

Seeing Singapore on the Run

Memories of the Singapore Hash House Harriets

By Andra Leo

If you ever find yourself strolling somewhere on a peaceful Wednesday evening and suddenly hear the strange cry of "On! On!" from behind, move swiftly to one side. It won't be long before the call is followed by the pounding of dozens of feet as a horde of sweaty runners dashes past.

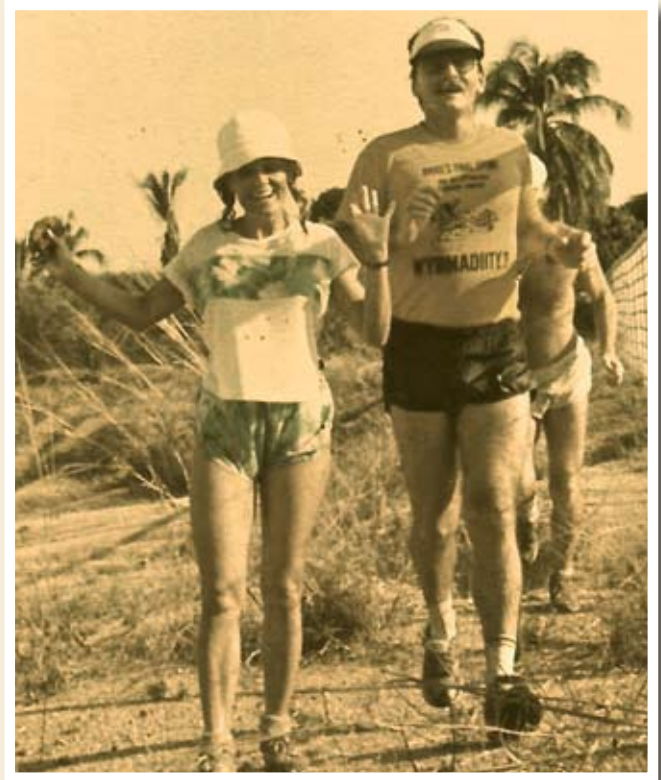
The motley group will include both men and women, members and guests of the Singapore Hash House Harriets (HHH). Originally a women-only running club, their inaugural event was held at a site in Dover Road on 17 October 1973 and organised by 'Hash widows' protesting the chauvinism of the Monday night men-only Hash. The 12 ladies who turned up found it so much fun that they gathered again the following week and so on, until a formal club was established. Coincidentally, its founding day was also the day my second son was born, but it would be six years later before I joined in the fun of running around Singapore and doing 'recces' (reconnaissance trips) to plan future runs. Thus did I explore little-known areas of an island that in the late 70s and early 80s still had large tracts of jungle, numerous *kampongs* (villages) and also fish, duck and pig farms. We organised runs through all of them, often startling *kampong* dwellers into yelling out "*siao angmoh!*" (or 'crazy white people').

Hashing began in the early 1930s in Kuala Lumpur and derived its name from the 'Hash House,' a mildly derogatory nickname for the Selangor Club Chambers (a place known for its monotonous food). Early clubs were all-male affairs and runs ended with copious amounts of beer being drunk. That tradition continues today. Runs are paper trails set beforehand by 'hares'. The trail is planned to confuse and confound the pack, ending abruptly at points where there are several different directions it can take. Faster runners go 'checking' and when they locate the beginning of another paper trail, "On! On!" is called and the pack takes off again.

Today there are clubs worldwide and every two years an international gathering is organised somewhere. I attended an Interhash (as it's called) in Sydney in 1984 and another in Pattaya, Thailand, in 1986. For these events, thousands of hashers come from all over the world and runs of various length are set – the long ones being half-marathons, the short ones for participants more inclined to the post-run celebrations than to the running.

After being elected to the position of Grand Hash Mistress in 1983, a close friend who was

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The author in Smurfette disguise for a Halloween Hash run



Finishing the long run during Interhash 1986 in Pattaya, Thailand

secretary of the club and I decided some changes were needed and inaugurated several innovations. Firstly, we introduced wine to the post-run libations. Many members vociferously protested this 'feminising' of the Hash. Nevertheless, we persisted and soon wine – along with beer, water and 100-Plus – was a standard post-run drink. Next we felt some special celebratory runs would liven things up and organised the very first Halloween run in October 1983. Appropriately, the run was set through Sime Road Cemetery, where controlled fires were lit at intervals as runners dashed past. Runners came dressed as swamp monsters, witches, devils, goblins, skeletons, Halloween pumpkins and even Playboy Bunnies. Heads turned and accidents almost occurred as we drove to the run site – other drivers being unaccustomed to seeing green-haired witches at the wheel. The following year a virtual Pandora's Box of creatures assembled – among them a vividly blue Smurfette (alias me) transformed by generous amounts of greasepaint. These runs are still held today, but the early ones were the most imaginative.

I no longer run with the Hash, but the years I spent with the club still provide me with both happy and hilarious memories.

Andra Leo ran with the Harriets and other Hash House clubs for more than 10 years. She also participated in numerous full and half marathons. An injury eventually brought her running days to an end.

Photos courtesy of author