

100 km for a good cause – Dodentocht 2013

Christian Janßen

How does one actually come to participate in a 100 km march? There may be many reasons for this. For me it was the army. During my basic military service in the German army in 1996, the cadets were forced to participate in the Dodentocht. Together with another fellow, I also wanted to join them. Unfortunately, our request was rejected for insurance reasons. Over the years, this event faded from my memory, until I stumbled upon the website of the Dodentocht end of 2011.

What's this Dodentocht? It is a marching event, which took place the first time in 1970 with 72 participants and has been held annually by the walking club Kadée ever since. One has to cover a distance of 100 kilometer by foot in a circular course around Bornem in Belgium (between Antwerp and Brussels) in maximum 24 hours. Several hundred people from business, politics, police, Red Cross, firefighters, numerous sponsors and over 1,000 volunteers contribute to the success of this event.

So I signed up for 2012, and just went to Belgium with a naive preparation of 270 kilometers of training. Result: after 50 km, I capitulated for physical, but above all, for psychological reasons. Shortly after give-up, my subconscious was trying to tell me: "Just leave it alone! That's just not for you! "But then I just did not want to give up. Somehow it had to be manageable.

At the end of 2012 I was able to convince my colleague Tobias-Lars Höher ("Tobi") to participate in this march. Even a joint preparation would be more fun than training on my own. Tobi then had a great idea: we should do it for a good cause. That way the torture is tolerable and the collected donations should remain in the region. After a long search, we found the "Kinderkrebshilfe Berchtesgadener Land und Traunstein e.V." (Children's Cancer Aid; <http://www.kinderkrebshilfe-bglts.de/>), a local nonprofit organization with many volunteers. They advise, support, and give financial help to families with children with cancer, as well as children and young people whose parents are ill with or died from cancer.

Collecting donations should actually provide enough motivation to endure as long as possible on the 100 km long trek. Since we both (and some relatives and friends) were not sure if we would make the entire route, we wanted to at least try to get as far as possible in the 24 hours. Our fundraising activity was in fact kilometer dependent, i.e. the potential donors pledged in advance to donate a fixed amount of money per kilometer, with the option to pledge for both of us together, or to only one of us. Flyers were printed; we informed colleagues, relatives and friends about the campaign. We also set up a website, which provided information in detail about the campaign and provided an online form for entering the willingness to donate. Rosmarie Baumgartner, 1st chairwoman of the organization, was immediately enthusiastic about our idea and supported us with sufficient information about the Children's Cancer Aid.

As expected the joint preparation was a lot more interesting than my solo tour last year. The training essentially consisted "just" of marching. During the common lunch break during the week, we often took a small turn around the company (about 3 to 4.5 kilometers). From time to time we met for a joint training over longer distances. At our Chiemsee circumnavigation in May, Tobi felt how it is to be on the road for 50 kilometers. I felt astonishingly good. In early July, the tide turned. On our nearly 50 kilometer turn around Lake Waging, Tobi could jog the last 3 kilometers, while I had to quit at 45 km as I had to realize that my favorite shoes were worn out. I therefore had to search for new shoes four weeks before the march, finally finding them at Sport Breitwieser in Tittmoning. The owner Sepp Breitwieser, who himself was already running marathons and ultra-marathons, was a very competent salesman.

Meanwhile the first donation commitments arrived. Some donors did not want to rely on how many kilometers we would eventually make and contributed nearly 2,000 Euro before the march.

With over 450 kilometers of training and with improved equipment and clothes and lots of other junk, we drove to Bornem on Thursday, August 8th. Tobi and I, accompanied by my wife Anja, arrived at the campsite in the early afternoon. The campsite is organized by the Boy Scouts of Bornem each year during the Dodentocht on the grounds of the Cistercian monastery of St. Bernard. For 23 Euro per person, you can camp there with a tent, caravan or camper from Thursday to Sunday, with toilet and shower use included. For just a few Euros, you can have breakfast and dinner. No sooner than when the first tent went up, Tobi was already involved in a conversation with representatives of the local newspaper. They saw the posters of our fundraiser on Tobi's car and wanted to know more about our motivation and goals. After a brief interview and photo session, they went away again with the promise that we could read it in the newspaper the next day.

At the invitation of the pastors of all denominations, which were on "promotional tour" on the campground in the afternoon, we visited an ecumenical mass in the evening, where we prayed for a good march and healthy feet. This was not our last meeting with the catholic priest.

On Friday morning we went shopping in the city center of Bornem. At a newspaper stand we looked for the newspaper whose reporters visited us the day before. Indeed, our photograph was on the front page of the "Gazet van Antwerpen"! Plus a small article on page 19! Although this gained no further donations from the local people in Belgium, it did give a boost to our motivation.

In the early afternoon we picked up our papers. Thanks to the pre-registration on the internet, this was completed in five minutes. Furthermore, we check-in our luggage, which would be available at the checkpoint at 50 kilometers. Then there was still enough time to relax and to recharge our batteries before it started in the evening.

The streets, which were abandoned at noon, were now filled with thousands of people who couldn't wait for the start. Understandably the gardens and flower beds, which served as a storage place for the marchers last year, were closed off this year with construction fences. Shortly before 8 pm we

were in the start area. Approximately 200 meters behind the start line, the crowd was so dense, that we simply sat down on the road and waited.

Precisely at 9 pm the starting signal was given. It began at a snail's pace. It lasted quite a while until approximately 11,000 people began to move. Within a half an hour, all participants had started. After the first few kilometers through the city center of Bornem, egged on by cheering spectators on the roadside, it went quickly into the nature through woods and along the river Schelde. Here we met again the Catholic priest, who, dressed for a Sunday afternoon walk, quickly overtook us. As it turned out later, he arrived an hour before us at the finish line. He was in a better shape than we were; he already completed the 100-km march eight times in the past.

After 7 km, we walked in the opposite direction again through Bornem. The route all along the Dodentocht was surrounded by numerous parties on the roadside or in the pubs. Many individuals had converted their front gardens into party grounds and cheered the passing marchers. Without the iron will to complete the 100 km, you could have easily become stuck here and celebrated with the others.

The first checkpoint came after about 15 km, where sports drinks and custard tarts were served. It was just past midnight, and not even a quarter of the distance, as the first blisters showed up. I just put some blister pads on them and continued. However it soon became clear that I could not continue this way. I pulled over, took my shoes off, punctured blisters with the Swiss Army knife, drained the blisters, put blister pads on them and continued to march. Shoes and socks could hardly be blamed for the wounds incurred, because they were extensively worn-in in advance. Tobi's guess was the higher humidity (it rained a bit on Friday morning), which was not that annoying during the march, but apparently had a significant influence on the feet.

After more than 10 ½ hours we reached the checkpoint at 50 kilometers, which was housed in the Palm Brewery. However we were not in the mood for beer. The 100 km were still doable. Which meant: do not waste time and energy. After a long queue outside the toilets we received our luggage. Tobi had pre-ordered a hot meal (spaghetti with sauce) and ate it there. After a change of clothes, treating the existing blisters and wounds and a bit of relaxing, we were back on the track.

We knew that our relatives and friends at home tracked us either through the Dodentocht website or via the smartphone app. The RFID tags, which were attached to our numbers, were scanned at each checkpoint and the times were sent to the central server. This allowed anyone to be able to keep track of where we were, at least in theory. The equipment obviously played tricks on me and did not send the times of the two stations after the 50 km checkpoint. Thus, the impression was that I gave up after 50 km and Tobi continued to run unabated. This was not the case. Since Tobi fought at this point with his calves and the circulation and I was reasonably fit, we made the decision to separate at 50 km and march ahead in our own pace.

We both now trusted on the power of music. I listened to a mix of heavy metal, techno and dance to forget the pain and walk kilometer after kilometer. Still in the belief that Tobi was behind me, I was quite surprised when I suddenly saw him before me at the 85 kilometers mark. In the meantime he recovered again; he passed two checkpoints without a long delay and overtook me somewhere between 80 and 85 kilometers. From then on we walked together again. We could not afford to take longer breaks any more. With every minute that you rested or sat down, it felt as if it took twice as long until you were able to get up again and get started.

While Tobi recovered more and more, I nearly knocked off myself just before the finish. We were marching at a good speed. Unfortunately, I forgot to listen to my body. Just before we reached the 90 kilometer mark, my circulation collapsed and my head was swimming. Obviously no longer master over my own body, Tobi had to tell me that I have to eat and drink something. I took a few sips from the hydration pack, and also ate a Belgian waffle I found in my pocket. After a few minutes my circulation came back to normal. Thank you, Tobi!

The last 5 kilometers became interesting again. Children marked the last kilometers on the street with chalk, which didn't correspond with the official information at all. It was just funny to read the chalk letters "FINISH" more than 2 kilometers away from the finish line.

As the final part of the route directly runs along the camping site, Anja was waiting for us and joined us on the final kilometers to the finish line. The last 500 meters through the city of Bornem were simply indescribable. Cheering people pressed against the barriers and congratulated all who came that way. All pain was temporarily forgotten while we enjoyed crossing the finish line. After 23 hours and 15 minutes we both made it! We therefore collected at least 10,000 euros for the Children's Cancer Aid! In addition to a medal and a certificate of participation, we even received a cake and a bottle of Belgian beer (Bornem Triple with 9 % alcohol). After we picked up our luggage (the one from checkpoint at 50 km), we headed back to the campsite. Away from the cheering crowds on side streets, the fast pace suddenly came to an end. I even ran the risk of being overtaken by a turtle. When I arrived at the campsite, I only had eyes for my bed in the tent. I wisely refrained from the consumption of a bottle of beer which I was looking forward to for more than 100 kilometers, because I did not want to test the interaction with the painkillers still in my body.

On Sunday the pain was a bit more as expected (also because the painkillers eased their effect). After a quick breakfast, adequate wound treatment and the removal of the tents, we drove back home.

Oh, how was the weather? After the summer really gained momentum in July with record temperatures, we feared even worse. However with a cool early August, the weather god showed its best side and presented a nearly optimal hiking weather. In the night it was just warm enough that you didn't freeze. In the morning it was still cloudy with pleasant temperatures. Just before noon, the sun came out. Since a part of the course went through the forest, and clouds repeatedly showed up in the afternoon, the weather was very enjoyable.

One of the most frequently asked questions after the march was: "And how are your feet?" Immediately following the march after all the painkillers eased, movement was very limited. We both had blisters, and we wishfully waited for their healing. While Tobi recovered quite quickly, I was still struggling with tendinitis in my left foot which forced me to lay down the entire week after the march. By now (four weeks after the march), all pain is gone. The skin under the blisters regenerated very well. The nail on my left little toe, which completely came off during the march, is growing again. Would this probably be the right time for a professional pedicure?

So what have we learned? At first we were not sure if we would make the 100 kilometers at all. With appropriate preparation, we focused on improving our physical fitness. However, the best trained body can't work if the head does not work. The desire to show off to everyone and last, but not least, the absolute will to collect as many donations as possible, made sure that we did not give up too early. During the march, it was absolutely necessary to listen to the body (i.e. my circulatory collapse before the end). But painful blisters and burning soles caused wounds and pain that eventually passed. All you do is just to suppress the pain. Since, as they say in sports: "The pain goes, the pride remains!"

What was the result of the fundraising? The potential donors and all relatives, friends and colleagues were informed shortly after the Dodentocht about our successful participation. Due to the holiday season, it took about 4 weeks until we had received all of the pledged donations. During this time, we received additional donations of just over 2,000 Euros. Thus, just over 200 people contributed to a total of 12,150 Euros. The spectrum ranged from a small donation from the children of a colleague to an individual donation of over 1,000 Euros. The symbolic cheque was handed over to the first chairwoman of the Children's Cancer Aid organization Mrs. Rosmarie Baumgartner at the night flea market (regularly organized by and for the Children's Cancer Aid in Oberteisendorf) on September 13th, 2013. Over coffee, tea and cake, we answered the questions of the local press, which also appeared at that time.

Also on behalf of the Children's Cancer Aid organization (Kinderkrebshilfe Berchtesgadener Land und Traunstein e.V. <http://www.kinderkrebshilfe-bglts.de/>), we would like to say thank you for the incredible support by so many donations from all the people who contributed to the success of this campaign.



Handover of the cheque at the night flea market on September 13th, 2013 in Oberteisendorf (f.l.t.r.): Christian Janßen, Rosmarie Baumgartner, Lore Haider, Tobias-Lars-Höher.



Marching for a good cause




Tobias Höher

9. / 10. August 2013

Christian Janßen

[Home](#)
[Our contributors](#)
[Gallery](#)
[Contact Us!](#)
[Impressum](#)
[DEUTSCHE VERSION](#)



Learn more about the Kinderkrebshilfe Berchtesgadener Land und Traunstein e.V.



Donate now!

What is it about?

We march - You support us!

We (Tobias Höher and Christian Janßen) are going to participate in the **Dodentocht** which takes place on August 9th, 2013 around the city of Bornem in Belgium. The Dodentocht is a 100 km hike which has to be finished by foot in minimum 10 and maximum 24 hours. 100 km or 24 hours can get very long, and we will have definitely our lows. So we decided to find as many supporters as possible, who are willing to donate a pre-determined amount of money for every commenced kilometer. These donations will go 100 % to the Kinderkrebshilfe Berchtesgadener Land und Traunstein e.V. (Children's Cancer Aid), an incorporated society with a lot of voluntary helpers. They are giving advise, help and financial support not only to children having cancer but also to children and teenagers whose parents suffer from cancer or already died as a result of cancer.

Finish the 100 km!

The Dodentocht isn't about runtime or rankings though the fastest participants finish well under 10 hours. It's the Olympic idea which makes us participating. The 100 km will be very demanding and we are still not sure if we will be able

Our main sponsors




The homepage of the fundraising campaign: <http://www.100-km.org/en/>



Tobi (left) and Christian (right) while training: marching, marching, marching,...



Welcome to Bornem, Belgium! Accommodation on the campsite of the Bornem scouts.



Overview over the campsite. Tobi prepared for all cases.



Obviously we caused some stir. We made it onto the front page of the „Gazet van Antwerpen“.

De eerste deelnemers aan de Dodentocht komen stilaan aan op de camping aan de Kloosterheide in Bornem. Meer dan 16 nationaliteiten kiezen ervoor om vlak naast de Sint-Bernardusabdij te overnachten. Hoewel er een grote uitdaging staat te wachten, lijkt het voor velen ook een beetje vakantie.

Al sinds de beginperiode zorgt de organisatie voor overnachtingsmogelijkheid op het binnenplein van de abdij. Een twintigtal tentjes werden de eerste keer opgesteld. Acht jaar later worden de terreinen aan de Kloosterheide omgetoerd tot een volwaardige kampeerplaats voor zowel tent, caravan als mobilhome. Tijdens deze 44ste editie wordt er bijna 800 man verwacht. "De organisatie van de camping ligt in handen van de scouts van Bornem. Ongeveer 40 vrijwilligers worden ingezet om het onze gasten zoveel mogelijk naar de zin te maken", zegt coördinator Marc Augustinus.

Scoutsleidster Evelynne Cammaert is voor de tweede keer op rij eindverantwoordelijke: "Het is een hele job, maar leuk om te doen."

De Duitsers zijn met hun 255 dé grootste groep op de camping. Gevolgd door de Nederlanders (206),

Engelsen (116) en Belgen (145). In totaal zijn er wel 16 nationaliteiten.

Tobias Lars Höher en zijn vriend Christian Jansen komen helemaal uit Salzburg (Duitsland). "Ik heb het al eens een keer in 2012 geprobeerd, maar door een blessure moest ik opgeven", zegt Jansen. "Ik heb deze keer meer getraind en heb

voor de achtste keer bij. Hij wandelt al meer dan 15 jaar mee en hoorde een eerste keer de Dodentocht vernoemen op de Marche du Souvenir. "Sindsdien ben ik in Bornem niet meer weg te slaan. Ik zou de sfeer niet meer kunnen missen. Voor mij is het - buiten de dag van de tocht zelf - steeds weer een beetje vakantie waarop ik heel wat leuke mensen terugzie."

Ook het Verenigd Koninkrijk is van de partij. "Ik kreeg deze tocht cadeau voor mijn 16de verjaardag van mijn moeder. Ik wandel en mama Diane komt iedere jaar mee supporteren. Dit is een jaarlijks mama-zoonmoment, ondertussen al negen jaar", glimlacht Josh Willes. Vorig jaar sloten ook Dave Lomas en Marie Swinfield uit Manchester bij het gezin Willes aan. "Wij leerden elkaar hier op de camping kennen en zijn sindsdien goeie vrienden geworden."

Swen Haeger uit de streek van Thüringen (Duitsland) is ultraloper en loopt geregeid marathons in heel Europa. Het Dodentochtparcours loopt hij samen met zijn Nederlandse vriend Albert Jan in zo'n twaalf uur uit. "Ik kom niet alleen naar Bornem voor de mars. De sfeer, de vriendschap die je hier ieder jaar weer opnieuw hebt, zijn uniek."

PASCAL SAELENS

Mirabelle d'Arlon, zoals deze Fransman graag genoemd wordt.

Swen Haeger uit Thüringen wandelt al voor de 18de keer mee.

Duitsers Tobias en Christian wandelen voor een goed doel.

De Britse delegatie met Josh, Diane, Marie en Dave.



Christian and Tobi picking up the papers.



Just before the mass start of over 11,000 participants. And half an hour later...



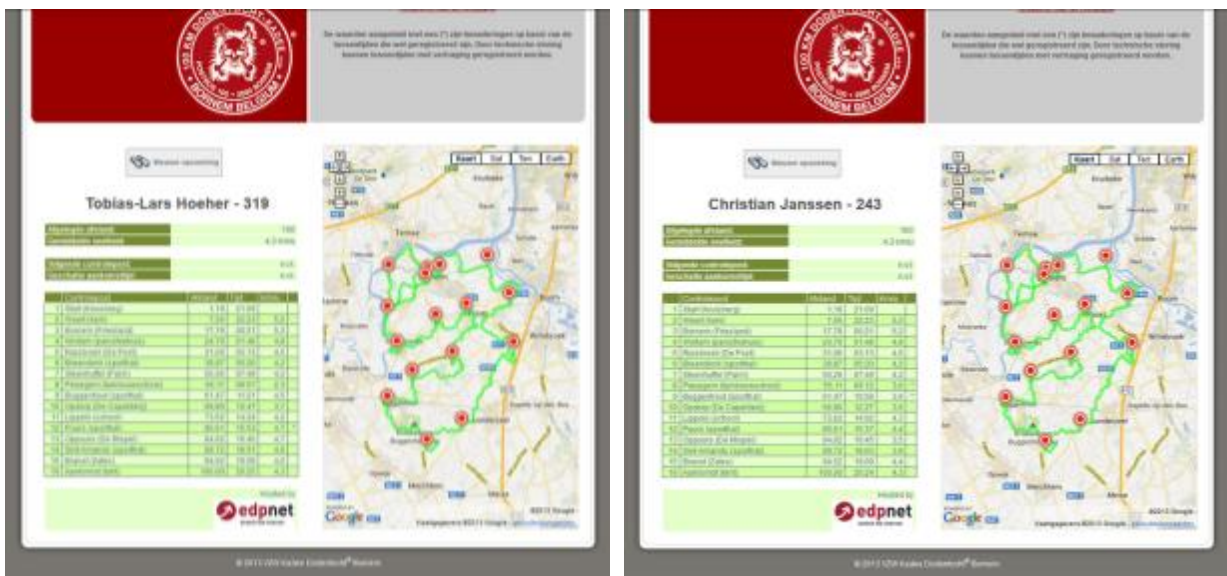
Marching 100 kilometers is not always that funny!



Tobi and Christian on the final kilometer. Such a march leaves one's mark.



Christian and Tobi finished after 23 hours and 15 minutes!



Tobi and Christian on the official tracking website of the Dodentocht.