plaster 1,000s of bright orange stickers with large black arrows on sign posts or whatever surface they would stick to, so runners and drivers would know where to go. Could stickers not be used, white chalk marks and arrows did the job and once in the dark up the Feld Berg, hot-pink spray paint did the job guiding the runners until daylight.

6. Food buyers to purchase daily supplies for meals and aid stations.

Not always an easy task supplying between five to eight aid stations and food for breakfast and dinner a few times. Generally no special food order requests were taken, with almost 100 people, a virtual impossibility.

7. Daily quarters in gyms, our quarters for each night.

On a scouting trip, Ingo tried to secure sport halls along the way and get commitments ahead of time, for us to stay whenever possible.

8. Traffic permits in highly bureaucratic Germany entail a very lengthy process taking several month at best. Then the fine-tuning of the route can take place.

9. Runners entry fee, the financial basis to support the event.

Rarely does an entry fee cover expenses, especially by such a large and longer event. Hence sponsors are a necessary part of the financial picture.

10. Policies, rules and regulations, without them chaos would ensue.

These are by no means all considerations but the mayor points to give the reader an idea of the complexity to organize such a multi-day event across an entire country.

12. Group dynamics:

Having close to 100 people at the beginning at close quarters in sometimes very crowded conditions isn't easy and can create frictions due to personalities. Fortunately this happened very little and the entire team worked as a unit and few incidents happened.

13. Food, always a very important part of any athlete, was very important here. Several evening meals were taken in restaurants and several were catered. Breakfast was usually served and eaten in the hall where we slept.

14. Quarters were exclusively in gyms.

Sleeping on a wooden floor with your inflatable mat is something you have to get used to, but it's not bad especially when very tired.

15. Weather can either make or break an event.

To say we were fortunate is understatement. Out of 17 days we had one full day of rain, one very windy day, a couple of partly cloudy days and the rest were sunny. This made the entire event so much easier as moral was high and all looks better with sunshine.

Trans Europe Foot Race comparison:

Those six runners who also ran the Trans Europe event, naturally made some comparisons. Four of these six finished and also were under the top-ten place finishers. One thing is for sure, all were glad the DL-2005 run was only 17 days long. Some of the runners had little or no multi-day running experience but did surprisingly well.

Final analysis:

The event was very well organized and all seemed to run pretty smooth, at least viewed from the participant's vantage point. The DL-2005 was a full success and it's already for sure that there will be a 2006 edition, as there are already several runners signed up for it.

It's impossible to please every one all the time, especially when things get tight, runners get injured, tired and even may be thinking of quitting. Based on this I have to say, all went very well and no serious problems happened.

As the official photographer with the freedom of driving a runner's car every day, I was in a very enviable position. Several days I either had one aid station or helped at one. For at least half the time I was free to follow the runners from the start, following on their heels as they basically led the way for me. On a few occasions I was able to time the runner's location with an incredible sunrise, which made for some great images which must be created and require planning, enthusiasm and often much waiting and walking. Was it worth it? Absolutely, check out my many images on the DL-2005 web site

The day I returned to the US, Jesper Olsen the Danish world runner also arrived in NY finishing his US leg of his world journey. I met him early Thursday morning together with several other local runners as he ran from the South Ferry to the UN building, officially ending his US running leg. He mentioned that I was the very first runner to accompany him on his US journey and now I also became the very last one to do so, something I am very proud of.

All this gave me certainly something to think about as a matter of comparison. The runners who just finished a 17-day run across Germany certainly had displayed much courage and accomplished a great feat. But now seeing Jesper nearing his ultimate goal of circumventing the world, the Germany run sort of paled against Jesper's effort of running for a year and ten months consecutive days of an average of between 30 to 50 kilometers day in and day out, no matter what the circumstances.

Any one wanting more info or photos on either event for personal or commercial use can send me an e-mail at Ankenbrand@aol.com,

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