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A variety of challenges

When it comes to setting new goals, it's hard to know which way to turn. There's such a wide variety of fitness challenges to choose from these days. In the past, many of us would settle for running a marathon and ticking 26.2 miles off our bucket lists, but not these days. Now we want to run faster, cycle further, hike halfway up a mountain – if not to the very top – and surprise and delight ourselves by what we're capable of achieving. Many people get a real buzz out of pushing themselves beyond their mental boundaries.

You may have all sorts of ambitions when it comes to fitness, but if you're not sure what to choose for your next goal, then I'm sure we can help with some ideas and inspiration. Our feature, ten of the best extreme challenges, reveals how you can push yourself beyond anything you've ever tried before. There's an Everest climb, an Arctic ultra and even a 'Death Race' where the organisers tell participants they can 'quit at any time'. Tempted, or even just a little bit curious? See page 20.

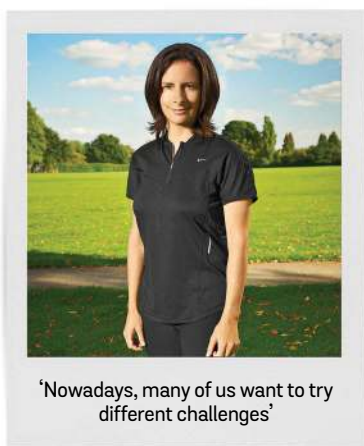
In order to tackle a new and tough challenge however, you have to work on your mindset. Your mind is like a computer. If you don't feed it the right information, then you won't get the best out of your training. Many people, including highly successful musicians and movie stars suffer from 'Imposter Syndrome' – an irrational fear of being 'found out' for not being as gifted as their achievements indicate. It's not uncommon but fortunately, it can be overcome. See page 34.

A regular fitness routine is easier to stick to if your nearest and dearest are involved, as you don't have to sneak out for a run on your own. Our feature on simple family adventures on page 40 will inspire you to get the whole family involved in an active lifestyle.

Finally, for anyone taking part in a spring marathon, it's not too late to introduce some key sessions into your training to ensure you arrive at the start line fresh. Turn to page 84 to for two key sessions highly experienced running coach Nick Anderson recommends you try. Until next month, keep moving.

Christina Neal, Editor

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SEE PAGE 58**



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STORIES OF THE MONTH



THE POWER OF CROSS TRAINING

Olympic cyclist Dani Rowe on the benefits of mixing it up **P30**



ADVENTURE RACING FOR BEGINNERS

Fun, varied and challenging... what's not to love? **P48**



BRITAIN'S BEST MARATHON ROUTES

The most scenic locations for distance running **P88**

CONTENTS 04.20

FITNESS

ON THE COVER

012 CLIMB NEW HEIGHTS

We talk to a climbing expert on how to improve

014 GET FIT FOR HARD HIKING

How to train for those ascents and descents

ON THE COVER

020 TEN OF THE BEST EXTREME CHALLENGES

Are you made of tough stuff? Find out

028 FAB FITNESS KIT

Our round-up of gear for spring workouts

030 THE POWER OF CROSS TRAINING

Why Olympic cyclist Dani Rowe mixes things up

034 OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Don't let it halt your fitness goals



REGULARS

006 MEET OUR EXPERTS

The team behind the magazine

008 HEALTH NEWS

The latest in fitness and nutrition to boost performance

011 PRODUCT NEWS

Cutting-edge kit and gear

114 THE LAST WORD

We speak to mountaineering legend Jon Gupta

20

'WOULD-BE ENTRANTS HAVE TO COMPLETE THE 350-MILE VERSION FIRST'



ADVENTURE

ON THE COVER

040 GET YOUR FAMILY ACTIVE

Great adventures for your loved ones

046 OUTDOOR KIT

Spring outdoor kit and accessories to meet all your needs

ON THE COVER

048 ADVENTURE RACING FOR BEGINNERS

And now for something completely different

054 BAG A NEW HOBBY

Why Island Bagging is growing in popularity



114



**SUBSCRIBE
AND SAVE
MONEY!
SEE PAGE 58**

WEARABLE TECH

062 UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS
What your data really means about your fitness

ON THE COVER

**064 TWO BUDGET GRAVEL BIKES
ON TEST**

We compare two leading brands

068 THE LATEST FIT-TECH

Top tech including some new watches



TRAVEL

ON THE COVER

072 BIKING IN JORDAN

Lara Dunn tests her endurance on two wheels



078 THE RISE OF THE BOOTCAMP BREAK

Ditch that beach holiday for your favourite fitness classes

72 'IT HAD BEEN A JOURNEY
OF UPS AND DOWNS BUT
WE MADE IT'



ENDURANCE

ON THE COVER

084 READY TO GO THE DISTANCE?

Expert advice on your final marathon strategy

**088 BRITAIN'S BEST MARATHON
TRAINING ROUTES**

Keep those miles up with some scenic routes



INSPIRATION

096 THE GREEN MILES

We talk to UTMB winner Eoin Keith

100 BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Don't let your mindset hold you back



NUTRITION

**106 EAT RIGHT FOR
YOUR CHOSEN SPORT**

Fuel right, compete at your best



ON THE COVER

110 BREAKFASTS OF CHAMPIONS

What the elites eat to gain the edge



Meet the team

Get to know the experts and contributors to *Outdoor Fitness & Adventure...*



JEFF ARCHER

Jeff Archer is the managing director of Tonic365, a corporate wellness

company that has worked with thousands of individuals over the last 20 years. Jeff is a keen runner and triathlete, and has participated in Olympic and long-distance events.



MALCOLM BRADBROOK

Malcolm is an experienced sports journalist who has been

competing as a runner, triathlete and cyclist for 18 years. He is fascinated by new technology and what motivates us as athletes and enthusiasts. He is passionate about endurance sports.



HOWARD COOPER

Howard Cooper is a leading Rapid Change expert. A qualified

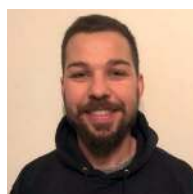
hypnotherapist and Master Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), he's spent 17 years helping people create rapid shifts in their thinking. Visit his website at rapidchange.works



LARA DUNN

Lara began her love affair with the great outdoors by swimming in rivers as a child.

Some years later, she still enjoys exploring the wilder places on two wheels, two feet, or from within the water. She is the former editor of *Adventure Travel*, *Women's Cycling* and *France* magazines.



IAN GARDNER

Ian is a personal trainer with six years' experience training people with

different fitness goals. He has interests in various disciplines, from Olympic weightlifting to ultra marathons. In 2018, he completed Race To The Stones. Follow him on Instagram @iangpt1510



LEONA GERRARD

Leona is a journalist who has worked on a range of national women's and

fitness magazines. She's passionate about cycling and travels the world in pursuit of amazing places to ride. She has written about training camps in Spain and cycling up volcanoes in central France.



LISA JACKSON

Lisa is a Croydon-based clinical hypnotherapist (see qmhypnotherapy.co.uk)

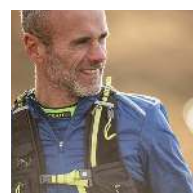
specialising in sports performance, fertility and cancer. She is author of two bestselling running books, *Your Pace Or Mine?* and *Running Made Easy*. She has been a runner for over 20 years.



ROB KEMP

Rob is a freelance journalist and author of the book *The Good Guys: 50*

Heroes Who Changed The World With Kindness. He has covered health, fitness and adventure sports for a range of publications for more than 20 years. He is also a keen runner.



SEAN MCFARLANE

Sean is one of Scotland's most successful long-distance

triathletes and adventure racers. An expert in so-called 'extreme triathlons', he has had multiple podiums in these most gruelling of events and has a passion for triathlon and endurance training.



JULIET MCGRATTAN

Juliet uses the experience she gained during her 16 years as a GP to help

people lead active lives. She is an ambassador for Kathrine Switzer's 261 Fearless running movement. She is also author of *Sorted: The Active Woman's Guide To Health*.



HELEN MURRAY

When she is not swimming, cycling or running herself, triathlon coach Helen Murray

can be found talking about it on the Inside Tri Show podcast. She is also a cancer rehabilitation specialist and a Nordic walking instructor who is keen to inspire others to be active.



MATT PHILLIPS

Matt is a Running Injury & Performance specialist, who writes for several

publications and websites. He is a speaker at international conferences, with his podcast, Runchatlive, helping runners, coaches and therapists clear up the myths that fill our industry.

SUUNTO 7

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HEALTH NEWS

The latest in health, fitness and nutrition to help you boost your performance



HAPPY HEART

Running a marathon for the first time can reverse the effects of ageing on our blood vessels by cutting around four years off the age of your arteries, according to the results from a fresh study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. The study analysed first-time marathon runners who took part in the London Marathon, examining them prior to six months of training, and again three weeks after completing the event to see how training affected heart health. They discovered that the runners were able to reduce their blood pressure and aortic stiffening through training and completing the 42.2km race – which equates to a four-year reduction in vascular age.



MOVE IT

Regular strenuous exercise helps to safeguard the brain from damage and keeps it healthy in old age, according to a new report, which found that fast-paced cardio, such as running or cycling, helps to halt the decline of grey matter. As we age, our arteries become less efficient at pumping oxygen-rich blood to the brain, but regular physical activity helps to boost oxygen uptake which is thought to keep brain cells functioning properly. The researchers recommend two-and-a-half hours of moderate activity each week in order to help protect the brain.

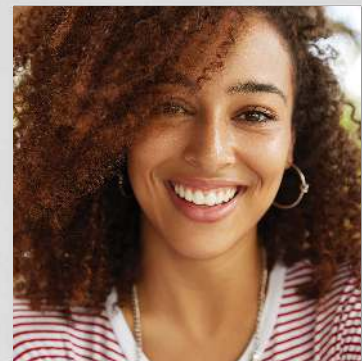


TIME FOR A CUPPA

Drinking tea at least three times a week is linked with a longer and healthier life, according to researchers from the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in Beijing. Regular tea drinkers, aged 50, developed coronary heart disease and stroke 1.41 years later and lived 1.26 years longer than non-tea drinkers. The study also found that green tea was linked to a 25 per cent lower risk of developing and dying from heart disease and stroke.



The percentage of people who admit to using the 'smell test' to assess the quality of food items over their official sell by dates.



PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The more you strive for happiness, the less likely that you'll actually feel content with your current life, suggests new research. Results from the study, which saw participants answer a series of online questionnaires related to happiness and emotions, found that westerners who valued happiness had a higher tendency to experience depression. The experts at the University of Reading and De Montfort University concluded that when you value happiness too much, you start to reduce the ability to enjoy experiences in that moment in time.

PETE BLAND SPORTS



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ALL'S WELL

There's a secret benefit to both exercise and meditation – incorporating physical and mental workouts into your life could help to stop you from getting sick. Researchers say that mindfulness meditation or moderate exercise reduce the risk of getting ill by almost 30 per cent. Findings from the study, which was undertaken by experts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, also found that people who did get sick, but engaged in either activity, experienced less severe symptoms, missed fewer days off work and paid fewer visits to the doctor than those who did neither.



IF THE SHOE FITS

The majority of UK runners could be pounding the pavements in the wrong shoes! Independent research commissioned on behalf of ASICS found that over three-quarters of us have never had a gait analysis (a test to analyse unique movement when running), and a further 70 per cent didn't know whether they were overpronating, underpronating or neutral – in fact only a third of those surveyed even understood the difference between each running movement.



RUN FASTER

Want to improve your PB? Fresh research published in *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* indicates that incorporating a core-workout programme into your running regime could improve your overall 5K time by more than 60 seconds. The study, undertaken by fitness brand, Les Mills, found that the participants decreased 5K run times by an average of 66 seconds, without a difference – in heart rate, when factoring dimensional core exercises such as plank variations into training.



38



The percentage of Brits (which equates to almost 17.5 million UK adults) who have used CBD oil to manage mental health problems.

DIVE IN

We know that exercise helps to slash our risk of chronic disease, but have you ever wondered whether one form of exercise was better than the other? A study carried out by the University of South Carolina compared whether walking, running or swimming was superior in helping to boost lifespan. Results from the study, involving 40,000 men aged between 20 and 90, who were followed over 32 years, found that swimmers were 50 per cent less likely to die than walkers or runners. It's thought that the benefits of swimming are down to the fact that it is aerobic and does not stress out joints.





FITNESS

BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BE FITTER, FASTER AND STRONGER

SLAM TIME

Playing tennis could beat other forms of activity when it comes to protecting muscles and bones, according to a new study. Musculoskeletal problems affect one in four of the UK adult population, and a new study by experts at Liverpool Hope University highlights the benefits of heading on to the court, particularly among those aged 50 and over. Two groups of healthy individuals were compared in the study. One group played tennis regularly and the other engaged in running, cycling and went to the gym for 150 minutes per week. The findings showed that the tennis players experienced significantly greater musculoskeletal health compared to the other group.



CONTENTS



- Get fit and fired-up for hiking **014**
- 10 of the most extreme challenges **020**
- Find the latest fitness kit here **028**
- Enjoy the benefits of cross training **030**
- The truth about imposter syndrome **034**

CLIMB NEW HEIGHTS

How long does it take to become a skilled climber? Inspired by the climber depicted on our front cover, we asked mountaineering expert Tad Hulacki for some tips.

Words: [Christina Neal](#)

**Y**

ou may have seen our cover image of the climber tackling a tough climb and be wondering how skilled you need to be to attempt such a feat.

We were wondering the same thing, so we decided to ask climbing

expert Tad Hulacki, creator of Massif Chalk (massif-climbing.com), how long it would take to build up to being able to try a climb like the one you see on our front cover. We were also keen to find out how long it takes to improve as a climber and what you should attempt in the way of climbs and difficulty level when you first begin...

Tad, our readers are reasonably fit and active but climbing involves lots of other fitness skills. How can they adapt their training to become good at it?

You don't need to adapt your training to start climbing – anyone in good health can give it a go. The great thing about modern climbing is that it runs the entire gamut of difficulty – you could be climbing in a gym, with crash mats and no ropes, never going more than three to four metres from the ground – or you could be on a crag outdoors, being lashed by the wind, relying on your belay partner to keep you safe if you lose your grip.

What about strength?

While strength is important, technique will always make more of a difference; which is why you see climbers in their 50s showing up the big strong guys at the gym who haven't perfected the art of efficient movement. You could certainly draw comparisons between climbing and other movement sports such as yoga, martial arts, even dancing; they're all full-body exercises and all hinge on moving your body strategically and efficiently. Climbing also has a mental aspect; imagine it as a puzzle, where you are looking up and planning your route to the top, predicting where your body will go and how best to use the available holds to keep yourself on the face.

What's the best way to start then?

It's very important that new climbers don't overstrain or overtrain themselves; our fingers are naturally fragile and easy to damage without conditioning. In the first instance a novice climber's strength will certainly give out in a particular session before they can do any damage; but over-frequent training can lead to injury.

How should someone train for climbing though, as presumably there are certain guidelines?

This is a can of worms but the prevailing advice for beginner to intermediate level climbers is simply to climb more. Until you have been climbing several times a week for a couple of years or so, there is no better training regimen than this. Then you move into progressive overload training like most other sports, particularly with a training aid called a 'hangboard' – a wooden block with various small ledges attached to it that you would hang on to strengthen your grip.

What do you think are the physical and mental qualities of a good climber?

While there is an element of mental fortitude required for climbing, all climbing that a novice would be doing would be well protected. There is always some risk, but I would say that more important is to trust the protection (ropes, harness and belay partner) to keep you safe.

A good climber is able to focus and keep breathing, looking around for holds that could allow them to climb more efficiently, and planning ahead to the next move and beyond. A good climber 'climbs lazy' – always picking the least physically taxing route which will facilitate the next move and conserving energy.

How long, on average, would it take a novice climber to be good enough to cope with a challenging climb?

Climbing routes are graded according to difficulty; there are some which an absolute beginner could handle.

What sort of outdoor climbs should a novice climber attempt in the beginning?

A novice should attempt short (under 15m) sport climbs at the beginning as they will lack the endurance to climb further (in part because of a likely lack of efficiency).

Outdoor sport climbing is a partner sport; a novice climber should only be climbing outdoors with an experienced belay partner. This person should act as a guide and mentor for a new climber and choose



Skilled climber
Tad Hulacki

the routes to attempt for them based on their own local knowledge – either from experience or from understanding how to read a climbing route guidebook like RockFax.

What are some of the best easier climbs for newbies to try?

By far the most accessible place to get into climbing is in a climbing gym. You can find climbing gyms in most large towns nowadays; these gyms can cater to both roped (sport) and unroped (boulder) climbing. Going for a session of bouldering, either with an experienced climber to guide you or with a tutoring service by the gym itself is as easy as booking a session and putting on some loose clothes. You can rent shoes at the centre. Once you have gone for a tutored bouldering session and learnt the safety rules and basic technique, you can simply turn up on your own and climb to your heart's content.

How long would it take to build up to being able to complete a tough climb like the one shown on our front cover?

The climb in the picture looks to be overhanging and already at the end of a prolonged section, so you would need to be intermediate level at least – maybe a couple of years of hard climbing. There could be some climbs that give this outward appearance which, for some reason, are not so hard and could be attempted by a newer climber.

Additionally, the climber in the picture is 'leading' – i.e. clipping in the route as he climbs. This means that firstly, he needs to let go with one hand, take a protective clip, and attach it to the rope and the bolt on the cliff face. If he falls, the rope will not catch him until he

falls past the last piece of protection he clipped (likely several metres, with a pendulum motion swinging him towards the cliff face at high speed). A new climber would be 'top roping' – climbing on the clipped protection that the climber before him/her had already clipped on their lead climb. This means that if they fall, they are immediately caught by the rope within a couple of feet. 



'A good climber is able to focus and keep breathing, looking around for holds'

MORE INFORMATION

Tad is the founder of Massif Climbing Equipment, which makes quality consumables and kit for rock climbing. He stays fit by climbing and eating healthily. Visit massif-climbing.com

GET FIT FOR TOUGH HIKES

Whether you're new to hiking or want to raise your game and go further or higher, you'll want to work on your fitness first and make sure you're ready for a new or greater challenge. **Christina Neal asks the experts for some advice**

Y

ou may be a fit runner or cyclist or a regular gym goer who enjoys their strength work, but if you are going to start hiking, you'll find yourself facing new fitness challenges. Varying terrain, steep ascents and descents or not being used to altitude can all take some time to get used to, even if you're already

fairly fit. So while you may be someone who can run for miles on a flat, fairly stable surface, or fine with cycling for endless miles, if you're a new or fairly inexperienced hiker, you'll benefit from doing some targeted training aimed at getting fit for harder hikes. So how can you get fit for a tough hike? And what do we mean by a 'tough hike' exactly? 'Incline and distance can both contribute to how tough a walk is, however, you can do a shorter walk somewhere like the Glyders in Snowdonia and find it just as tough as a 25-mile walk on the North Yorkshire Moors,' says Eli Bishop, a hiker and ambassador for outdoor brand Merrell (merrell.com/UK/en_GB/home) and mental health charity Mind (mind.org.uk). 'It's still important to remember that you may be able to run a 10K or cycle 30 miles every day to work and back but may still find hiking tough. I can walk for miles but get me on a bike or running even a 5K and I can struggle. Even if you are physically fit, I would recommend starting with shorter but equally beautiful walks first to gauge your own level before progressing to the bigger stuff. Remember though that navigation is a fundamental skill for hiking.'

A LIFESTYLE CHOICE

Jamie Ramsay is a British Endurance Adventure Athlete and ambassador for GORE® Wear (gorewear.com/uk/en-uk/) who has ➤➤





'I LIKE TO THINK THAT THE WORK I DO BEFORE I GO HIKING MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE ON THE MOUNTAIN'

– JAMIE RAMSAY (PICTURED)



➤ covered over 30,000km of human powered adventuring. Jamie, who completed a Mongolian trek of 400km on foot accompanying camels, says that treating hiking as a lifestyle is a good outlook. 'A lot of people look at a specific hike or adventure and then try to furiously train for it,' he says. 'This isn't how I approach my adventures. If you are a hiker, biker, runner or mountaineer, you should approach it as a lifestyle rather than looking at individual trips. Therefore, you should

train in a way that means you are always ready for the mental side of adventuring. If we put all of our focus onto one thing then there is a loss when it is over and that can be hard to deal with.'

Good strength is key but cardiovascular endurance cannot be overlooked according to Jamie. 'For hiking, I would adopt a cross discipline routine. The last few hikes I have been on have involved carrying 30kg backpacks, climbing small cliffs and long ascents and descents. Therefore, you need to be fit, strong

and have endurance. I do a lot of HIIT (high intensity interval training) to get overall body fitness. I also do yoga for injury prevention and flexibility and then weights to help with strength.'

Jamie also seeks to make training part of his daily routine and looks for opportunities to keep working on his fitness wherever he can. 'I look at everything I am doing in my daily routine and see how I

Eli Bishop



IS THERE A TYPICAL BUILD OR BODY SHAPE BEST SUITED TO HIKING?

'No,' says Simon from Mountaineerin. 'We see and work with people of all shapes and sizes and sometimes the person you expect to be at the back struggling is out in front leading the way. You might think it goes without saying that the fitter you are the more likely you will be suited to hiking but that isn't always the case. Hiking is both physically and mentally challenging and long days on the trail often require a strong mind to keep you going.'

'Anyone can go hiking and enjoy everything nature has to offer,' says Jamie Ramsay. 'The more you hike the better suited you are and the further and more demanding the hikes can be. Hiking offers a variation of trails. You don't always have to adapt to the trail but find the trail that works for you.'

BEST STRENGTH EXERCISES FOR HIKING

Abbie Watkins, a personal trainer for OriGym Centre of Excellence (origympersonaltrainercourses.co.uk), a leading UK fitness training provider, recommends these exercises for hiking strength...



Goblet squats

- Step-ups
- Goblet squats
- Bulgarian split squats
- Kettlebell deadlifts
- Calf raises
- Box jumps

Abbie says: 'It's good to do a lot of compound movements that will mainly build your lower body strength but also incorporate your core muscles which will help to improve your balance. If you are planning on using walking poles, then it would be good to incorporate a few upper body moves like push-ups, overhead presses and lat raises.'

Don't neglect your strength work. 'Resistance training is just as important as cardio because you'll need to build the muscles that protect your knees and your ankles to avoid injury.'



Kettlebell deadlifts



can change that into training,' he says. 'I reduce my use of public transport and carry more weight and just get used to being active for as much of the day as possible.' Here are some expert tips on getting fit for tough hikes...

■ Work on your strength and cardiovascular fitness – 'I would include lunges, burpees, skipping, deadlifts, squats, long slow runs and long uphill treks in your training,' recommends Jamie.

■ Find those inclines, wherever you are – 'If you are stuck in a town or city, go to the gym and stick the running machine on the highest elevation and watch a box set while walking,' adds Jamie.

■ Develop your mental strength – 'You need to be able to keep your motivation and determination up at all times,' says Jamie. 'Hiking is hard work and there will be a time when you question your ability to continue. If you have thought about this scenario before you start, then you will be able to dig deep and find that spark that makes you continue to push. The more you hike, the more you will learn that the lows are nearly always followed by highs and hard days are followed by easy ones.'

■ Trek or hike whenever you can – 'There isn't a perfect substitute for hill walking and hiking so the best way to train for a long-distance trek or hike is simply to do more hiking or trekking than usual,' says Simon Ogunlana, Company Director of Mountaineerin (mountaineerin.com). ➡

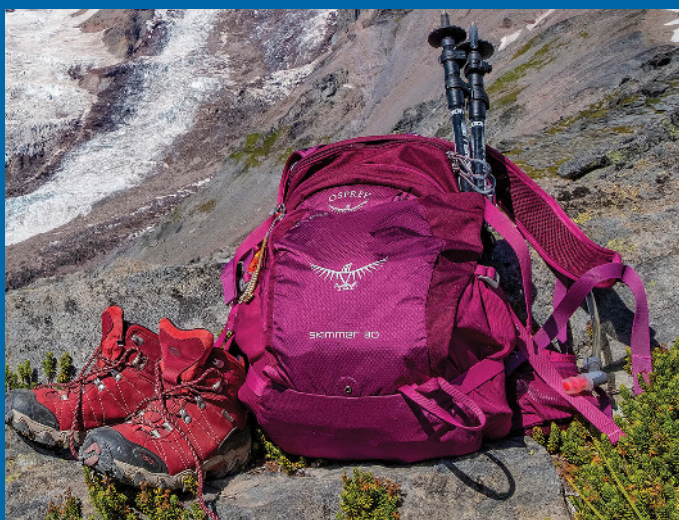
» ■ Work on your navigation skills as your safety could depend on it – ‘When hiking in the UK it’s important to remember that the weather can be extremely changeable which can present unexpected challenges,’ says Simon. ‘Most of the UK’s mountainous areas are near the coast which means that warm moist air rushes off the sea and quickly condenses around the mountains, creating fog and cloud which makes visibility poor and navigation difficult. This is why the ability to use a map and compass is essential when heading out on a bike.’

■ Make the most of the urban world we live in – ‘I like to think that the work I do before I go hiking makes a big difference on the mountain,’ says Jamie. ‘I rarely take elevators or escalators, always double step on staircases and carry heavy backpacks whenever I can. When I arrive in the mountains, I then attack it with a confidence that I have the required leg strength. If the incline is very steep, I will zigzag up the hill and sometimes put my hands on the bottom of my thighs as a support if I’m not using walking poles.’

‘YOU NEED TO BE FIT, STRONG AND HAVE ENDURANCE. I DO A LOT OF HIIT (HIGH INTENSITY INTERVAL TRAINING) TO GET OVERALL BODY FITNESS’

– JAMIE RAMSAY

HOW TO HANDLE A BACKPACK



Get the right backpack for you and make sure you only take what you need. Learn from past adventures. ‘I work on my upper body strength and make sure that my backpack is as efficient as possible,’ says Jamie. ‘If you get used to wearing a heavy backpack in advance then it won’t come as such a surprise. Packing efficiently with the right kit and clothing can make all the difference too. After every adventure, I make a list of all the kit I didn’t need so that I can pack lighter next time.’

‘A pack should always feel heavier in your hand than on your back and if it is fitted properly the weight should go through your hips and legs, as they are the strongest part of your body,’ says Simon. ‘Some manufacturers make women-specific backpacks as well as packs with different back sizes. Taking your time and finding the right backpack for your body is crucial.’

■ Work on a consistent pace when walking uphill – ‘The most efficient way to hike uphill is to walk slowly and steadily,’ says Simon. ‘Walking quickly in big blasts of energy and then getting tired and having to stop often is far less efficient than walking slowly and steadily.’

■ Hit the stepper – If you can’t always get outside and tackle some hills then the stepper at the gym will do the trick. ‘Use the stepper if you can’t get outside during the week,’ says Simon.

■ Don’t ignore core strength – ‘Hiking is my first love and is the one thing I could happily do every single day, but there are some great exercises you can do to build up strength,’ says Eli. ‘I make sure I plank every day.’

■ Keep your muscles supple – ‘Give your body a chance to relax and stretch,’ says Eli. ‘I practice yoga and can also do some stretches on walks when my muscles feel tight, especially my shoulders from carrying a fully loaded backpack.’



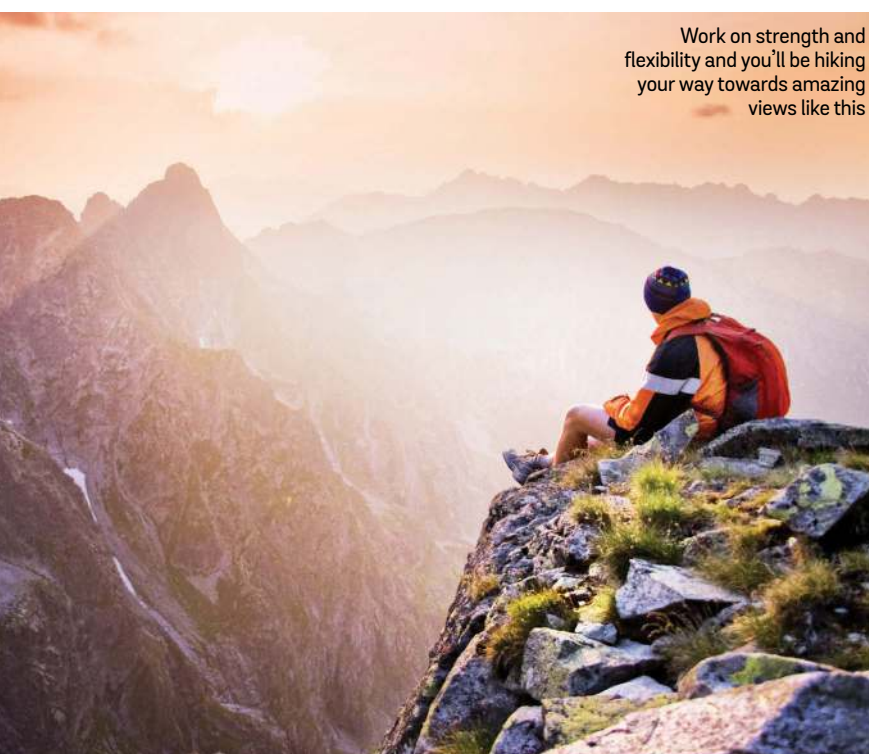
WALKING DOWNHILL ON A STEEP DESCENT

'There are a number of ways you can make downhill easier,' says Jamie. 'Confidence is a big part of it. A lot of people feel nervous of downhills and as a result lean back. This makes it easier to slip, especially if you are on scree or sand. I have a background in trail running and you learn to be more attacking. Having good grip (from the right shoes) is important.'

'When it comes to walking downhill efficiently, I often find it only comes with practice and experience,' says Simon. 'The more you walk downhill the more confident you will become in the grip of your boots and where you can step safely. This allows you to descend faster as it becomes more natural.'

That said, there are some techniques you can use. 'Shorten your step, lean into the hill slightly, have soft knees to prevent jarring and if it is steep ground then place your feet sideways onto the hill so you get more grip,' says Eli.

Work on strength and flexibility and you'll be hiking your way towards amazing views like this



Photography Shutterstock / James Carnegie / Harald Wisthaler

10 OF THE MOST EXTREME CHALLENGES

Looking to push yourself a bit further and surpass your inner limitations? **Lisa Jackson** presents her pick of the toughest, most gruelling fitness feats



The one with...

VERY LITTLE OXYGEN

THE ORIGINAL EVEREST MARATHON, NEPAL

This spectacular event, which can lay claim to the title of the highest marathon in the world, is run at altitude, so the air is extremely thin and you're likely to get breathless just climbing into bed, let alone running 26.2 miles on scree, uneven tracks and swaying suspension bridges. The mostly downhill course starts at an altitude of 5,184m at Gorak Shep, the original Everest Base Camp, and traverses Sherpa trails on which you'll pass the World Heritage Site of Tengboche Monastery, rhododendron forests and breathtaking mountain vistas before ending at Namche Bazaar. Apparently a background in reindeer herding (or more mundane activities such as fell-running or mountaineering) is an advantage: in other words you require more experience than just road-running and need to be able to take care of yourself in a cold, hostile environment. originaleverestmarathon.com

Photography Keith Macintosh



Taking running to the extreme, the Original Everest Marathon in Nepal starts at an altitude of 5,184m and it's all downhill from there

The 6633 Arctic Ultra will give you the chill-factor



The one with...

EXTREME WIND CHILL

6633 ARCTIC ULTRA, CANADA

As if running in the Arctic in winter with not much daylight isn't bad enough, the organisers claim that this event is 'regarded by many as the toughest, coldest, windiest ultra-distance footrace on the planet'. If you've ever experienced sub-zero temperatures

you'll know how your hands and feet eventually start to feel as if they're on fire. Now imagine enduring that feeling for either 120 miles or 380 miles while carrying all your own gear. While both distances cross the line of the Arctic Circle, the 'shorter' race finishes at the First Nations hamlet of Fort McPherson

(a place where temperatures plummeted to their coldest ever in 1894, a brain-freezingly cold -55.6°C), while the longer race continues all the way to the banks of the Arctic Ocean at Tuktoyaktuk, a settlement where many locals still hunt caribou and geese, and herd reindeer for a living. 6633ultra.com

Photography Evan Davies

The one where...

YOU NEED TO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

The Death Race in Vermont includes a 12-hour crawl under barbed wire and a 30,000ft rope pull



DEATH RACE, PITTSFIELD, VERMONT, US

A race with a trademarked catchphrase 'You may die' probably tells you everything you need to know about this 70-hour-long obstacle and challenge-driven race in Vermont's Green Mountains. Its organisers refuse to tell you when it starts or ends or what it entails and boast that they 'want you to fail and encourage you to quit at any time'. Entrants can expect bloody and brutal challenges along the lines of holding stress positions while supporting a wooden log, wading through stinging nettles, and completing an all-night trek, a 30,000ft rope pull and a 12-hour crawl under barbed wire. The website states that 'Every man dies, but not every man lives', so if you want to live a little and take a few risks, then this is the race for you.

Photography Marion Abrams

peakraces.com/death-races ➔



The one with...

THE MOST HOSTILE TERRAIN

JUNGLE ULTRA, PERU

You don't so much 'run' the Jungle Ultra as 'survive' it, as the route of this five-stage 230km race, which plunges through often impenetrable Amazonian rainforest in Peru's Manu National Park, is jam-packed with 70 raging rivers (some of which have to be zip-lined over), dark undergrowth and towering Andean mountains. Entrants have to carry their own kit, including specialist gear to help them survive the hostile terrain. Add to that the fact that it's run at altitude and mostly downhill (it drops 10,500ft), and that it's hot as Hades and you have an extreme event that's a shortcut to your discomfort zone.

beyondtheultimate.co.uk

Photography: Beyond the ultimate/Will Roberts

The one where...

YOU RUN BELOW SEA LEVEL

DEAD SEA MARATHON, ISRAEL

How low can you go? Well, in Israel, you can sink to new levels – 430ft below sea level to be precise, in this quirky race series which takes place on the shores of the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth, as well as a gravel dike jutting out into it. Besides the marathon, there are 5K, 10K, half marathon and 50K options on this flat and fast course which has wonderful views of desert landscapes and the Jordanian mountains in the distance. Of course, a soak in the weirdly oily waters of the Dead Sea afterwards is almost compulsory, just don't shave beforehand and make sure any blisters are still intact or else it'll sting like crazy. deadsea.run



'IN ISRAEL, YOU CAN SINK TO NEW LEVELS – 430FT BELOW SEA LEVEL TO BE PRECISE'

Photography: Elements



It's no surprise that this 250km, six-day desert race in temperatures of 50°C is dubbed 'the toughest footrace on earth'

The one with...

THE SCORCHING HEAT

MARATHON DES SABLES, MOROCCO

Described by the Discovery Channel as 'the toughest footrace on earth', the Marathon des Sables in Morocco's Sahara Desert is probably the one ultra even non-runners have heard of. Not only does it take place in sweltering temperatures of up to 50°C, but water is rationed and if you drink more than what's allowed there's a time penalty. But heat isn't the only enemy here: there's also the sand (which gets absolutely everywhere and often results in truly eye-smarting, fried-egg-sized blisters), the hills and the distance, a mere 250km (156 miles) over six days through one of the world's most inhospitable landscapes. That's the equivalent of running from London to Dover and back again. Oh, and did we mention you need to carry all your own food and equipment? marathondessables.co.uk ➤➤



HOW TO RUN AT ALTITUDE

'Altitude significantly increases the intensity of your running as your heart and breathing rate increase as your body requires more oxygen,' says Dawn Morse, the founder of Core Elements

Training (coreelements.uk.com), who has an MSc in sport and exercise sciences. 'It often takes a few weeks for your body to acclimatise fully, but you can prepare for these changes by including hill repetitions and interval-training sessions into your current training programme prior to your altitude event.'

Here are Dawn's top tips for running at altitude:

- Stay hydrated by drinking slightly more water than usual and avoiding alcohol, caffeine and sodium, because your body will dehydrate more quickly.
- Get plenty of sleep to help your body repair and adjust.
- Include a longer warm-up to help your body ease into your run.

The one with...

EXTREME ELEVATION

ULTRA TRAIL MONT-BLANC, FRANCE, ITALY AND SWITZERLAND

The organisers of this epic Alpine single-stage race, known in ultra-running circles as the UTMB, obviously love understatement, as they describe it as 'quite difficult', despite the fact that it's got a race profile like the teeth of a saw. No sooner will you have run up a mountainside that's hands-on-thighs hard, than you'll be pelting down one at quad-jolting speed. To make matters even more challenging, this 171km (106 mile) mountain race involves 10,000m (more than 32,800ft) of elevation gain, which is more elevation than you'd get climbing Mount Everest. It also has to be tackled at an altitude of around 2,500m and features extreme weather conditions including ferocious winds, torrential rain and the odd blizzard (often in the same day or night). The average finishing time is 40 hours, though runners have 46h30 to complete it. Even getting in is a challenge – not only do you have to gain points to enter, but once you've done that there's a lottery to choose the lucky participants. utmbmontblanc.com



The one with...

THE HUGE DROP-OUT RATE

IDITAROD TRAIL INVITATIONAL, ALASKA

It's an invitation that many would find easy to refuse: running, skiing or biking 350 or 1,000 miles from Knik (near Anchorage) in Alaska to either McGrath or Nome on the shores of the Bering Sea across a barren, frozen landscape on a route that's close to the one used in the famous Iditarod dog-sled race. Would-be entrants have to complete the 350-mile version first before being allowed to apply for the 1000-miler and the drop-out rate of what's billed as 'the world's longest winter ultra-marathon' is staggering: in some years, only about 50 per cent have made it (in 2019 there were 10 finishers of the 1,000-mile event, and in 2012, zero, as it was a particularly snowy year). The event proudly boasts that it built its reputation on its 'notoriously inhospitable conditions and minimal outside support' and entrants must be prepared to carry their own survival gear. Since the event was founded in 2000, only 60 people have completed the 1,000 mile race.

iditarodtrailinvitational.com

So staggering is the Iditarod Trail Invitational, that, in 2012, there were zero finishers

Photography Iditarod Trail Invitational

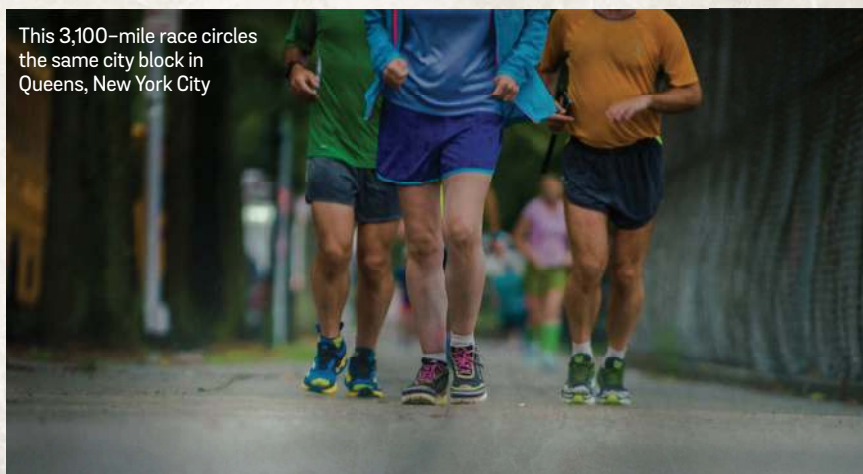
The one with...

NO END IN SIGHT

THE SRI CHINMOY SELF-TRANSCENDENCE 3,100 MILE RACE

Billed as the 'world's longest certified road race', in this über-challenging event runners tackle an almost unbelievable 3,100 miles – the equivalent of running from London to Lagos in Nigeria – by circling round the same city block in Queens, New York City. Running from 6am until midnight for 52 consecutive days, on average runners need to cover about 60 miles a day (just over two marathons daily). In 2019, only seven runners managed to hit the target of completing 5,649 loops of the 883m-long course. Gruelling, and then some! 3100.srichinmoyraces.org ➡

This 3,100-mile race circles the same city block in Queens, New York City



'RUNNERS TACKLE AN ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE 3,100 MILES – THE EQUIVALENT OF RUNNING FROM LONDON TO LAGOS IN NIGERIA'

Photography Sri Chinmoy Ultra Photo





The one with...

THE WILDEST WILDLIFE

FOR RANGERS ULTRA, KENYA

This five-stage, 230km ultra in the home of long-distance running involves traversing stony riverbeds, sun-baked savannah and mountains teeming with wildlife such as zebras, giraffes, impala, elephants and rhino under the watchful eyes of park rangers (aided by helicopters and planes), before camping out each night under canvas and a canopy of stars. Hosted by Beyond Ultimate, all profits go to savetherhino.org and forrangers.com, an international group that provides life insurance, equipment and training to rangers who are the last line of defence against rhino-poaching cartels. In only two years this event has raised an amazing £250,000 for ranger and rhino welfare. beyondtheultimate.co.uk



Watch out, zebra crossing!



Eliud Kipchoge hands out the medals



THE ORIGINAL EVEREST MARATHON



Join a group of
international
runners taking
part in the
highest and
most
spectacular
challenge in
the world

"The holiday was the best I have ever had and the marathon
the best sporting experience of my life."

Richard Hardy – OEM 2019

NOVEMBER 7 TO NOVEMBER 29 2020

originaleverestmarathon.com

FIT FOR PURPOSE

Lara Dunn has a round-up of some of the best fitness gear and apparel to keep you active in the spring



THULE VITAL 6L HYDRATION PACK £105

A compact unisex pack created with high intensity bike rides in mind, this comes with a 2.5 litre hydration bladder as well as storage for the essentials of extra clothing, food and tools in various pockets. Zipped side pockets make grabbing food on the go quick and painless (no need to take off the pack) and the harness and sternum strap make for a secure and stable fit, no matter how rough the terrain.

thule.com



LA SPORTIVA JACKAL £130

Aimed at medium to long distance trail runners, this shoe uses special cushioning designed to give good energy return, helping to reduce fatigue. A broader fit allows for swelling of the foot over the course of longer runs, with an easy to adjust lacing system for the perfect fit. The mid-sole also features an integrated Rock-Shield for good stability and under-foot protection on even the rockiest trails. Men's and women's versions available.

lasportiva.com



BJORN BORG CENDALL BLOCKED TRAINING TIGHTS £55

These striking looking women's exercise tights are super stretchy and have a mid-height rise at the waist for confidence no matter how intense the workout, while a hidden key pocket allows for stowing valuables.

bjornborg.com
johnlewis.com



NIKWAX BASEFRESH £4

There's little worse than fitness kit that retains a slight aroma no matter how you wash it. This inexpensive product is especially formulated to deodorise technical fabrics, and enhance their performance, and can simply be added to a normal machine wash alongside regular detergent. Keeps kit fresher for longer.

nikwax.com



MERRELL MTL LONGSKY £125

A high performance trail running shoe designed with input from ultra runner Anna Frost, this uses lightweight tear-resistant fabric in the uppers, a medial post for good stability and an aggressively lugged Vibram Megagrip outsole for exceptional traction. Fast and supportive for long runs in rugged terrain. Men's and women's available.

merrell.com/blacks.co.uk



BRIDGEDALE TRAILSORT ULTRALIGHT T2 WOMEN'S ANKLE SOCK £14

Super light low ankle socks made using a merino blend for breathability for all activities from running to cycling or gym work, these have cushioned areas on the heels, the balls of the feet and Achilles tendon but lighter mesh areas elsewhere for moisture management. Men's and women's available.

bridgedale.com



MONTANE MINIMUS STRETCH ULTRA PULL-ON £145

Designed to offer low-weight, packable protection in adverse conditions, this pull-on style men's running jacket is made from a stretch waterproof Pertex Shield fabric and has a sleek close fit for ultimate performance.

montane.co.uk



LEKI MCT VARIO CARBON POLES £184.95

These ultra lightweight carbon fibre trekking poles with an ergonomic grip are specifically designed for those who want to move as swiftly as possible in the mountains. They fold down for easy stowing when not in use, but are designed to offer maximum support on even the toughest terrain. Men's and women's available. leki.com



NIKE SWIM VAPOR GOGGLES £27.99

Available with mirrored or plain lenses, these unisex swimming goggles have low profile and curved larger lenses to offer a wider field of view, making them ideal for either pool or open water use.

nikeswim.com/proswimwear.co.uk



OAKLEY SUTRO SUNGLASSES £135

Using Oakley's Prizm™ lenses to enhance colour, contrast and detail, these lightweight unisex sunglasses are designed with cyclists in mind, but are suitable for all sorts of sporting activities. Special nose pads with grip that increases with perspiration add comfort with a secure fit.

oakley.com



SAUCONY GUIDE 13 £120

A combination of support and plush-feeling cushioning in a responsive road running shoe that's happy to give as many miles as you want. Offering sufficient stability for those who need it to allow a natural, comfortable gait, these also have a fit that can accommodate a wide range of foot shapes. Men's and women's versions available.

saucony.com



ARC'TERYX NORVAN LD WOMEN'S £140

With the LD standing for Long Distance, the clue is in the name with these lightweight, but supportive trail running shoes. The materials used in the construction of the shoe and the design are all targeted at endurance runs on rough terrain, giving comfort, protection and durability without a weight penalty. Men's version also available.

arcteryx.com

**'I FEEL SO
MUCH BETTER
IN MYSELF
WHEN I HAVE
DONE A RUN
FOR THE DAY'**

THE POWER OF CROSS TRAINING

If you're tempted to stick at one sport or discipline when you want to get fitter, then think again. Olympic cyclist, Dani Rowe, who won gold in the team pursuit at London 2012, reveals the importance of cross training and how it made a difference to her fitness when she transitioned from cycling to running. Words **Mark Bailey**



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START CROSS TRAINING WITH OTHER SPORTS LIKE RUNNING?

The beauty of health and fitness is that, unless you are a professional athlete competing for medals in a specific sport – like I used to do in the World Championships and Olympic Games – there are so many different activities to try. Since retiring (in December 2018),

I have done everything from swimming to boxing. But I have really loved getting into running. I finished the Wiggle Half Marathon in 2019 and I am doing a lot more running now.

Initially, when I stopped cycling, I sustained two stress fractures (through running) from my body just not being used to the impact. All I'd done for years was ride a bike – I hardly even walked. But cross training can prevent problems like that before they happen. Doing other sports strengthens your overall body and sorts out your weak spots. Cross training works different muscles, develops your all-round fitness and makes you a healthier athlete. And because I rode a bike for so long, it is so nice to do something else and mix it up.

WHAT OTHER BENEFITS MIGHT A CYCLIST GET BY ADDING SOME RUNNING INTO THEIR TRAINING?

Running is more time efficient for my goals than cycling. When you run, you don't have to do a long duration to burn the same calories because it is weight-bearing. It can also help to prevent stress fractures like the ones I suffered. I wasn't that surprised I got them because I knew how little walking or running I had done, and I pushed myself too hard. But if you can just do a little bit more running and walking, that will be good for your bones, tendons, ligaments and your overall health. ➤➤

Olympic gold medallist, Dani, has enjoyed the strengthening benefits of cross training





DANI'S FOUR STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL CROSS TRAINING

The first hurdle is to just try a new sport for the first time – it's a big change. But once that hurdle is out of the way, you know you can do it.

Seek advice from people, suss out clubs and speak to friends. Social media is also good for reaching out to people for advice.

Start slowly. Just once or twice a week. If you push too hard while using new muscles for the first time, you can get injured. Build up gently as you go along.

Make sure your new sport excites you. If you give something a go, nine times out of 10 you will love it.

'CROSS TRAINING WORKS DIFFERENT MUSCLES, DEVELOPS YOUR ALL-ROUND FITNESS AND MAKES YOU A HEALTHIER ATHLETE'

➤ WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR SWIMMERS AND RUNNERS WHO TRY CYCLING TOO?

Cycling is low impact, so it's a great way to improve your cardiovascular system without really hurting your body. It will add something to your overall health and mix up your training. It also means you get to travel longer distances, see new places and enjoy nature.

AS A BEGINNER, HOW DID YOU PROGRESS YOUR RUNNING AS THE MONTHS WENT BY?

Initially, I started just doing duration running, so running at a steady pace for a certain amount of time. But my dad has run a few marathons and he gave me a programme in the lead-up to the Wiggle Half Marathon in Manchester. I did different types of running in terms of duration and intensity. So I might run half a mile at a steady pace, then half a mile fast.

I know from my cycling that if you only go at the same pace, you will never get faster. You might get more efficient and be able to run further but you need those changes of intensity to improve your speed. I like those intense interval sessions, as I loved them on the bike too. It's a bit weird, I guess, but rather than do a four-hour ride I'd do an hour and push myself to the limit. That translates well into running too. I probably only do 5-6 hours a week now, whereas I used to do 20 hours, but it's a lot more intense.

WHAT DIFFERENT REWARDS DO YOU GET FROM AMATEUR RUNNING COMPARED TO ELITE CYCLING?

Because I can choose what I do, when I do it, and how hard I do it, I really enjoy it. It is more for my mental health now. I feel so much



better in myself when I have done a run for the day. That is why I train in the morning and get it done. My day feels significantly better if I do. Once I am actually exercising, I have always got a smile on my face – if not a grimace – and after having a shower and some breakfast I just feel so much better.

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE LONDON MARATHON?

I do a lot of running on the road. But I do some training in the gym too. I might use the treadmill for a warm-up. I also have a loop where I run 1-2km on a gravel path. I am hoping to do the marathon this year. It was a massive tick in the box getting through the Wiggle Half and I was pleased with my time (1 hr 42mins). I would love to get around the London Marathon course. I have got more respect for it now, after doing a half. It's a huge challenge.

WHAT OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU ENJOYED?

I did a lot of swimming as I entered the Swim Serpentine event. My initial aim was to complete the London Classics, which is the London Marathon, Swim Serpentine and Ride London 100, which I have already done twice. Because it was an open-water swim, I reached out to British Olympic and open-water swimmer, Jazz Carlin. I also did an open-water camp in Majorca. Swimming in the sea is pretty tough but Swim Serpentine was really good. I also like walking – a lot of my friends have dogs and we just go out.

ARE THERE ANY OUTDOOR SPORTS YOU WOULDN'T TRY?

My husband is trying to get me into mountain biking. I am not a massive fan and I am not super-confident. That is the biggest thing. A lot of mountain biking is quite technical. Since retiring, I have been on the road and had some charity days on the track again, but it is nice to do different things. I am addicted to exercise, so I don't need persuading to do it.

FINALLY, WHAT IS THE BEST MOTIVATIONAL TOOL YOU LEARNED AS AN ATHLETE?

I have grown up with a sporting mental attitude, so I don't get nervous about trying new things. It is ingrained in me to go for it and give things a try and I think that is really positive. But being able to push myself is the biggest one. I have learned through cycling and other sports just how amazing the body is, how far you can push it, and what it is capable of if you really try. 

MORE INFORMATION

Dani Rowe is a Wiggle ambassador. Visit wiggle.co.uk

WHY YOU NEED TO WORK ON YOUR WEAKNESSES



Working on weaker body parts, like the arms, will make you more resistant to injury and improve fitness

When Dani Rowe retired from pro cycling and started swimming and boxing, she realised that cycling hadn't prepared her for the rigours of other sports. 'My arms were the big weakness,' she admits. 'When you are cycling, you are only moving your legs but with boxing it was my arms, and with swimming it was my arms, and with lifting weights in boot camps it was my arms.' Ignoring your weaker body parts only makes you vulnerable to aches and niggles, so always try to balance out your training with different activities. 'It will improve your overall fitness and make you more resilient to injury,' insists Rowe.

FEELING LIKE A FRAUD

Performance psychologist **Dr Josephine Perry** shines a light on imposter syndrome – a very real phenomenon that can cause even the highest of achievers to be overcome by self-doubt

A

lbert Einstein thought of himself as a swindler. Will Smith says he doubts himself every single day. Ben Fogle never felt he belonged. They may be Nobel-prize winning, Grammy-owning and mountain-conquering but, like 70 per cent of us,

they feel like imposters.

Imposter syndrome is when you have a deeply felt belief that you just don't have what it takes, no matter what your achievements. You fail to internalise your successes and live in fear of being exposed as a fraud. Instead of connecting your achievements to your abilities or efforts, you feel any accomplishments are undeserved; you keep expecting to be unmasked. Irrefutable evidence of success is put down to luck. Compliments get discounted as people being polite. A personal best becomes a fluke. A win gets attributed to better athletes not showing up that day.

Ironically, the more you feel it, the less of an imposter you are likely to be. This is the 'Dunning-Kruger effect'. When you first start doing something, you have so little experience that you don't realise how bad you are at it. In fact, you think you're pretty good. However, once you've done lots of practice and training, you become more of an expert, and that expertise simply helps you to see how big the subject is, and how much more there is still to know. It is this space between where you are and where you believe true expertise lies that makes you feel like you don't fit in or deserve the position you have. You may have officially 'made it' but you

can see there is further to go – and more to lose.

Performance-wise, if you have joined a team or club and you don't feel like you deserve to be there, you will do everything you can to eradicate your self-doubt: extensively preparing, maximising motivation, working hard on your skills and focusing on boosting your fitness. Clearly, doing all that is going to positively affect your performance. You'll also be radiating humility and displaying a lack of arrogance. But the pressure and extra work that comes from trying to fit in stops you feeling comfortable, prevents enjoyment and, if you don't believe you deserve your successes, you won't celebrate them. You put in a shedload of work and come out with nothing but a shedload of guilt, impacting your wellbeing and making you susceptible to anxiety, depression, burnout or emotional exhaustion.

ACHIEVING ISN'T BELIEVING

Stuart Travis is one of the fastest cyclists in the country. He holds the national record for 30 miles, having covered the distance in 53 minutes and 44 seconds. That is cycling at 33.6mph for almost an hour. He's achieved times most amateur riders could only dream of, yet his imposter syndrome means he doesn't even feel confident labelling himself a cyclist. 'I only started riding competitively in 2014, but to get to where I have in a short space of time means I must have fluked it,' he says. 'I know even when I've set national records that someone else would do better if they were there on the day.' This mindset means he doesn't





**'FEELING LIKE
AN IMPOSTER
MEANS YOU
RESTRICT THE
OPPORTUNITIES
YOU GO FOR'**

▶▶ celebrate success. Not even after setting the national record. 'I had just come off a stag do, which cemented my belief that I'm not that good, because I only did it off the back of a bender.'

As well as reduced wellbeing and bypassing celebrations, feeling like an imposter means you self-restrict the opportunities you go for, taking chances only when you feel 100 per cent ready, giving away fantastic opportunities to others who ironically may be less well skilled, qualified or fit than you. If you feel completely out of place in the weights section at the gym, for example, you'll stick

'THE THINGS THAT PREVIOUSLY LED TO MY IMPOSTER SYNDROME, I NOW OWN AND EMBRACE'

to the cardio machines – limiting performance success. If you feel you don't deserve to be up front at parkrun, you'll start too far back and run slower as you have to weave through others for the first couple of kilometres.

Travis was one such self-restrictor. 'After I broke the records, I went through a period of wondering 'How do I top that?'' I didn't think I could, so I didn't ride for three months and I only got back into proper training after six months. This meant if I got beaten, I had a good excuse.'

FAINT PRAISE

With imposter syndrome impacting so many of us, understanding what causes it could help to overcome it. Like so many conditions, studying your childhood is a good place to start. Growing up with parents or teachers who place a huge focus on achievement can taint our self-worth. Growing up in a family where you are labelled 'the clever one' or 'the sporty one' can also cause issues when you start doing something outside of that role. And being praised inappropriately can be harmful too: undeserved praise can be pretty transparent, so we learn to distrust any praise at all. But not getting that praise means we feel unworthy and inadequate, and the cycle starts anew. Regular, deserved praise that focuses on effort and behaviours is what we need to help protect against imposter syndrome.

Simon Mundie is a BBC sports reporter. He presents the podcast *Don't Tell Me The Score* on BBC Radio 4 and loves playing both rugby and tennis. In the studio, he sounds relaxed and completely in control. On the tennis court, he looks at home. And yet, he struggled with imposter syndrome for a long time. He puts that down to the way his approach is different to other reporters. 'I like football, but I don't



support a specific team,' he says, 'and this is very unusual for a sports reporter. It is always one of the first questions you're asked in the newsroom. I assumed a team, because it is the done thing and it fitted in with my perception of how a sports reporter should sound, but that isn't me being authentically me.' Mundie realised that to feel more comfortable and less of an imposter, he needed to embrace his different approach. 'I see sport as fun and something not to be taken too seriously. This gave me a distinctive style and I now embrace the fact that I don't support a football team. The things that previously led to my imposter syndrome, I now own and embrace. The fears I had about being found out no longer hold water.'

CONFIDENCE IS KEY

Mundie cracked the code to overcoming the worst elements of his imposter syndrome; he owned his fears and worked hard to grow his confidence. High levels of confidence give us a degree of certainty that we can achieve our goals and help us feel we deserve our place. Boosting our levels of resilience and mental toughness, it is a lens through which we think and feel about everything that happens to us. The higher our confidence, the more rose-tinted our glasses become. It means we focus on what is needed to be successful, rather than on what is necessary to avoid failure. Once we are more confident, we will care less about being judged. Once we accept recognition, we can enjoy the fruits of our successes, rather than worrying that we just got lucky. 

FIVE SIGNS OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME

1 You don't celebrate success because you don't feel like you deserve it or really earned it.

2 You openly accept failures but make lots of excuses for success. Phrases like 'I just got lucky' or 'I only did well because nobody good showed up today' get rolled out regularly.

3 You struggle to accept compliments and always bat them back by playing down your part in whatever went well.

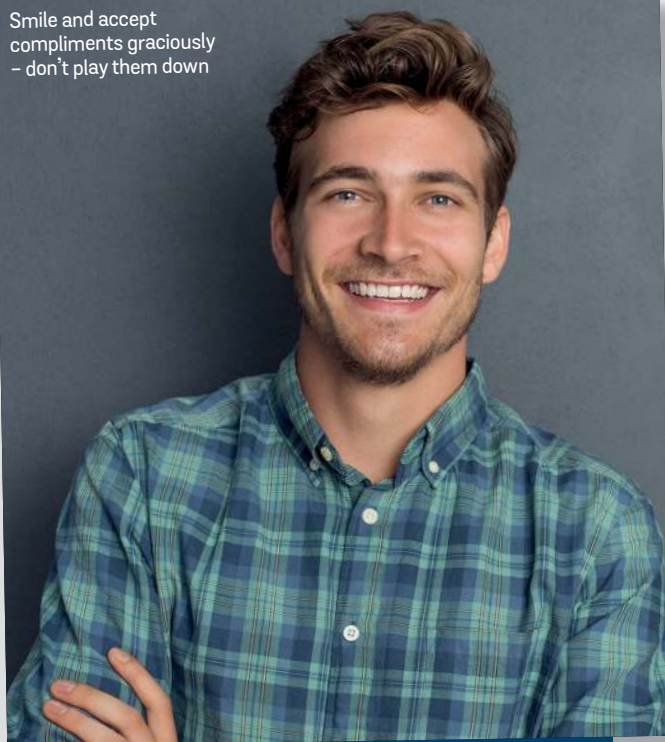
4 You find yourself using lots of minimising language.

5 At the end of a project, event or competition, you spend far more time focusing on what went wrong rather than what you did well.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

How to boost self-confidence and feel like less of a fake

Smile and accept compliments graciously – don't play them down



■ WATCH YOUR WORDS

Proactively reframe any language you use which reinforces your imposter syndrome. We reframe by finding a positive or helpful element to what we are thinking. Turning 'I was lucky' into 'I worked hard' reinforces your efforts. Taking 'I didn't do much' and changing it to 'I loved being involved' highlights the part you did play.

■ CREATE A CONFIDENCE JAR

You just need a jar and 24 small pieces of paper. Every time you have a success – new PB, completed work project, heavier weight lifted, extra rep completed or a new skill mastered – scribble it down and put it in your jar. Soon, you will have loads of evidence that you deserve your successes. Leaving your jar by your bed or in your kit bag means those successes regularly stay at the front of your mind.

■ ENJOY YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Rather than explaining away successes, celebrate them. This will help you appreciate all the ways you have developed, improved and been rewarded for your efforts.

■ ACCEPT THE RECOGNITION

Embrace praise and compliments. Instead of arguing them down, smile and say 'thank you'.

Photography Shutterstock

the big retreat Wales

22nd-25th May 2020

The 'FEEL GOOD' Festival

Escape
to the
Big Retreat Wales

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ADVENTURE

TRAVEL, EXPLORE, EXPERIENCE

YOUR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Putting your best foot forward on a hiking adventure could be the best antidote to stress according to new research. Of the people surveyed in a recent YouGov poll, 89.9 per cent reported that walking in nature or green spaces helped them to unwind and relax. With that in mind why not put your hiking skills to the test with an adventure-seeking hike? Scotland's thrilling Aonach Eagach Ridge (six miles in length and a grade two scramble) and the rocky Besseggen Ridge in Norway are top of our hiking bucket list.

CONTENTS

- Ten great family adventures **040**
- Outdoor spring kit round-up **046**
- Adventure racing for beginners **048**
- Island Bagging experiences **054**





OF THE BEST FAMILY ADVENTURES

Got a thirst for adventure and want to take the kids along for the ride? No problem! Here are several exciting UK excursions and experiences that the whole family can enjoy this year. Words Claire Chamberlain

01 CHECK OUT A FESTIVAL

Think festivals are all about music and drinking? Not so. Some festivals have well and truly embraced the wellness and adventure arena, offering a host of experiences and activities designed to leave you feeling invigorated, refreshed and at one with the natural world. And the even better news? They're perfect for the whole family. We love The Big Retreat in Pembrokeshire, which offers a host of family adventure activities, including bug hunts, wild swimming, assault courses, parkour, den building, bushcraft skills and storytelling.

MORE DETAILS: The Big Retreat takes place from 22-25 May 2020. Visit thebigretreatwales.co.uk for further information and booking.



Build a den with the kids or tackle an assault course at The Big Retreat in Pembrokeshire

02 RACE THE TRAIN!

Fancy taking part in a race that's as exciting for spectators as it is for you? Then Race The Train could be just the thing. Taking place alongside the Talylyn Railway (as far as is accessible) on its journey to Abergynolwyn and back, the route will see you cover 14 miles along varied terrain – think public roads, lanes, farmland, tracks and rough grazing pastures – as you see if you can beat the train back to the station.

But the best bit (for your family, at least)? Spectators get to ride in the train as you run, meaning they can cheer you on. Of course, if your kids aren't ones for sitting back and enjoying the ride, there are plenty of opportunities for them to pull on their running shoes and get racing: with a 10K (for 15 years plus); 5.5 miles (for 10 years plus); 3.5 miles (for nine years plus); and Toddlers Trot (for everyone, including babes in arms), the whole family can get involved!

MORE DETAILS: This year's Race The Train takes place on 15 August 2020. To enter, visit racethetrain.com ➡➡



Race the train and get cheered on by its passengers

03 HEAD FOR A HIKE

The best thing about hiking (other than the outdoor exercise, fresh air and often expansive views, of course) is the fact it's an extremely purse-friendly pursuit: as long as you've got good-quality footwear, waterproofs and a decent rucksack, you're good to go. Depending on the age of your kids, you may need a bit more equipment – a sling or child backpack carrier will be a must if your little ones are still small, but if they are still portable in this way, it's often the best time for longer-haul hikes, as you won't be restricted by how far they can travel on their own two legs. If your children are a little older but still young, you'll likely be limited by distance for a few years, but this doesn't mean your walks and hikes need be any less fun: find trails with rivers and stepping stones; search for bugs; or turn your hike into a scavenger hunt en route to keep them engaged. And don't forget the snacks (or even better, a picnic): long walks and hungry kids don't mix.

WE LOVE: Box Hill Stepping Stones Walk (2 miles, moderate hills, mixed terrain), which starts from the National Trust Visitor Centre KT20 7LB.



Explore trails with rivers and stepping stones, or hunt for bugs, on a hike with the whole family

04 GIVE WATER SPORTS A GO

With the spring and summer months approaching, it's the perfect time to get your kids out on the water. Hiring paddleboards is a great family activity – older children can get involved paddling their own boards, and younger kids can sit at the front and enjoy the ride while you do the work. Hiring a canoe is also a good option for families – kids will generally be given their own short oars, so you can all experience the excitement of propelling yourselves downriver. Life jackets will be compulsory for children for all watersport activities.

MORE DETAILS: Check out local watersports providers in your area. We love Lake District Paddle Boarding (lakedistrictpaddleboarding.co.uk), which offers introductory lessons to paddleboarding and private family sessions, on Derwent Water, Coniston and Windermere.



05 HIT THE HIGH ROPES

A high ropes course involves making your way along an assault course above the ground. Not for the faint-hearted, you (and your kids) will be harnessed into the course, before tackling tricky crossings, unstable bridges and, often, experiencing the thrill of zip wires, before getting your feet back on solid ground once more. Check for course restrictions, as there may be age, height or weight limits at some centres. Go Ape's Treetop Adventure has no age limit, but a height limit of 1m, making it the perfect challenge for families with young children.

MORE DETAILS: Go Ape is open at 34 locations nationwide. Visit goape.co.uk

'YOU (AND YOUR KIDS) WILL BE HARNESSSED INTO THE COURSE, BEFORE TACKLING TRICKY CROSSINGS'

06 HAVE A WILD WEEKEND AT HOME

Fancy living life on the wild side with your kids? Then dedicate an entire weekend to wild activities – you don't even need to venture far from home! Pitch a tent in your back garden (if you have one) and sleep under canvas (knowing all the mod cons are close to hand should you need them); go for bug hunts in the park; head for a bike ride; light a campfire and toast marshmallows; set up a mud kitchen with old pots, pans and utensils; and go foraging in local woodland (what you find will depend on the time of year, but it could be anything from wild garlic to blackberries). Pick and choose from the above options or put together your own wild playtime. It's fun acting like a kid sometimes!

WE LOVE: Keeping cosy under canvas together, knowing the kettle isn't far! ➤➤

Pitch a tent in your back garden and gather round the campfire



At the Spitfire Scramble in Hornchurch Country Park in Essex, children can take part in a Mini Scramble



07 TAKE PART IN A 24-HOUR RACE

OK, we appreciate your tots aren't going to be running all through the night but bear with us. The thing that makes 24-hour races a great place for families is the overnight element.

'We've seen a big rise in the number of runners who make the Scramble a family weekend – my own kids included,' says Danny Coyle, race director of Spitfire Scramble, London's only 24-hour trail race. 'They think it's a wonderful adventure to camp out for a couple of nights, and having so many families on-site has helped create the friendly and fun atmosphere we always see.'

But it's not just the camping and camaraderie that makes an event like this super for kids – they often get the chance to participate, too, so they can test their own endurance while you're pushing yours to the limit.

'We added a race for four- to 14-year-olds two years ago, and it's gone from strength to strength. Some of the older children also accompany their mum or dad on a lap of the main course – it's fantastic to see the next generation enjoying themselves and hopefully being inspired to become runners themselves.'

MORE DETAILS: This year's Spitfire Scramble takes place on 18-19 July 2020. Visit spitfirescramble.co.uk



08 SIGN UP FOR PARKRUN

parkrun probably needs no introduction from us! Needless to say, these free, timed, weekly 5K events held in parks across the country are the perfect way to get the whole family active together – even the youngest members of your tribe can come along for the ride in a buggy! Is 5K too long for the kids? Then get involved in junior parkrun, a series of 2K runs for children aged four to 14 (parents, you can run with your kids – just don't head down the finish funnel, as you won't have a barcode!).

MORE DETAILS: Visit parkrun.org.uk for information on your nearest parkrun and junior parkrun.

OTHER IDEAS

Of course, there are so many other adventures you can go on with your family! Why not try...



CAMPING



RAFT BUILDING



COASTEERING



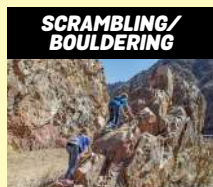
TREE CLIMBING



BUGGY RUNNING



WILD SWIMMING



SCRAMBLING/
BOULDERING



SURFING



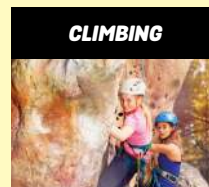
PAINT BALLING



ZIP LINING



FORAGING



CLIMBING

Photography Shutterstock

09 GET ON YER BIKE(S)

Cycling is a great way to head out on an adventure, and the good news is that, thanks to a host of family bike accessories, you don't need to wait until your children are old enough to pedal huge distances themselves before you can get going. Child bike seats, trailers and tagalongs provide a range of options for your little ones, depending on their age and ability. If you won't be riding regularly and therefore don't want to fork out the cash to buy these yourself, they will usually be available to hire at cycling centres – call ahead to see which options are available. And of course, even if they're not cycling themselves, your kids will still need to wear bike helmets to keep them safe.

WE LOVE: Cycling along the Tarka Trail in Devon. See tarkatrail.org.uk for details

10 HEAD OUT AFTER DARK

Taking a stroll through the woods or the park is all well and good, but head there after dark, equipped with torches and headlamps, and it's a whole different adventure. The great thing is, you don't have to stray too far afield to experience the thrills of being outdoors after dark, because even areas you and the kids know well can take on a whole different feel. See if you can spot or hear any wildlife, gaze up at the stars, then make your way home and cosy up together under blankets with a mug of hot chocolate. If you're feeling even more adventurous, you could take a trip to a National Park, where the opportunity to stargaze is second to none. The UK has four National Parks that are International Dark Sky Reserves – Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia, South Downs and Exmoor, as well as two International Dark Sky Parks, in Northumberland and the Cairngorms.

MORE DETAILS: To find out more about Dark Skies National Parks, visit darkskiesnationalparks.org.uk/about/stargazing 

'IF YOU'RE FEELING EVEN MORE ADVENTUROUS, YOU COULD TAKE A TRIP TO A NATIONAL PARK'



Hit Devon's Tarka Trail for family fun on two wheels



GO OUTSIDE

Embrace the elements with **Lara Dunn**'s round-up of the best outdoor kit and accessories



DARN TOUGH LIGHT HIKER CREW SOCK £20

Made using high quality merino wool for optimal comfort, durability and temperature management, these hiking socks have reinforced cushioning at the Achilles tendon, and mesh zones at the top of the foot for extra breathability.

trekitt.co.uk



LOMO DRY BAG SWIMMING TOW FLOAT £19.99

If you're an outdoor swimmer, a tow float is a must for safety. This inexpensive and highly visible version – it comes in pink and orange – also doubles as a handy dry bag and is extremely tough and durable.

lomo.co.uk



HYDROFLASK 210Z £31.95

Available in a multitude of lovely colours, this rugged bottle is made from stainless steel, so won't adopt the taste of what you put inside it. It's insulated to keep cold drinks cold for up to 24 hours and hot liquids hot for up to 12.

uk.hydroflask.com



ASOLO MEN'S GREENWOOD GV BOOT £196.15

With a one-piece highly water-resistant leather upper and a breathable Gore-Tex lining, this hiking boot is ready for year-round adventure. A tough protective toe rand and a deep tread on the grippy Vibram outsole with self-cleaning lugs make it suitable for even the least welcoming of terrain. Women's version also available.

asolo.com



GREGORY JADE 38 £135

Light and sleek, this pack is designed specifically for women. The 38-litre capacity is spot on for overnight adventures, summer weekends or super lightweight hut-to-hut type hikes. The harness is supportive and well-cushioned for ultimate comfort, even with a full pack. Comes with its own rain cover. The men's equivalent is Zulu 40.

eu.gregorypacks.com



OBOZ WOMEN'S FIREBRAND II LOW B-DRY £125

With a waterproof upper and a super aggressive and grippy outsole, this shoe is designed with rough trails in mind. A dual density midsole and a nylon shank give the foot extra support on challenging terrain. Men's also available.

obozfootwear.com



FINDRA MARIN MERINO COWL NECK TOP £100

Made from the softest and most breathable merino wool, this great-looking women's top is constructed seamlessly for ultimate comfort. The cowl neck is cosy, as are the thumb loops on the cuffs, but the top is perfect for spring, autumn and winter use.

findraclothing.com

PARAMO WOMEN'S FUERA SMOCK £75

Windproof but highly breathable, this lightweight smock-style jacket offers good levels of water repellency too, making it ideal for spring outdoor activities where the weather could be changeable. It's fully recyclable through Paramo too. Men's also available.

paramo-clothing.com



SALOMON OUTSPEED 360 3L JACKET £220

Incredibly light, yet waterproof and protective, this men's jacket packs down into its own chest pocket yet provides exceptional freedom of movement and great protection when the weather takes a turn for the worst. Elasticated cuffs and hem, and a peaked hood help keep everything dry, no matter what the weather.

salomon.com



ADIDAS TERREX MEN'S FREE HIKER PARLEY £169.95

Part trail running shoe, part hiking boot, these are just the ticket for those who like a responsive feel to their hike. With less of a sense of weight and bulk than a traditional boot, these have a comfortable foot-hugging water repellent knitted upper and a flexible and cushioned, but grippy outsole.

Women's also available.

adidas.co.uk

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ADVENTURE RACING

Adventure racing was once the domain of the hardy enthusiast but is now rapidly growing as a sport for newcomers. **Malcolm Bradbrook** looks at what's involved and why it's becoming so popular





'WE SEEM TO SEE A LOT OF TRIATHLETES WHO HAVE BECOME FRUSTRATED WITH TRYING TO TRIM A FEW SECONDS OFF THEIR SPRINT TIME'



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arathons, trail running and triathlons may have to move over as a new kid on the outdoor events block is coming up fast on the inside. Adventure racing events are popping up across the country and further afield and are tempting more and more people away from the mainstream.

The reason for their growth in popularity is relatively straightforward: they are exciting, versatile and feature sports we don't do week-in, week-out, such as kayaking and paddleboarding. To top that off, they are usually set in some of the most stunning scenery that the UK has to offer.

One of the events to surf the tide of popularity in the past decade is the Quest Adventure Series, which started in Ireland and has expanded across the water.

Oli Kirwan, Race Director for Quest Adventure Series, says the event was created for two basic reasons. Firstly, in Killarney, they had Ireland's highest mountains on their doorstep, and secondly, they wanted to open up adventure

racing to new audiences. He explains: 'There were so many multiday adventure races that demanded a lot of commitment and fitness for all participants, as well as the need to own a lot of expensive commitment.'

MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

Oli's starting point was that if you could run 10K and wanted a memorable experience in beautiful scenery, they had the event for you. They added road bike and kayak sections to the trail run, and Quest was born.

Just 200 people participated in the first event and when

they reached 10,000 participants across five events in Ireland, they jumped across the sea and into the UK with an event in Wales that is now entering its fourth year.

Oli adds: 'We'd thought about it for a while and just wanted somewhere beautiful and challenging that people

Take part in an event as a team or go solo



Adventure racing features activities that you wouldn't do in your day-to-day training, like kayaking



Strong bonds are formed on multiday challenges

OLI KIRWAN'S COUCH TO QUEST TRAINING TIPS

Quest has developed a 12-week training plan to get complete beginners to the start line in good shape and to the finish line with a smile on their face. The first four weeks establish a solid base of fitness and the remaining seven weeks focus on race-specific training, such as hill running and cycling and the odd 'brick' session, in which you will run immediately after cycling to get your legs used to that unique sensation.

As important as building up the endurance is the need to get your stomach used to 'race food' such as jelly babies, energy gels and shot blocks. This is important as some may upset your stomach, or you may find some hard to eat when running or cycling.

For full details on Couch to Quest, go to questadventureseries.com/training

would want to go to, and Snowdonia had lots of those things.'

Participants can choose from three routes, so there's one to suit all fitness levels: the 50km Expert; the 38km Sport and the 23km Challenge.

'We're different to a lot of the events out there like Ironman and Tough Mudder in that we don't throw a lot of marketing at an event – we put it on and if people like it then they come back and bring their friends and that is how we grow.

'It's perfect for the weekend warrior type of person, so we get complete beginners, people who want to improve and we seem to see a lot of triathletes who have become frustrated with trying to trim a few seconds off their sprint time and just want a great experience.'

It will be a test, though, as Quest Adventure Series is always set in rugged and challenging landscapes, but Oli stresses that the challenge is completion, not the time. The good news for English adventure fans is that the company is now looking to expand into England and is eyeing rugged terrain from Land's End to ➤➤



The varied terrain and camaraderie keep adventure racing exciting



Traversing rivers and scaling mountains is par for the course



➤ Berwick-upon-Tweed to find the ideal location. Husband and wife team, Lee and Liz Merrett, dipped their toe into the adventure racing scene – the SupBikeRun, in Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire – as they felt they needed a change from the triathlons they enjoyed so much. One of the major reasons that people give for trying their hand at adventure racing is that they feel stuck in a rut with their usual events.

OVERNIGHT ADVENTURE

Fifty-year-old Lee from Oxfordshire explains: 'I have long thought that when I am tired of triathlon that adventure racing will take over, certainly as I get older and even slower. Liz was also keen to try paddleboarding, so this ticked a lot of boxes. A bonus was that it was not a long event and we could camp over the night before, adding to the adventure.'

The event was set up for people with a good level of general fitness, but novices to paddleboarding, as classes were given the day before the race. Lee adds: 'Heavy weed in the lake made the paddleboard hard going and you had to clear weeds from the fin to continue moving, a process of going from standing up to

'THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE ADVENTURE RACE IS WHAT MAKES IT SO BRILLIANT'

lying down and fishing around under the paddleboard. I did go in, several times. The event was so much fun, and not competitive. There were some very good paddleboarders who were going for it, but for the most it was just a fun event.'

The pair managed to pick up places out on the bike and run, which was off-road but not too challenging for the novice.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Liz says: 'Adventure racing will certainly form part of future challenges. We are pretty much using mountain bikes every weekend over winter instead of the dreaded turbos that most triathletes utilise when the weather turns.'

But these events are not just for the newcomers and the front of the pack will buzz along at a high pace. One such racer is 37-year-old Killarney native, Barry Cronin, who started nine years ago but quickly discovered he had a real knack for such events, with several wins and many top fives under his belt.

He says: 'I love it. I do the odd triathlon but the unpredictability of the adventure race is what makes it so brilliant and it is such an incredible atmosphere – about 80 per cent of the people in the race are just there to complete it and have a great time.'

Photography: clearskiesahead.com/Marek Hajdasz/Andrew McCandlish

TOP UK ADVENTURE RACES

SUPBIKERUN (ISLE OF PURBECK, DORSET)

With so much attention being focused on the traditional mountain spots of the UK like

Snowdonia, the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands, it is easy to overlook other stunning locations. This is one such event and involves paddleboarding, mountain biking and trail running along a stunning coastal peninsula on a weekend. 25-26 July, 2020. supbikerun.co.uk

RAT RACE COAST TO COAST

Rat Racers run, ride and kayak 105 miles across the Scottish Highlands taking in incredible views as they traverse from Nairn past the historic Cawdor Castle, the legendary Loch Ness and the mountainous Glen Nevis and Glen Coe. 12-13 September, 2020. ratracecoasttocoast.co.uk

QUEST WALES

This one-day multi-adventure sports race starts and finishes in the idyllic village of Betws-y-Coed in the shadow of Snowdon. You'll run, cycle and kayak across the spectacular mountains and valleys and can choose from three routes: 50km Expert; 38km Sport and 23km Challenge. Kayaks are provided as part of the entry fee. 20 June, 2020. questadventureseries.com

RACE THE SUN

This event in the Brecon Beacons sees teams of four set off at sunrise on this Triathlon-style adventure challenge aiming to finish before sunset. Teams will cycle, hike and canoe around the beautiful countryside. 3 June, 2020. active.com

QUESTARS COTSWOLD ADVENTURE RACE

Questars adventure races are for beginners and more experienced athletes alike, and include mountain biking, trail running, plus an option to kayak. All kayaking equipment is provided and bike hire is available if needed. Take part as a solo participant, in a pair, or as a team of three or four people. 16 May, 2020. questars.co.uk

BRIGG BOMBER QUADRATHLON

This takes the triathlon format and adds a kayak. It involves a 1.5K river swim, 38K bike, a 7K kayak, 10K run and may be a speedy race this year as the World Quadrathlon Federation (WQF) has awarded the event the middle-distance European Championships. 24 May, 2020. lincsquad.co.uk

ROYAL MARINES CHARITY BOOTCAMP CHALLENGE

If you want to see how it's done in the military, this event in Bristol gives adults of all ages and abilities the chance to try out the Potential Royal Marines Course (PRMC) which anyone looking to join the elite unit would have to complete. 25 July, 2020. rmc-bootcampchallenge.co.uk

MAN VS COAST

This event covers one of the most famous coastlines in the UK, starting at St Michael's Mount and finishing at Land's End. It is a 23-mile route, which takes in high cliffs, brooding moorland, picture-perfect beaches, crashing waves, big swells, rough-hewn rocks, water jumps and short swims, plus a few cheeky surprises. 4 July, 2020. ratracemanvscoast.co.uk



BAG A NEW HOBBY

If you like a list, you'll love Island Bagging. The latest outdoor trend is encouraging adventure fans to visit as many of the UK's offshore isles by whatever means they fancy.

Words: Fiona Russell

Y

ou could swim, kayak, catch a ferry, cycle over a bridge, walk a causeway or take a stand-up paddleboard – but whatever way you choose to go, it's the goal of visiting an island that defines a new

hobby for outdoor fitness fans.

Island bagging is capturing the imagination of a growing number of people and with 6000 islands around the shores of the UK, there is plenty to choose from. It basically means visiting as many British Isles as you can, by whatever means possible. There are islands in estuaries and sea lochs, some that are a stone's throw from the mainland and others that are so remote they take many hours to sail to.

While a minority are inhabited, many are home to an array of impressive wildlife. And almost all boast a fascinating heritage and have their own unique atmosphere.

THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

Many outdoor fans will have heard of Munro Bagging, which is defined as 'ticking off' the summits of all 282 Scottish mountains with a height of at least 3000ft (914m).

The idea originated with Sir Hugh Munro, who in

1891 compiled a list of the highest mountains in Scotland.

Next came lists of collections of lesser hills, the Corbetts, Grahams and Donalds.

Across the UK, people also enjoy Trigbagging, where the aim is to reach the many thousands of trigpoints and pillars dotted across the UK. In case you were wondering, a trigpoint is a concrete pillar previously used by the Ordnance Survey to determine the shape of the country, resulting in the OS maps we know and benefit from today.

Now the pursuit has been expanded to cover islands. Late last

Gylen Castle overlooks the Firth of Lorne





‘ISLAND BAGGING IS ABOUT THE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO REALLY GET TO KNOW THE ISLANDS’



year, a book called *Scottish Island Bagging* was published. Authors Helen and Paul Webster have focused on 99 islands that can be reached by ferry or by booking a boat.

The couple, who run a walking website, Walk Highlands (<https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk>), report that Island Bagging is already a hit. They reveal that many thousands of people have been ticking off islands on an interactive digital map.

It's likely that a Scottish Islands Passport scheme, planned for launch by the Highland and Islands Transport Partnership later this year, and to coincide with Scotland's year of Coasts and Waters 2020, will boost the trend.

Of course, there are also many baggable islands in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, too, and an ever growing summit cataloging website, Harold Street (haroldstreet.org.uk) has a database of island summits around the UK.

MORE THAN JUST TICK

For the Websters, Island Bagging should be more than a quick visit. Paul says: 'We hope to counteract the association some people have of the word "bagging" with just turning up somewhere and ticking it off. 'Hence, our Island Bagging book is ➤

WHAT WILL YOU BAG? 8 UK ISLANDS

■ Harris, in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland, is famed for its Hawaiian style beaches on the west coast and rugged mountainous terrain on the eastern side. It's accessible by ferry.

■ St Michael's Mount is a small tidal island in Mount's Bay, Cornwall, England, where a medieval church and castle sit on a hill. It's reached by a short walk across a cobblestone causeway.

■ The Scottish archipelago of St Kilda, situated 180km from the mainland in the wild North Atlantic Ocean, comprises four islands. It is the UK's only UNESCO Dual World Heritage Site and National Nature Reserve. Book in with a boat operator to sail to St Kilda.

■ Llanddwyn is a small tidal island off the west coast of Anglesey, Wales. It is a lovely place for a stroll with dunes, rocky outcrops and historic buildings.

■ Skomer is located off the coast of southern Pembrokeshire, Wales, next to the isles of Skokholm and Grassholm. The trio of islands, accessible by boat, have amazing wildlife including a puffin colony.

■ The 'Holy Island' of Lindisfarne, in Northumberland, England, is famous for its medieval religious heritage and a 16th century castle. There is a road to the isle at low tide.

■ Lundy Island, in the Bristol Channel, England, is owned by the National Trust and home to England's first marine wildlife reserve.

■ Rathlin Island, County Antrim, is the only inhabited offshore island in Northern Ireland. Take a ferry from Ballycastle and walk to the highest point at 134m on Slieveard.



Island Bagging experts encourage us to spend as much time as we can at each location

'ONCE YOU'VE STARTED, THERE IS NO CURE FOR SCOTTISH ISLAND-BAGGING'

Mersea Island in Essex is the most Easterly inhabited island in the UK



▶ all about the best and unique experiences you can have on each island. It's about the things you can do to really get to know the islands better and therefore there is a link with "slow tourism".

'For example, you should take the time to stay on the island, perhaps climbing to the highest hill, uncovering its history and culture, sampling local produce, or taking part in a community event.

'The island experiences you choose are entirely up to you, but you should go slow and soak up what each island offers to be able to count it as bagged.'

ISLAND BAGGING BY OTHER NAMES

Another closely connected activity that is also gaining in popularity is Islandeering. It is the brainchild of Lisa Drewe, who defines islandeering as circumnavigating an island on foot, by bike, swimming, coasteering or in a kayak.

Her book *Islandeering: Adventures Around the*

Edge of Britain's Hidden Islands, offers details of how to walk a circuit of 50 of the UK's islands. A website, islandeering.com, has further ideas.

Meanwhile, 'Sibbing' is to tick off a list of SIBs – Significant Isles of Britain and Ireland. The SIBs are defined on Harold Street as 'naturally occurring land that at high tide is surrounded by water with either an area of at least 30 hectares or a prominence of 30 metre height'.

THE ISLAND BAGGERS

As you might expect, Paul and Helen have bagged many of the Scottish islands between them. Paul has personally visited 92.

However, this still leaves them far behind the top Island Bagger in the UK, Rob Woodall.

The walker from Peterborough holds many bagging records and is the SIBbing leader with 518 of 823 SIBs visited so far.

Another keen Island Bagger is Bee Leask, originally from Shetland and now living in Glasgow.

She has bagged 57 islands and writes about her adventures at Bumblebambi.

She says: 'As an islander I like to get back to Shetland as regularly as possible, but it isn't always practical, so I think that visiting a Scottish island is like a little reminder of home for me. 'I love the island lifestyle, the adventure of getting there and being surrounded by sea.'

WHERE DOES IT END?

The Websters believe that Island Bagging could become even more addictive than the more popular Munro Bagging because you get a high from the



advancing stage of it. Paul says: 'Many hillwalkers, after climbing their first few Munros, find Munro-bagging addictive, even if they try to resist.

'As they advance it can become all consuming. But at least Munro Bagging has an end point, when that final summit is reached.

'Island-bagging, on the other hand, may be more dangerous. You may get a passion for it. You might start with a visit to the islands accessed by boats, ferries and bridges.

'And then you might get a kayak or charter a boat to visit the more remote islands.

'But whatever you do, there will be always be more to visit, more skerries, islets, rocks and stacks to discover.

'Once you've started, there is no cure for Scottish Island Bagging. You have been warned!'

MORE INFORMATION

Fiona Russell is an award-winning outdoors journalist and blogger who is better known as Fiona Outdoors. She lives in Scotland and balances a passion for adventures with work.

With Island Bagging, there is always more to do... more places to visit and more rocks to discover



USEFUL RESOURCES

■ **Islandeering: Adventures Around the Edge of Britain's Hidden Islands** by Lisa Drewe. Published by Wild Things, priced £16.99.

■ **Island Bagging** by Helen and Phil Webster, Published by Vertebrate, priced £17.99.

■ **The Scottish Islands** by Hamish Haswell-Smith. Published by Canongate Books priced from £26.

■ **Island bagging section of Walk Highlands** at www.walkhighlands.co.uk

■ **Island bagging group on Facebook.**

■ **Harold Street's website** www.haroldstreet.org.uk/other/island-bagging.

ADVENTURE



WHAT IS AN ISLAND?

It might seem obvious but there are a number of different definitions for island baggers.

In general terms, an island is an area of land smaller than a continent and entirely surrounded by water.

Islands are located in oceans, seas, lakes, lochs or rivers. A group of islands is called an archipelago.

According to an 1861 Census, an island was 'any piece of solid land surrounded by water which affords sufficient vegetation to support one or two sheep, or is inhabited by man'.

A more modern definition is that of Hamish Haswell-Smith, in his book The Scottish Islands, in which he described an island as an area of land of at least 40 hectares. He did not include tidal islands and those reached by a bridge.

Another much-used definition is that an island must rise at least 100ft (30.5m) from the sea or cover more than 74 hectares.

Meanwhile Harold Street states an island is at least 30 hectares and 30m high.

In the end, it's up to the UK island bagger to choose their island definition and how many of the possible 6000 islands, isles, islets and skerries to visit.

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WEARABLE TECH

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OBSESSED WITH STATS

Data-obsessed folk in the UK spend 183 hours (roughly the equivalent of a whole week of each year), monitoring and measuring their behaviour using analytical apps and devices. The Smart Energy survey of 2,000 adults discovered that we use an average of six apps or tracking tools to measure key areas of our lives. Of those surveyed, over half used technology to calculate their steps and movement, 38 per cent tracked their fitness and a quarter kept tabs on how much sleep they got each night. More than half of the study's participants also admitted to finding the process of tracking and monitoring addictive, while a quarter use the information they gather as motivation to improve habits.



CONTENTS

- What your data really means 062
- Two best budget bikes tested 064
- Wearable kit round-up 068

WHAT YOUR

DATA REALLY MEANS

At times it can feel as though technology is taking over with many ways to measure and quantify our training. **Malcolm Bradbrook** breaks down the numbers



umbers, numbers everywhere' is a feeling that must be familiar to tens of thousands of us as we train. Whether it be for running, cycling or even kayaking, there are so many different ways to keep track of what we do.

Dr Barney Wainwright is Head of Science at Boardman Performance Centre and Senior Research Fellow at Leeds Beckett University and scientific advisor to Wattbike.

He says: 'Data can be an incredibly useful part of many weekend warriors' training programmes, offering an insight into fitness, making it possible to structure a programme to best support the individual. For athletes short on time, it can help them to get the very most out of each and every training set.'

There are three main sets of data that we can use when training and racing; heart rate, pace and power.

It is easy to get carried away and use GPS to measure your pace at all times. However, pace is just one piece of data and it doesn't reflect other things such as what you did yesterday, how you are feeling in general and the terrain.

A common misconception about training to heart rate is that it is about trying to get your beats per minute as high as possible for as long as possible.

Adam Clarke, from Matt Bottrill Performance Coaching, says that training to low heart rate over a good period of time will seriously develop



your endurance engine. Improving this part of your fitness is what allows you to run at a faster pace for the same heart rate because you have become a more efficient athlete which is vital for long distance runners and cyclists. 'In addition to the running efficiency, running at a low heart rate also trains your body to use stored body fat as an energy source rather than all carbs or a mixture of fat and carbs,' adds Adam. 'The benefit of this is that the body has an almost limitless store of fat.'

Tour de France enthusiasts will be familiar with Chris Froome hunched over his handlebars gazing at his power metre.

A steady climber like Froome or Geraint Thomas will identify a power output in watts and try to maintain it for the whole climb, whereas a more explosive climber like Alberto Contador or Julian Alaphilippe will put in a few big, high-powered efforts interspersed with a steadier recovery pace.

Liz Shenton is the training lead for Polar. 'The key element to gaining any data is ensuring that it is tailored to the individual,' she says. 'We are all different and that is why we have built all of our systems around assessing you for things like your height, weight, age, maximum heart rate and more,' Liz explains.

Liz breaks training load into three categories: cardio load, muscle load and perceived load.

'A STEADY CLIMBER LIKE FROOME OR GERAIN'T THOMAS WILL IDENTIFY A POWER OUTPUT IN WATTS AND TRY TO MAINTAIN IT FOR THE WHOLE CLIMB'

Cardio load measures how hard the heart is working, muscle load quantifies how much power is being used, and perceived load is subjective and measures how hard the athlete found the effort.

Liz says: 'People always think they need to push themselves much harder than they do. There are so many other factors to consider such as how you are feeling, if you have recovered from your last session, and even how much sleep you are getting.'

Polar's most recent sports watch is the first to offer runners wrist-based power readings.

'The great thing about power output is that it is quick to react – much quicker than heart rate,' Liz adds. 'You can follow a power output so you don't set off too fast and leave enough for the end.'

Power is particularly useful on hill running efforts where it is tempting to go off too hard while you feel fresh and it seems very easy.

But, as dedicated to data as Dr Wainwright is, he does have a warning: 'It's good to be mindful and at the same time not to feel overwhelmed with too much data, and either lose sight of the most important variables in a training plan, or overcomplicate things and lose the fun factor.' 

WE LOOK AT THE PROS AND CONS OF TRAINING TO POWER AND HEART RATE AND SOME KIT TO HELP

POWER

Advantage: Accurately measures how hard you are working rather than how fast you are going.

Disadvantage: You can lose the ability to run by feel and become obsessed by the reading.

POLAR VANTAGE V

Power is measured from the wrist using Polar's own algorithm based on your GPS and barometer data. The Polar Vantage V uses these watts to calculate muscle load – the impact your effort puts on your joints and your muscular and skeletal systems.

£439 polar.com



STRYD

Stryd is a 10g pod that clips directly to your shoelaces and contains sensors to measure the acceleration of your foot horizontally, vertically and laterally as it strikes the ground to provide your running power in watts.

£199 uk.stryd.com



HEART RATE

Advantage: Provides zones which give different functions so it helps to assess the effectiveness of your workout.

Disadvantage: If you don't accurately gauge your maximum heart rate and resting heart rate the data can be meaningless.

WAHOO TICKR X

The TICKR X is an evolution of the simple heart rate monitor as it combines the core function with a workout tracker which captures motion and intensity.

£64.99 uk.wahoofitness.com



POLAR VANTAGE M

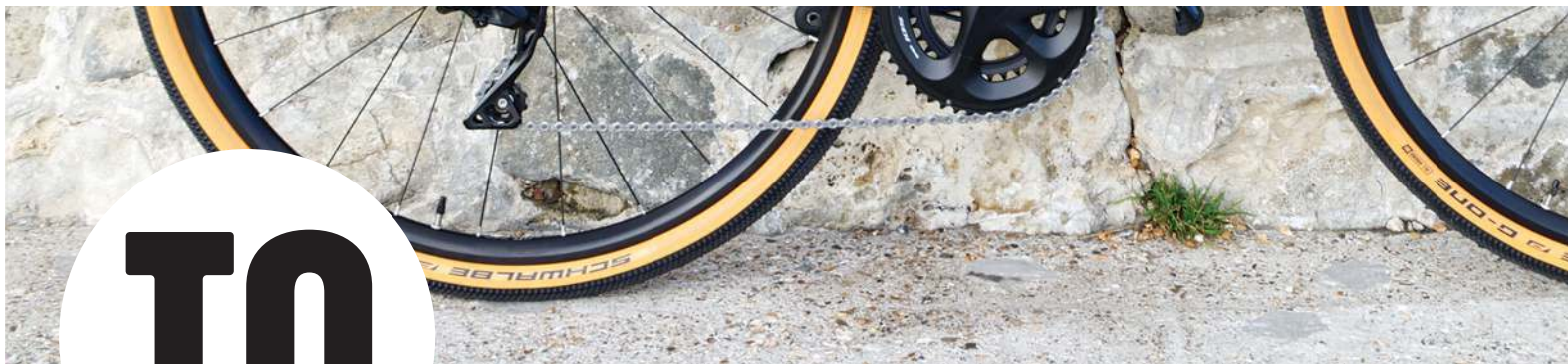
Yes, Polar again but almost half the price of its power-measuring sibling. It has nine LEDs taking the wrist measurement rather than the standard two to six.

£249 polar.com



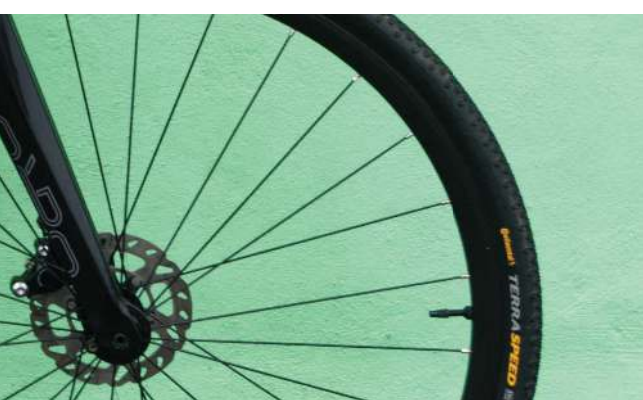
TRIED AND TESTED

ONE RIDE



TO RULE THEM ALL





They may look like traditional road bikes at first glance, but the fast-emerging gravel bike category has drastically increased the scope for two-wheeled adventures both on and off the beaten track.

Neil Gerrard compares two of the best British-designed bikes in the category for around £1,500 – the Orro Terra Gravel 105 Hydro and the Ribble CGR AL

Cyclists are a tribal bunch. You've got the roadies and the mountain bikers and while they have never quite gone to war, the two tribes have traditionally regarded each other with a healthy dose of suspicion. But slowly yet surely, the lines are finally being blurred. Features like disc brakes or vibration damping on a road bike would once have been regarded as witchcraft but have become more widely accepted. And that has helped to give rise to a versatile new category – the gravel bike. While the name sounds intimidatingly specific – unlike in the USA, the UK isn't blessed with all that many gravel trails – the concept is actually quite simple. Gravel bikes combine the best features of a speed-focused road bike, making it capable of eating up the miles on tarmac, with a more relaxed riding position, more powerful brakes, and the capability to take much wider tyres that borrow from mountain and cross biking. That means the gravel bike is equally at home on the rough stuff.

In theory, the upshot is a two-wheeled answer to the Swiss Army knife – a bike that will happily act as a commuting workhorse, an off-road machine, and even the sort of steed you might want to take on a bikepacking adventure. We took two British-designed bikes from Ribble and Orro at the relatively affordable £1,500 price point and tested them extensively to find out if you really can have one bike to rule them all.

The CGR is available in either blue or orange and can be built in a variety of different formats using Ribble's online Bikebuilder tool

WHAT WE TESTED:

Quality: How well put together is the bike and what level of components do you get for your money?

Comfort: Can you survive a long day in the saddle without suffering from a sore back or a crooked neck?

Durability: Will the bike take the sort of beating that off-road trails and poorly maintained roads will throw at it, ride after ride?

Style: You may be getting it muddy, but it still has to look good. Does the bike turn heads at the local café?

Good for... What does the bike suit best – long rides, trails, roads, or all of the above? ➡➡



ORRO TERRA GRAVEL 105 HYDRO

£1,499.99; orrobikes.com

With a frame finished in raw aluminium and covered in a clear lacquer, combined with black carbon forks and black finishing kit, the Orro Terra G looks a little understated at first glance. That's until you spot the oversized head tube and tapered, almost triangular-looking down tube that gives the bike a rugged yet sleek appearance.

Orro has thought carefully about practicalities with the Terra Gravel – it's a bike that's designed to be ridden hard and far. The Sussex-based brand has added bosses to the top tube, in addition to the standard two sets of bottle cage bosses on the seat tube and down tube, which allow the option of adding a bag for bikepacking adventures. There's enough clearance for 35C tyres and our test version was shod with Continental's excellent Terra Speed tubeless tyres which offer bags of grip while still being capable of rolling surprisingly quickly on the road.

Orro plans to sell the bike with Terra Speed tyres as standard once it has stock – for the time being it comes equipped with the more



The more aggressively set-up Orro has clearance for 35mm tyres

road-oriented Vittoria Zaffiro 28Cs. Without pedals and in a size large, the Orro weighed in at 9.4kg on our scale, making it a fairly lightweight option. It picked up speed reasonably quickly, helped along by the Fulcrum 600 DB wheels our test version was kitted out with, which are around 50g lighter and £50 more expensive than the Fulcrum 700 DB wheelset the bike typically comes with.



The Terra Gravel 105 Hydro comes with a Deda Zero 1 stem and handlebar

SHARP HANDLING

Handling was pin sharp, and descending rough, rutted tracks the Orro felt like it was on rails. Nonetheless, it was no slouch on the road either and we used it more than once for winter club road rides averaging 20mph for 60 miles plus, thanks to what felt like a relatively aggressive riding position for a gravel bike. Shimano's mid-range 105 chainset never missed a beat while the feel and stopping power in the hydraulic brakes with 140mm disc rotors was superb. Still comfortable, despite its speed, it floated over bumps without ever feeling disconnected from the track or road. The rear light mounted to the seat clamp is another nice little touch that gives the whole package a feel of quality and value for money, as are the mudguard and pannier mounts.



RIBBLE CGR AL

From £999 (£1,484 as tested); ribblecycles.co.uk

Ribble is a venerable British brand that can trace its roots all the way back to 1897. More recently, it has made an effort to take its bikes upmarket. The CGR AL, a relatively recent addition to the range, is a great example of the approach. Coming in a wide variety of flavours and colours, it is about as versatile as a bike can get and offers an impressively high level of quality for the price. CGR stands for 'cross, gravel, road' and Ribble has designed it to be able to take both 700c road and 650b mountain bike wheels. It also has three sets of bottle cage bosses (two in the usual places plus another on the underside of the down tube), mudguard mounts, clearance for 45mm tyres (on 700c wheels), and mounts for a rear pannier rack that can haul about 20kg of luggage. Our test version was even equipped with 3M reflective bar tape – a very handy extra safety measure for night riding.

That all sounds very sensible, and indeed it is. But the CGR AL is a looker too, with a choice of either a vibrant orange or dark blue frame in glossy, faintly metallic paint. Our blue version generated plenty of envy at the local café, and it's also great to see Ribble add a Lancashire rose to the base of the down tube and reintroduce a proper head badge to reflect the heritage and general quality of the package.

LEVEL BRAND

Finishing kit is from Ribble's own Level brand, complete with a carbon fibre seatpost that you might expect to see on a more expensive model. In addition to a Shimano 11-speed 105 groupset and hydraulic brakes similar to that found on the Orro, our test version boasted Mavic Allroad wheels (that can be added in Ribble's excellent online Bikebuilder, which allows you to spec your bike the way you want it) and Schwalbe's massive 40mm G-One Allround tyres.

As far as the ride is concerned, the Ribble is noticeably more relaxed than the Orro and the wide rubber and solid build inject huge amounts of comfort and confidence off and on the road. Thanks in part to the carbon forks, handling is lively and responsive. All this does come at a slight penalty in terms of weight. The bike, sized XL and



The Ribble's quality paint job and finish kit turned heads at the local café

therefore bigger than the Orro, was understandably slightly heavier on our scale at 10.1kg without pedals, but the sluggish Mavic wheels and heavier tyres made it feel more so and it was noticeably harder to drive the bike up inclines. Don't let that put you off, however – the CGR is a superb off-roader, would make a highly capable adventure bike and a reliable commuter. If you want one bike that can truly do it all then this could well be it.

WHAT DID WE THINK?

In truth, it's very hard to separate these bikes. The versatility, attention to detail and quality on offer from both Ribble and Orro at the relatively affordable £1,500 mark is impressive. Ultimately, it comes down to what you want. Designed to appeal to the road rider with its more aggressive position, the Orro Terra Gravel makes a fantastic winter steed for hacking around rough country roads with the local club at pace, and would therefore be our personal choice. The Ribble certainly has the cross and the gravel covered, but is harder work on the road.

Then again, it edges the Orro for versatility, looks and off-road capability. Take your pick – neither will disappoint. 🏆

TOP TECH

This month's tech round-up features two big hitters in the watch market as well as a variety of gadgets. Words: **Malcolm Bradbrook**



GARMIN FENIX 6 SAPPHIRE £529.99

The Fenix is at the top end in pricing and comes equipped with a regular Swiss Army array of data-gathering. The huge 1.4" screen might sound like it should be uncomfortable on the wrist but the fit is so snug it has a great feel. Runners can create plans directly from the watch and other sports are well catered for as it features more than 2,000 ski resorts and 41,000 golf courses.

garmin.com



AURO £4.99 FOR 12 MONTHS (14-DAY FREE TRIAL)

If you're just getting into fitness and the colder weather is discouraging you from cutting your teeth outdoors, Auro is a new motivational audio fitness app which provides hundreds of workouts completely tailored to the user. Classes can also be downloaded to avoid WiFi issues advance in case there is no connectivity when working out.

auro.fit



SUUNTO 7 £429

This Finnish firm has become synonymous with high quality tech used by pros around the world. The 7 is marketed as 'adventure-proof' and is certainly tough, featuring a 'Gorilla Glass' screen but at 70g is still relatively light on the wrist. An improved battery provides up to 12 hours in GPS tracking mode and the 7 is waterproof to 50m.

suunto.com



ROCKRIDER G-EYE 500 £59.99

The G-Eye 500 is a Full HD WiFi Sport Camera which comes in at a budget price, meaning you can capture all of your successes (and spills) without breaking the bank. It films in 1080p at 30 frames per second and can be controlled from your smartphone. The package includes watertight housing to keep the 2" LCD screen safe.

decathlon.co.uk



ALPKIT QARK £29

We still have plenty of dark mornings ahead of us and the Qark head torch offers a very impressive 580 lumen. It is rechargeable but compatible with AAA. The Qark will light the way for 18 hours on the low setting (30 lumen) with an option of 2hrs 30 for the full beam or 5hrs 30 for the mid-setting (270 lumen).

alpkit.com



NABAIJI 100 V3 SWIMMERS' MP3 PLAYER £29.99

Completely waterproof MP3 player which is perfect for swimmers who need their music fix while in the pool during the colder months. The 100 V3 has a battery life of 10 hours, recharges via USB and can store 4GB of music.

decathlon.co.uk

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TRAVEL

THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER – ENJOY THE JOURNEY

GREEN TRAVEL

Ahead of Earth Day on 22 April which, this year, is themed around climate action, we've rounded up the top five international cities that are considered the greenest in the world. With tons of outdoor green space and effective use of energies, these hotspots are paving the way for sustainable living, according to World Travel Guide: Copenhagen – where roughly as many people cycle to work as those in the entire USA – claimed the top spot; Sweden, with its constitutional law which grants all citizens access to all of the region's countryside whether it's public or privately owned, scored second place; and fitness-friendly Vancouver bagged the third spot.

CONTENTS

Biking in Jordan **072**

The rise of the bootcamp break **078**



Copenhagen (pictured) is one of the most bike-friendly cities in the world



The first real off-road section.
Definitely worth the wait



A TEST OF ENDURANCE

Wadi Rum, the spectacular
desert landscape

**Keen cyclist Lara Dunn
digs deep as she cycles
from the Dead Sea to
the Red Sea in Jordan,
taking in some great
sights along the way**



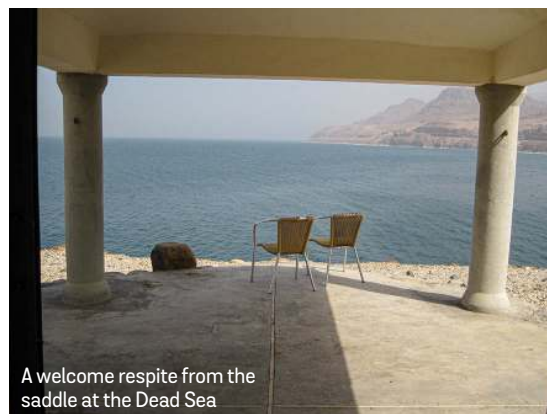
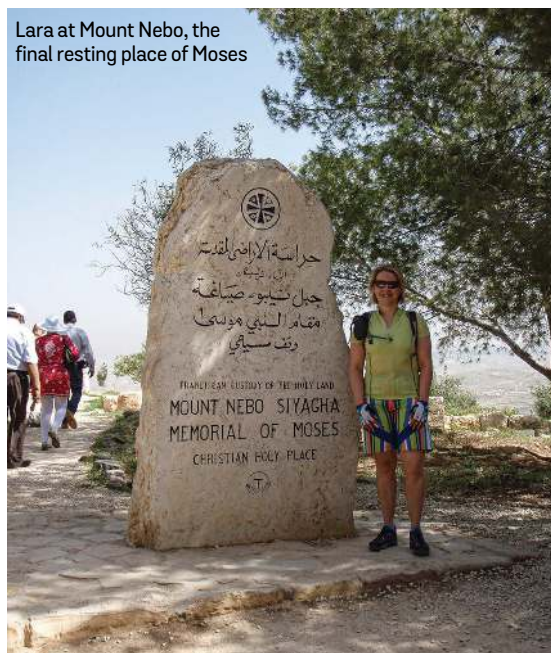
Sun, sea, sand and cycling, does it get much better than that? It certainly seems a whole lot more adventurous when you factor in that the sea is actually two seas with the route travelling between them, and that the sand is the famous ochre-hued Wadi Rum. I'd been on numerous cycling holidays before, so I was looking for something a bit out of the ordinary this time around, and maybe a little more challenging. Graded as 8 (out of 12) on the company's difficulty scale, KE Adventure's eight-day Dead 2 Red tour seemed to tick all the boxes.

Several months after booking the trip, as the hours to departure ticked by, I was getting nervous. Was I going to cope with the fairly long days, the heat, the long climbs? I'd been training pretty hard, but there's a world of difference between hilly Herefordshire rides during the winter and spring, and mountainous terrain in a desert country.

I'm not a born hill-climber. Or descender. Our first day riding in Jordan, from the starting point at Madaba gave me a swift insight into what was to come. Suffice to say the scale of hills in Jordan was a little different from home! Vast sweeping views of rocky landscapes were a constant backdrop to the long steady climbs and swift descents. Stopping at Mount Nebo, it became clear that we were deep in the countryside of the Bible. Reputed to be the point from which Moses first viewed the Holy Land, Mount Nebo offers vistas that reach as far as the Dead Sea and River Jordan, and even as far as Jerusalem on a clear day. It's a fascinating place to take a breather.

Following the King's Highway – the ancient route between Madaba and Petra – we then moved off-road, the gravelly trails taking us to another Sunday-school sight, King Herod's Palace, where John the Baptist met a sticky end. The ruins were peaceful and serene, with gentle birdsong and the chirrups of insects the only sounds to be heard as we enjoyed the views.

Lara at Mount Nebo, the final resting place of Moses



A welcome respite from the saddle at the Dead Sea



Incredible vistas from Herod's Palace near Mukawir

DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN JORDAN

By the time we reached the homestay that was to be our accommodation for the night at Mukawir, it already felt like we had crammed a week's experiences into what had only been one day. Staying with a local family was for me a high point of the entire trip. A rare glimpse of real day-to-day life in a Jordanian village, the hospitality was beyond compare. Sitting on the floor enjoying a shared meal of the local chicken and yoghurt speciality, mansef, we were treated like we were a part of the family. Sleep came early.

Heading out the next morning, I was a touch nervous as I knew that this was one of the toughest days on the itinerary. Descending from 800m to 400m below sea level, the temperatures rose as we did the opposite. Arriving at the Dead Sea was a welcome break, although the incredibly high salt content of the water made swimming more of an ungainly bobbing affair! Soon we were back on the road, the salt in the air stinging our eyes as we pedalled with what felt like a hairdryer blowing into our faces. By the time we reached the start of the climb up to Karak, the hardest of the whole itinerary, I'd already decided that the air-conditioned van was more my speed. Hot, dehydrated from travelling and exhausted, I watched as, one by one, my fellow riders stopped at the side of the road, defeated by the 1,300m climb. Some manage it, by all accounts, but not this time. Karak Castle, at the top of the mountain, is an imposing 12th-century Crusader Castle and a great place to finish a day's hard riding.

The next day undulated through rocky canyons and alongside fields, ruins and villages. The term 'Jordanian flat' was coined, referring to the fact that the guides would report a section to be 'flat' when in reality it was an extremely gentle, but very, very long climb. Bafflingly, there always seemed to be more of these than the equivalent descents. We arrived in the village of Dana in the afternoon, which sits at the

‘JUSTIFIABLY WORLD FAMOUS, THE WADI RUM IS A UNIQUE LANDSCAPE OF SAND, ROCKS AND CLIFFS, ALL IN BOLD COLOURS THAT CHANGE AS THE LIGHT SHIFTS THROUGHOUT THE DAY’



➤ edge of Jordan's largest nature reserve. The hundreds of square kilometres of the Dana Biosphere Reserve stretch out along the face of the Great Rift Valley, and comprise wadis, mountains and desert. Leaving Dana the next morning, we were aware of drawing ever closer to that iconic landscape as we rode towards Shobak Castle, another of the crusader fortresses strung in a chain across the Jordanian landscape. Following sandy, rocky trails, we gained and lost height in equal measure, eventually arriving hot, sweaty and tired at the edge of what is arguably Jordan's most famous landmark, the rose-hued Nabataean city of Petra.

HOT CONDITIONS

Thankfully, Petra was also going to be a rest day for us. I say thankfully, as my backside was complaining bitterly about long days in the saddle in hot conditions, even with plenty of chamois cream. After checking into our hotel in what was the most touristy town we'd seen so far, accommodation and restaurants arrayed along the main street, we sought out a hammam. Scrubbed, massaged and hosed down on a tiled slab like fish at a market, an hour or so later, we were so clean we squeaked. After a good night's sleep in an air-conditioned room, we were ready to see the sights. Walking was a welcome break from pedalling, easing out tired muscles nicely, although the hike up the 800 steps

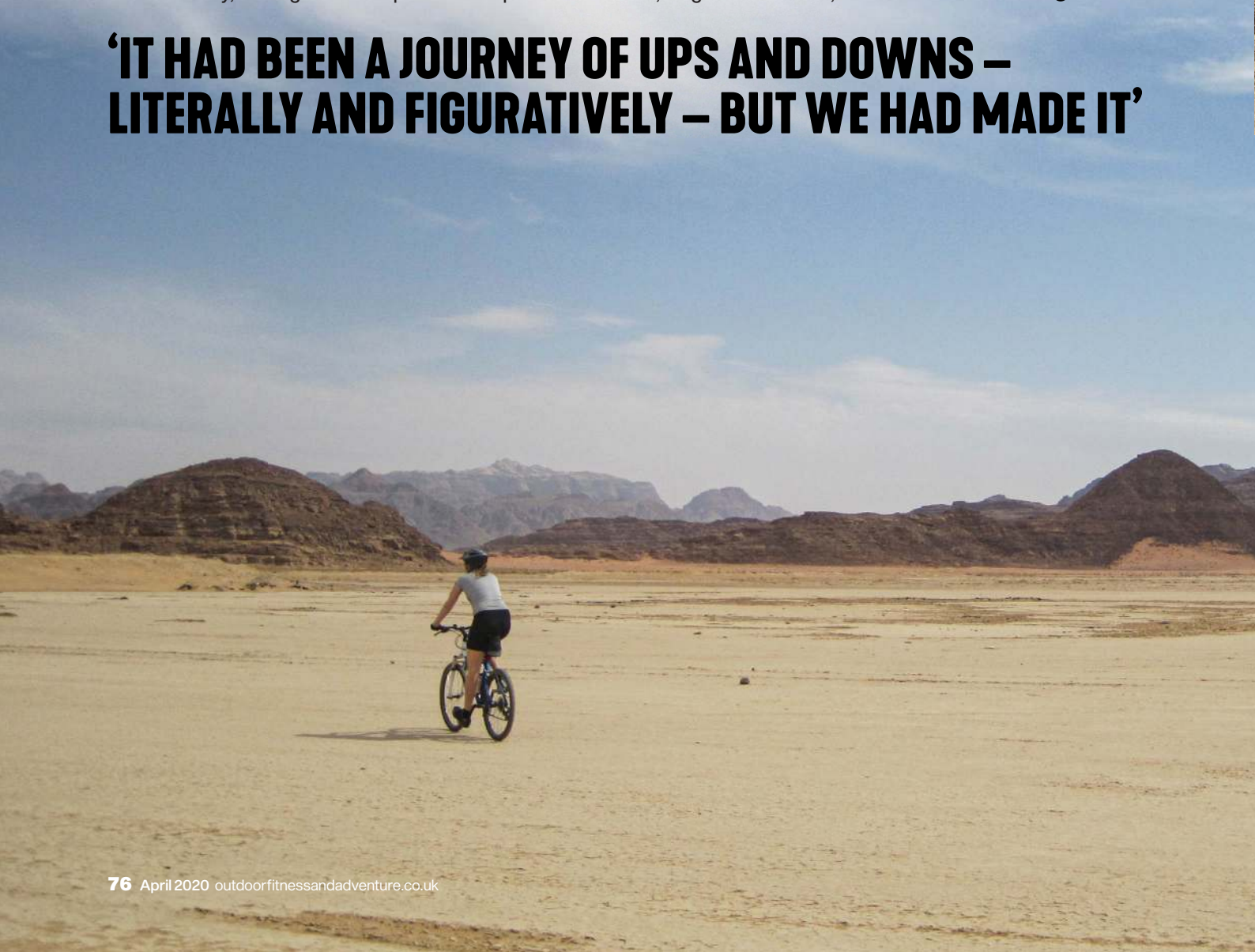
to the Monastery high above the popular Treasury – made so famous by Indiana Jones – was far from gentle. Petra has certainly earned its UNESCO World Heritage status. It's one of those places that far exceeds expectations, and a full day to explore was perfect.

Refreshed after a day off the bikes, we relished the desert sections to come. At least until the 18th topple in the sand that made steering optional, that is. We were entering the heartland of the Wadi Rum and the terrain that enveloped us looked like it hadn't changed in millennia. Justifiably world famous, the Wadi Rum is a unique landscape of sand, rocks and cliffs, all in bold colours that change as the light shifts through the day. There's little to rival the experience of clambering up onto a rocky ledge to watch the shadows build and the colours change as the setting sun dips below the horizon. Sleeping overnight in a Bedouin camp out in the desert made this experience possible. Riding out in the morning, after a good night's sleep following a meal cooked beneath the embers of the campfire, the hues of the rocks around us were different again. We were sad to be leaving such glorious ever-shifting scenery, although leaving the soft sand behind was going to be less traumatic.

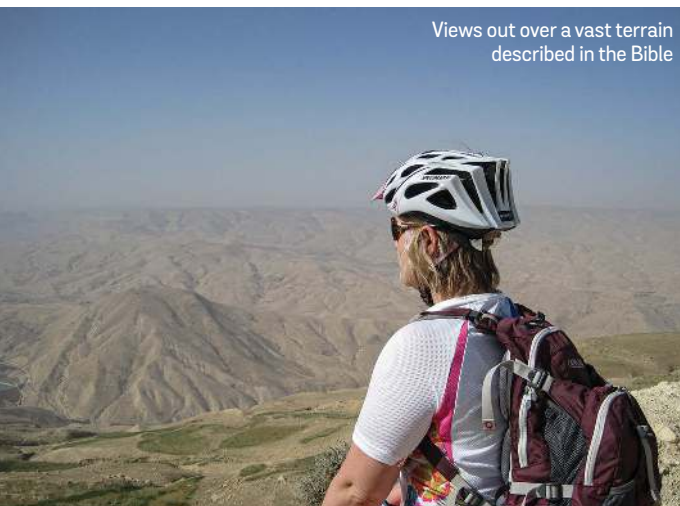
RED SEA

Eventually, the sand started to peter out, inexorably morphing into tarmac, and in what felt like the blink of an eye, we were back onto the road and nearing Aqaba and our final destination – the Red Sea. It had been a journey of ups and downs – literally and figuratively – but we had made it, we had cycled 450km from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea. The achievement felt incredible and our reward was an afternoon chilling out at one of the resorts by the Red Sea, enjoying a more traditional beach holiday for a few hours. For me, though getting here under my own steam, tough as it had been, was what it was all about. **OFA**

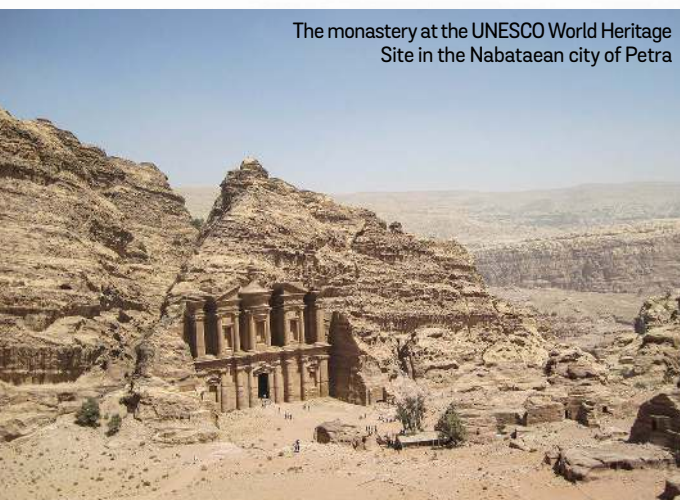
'IT HAD BEEN A JOURNEY OF UPS AND DOWNS – LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY – BUT WE HAD MADE IT'



Views out over a vast terrain
described in the Bible



The monastery at the UNESCO World Heritage
Site in the Nabataean city of Petra



MORE INFORMATION

Visit keadventure.com for details
on biking in Jordan. The Bike
Jordan Dead 2 Red trip costs
from £1,377, excluding flights.



Wide open spaces in the Wadi Rum

FIVE OTHER GREAT CYCLING HOLIDAYS

TREASURES OF THE DANUBE – PASSAU, GERMANY TO VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Part of the epic Eurovelo 6 that runs 2,300 miles from the French Atlantic coast to the Black Sea, this popular 200-mile stretch of the Danube Cycle Path is largely flat and mostly segregated from traffic, making it perfect for all levels of rider over a week to 10 days, either with a tour company or independently.

Available from £869; ingham.co.uk

CYCLE THE DESERTS OF NAMIBIA

Fat biking for eight days through the vast deserts of Namibia, spotting wildlife and visiting the Skeleton Coast along the way. Strictly one for a supported trip!

Available from £1,238; muchbetteradventures.com

CUBA HIGHLIGHTS

Check out fabulous Havana, but see the rest of this fascinating island, too, on a laid-back nine-day supported ride. Sugar plantations, classic American cars, memories of the Revolution, beaches and mojitos.

Available from £2,349; exodus.co.uk

JURA BIKE, SWITZERLAND

A multiday off-road tour of the green pastures and rolling hills of the Swiss Jura. Well-signposted all the way and with lovely accommodation in small towns along the route, it's possible to do the ride fully independently or with varying levels of support like luggage transfers.

Available from £686; eurotrek.ch/en; schweizmobil.ch/en

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There are hundreds of kilometres of mountain biking trails to be enjoyed in the wild, dramatic landscapes of the Cairngorms National Park. Bikepack it and camp out, or join an organised tour and stay in some comfortable B&Bs, relishing the renowned Scottish hospitality.

Available from £1,795; wildernessscotland.com

THE RISE OF THE BOOTCAMP BREAK

As wellness tourism continues to soar, swarms of people are swapping their relaxing summer holidays for intense, HIIT-packed trips in the heat and, in some cases, taking a digital detox at the same time. **Claire Blackmore** explores why

Setting an alarm for sunrise yoga might not play into your usual holiday protocol, but the last decade has seen a sharp rise in the number of people signing up for bootcamp breaks, both in the UK and abroad. While summer trips often centre around sunbathing, swimming and sipping on Pina colodas, wellness weeks focus on rigorous training, clean eating and meditative sessions that start as soon as dawn breaks.

These restorative fitness retreats have gone from niche to normal in just a few short years as Brits dedicate more time to physical and mental wellness – so, why the shift?

‘People are becoming increasingly aware of how lifestyle and dietary factors impact their lives,’ says Roberta Stringer from international fitness and weight loss retreat No1 Bootcamp. ‘They are taking wellness into their own hands and making positive steps towards taking control of their health. Bootcamps and retreats

really help kickstart people’s goals and give them the chance to gain both the education and mindset they need to continue their wellness journeys back home.’

And she’s not wrong. A new study by ABTA found that more than two million people were planning on booking at least one wellness trip in 2020. This marks a global increase of 20 per cent since 2015. The research revealed that many holidaymakers wanted to switch off from technology such as smartphones, laptops and tablets in the year ahead, and instead schedule time for active pursuits abroad, from hiking and swimming to yoga and Pilates. The reason? To maximise relaxation and prioritise mental health.

DISCONNECT FROM TECH

Paul Joseph, founder of leading global wellness travel company, Health and Fitness Travel (healthandfitnesstravel.com), believes bootcamp breaks are surging in popularity because travellers are searching for a ‘transformative wellness experience’. He says: ‘Very few people above the age of 35 go on holiday anymore without some form of mental, >>



Try an intensive boxing camp in Thailand



**‘VERY FEW PEOPLE GO ON HOLIDAY
ANYMORE WITHOUT SOME FORM OF
MENTAL, SPIRITUAL OR PHYSICAL
SELF-IMPROVEMENT IN MIND’**



'I CAME HOME FITTER, STRONGER, READY TO THROW MYSELF BACK INTO EXERCISE – I'M MAKING THIS TRIP AN ANNUAL EVENT'

➤ spiritual or physical self-improvement in mind. Staying active while on holiday is now important for 82 per cent of people.' Paul explains that people living in the digital age are aching to find 'mental clarity' as well as a sense of purpose in what has become a busy and fast-paced world.

Not only are they desperate to stop themselves mindlessly scrolling through emails, texts and social media platforms, but people seem to be craving a sense of support and community too – one that can be found on a trip in which everyone shares the same collective goal. 'Retreats offer a great all-round experience for self-improvement and the chance to be on holiday with like-minded travellers who share the same journey for staying healthy and fit,' adds Paul. 'We have even seen an increase in clients booking retreats to overcome certain obstacles in their life such as grief, divorce or various health concerns.'

LONG-TERM TRANSFORMATION

Many popular fitness trips have a holistic approach to long-term change and push the benefits of returning home rested and recharged, ready to continue the wellness journey. Kim, 40, endured a painful separation before embarking on a bootcamp in Mallorca with Ultimate Fitness, which sparked a new chapter in her life. 'It's amazing how just one week can transform your mindset. Seven

A TYPICAL TRAINING DAY

7.30	Dynamic stretch
8.00	Body weight circuit
9.15	Breakfast
10.15	Metabolic conditioning
11.15	Snack/hydrate
11.45	Boxing
12.45	Lunch
13.00	Recovery/rest
14.15	Mixed circuit
15.15	Snack/hydrate
15.45	Walk/hike
17.00	Stretch/swim
18.00	Dinner
19.00	Treatments/relaxation



Early yoga classes help calm the mind before the day's cardio exertions

when exercising and more sore than I ever had before. This trip opened my eyes to the importance of stretching and flexibility. Every morning, the early yoga sessions helped me to release pent-up tension that had formed in my limbs. After that, I hit the pavement for long, endurance runs around the coastline, which felt so much better than they had in years. Yoga improved my recovery and led me to form a good habit, one that I have stuck by religiously ever since.'

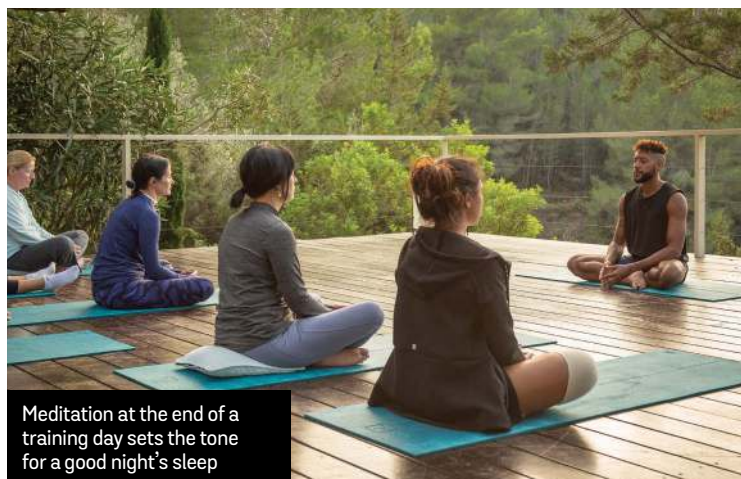
TAILORMADE TRIPS

With plenty of active trips to choose from, including rigorous HIIT holidays in Ibiza, healing weeks of self-reflection in Sri Lanka, intensive boxing camps in Thailand, and awakening yoga retreats in India, the world of the bootcamp break really is exploding with options for everyone. 'It's a very different market from when we launched 12 years ago,' reveals Roberta. 'We've moved away from the early days of military fitness to provide a safe, welcoming environment for all, in which we educate, mentor and coach clients to achieve their goals – and have expanded throughout the globe.' No1 Bootcamp currently has camps running in Norfolk, Marrakesh, Ibiza and Portugal.

If you're sold on the concept, here's what you can expect. With nutritionists, wellness experts and personal trainers on hand to offer dietary advice and daily, dynamic workouts, ready yourself for plant-based and paleo breakfast options, sunrise yoga sessions with a view of the sea, sweaty cardio classes made even harder by the sand underneath your feet, breathtaking hikes in the mountains, morning SUP paddles led by instructors who guide you through the calm ocean waters, and so much more. There is usually a jam-packed schedule of aerobic and anaerobic exercises, along with weights, strengthening and conditioning, wellness workshops, group activities, swims, stretching and breath work. Some even offer holistic therapies and treatments such as massage and meditation to increase energy, vitality and stimulate spirituality. For the most part, accommodation is luxurious, although often shared – but that all adds to the camaraderie. And the food tends to be plentiful, seen as fuel rather than a tool for weight loss. So whether you want to refresh your training regime, recover from a personal challenge, slim down, or simply boost motivation levels and endorphins, why not book a bootcamp break and reinforce a whole new spectrum of healthy habits on your next holiday? (We won't tell if you sneak in a Pina colada or two!) 🍹

MORE INFORMATION

A fitness holiday with No1 Bootcamp starts at £1,070 in the UK, £1,470 in Ibiza and Marrakesh, or £1,950 in Portugal. All prices per week. See no1bootcamp.co.uk



Meditation at the end of a training day sets the tone for a good night's sleep

days of good nutrition, intense exercise, tough hikes and challenging cycle rides gave me my sense of control back. I came home fitter, stronger, ready to throw myself back into exercise – I'm making this trip an annual event.'

Sophie, 28, flew out to Empire Fit Club in Bali after recovering from a triathlon injury. For her, fitness found new meaning: 'I picked this bootcamp because it focused on bodyweight and strength training, with some power circuits thrown in. I wanted to swap my usual endurance sessions for high-intensity weight training to regain my strength and build up some muscle. It ended up transforming the entire way I approach my fitness regime. I also got to spend the week lifting on the beach with people I now count as friends for life.'

James, 42, describes his bootcamp journey as a 'new take on old habits' and approaches exercise differently thanks to the camp's daily yoga classes. 'I started feeling my age a few years ago – I felt stiff

PUSHING BOUNDARIES OPENING MINDS

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ENDURANCE

STRENGTH AND STAMINA FOR GOING THE LONG-HAUL

SNEAKER PEAK

We all know that finding a shoe that comfortably matches your regular running stride is one of the biggest factors for successful endurance running. And if you've set your sights on the London Marathon or any other marathon or even an ultra, your choice of shoe could help you go that extra mile a bit faster. Research by athlete social network app Strava, which looked at six major 2019 marathons (Tokyo, Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago and New York), found that the runners who wore Nike ZoomX Vaporfly Next% trainers finished each of the Marathon Majors the fastest, closely followed by Nike Zoom Vaporfly. The shoe contains a carbon-fibre plate that propels runners forward, apparently boosting speed.



Words Louise Pyne

CONTENTS ➔

Key marathon training tips **084**
Best marathon training routes **090**

READY TO GO THE DISTANCE?

With the marathon season looming, what you do or don't do in the last four to six weeks before race-day will be key to your performance during your chosen marathon.

Christina Neal reports

With approximately four to six weeks out from your spring marathon (depending on which marathon you're doing and when you picked up this copy of OFA), you may be wondering if you've done enough.

You may be questioning your ability to complete the distance or complete it in your chosen time if you're an experienced runner, or you might even be a bit stressed. Mild panic may be setting in if you feel that you've not done enough. It's certainly too late to make any huge strides (pun intended) in training volume between now and race day without risking injury, so what should you be doing in the next four to six weeks? How can you ensure that what you do is going to benefit your performance on race day and not leave you exposed to injury risk or fatigue? Running coach Nick Anderson, founder and owner of runningwithus.com and UK Coach for Saucony, has some expert advice: 'Most good marathon training plans typically have their longest marathon training run around three to four weeks out from race day,' he says. 'Then the long run starts to get shorter in those final few weeks, which is the beginning of the taper. You shouldn't really go much further than three to three and a half hours for your longest run. For some people, this will mean they have easily run 20 miles or maybe more. For a five-hour marathon runner, there's a danger they may have run only 17 or 18 miles and they may be wondering whether to do more.'



Coach Nick Anderson

APPROACH WITH CAUTION

This is where caution is needed. Nick says it's better to turn up at the start line refreshed and slightly undertrained than overtrained and fatigued. 'If your longest run three or four weeks out is around three and a half hours or between 18-22 miles then you should arrive at race day ready to run. Race day is your best long run.'

What if you feel you haven't done enough training and you are starting to panic? 'Whatever you do you must arrive at race day fresh,' says Nick. 'It comes back to the runner who is only 90 per cent fit and 100 per cent fresh will always outperform the runner who is 110 per cent fit but overtrained. We know your body doesn't make any further fitness gains in the last two weeks. It becomes a game of protecting what you've got and you have to accept where you are. Remember that the marathon is built over 12 to 16 weeks of consistent running, it's not built into

'YOU SHOULDN'T REALLY GO MUCH FURTHER THAN THREE TO THREE AND A HALF HOURS FOR YOUR LONGEST RUN'

suddenly cramming in two or three weeks of training.'

Rather than just focusing on long runs, don't underestimate the value of other types of training sessions such as threshold runs and even cross training. 'All of that adds up on race day to give you a marathon result,' Nick says. 'It's not about these long runs that people panic about all the time. I would even be bold and say that the last ten miles of your marathon doesn't really come from your long runs. It comes partly from your long run, but it actually comes from doing the right running consistently over the weeks and your threshold running.'

Nick has recommended two types of running sessions that will benefit you on race day without putting you at risk of fatigue or injury – he says to try threshold or progression runs.

Threshold is a session you do every week where you run at three to four-word answer pace for specified blocks of time with recovery in between at a more moderate pace. 'It's about an eight out of ten intensity in terms of perceived effort,' says Nick. 'You can speak three words but can't speak a full sentence when running at that effort. In the last six weeks you could do four by five minutes of threshold or four by six minutes of threshold and if >>

ARE DOUBLE RUN DAYS A GOOD IDEA?

Some endurance athletes swear by double run days, where they run ten miles in the morning, then go out and run another ten miles in the evening. The theory is that your body has had some rest and you will have been able to get good nutrition into your body during the rest period. Is it a good idea for everyone though? 'There's a bit of a buzz out there about double run days and it's worked for some and for others it's not gone so well, says Nick. 'Most physiologists would probably argue that doing a long run at a consistent and continuous effort will probably still give you more than a long run that has been split up as the time on your feet will benefit you.'

Nick feels that double run days are best suited to endurance athletes rather than recreational runners. While he knows some athletes who run two half marathons separately in one day, it's definitely not advisable for everyone. 'You have got to be doing a high amount of mileage to be able to recover from that,' he says. 'For anyone doing 30-40 miles a week, that would be too hard a session and they would be too tired.'



➤ you get to the point where you can do three by ten minutes of that type of running built into an hour, that's going to have as much physical and aerobic build as spending time doing a long run.'

More experienced? 'For a reasonably fit person then it might be a 60-90 minute run that contains three blocks of ten minutes or three blocks of 12 minutes but at their half marathon intensity,' suggests Nick. 'The more experienced you are, the more effort you can hold onto.'

A progression run is another option. 'Go out and do runs where the pace gets tougher,' says Nick. This could mean:

- 20 minutes at an easy intensity (six out of ten)
- 20 minutes steady (seven out of ten)
- 20 minutes at threshold (eight out of ten)

You can use a progression run in one of your long runs in the final six weeks. 'If you were to do a three-hour run, you wouldn't be able to do the last hour at threshold as it would be too hard,' says Nick. 'But you might be able to do the first hour very easy, the second hour a bit quicker and then the final hour at marathon pace.'

FEET FIRST

While it's tempting to focus just on your training, don't forget about your shoes. Don't change them too close to race day. 'In those last two or three long runs, at least one, if not a couple of runs, should be done in the shoes you plan to run in on race day,' says Nick. 'Don't line up on race day in a pair of shoes you've done all of your marathon training in that are going to be tired and have lost their cushioning and support. If you are going to get a new pair, get them four, five or six weeks out from the marathon, do a couple of key runs in them and then wear them sparingly up to race day so that they feel good. If you have had no injury problems and the shoes have felt good, then get another pair exactly the same.' 

WHEN SHOULD YOU PULL OUT OF A MARATHON?

'If you want to do between five and six hours and are happy to do a mile jog and a mile walk, where at the end of it you've done 13 miles of running and 13 miles of brisk walking, you will still finish at the same time as the busiest time of the race,' says Nick. 'People think the busiest time for the London Marathon finish is about four hours but it's not. It's about five and a half hours, so you will still finish with the masses.'

So if your aim is to get round and raise money for charity then don't be despondent if the training hasn't gone exactly to plan. There are, however, a few occasions when you should strongly consider pulling out altogether.

'If you've got an injury which is going to mean for the next few months you're not able to run – the sort of thing where your physio says this is really going to cause long-term damage, I would listen to the physio,' says Nick.

Another reason to pull out is if you've been unfortunate enough to have had a bad cold that has gone to your chest. 'If it's been very much on your chest and has left you low for a while it's really dangerous to try and run a marathon as there's some dangerous heart risks with that,' says Nick. 'Every now and then we see a cardiac issue either during or after the marathon as a result of trying to do it.'



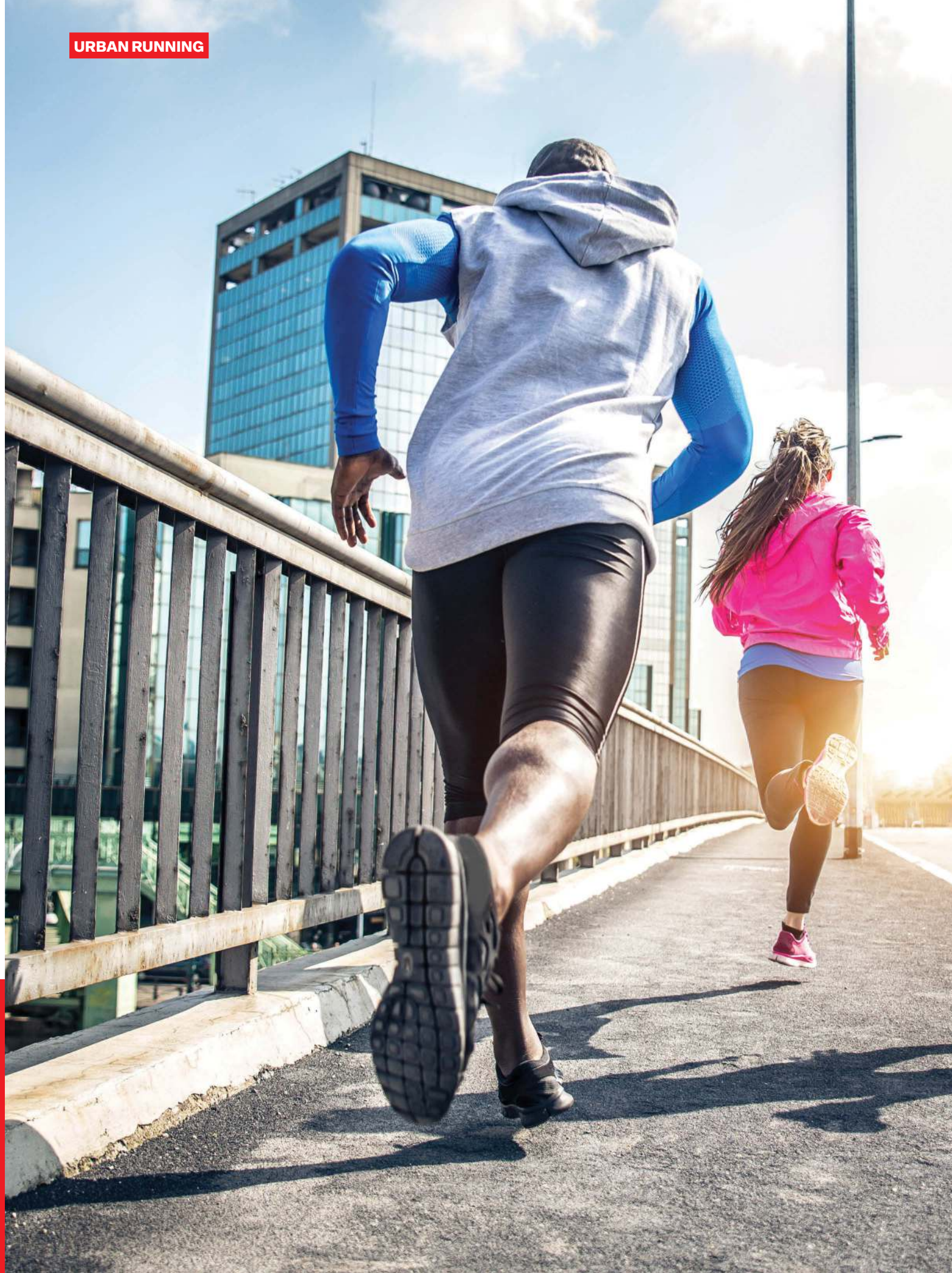
MORE INFORMATION

Nick Anderson has over 25 years of running experience and is a graduate in Science & Management of Health & Fitness, a UKA Level 4 Endurance Coach and manages GB squads at events such as the World Half Marathon Championships. Nick is a Saucony UK Coach and can be found on social media @runningwithus. Find out more about the latest Saucony releases at www.saucony.co.uk



**'THE RUNNER WHO IS ONLY 90 PER CENT FIT AND 100 PER CENT FRESH
WILL ALWAYS OUTPERFORM THE RUNNER WHO IS 110 PER CENT FIT
BUT OVERTRAINED'**





CITY, NO LIMITS

With the London Marathon imminent, and runners from all over the UK signed up to compete in a spring marathon of their choice, we suggest 10 of the best long-distance urban training routes. Words: Dominic Bliss



he marathon season is nearly here, and by now entrants will be ramping up their training schedules. If you live in the countryside you'll have plenty of long-distance routes to choose from. But what if you're a city dweller? How can you find an inspiring training route that avoids traffic and pedestrians? Or you might not be running a marathon, but may be keen to boost your distance. How do you stave off boredom?

All it requires is a bit of imagination. Look for cycle routes, large parks, canal towpaths or footpaths along rivers. Fortunately many of our cities are very green, with off-road and traffic-calmed routes, even in town centres.

Here, we suggest 10 of the best training routes, each one between 15 and 20 miles long – the maximum recommended length when training for a full marathon. The routes are either out and back or in a loop. Terrain ranges from tarmac to gravel to footpaths. >>

EDINBURGH



■ EDINBURGH

Stretching right across the Scottish capital, there is a 13-mile footpath and cycleway called the Water of Leith Walkway. Start your run in Leith and follow this path as it wiggles in a southwesterly direction, hugging the river of the same name. Eventually, at the Slateford Aqueduct, you'll hit the Union Canal. Turn left, back towards the city centre, as far as the end of the canal, and then wiggle the short distance north along city streets back to the Water of Leith. Now turn right. Finally, after a total of 15 miles, you'll have retraced your steps back to Leith itself.



■ YORK

Encircling York, in a three-mile loop, are its famous city walls and an accompanying walkway. Avoid weekends in the summer and you should manage happily to weave around the pedestrians. Bear in mind, though, that the walkway isn't complete, and there are loads of steps and gatehouses (known as bars) to negotiate, which adds to the challenge. Five loops will give you more than 15 miles of running.

■ GLASGOW

Flowing through the centre of Scotland's largest city is the River Clyde, criss-crossed by myriad road and pedestrian bridges. Even with no knowledge of the city, you can easily build up a lengthy run by sticking to the pathways and roads that hug the river, and then crossing back and forth over it whenever the mood takes you. Start at the Science Centre and head east, eventually taking in the greenery of Glasgow Green. On your return leg, cross different bridges to vary the route.

YORK



BIRMINGHAM



■ BIRMINGHAM

Thanks to its industrial past, Birmingham is criss-crossed by a whole network of canals, many of which are lined with towpaths ideal for running. It's just a question of choosing which one to pound. Until you reach the suburbs, the scenery is understandably industrial and grey. But they are all great escape routes from the city.

Here's a good circular run that starts in the city centre: join the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, right next to the National Indoor Arena and head northeast for just over three miles to the famous Spaghetti Junction. Then turn sharp right and head south along the Warwick and Birmingham Canal for two-and-a-half miles until you hit the Grand Union Canal. Turn right until you find yourself back on the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, retracing your steps to your start point. Two of these loops will give you over 16 miles.

LONDON (CENTRAL)



'MANY OF OUR CITIES ARE VERY GREEN, WITH OFF-ROAD AND TRAFFIC-CALMED ROUTES, EVEN IN TOWN CENTRES'

■ LONDON (CENTRAL)

This is a great figure-of-eight running route, often used by the Serpentine Running Club. All tarmacked, it avoids road traffic altogether. Start at Hyde Park Corner, near the Tube station of the same name, in the southeast corner of Hyde Park. Run anticlockwise around the perimeter of Hyde Park. Then, using the underpass beneath Hyde Park Corner, cross into Green Park, skirting the southern edge, around Buckingham Palace, and then anticlockwise around St James's Park, returning all the way along The Mall to complete the northern section of Green Park. By the time you get back to Hyde Park Corner you'll have run around 7.5 miles. Run the route twice for a good 15-miler. ➡➡

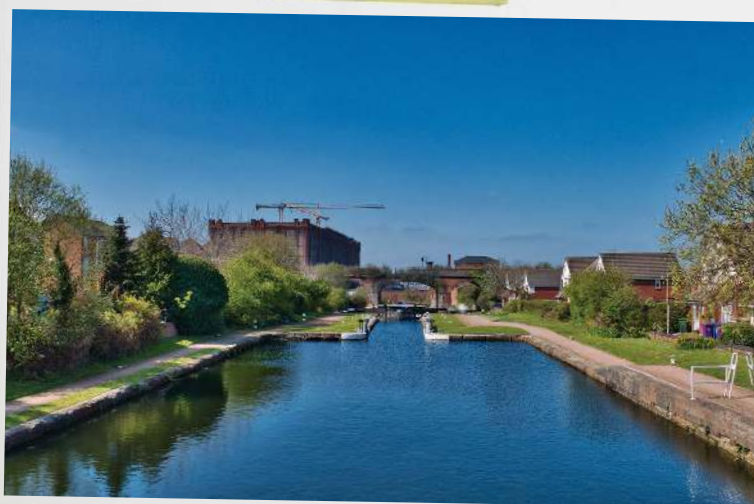
LONDON (SUBURBS)



■ LONDON (SUBURBS)

This extremely varied route in the southwestern suburbs of London avoids roads and takes you past some great landmarks. Start at Putney Bridge (not far from Putney railway station or Putney Bridge Tube station) and head west along the Thames towpath. You'll pass London Wetland Centre, Hammersmith Bridge, Kew Gardens and Richmond Palace before (nine miles into your run) leaving the towpath at Terrace Fields in Richmond town itself. Then climb the short hill and enter Richmond Park at Richmond Gate. Now complete a long, very pretty (and occasionally hilly) perimeter run of the park on the gravel track called the Tamsin Trail. This is another 7.2 miles, making for a total route length of around 16 miles. You can catch the train or Tube back to central London from Richmond station and the trains run fairly frequently too.

LEEDS



■ LEEDS

Pick up the Leeds & Liverpool Canal by Granary Wharf, just south of Leeds City railway station, and start running west along the towpath. It's not long before you pass Armley Park and Gotts Park on your left, then Kirkstall Valley Nature Reserve on your right. The towpath then loops round Bramley Fall Park and Rodley Nature Reserve, under the A6120, and eventually as far as the village of Esholt. By now you'll have run around 10 miles. Turn around and head home for a decent 20 miler.

MANCHESTER



■ MANCHESTER

Manchester's Bridgewater Canal is perfect for runners. It starts in the centre of the city, near Deansgate railway station, before heading west, past Old Trafford, Sale Water Park and into the suburbs. Ten miles will take you to Dunham Town where you can turn around and head back to the centre of town.



CARDIFF

Photography Shutterstock



■ CARDIFF

Everyone in Cardiff knows the Taff Trail, a walking and cycle path that runs for 55 miles all the way from Cardiff Bay to Brecon, along the route of the River Taff. Runners can pick it up on the west bank of the river, close to Cardiff Central Station, and head upriver past Principality Stadium (Millennium Stadium), and Pontcanna Fields. Occasionally the trail takes you across or away from the river but generally it's well signposted. At the village of Tongwynlais, be sure to choose the lower route to avoid a steep climb. By the time you reach Rhydyfelin, you'll have completed over 10 miles and it will be time to turn around and head home.

'THE ROUTES ARE EITHER OUT AND BACK OR IN A LOOP. TERRAIN RANGES FROM TARMAC TO GRAVEL TO FOOTPATHS'

BRIGHTON



■ BRIGHTON

Running in this coastal town couldn't be easier: just head for the beach. You can run for miles along the promenades, pavements and paths that stretch from Shoreham-on-Sea, through Brighton and as far east as Rottingdean. Once in Rottingdean, create a little loop by heading north on the B2123 to Woodingdean and back round to the sea front at Kempdown. 



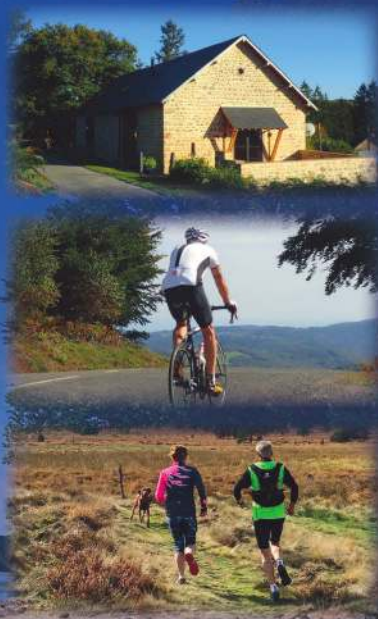
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INSPIRATION

REAL-LIFE MOTIVATION AND UPLIFTING STORIES

GOING FOR GOLD

It's the most anticipated sporting event of the year, and based on performances since Rio 2016, a new report by analysis company Gracenote (which provides data services to sports organisations), has predicted Team GB will win 42 medals in the Tokyo Olympics this summer. The company's virtual medal table predicts the United States will win the most medals overall, while China and Russia will bag second and third place, and there's hopes for the UK to land a spot in the top five. While the predictions mean that Team GB *won't* better its 2016 performance, some experts still believe that Britain has a chance of smashing its record medal haul from Rio.



Mo Farah pictured winning the Men's 10,000m final during the 20th European Athletics Championships at the Olympic Stadium in July 2010 in Barcelona

CONTENTS ➤

Ultra-winner Eoin Keith's future training goals **096**
How to break boundaries and boost self-belief **100**

THE GREEN MILES



Eoin Keith, one of Ireland's greatest living athletes and a champion of ultramarathons, actually stumbled into endurance racing on a whim. Now, he leaves the competition in his wake... Words: Rob Kemp

Ultrarunner and Columbia athlete Eoin Keith added another feather to his cap in December 2019 when he won the OMAN by UTMB. The Irishman, 51, took first place at the finish of the two-day, 170km race through the Al Hajar mountain range in Oman, having completed one of the most unique mountain endurance challenges in 36 hours, 4 minutes and 29 seconds. The victory marked the latest in a long line of astonishing achievements by Ireland's most decorated ultrarunner. As he approaches the 20th anniversary of his first ever endurance event, *Outdoor Fitness & Adventure* managed to catch up with Eoin to discover more about his incredible feats to date.

OFA: Eoin, congratulations. You beat a field of 2,000 runners from 69 countries running beneath an intense Arabian sun – how was the race for you?

Eoin Keith: It was possibly the most technical race I've ever done. There was a long 1,000m descent which you normally would expect to make tonnes of time on but we were slow. There was no real let-up mentally and it was intense racing all the way. Oman is a gorgeous country and the mountains are truly special. I've done some adventure racing in Abu Dhabi and in Utah before, so I know how to run the desert environments – very oddly for an Irish person, I love the heat!

OFA: The course covered a total climb of over 10,000m and some of the highest points on the Arabian Peninsula; it's all a long way from how you started out in endurance running though.

EK: Ha! That's right. I was a hill walker before I was a runner. Back in 1998, some of my hill walking friends were doing the Dublin City Marathon and I, rather foolishly, decided that

I would join them. I discovered while doing the training that I was a little faster than those people who I had looked up to. Our last long training run (20 miles) before the marathon was around Phoenix Park. I sprinted the final two miles and realised that I could run quite well. I did that first marathon in 2 hours 57 minutes.

OFA: It sounds like you were a natural for long-distance running then?

EK: Absolutely, but I only found out the



AT A GLANCE **OMAN BY UTMB**

Distance:

170K (105.6 miles)

Surface:

Running through the Al Hajar mountain range in Oman

Mountains summited:

The 3,000m Jebel Shams, one of the highest points on the Arabian peninsula, and Jebel Al Akhdar, the Green Mountain

Total course climb:

10,000m

long way round. At school I was the last kid picked for any sports. The hill walking and mountaineering and a bit of golf I did in my 20s showed that I had stamina but it was only after the first marathon, when I started doing hill running and I got better at it, that I realised I had a skill for this. I entered the only ultramarathon there was in Ireland at that time – you could fit the total number of ultrarunners in Ireland in a phone box at that stage – and I came fourth, but I was hooked. I went back the following year and won that ultra.

OFA: *You've had a major impact on the sport of ultrarunning in Ireland ever since – so much so that they'd need a much bigger phone box now for you all.*

EK: They would! It's a big sport here now – as it is worldwide. On the basis of that first ultra, I was picked for international 100km events. I found the longer I went, the happier I was and that pacing was one of my little super powers. I know how to pace a race right, instinctively. Every time I tried something longer, I've been more competitive and I've yet to find my limit!

OFA: *How do you adjust your training ahead of a major event?*

EK: Leading up to Oman, I worked on ➡➡

'I'VE NOW GOT TO A POINT WHERE I CAN RUN FOR THREE OR FOUR DAYS ON VERY LITTLE FOOD'



AT A GLANCE **Eoin's RECORD**

First at Britain's 'most brutal race' – the Spine Race – in January 2016. Completing the 431km course in just 95 hours and 23 minutes, he shaved five hours and 22 minutes off the previous record.

First at the inaugural Northern Traverse race in June 2016 – the gruelling 300km 'Wainwright route' from the west coast of Britain, through the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors before finishing on the east coast. He completed the whole course in only 51 hours and 37 minutes, five hours ahead of John Knapp in second place.

Holds the record for the 50-mile Wicklow Way race; finished fifth in the World 24-hour Running Championships; and has placed fourth in the European Championships.

Set a new, unique world record in May 2017 by running the entire length of Ireland, 555km from Mizen Head to Malin Head, in just three days, three hours and 47 minutes, smashing the previous record by more than 12 hours.

» my hill running; the technical sections were the main bit I incorporated into my regular runs. I maintain a good level of fitness all year round and tend to be ready to go at any time. It doesn't take too much training – just tweaking my run ahead of the event according to its terrain.

OFA: You looked genuinely overjoyed at the finish line in Oman. What made it such a special victory for you?

EK: It's one of my career highlights. I never anticipated actually winning that race. From the moment I realised I'd got in front, it was really overwhelming. I was genuinely full of joy. If I'd had any sense I'd have retired on the spot!

OFA: What is it about ultrarunning that appeals to you the most?

EK: I definitely enjoy the mental aspect of it. I prefer to outrace someone than outrun them and the whole strategising to tactically run a race – I love that. I call it the 'chess playing' part of running. For something like the Spine Race or even in Oman, that feeling of being completely responsible for your own outcome – where you're taken away from any first-world comforts – that's great for the mind too. I get to use my

mountaineering skills. Having that physical and mental endurance combined together is a serious skillset not to be underestimated or undervalued.

OFA: How do you fuel for these mammoth races – and has that changed over the years?

EK: In Oman, between aid stations, I ate very little. Over the entirety of the race I had one more piece of chocolate. Quite often, when I do eat mid-race, it's for a mental boost as much as anything. If I'm feeling physically or mentally jaded between feeding points I'll have something like a jelly bean just for the mental buzz. For a race like Oman, where you're running over 36 hours, you'd have to take a tonne of carbs because they only last a couple of hours.

OFA: So you use fat instead of carbs for races that go on for days?

EK: Yes. I've trained myself to get my fuel from fat. It takes time but I've now got to a point where I can run for three or four days on very little food. It's something I accidentally picked up – then I discovered the whole theory of burning fat for energy after I'd started doing it. I do my long weekend runs in a fasted state – straight out without breakfast – so it forces me to burn fat and the body adapts. It also gives me a huge mental boost, knowing I can run without needing to stop at the aid stations. I've used it as a race strategy at times where I accelerate through the aid stations leaving my competitors with Hobson's choice – whether to follow me and not eat or stop and eat. It's proved successful to date.

OFA: What are your race plans for 2020 – you've just done the Spine Race again? (11 January 2020)

EK: I'm still nailing down the plans for the year ahead. For the Spine Race, the interesting thing for me was going up against John Kelly, the last man to finish the Barkley Marathons (see right). He was the clear favourite, so I was looking forward to racing against him. For my own race, it was about going out and enjoying it. Obviously, I was aiming to put in a good result, get to the finish as fast as I could and put in my own PB – but the field was a little too strong this time. (Note: John Kelly won the Spine Race 2020, beating Eoin into second place). 

'IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE FIRST MARATHON, WHEN I STARTED DOING HILL RUNNING AND I GOT BETTER AT IT, THAT I REALISED I HAD A SKILL FOR THIS'



MORE INFORMATION

Eoin Keith is the 2019 champion of OMAN by UTMB® and a Columbia athlete. He races in the Columbia Montrail Rogue F.K.T collection. See columbiasportswear.co.uk

The Barkley Marathons in Frozen Head State Park, Tennessee, is known as the toughest endurance challenge ever, with over 160 kilometres of gruelling terrain, sheer drops and thick forest. Having run since 1986, it's one of the few running races that boasts an almost 100 per cent failure rate.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES AND BELIEFS





Rapid Change expert **Howard Cooper** explains how challenging your beliefs and harnessing your mental strength can help you escape your comfort zone and conquer new boundaries

A

re you gripped by a keen spirit of adventure? Are you always striving to reach new fitness goals? If so, then you'll probably have a dream.

That dream might be in the shape of a mountain on whose summit you've always dreamed of planting your flag, that rock face you've long

imagined scaling, or that cross-country PB you have set your heart on smashing.

Part of you desperately wants to break these new boundaries and explore new levels of achievement. And yet, frustratingly, another part of you doesn't really believe that's possible.

Perhaps it's almost as if there's an invisible barrier stopping you achieving. Maybe you think it's possible for others, but your body is not up to it (regardless of the amount of training you've put in).

Well, what if I told you the secret to conquering these boundaries is just a matter of breaking your own pre-conceived beliefs?

Next time you visit a library or find yourself browsing through a friend's bookshelves, grab a bunch of personal development books and skim through them. You'll probably come across the often-cited case of Roger Bannister, who, on 6 May 1954, became the first person to run a mile in under four minutes.

Many scientists and physicians of the day believed this great feat was impossible for the human frame to achieve.

NEW MILESTONE, BUT NOT FOR LONG

People had neared this milestone before, but never beaten it – until Bannister achieved his belief-shattering time of 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds. Books often also point out that, just 46 days later, an Australian runner, John Landy, achieved it in an even faster time. In following years, a plethora of others broke through this four-minute barrier, too.

Books on 'positive thinking' say Bannister made his historic achievement because he held a strong belief he could break this

boundary. These books suggest that this also helped others believe it was possible. Now I'm no athlete and I'm a faster reader than I am a sprinter, but I suggest that this is only half the story.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Bear with me while I take you on a journey, back to the previous century. For there, the history of cinema contains a clue that may help you tackle that mountain, push past your PB and scale new heights. Maybe along the way I can also shed some fresh light on the truth behind Bannister's great gift to mankind.

The year is 1886 and the Lumière brothers (those pioneering creators of cinema) are about to demonstrate one of their first movies to some unsuspecting French citizens. Bear in mind, if you will, these people have never before seen cinema and therefore have no frame of reference at all for what they are about to witness.

The movie is just a 90-second clip of a train pulling into a station. As the Lumière brothers showed their clip, rumour has it many audience members, on seeing the train coming towards them, freaked out completely. Some ducked, others screamed; many raced out of the cinema to avoid being run over.

APPEARANCE VS REALITY

Now, to you and me – having grown up around cinema – all this seems excessive. We are familiar with the technology, so we understand this image of the train is not actually a real train – it's just an image.

But ask the fleeing French citizens whether they felt genuinely anxious. They'd have replied: 'Zut alors! Of course we're really anxious. A train was coming towards us!'

So, what on earth does this have to do with Roger Bannister or breaking boundaries and beliefs? And how can this help you increase your mental strength so you can step beyond your comfort zone and push the limits of your adventurous warrior spirit further?

WHAT IS A BELIEF?

A belief is simply a mental image, connected to a sensation in the body of certainty. Essentially, it's your body interpreting the mental image as though it is real. This is the same mechanism we use when fleeing a cinema, screaming: 'Train!'. The French

FIVE STEPS TO BREAKING DOWN YOUR BELIEFS

Close your eyes: Think of a belief that's been holding you back with your fitness or adventure goals.

Get curious: How does this 'belief' present itself in your thoughts – as a mental image, a set of internal words, or both?

Imagine: Picture seeing these images or words on just a TV screen in your mind.

Now ask yourself: 'Are these images or words literally happening or are they just mental images right now?'

Then notice: Those sensations of certainty reduce as you acknowledge they are all 'just thoughts'.

filmgoers saw an image on the wall and responded with certainty as though it were real.

Likewise, when people thought: 'Humans can't run a four-minute mile', and felt a sensation of certainty, inside they interpreted that as a truth.

But is that thought any more real than the image of the train was? The answer is, 'No. It was just a "mental image".'

Back to our French cinema. Having grown up with film technology, how would you have responded to a movie of a train entering a station?

I'd hazard a guess you wouldn't have fled screaming. Your body would barely have responded. Why? Because you knew deep down it was just an image.

OVERCOMING MENTAL BARRIERS

When you really know that something isn't real, your body stops responding as though it were.

So, what really happened after Bannister broke the four-minute mile?

Was it that people began to believe they could run that fast, too? Or the other way around – that people simply stopped believing it was impossible? They suddenly saw the 'It's impossible' thought as just a mental image.

When they had the thought: 'Humans can't run four-minute miles', they were better able to dispute it, to deeply see it as just an image'.

Then suddenly their bodies no longer responded with that same feeling of certainty. Their belief in the impossibility became weaker. This mental barrier had been broken and the four-minute mile seemed more achievable, and repeatable.

Finally, I invite you to consider what this means for you when you stare up at that rock face and catch the: 'I'll-never-be-able-to-climb-that' thought trying to ensnare you into believing that's true.

SEEING THROUGH THE ILLUSION OF THOUGHT

What if, instead of struggling to do 'positive thinking', all you had to do was realise something else really simple? What if, what you called 'beliefs



Uncover your true fitness goals with the belief that it's possible to achieve them

Photography Shutterstock

of impossibility' were just words or just images in your head that you had interpreted as real?

Then the secret to breaking boundaries and beliefs is revealed: it's all a question of seeing through this illusion of thought.

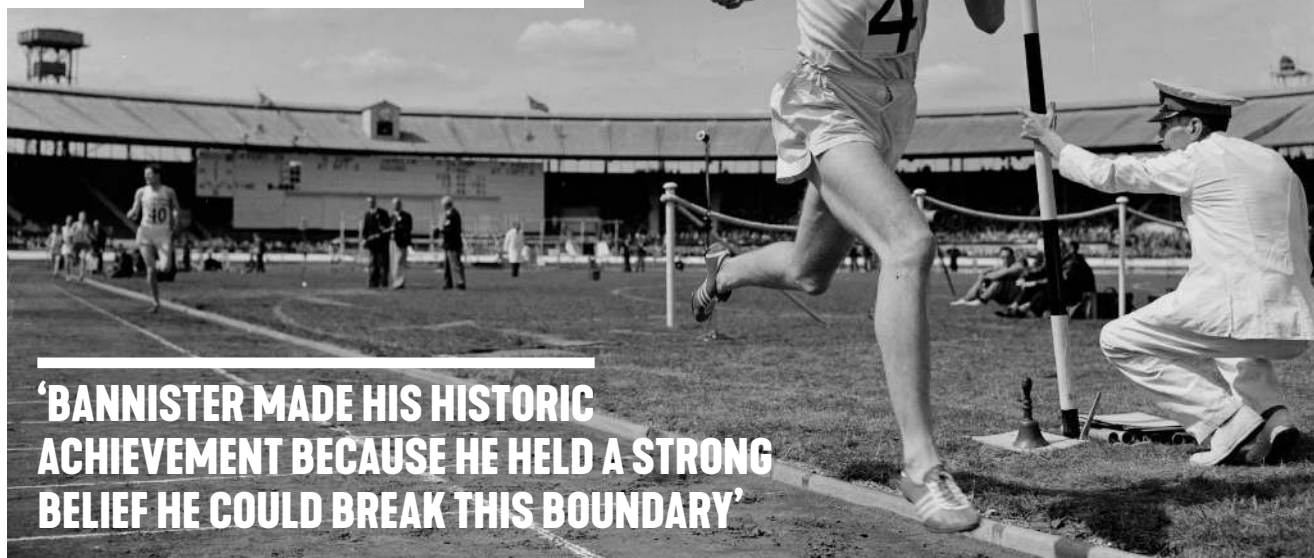
In the immortal words of Henry Ford, the great American industrialist and business magnate who founded the Ford Motor Company: 'Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you're right'.

So now you can release your handbrake, engage a new gear, climb to new heights, run faster than before, explore your full adventurous potential and don't let those images or words in your head fool you anymore.

Break free from being hampered by these mental illusions, and you will unlock your fitness and adventure goals in a way that you always dreamed possible. 

MORE INFORMATION

Howard Cooper is one of Britain's leading Rapid Change experts. A qualified hypnotherapist and Master Practitioner in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), he has spent the past 17 years helping people create rapid shifts in their thinking. For more details of his work, visit rapidchange.works



Photography Getty Images

'BANNISTER MADE HIS HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENT BECAUSE HE HELD A STRONG BELIEF HE COULD BREAK THIS BOUNDARY'

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NUTRITION

IMMUNE-BOOSTING FOOD FOR ENERGY AND ENDURANCE

POTATO POWER-UP

When it comes to endurance, carbohydrates that are rapidly digested and absorbed are the ideal choice. But instead of reaching for an energy gel, you might be better off picking up a potato. Researchers compared the effectiveness of potato purée and energy gels to fuel trained cyclists over a two-hour cycle, followed by a time trial. They found potato was just as effective as the energy gels in sustaining performance and blood glucose levels. Potatoes are also a surprisingly good source of many performance nutrients, including B vitamins, potassium, manganese, magnesium and vitamin C.



CONTENTS ➤

Eat right for your chosen discipline **106**
Breakfasts of champions **110**



EAT RIGHT FOR YOUR CHOSEN DISCIPLINE



No matter what the distance or the demands – nutrition scientists can prescribe the best performance-boosting meals and supplements to leave nothing to chance. Words: **Rob Kemp**

W

hatever your race goals, or whichever distance you're looking to conquer, getting the right fuelling in terms of content and amounts will be key to your success.

5K PARKRUN

For a 5K (3.1 mile) parkrun, depending on your make-up, you'll burn in the region of 300 calories over 30–45 minutes. 'If you do want to eat ahead of a short run and avoid any problems, then allow around 90 minutes between finishing your meal – maybe a banana or bowl of muesli – and the start,' suggests Anita Bean, sports and exercise nutritionist and author of *Vegetarian Meals in 30 Minutes* (Bloomsbury). Many runners opt to do this distance in a 'fasted' state or with just a cup of coffee inside them.

10K RACE

'Depending on the time of the race, a light breakfast two hours beforehand – porridge or toast with peanut butter – will boost glycogen levels without discomfort,' says Bean. 'Aim to start properly hydrated but take water on a hot day – use urine colour as a guide – and drink according to thirst.' There's no need to carb-load or even have top-up snacks during the run but fuelling your body the day

before a 10k with a balanced combination of carbs and protein can help. 'Foods like baked potatoes with cheese, or a protein source with rice and vegetables will lay down some carbs in your system but avoid fried foods these can be quite hard to digest.'

HALF-MARATHON (13.1 MILES/21K)

Pushing your run beyond 60 minutes and moving into half-marathon distances means paying more attention to your carb intake. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* research shows that for runners an optimum of 30–60g (see box out) of carbohydrate per hour of exercise is the ideal amount to minimise negative energy balance – maintaining blood glucose levels – while providing all the nutrition you need without overloading the digestive system.

'That's for every hour beyond the first one,' says Anita. 'Tapering your training – maintaining your carb intake but just reducing the volume of training – will stock your glycogen stores before the race.' Key to this is eating sufficient carbohydrate in the days before, such as rice and other grains, sweet potatoes, pasta and bread in each of your meals. 'Adding snacks – bananas and fruit and nut bars – helps fill those glycogen stores.'

During a half marathon some runners can get away with not eating anything. But as you stretch beyond 90 minutes, when glycogen levels can dip, those fast-absorbing sweet snacks come into their own.

MARATHON (26.2 MILES/42K)

With marathon distances and beyond it's imperative that you have a good, well-tested fuelling and hydration plan as the body only has the capacity to store enough fuel for approximately 18 to 20 miles of running. 'Use those long training runs to try out different fuelling to find out which foods agree with you,' suggests Bean. 'Having a small amount of food in your gut at the start of a long run gets the stomach used to running with food and trains the

carbohydrate transporter – molecules inside the gut that transport glucose and fructose – into the bloodstream. By practising eating and running at the same time you are actually training your gut's ability to absorb great amounts carbohydrate.'

Start refuelling during the race after about 60 minutes. 'That's a guide but it can all depend upon your pace and your gut,' adds Bean. 'Elite runners will have specially formulated mixes of glucose, fructose and other carbs; the faster the runner the more frequently they'll need refuelling – most regular runners want to be taking on fuel every 30 to 60 minutes, roughly every five miles.' ➤➤

'HAVING A SMALL AMOUNT OF FOOD IN YOUR GUT AT THE START OF A LONG RUN GETS THE STOMACH USED TO RUNNING WITH FOOD'



► TRIATHLON (STANDARD OR OLYMPIC – 1.5KM (0.93 MILE) SWIM; 40KM (25 MILE) BIKE; 10 KM/6.2 MILE RUN)

While similar marathon pre-loading guidelines can help boost glycogen levels for a tri, it's the unique make-up of these events – featuring a swim stage where it's virtually impossible to refuel – that makes taking on food more technical. 'The higher the intensity of an event, the harder it is for you to physically fuel along the way, but more importantly, the less efficient your digestive system will be in receiving the fuel,' suggests Shawn Wells, performance nutritionist. 'You're likely to feel gut distress when you eat anything while exercising at higher intensities.'

'So for more intense events, opt for higher concentration, less volume, more liquid-based foods and those that are fast digesting,' adds Wells. 'Try

CARB-LOADING GUIDELINES

Carb depletion is the limiting factor in endurance events but by carb-loading in the build-up to a race you're able to increase the levels of carbohydrate converting to energy in your liver and muscles. 'This will help you to avoid "hitting the wall",' insists Anita Bean. 'It's done by gradually tapering your training in the last few days before the race, so you use less energy, but consuming more by adding carbs (like pasta) to every meal and having carb-based snacks.' Use the little and often approach here – consuming over-sized amounts of pasta on the eve of a race could disrupt your sleep and hinder your performance.

simple sugars from energy drinks and gels, honey or gummy bears.' The type of food really depends on your habitual diet. 'If you are more of a fat-adapted athlete, you are probably better at utilising fat for fuel – therefore nuts, seeds, MCT oil could be your preferred choice, although on race day, adding some complex carbohydrates such as oats pre-race or dates during the race could give you that extra kick.'

CYCLOSPORTIVES OR MULTIDAY EVENTS

'With long events, what you should be trying to do is keep your blood glucose levels (blood sugar levels) topped up,' says Nigel Mitchell, former Team SKY sports nutritionist and author of *The Plant-Based Cyclist* (GCN, £14.99)

'As a rule of thumb when you are doing something like a six-hour bike event, then trying to maintain in the region of 40g of carbs per hour is a good target to aim for, to maintain blood glucose levels (feeding both the muscles, and the brain).'

Mitchell recommends having bananas, energy bars, homemade race foods like rice cakes or rice balls wrapped in seaweed, energy drinks and gels. 'It's important to "practise" that kind of volume and type of intake beforehand on a similar scale.'

'For a good pre-race meal, one we use a lot with our pro riders is porridge oats, often with eggs. The combination of the fats and protein helps to regulate the digestion and absorption of the carbohydrate. If people are on a plant-based diet, then including things like coconut oil and soya milk with your oats ensures that you get the protein and fat there too.'

ULTRAMARATHON 100KM (60 MILES)

Beyond the marathon distance, experimentation comes to the fore. Food stations at ultra events are



'FOR LONGER EVENTS, IT IS LIKELY MORE BENEFICIAL TO BE A MORE FAT-ADAPTED ATHLETE'



WHAT DOES 30-60G OF CARBS LOOK LIKE?



Jelly Babies = $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ a 150g bag

Apricot & sultana flapjack = $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 whole 27g flapjack

Homemade flapjack = $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 whole 90g flapjack



Jaffa cakes = 3 to 6 cakes (8.6g carbs per cake)

Eccles Cake = 1 to 2 cakes

Boiled baby potatoes = 3 to 6 potatoes

Marzipan nut/raisin balls = 3 to 6 balls (12g carbs per ball)

Banana = 2 medium size (30g carbs each)



awash with savoury snacks because over such long distances an athlete's palate can become tired of sweet, energy snacks. Ultrarunners and endurance cyclists will turn to everything from salami paninis to peanut butter sandwiches and even mini cheeses or rice cakes to get a savoury energy hit. They're easy on the gut but also offering the psychological boost of not being another sugary gel. And then there are the fat-adapted or keto diet-converted ultra athletes.

'For longer events, it is likely more beneficial to be a more fat-adapted athlete,' suggests Shawn Wells. This is achieved by having a low-carb, high-fat habitual diet as opposed to a mixed diet. 'When you're able to burn fat more readily for energy, you become less reliant on carbohydrates, and therefore need to consume far less during a race than a carbohydrate-dependent athlete would,' adds Wells. This is because you have plenty of fat stores on board to keep you going for several days.

'Without the ability to use fat for fuel, you have to continuously top up with carbohydrate stores – as when glycogen gets depleted (which is usually after about 90 minutes), you are fully reliant on blood glucose for energy.' But this only holds true for longer, lower intensity races such as ultramarathons. So being able to use less fuel and more efficient fuel (fat) may be beneficial for longer events. 'If you're carb dependent, you'll need about 60g of carbs an hour,' says Wells. 'But if you're fat adapted, you'll need a lot less!' 

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BREAKFASTS OF CHAMPIONS

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day... especially for endurance athletes. Rob Kemp finds out what they eat to get the competitive edge

Getting off to a strong start can be the secret to success in major races and for many endurance enthusiasts the seeds to that success are sown at breakfast time. 'A good breakfast can also give you a bit of a psychological boost and some comfort in the knowledge that you've got the fuel in the system to see you through a long event,' insists Nigel Mitchell, acclaimed professional World Tour cycling nutritionist for Team Sky and author of *The Plant-Based Cyclist* (GCN). 'When you wake up your body is inevitably in a slightly depleted state – even though you've been asleep, your brain has been active and the glucose reserves in the body will have dipped.'

Ahead of a major event most athletes will build up to race day with a nutrition plan which means breakfast on the day will simply top up their system and provide additional fuel for the first few kilometres. That's not to say it should be taken lightly though. Breakfast provides essential pre-fuelling ahead of a long day running, cycling, canoeing or climbing. But, as meals go, breakfast can be a bit, well, Marmite among athletes of all standards. Some love to start a training

session or event with a light breakfast at the very least, while others can't face eating at all. To combat this, Mitchell suggests timing your first meals so that there's a long enough gap between eating and competing. 'With pros we work back from the start of the event and aim to have breakfast early enough to ensure it's fully digested.' Knowing that you should have breakfast and when to eat it aren't the only factors to consider though – knowing what to eat is crucial too. And that's where the champions come in...

CHAMPION'S CHOICES

Mark Beaumont, Around the World in 80 Days long-distance cyclist, broadcaster and Vango ambassador
'As an ultra-endurance athlete, I am a "diesel" engine, so need lots of slow-release energy – so a high-fat diet, as opposed to particularly high carbohydrate or



Mark Beaumont

protein. Sometimes, I'm limited to pre-prepared food, especially when mountaineering or ocean rowing, for example, I recently climbed the world's highest volcano in Chile and used the Firepot vegetarian range. But where possible on expedition, I use freshly prepared food, especially when out there for weeks and months. I start the day with porridge, adding raisins, seeds and banana. Then, within the hour, I will have a big smoothie with loads of calories blended in – often with avocado and yoghurt to add the fats. Don't forget a great coffee as well, even if it's on the go as I pedal along at 4am.'

Ricky Lightfoot, Salomon's world champion trail runner

'What I eat depends a lot on the type of race I'm doing, but in all cases I make sure I have a good feed the night before. If I'm doing a short race (20km or below), I'll drink a little water (1.5 pints) with some caffeine/electrolytes and have maybe a small bowl of porridge with a banana. I usually eat this around 2.5-3.5 hrs before the start of the race. For a longer race (anything over 20km), I eat the same but maybe a larger bowl of porridge (overnight soaked porridge oats with honey, goji berries

and coconut milk) and some toast and a cereal bar. The other difference is I may eat a little later (1.5 to 2.5 hrs before) as quite often the longer races have a slower start and/or a long uphill to begin with. I'll also keep drinking until around 30 minutes before the start.'

Jonathan Albon is the world's number-one obstacle course racer (OCR), Spartan (spartanrace.uk/en) ultra-endurance world champion and current world Skyrunning (mountain running) champion.

'I aim to eat as little processed food as possible and also actual food. I've



Jonathan Albon

switched to eating a lot more bread at breakfast. I used to eat cereals but they're often full of sugar and I would prefer a more natural or even cooked breakfast for calories.'

Susannah Gill, 7 marathons on 7 continents in 7 days (February 2019) world record breaker

'I keep things very simple – my usual breakfast is two pieces of brown toast with peanut butter and Marmite. It has to be crunchy Whole Earth peanut butter which has no added sugar and is just full of energy. This gives me the base of energy I need for the day. Sometimes, I also have orange or apple juice for some extra vitamin C and because it's delicious. Absolutely essential is at least one large cup of tea – normally decaf these days and then I can boost myself with a caffeinated cup on days I need it.' ➡➡

**'I DON'T TRAIN IN
A FASTED STATE.
I ALWAYS LIKE TO HAVE
SOMETHING INSIDE
PRIOR TO A SESSION'
— TOM MARSHALL**

➤ **Ed Clancy OBE, Team GB track and road cyclist – six-time world champion** 'Slow-release energy staples such as a bowl of porridge (600g of porridge with semi-skimmed milk) on an endurance training day and then carbs such as apple, plus some juice (apple too) and water. I'm not too big on coffee – I know that doesn't tally with a lot of cyclists, but I prefer juice in the morning. To mix things up I'll have scrambled eggs too and some carbs from wholemeal toast on some days.'

Eilish McColgan, double Olympian long-distance runner and sporting ambassador for PolarUK



Eilish McColgan

'My staple diet is porridge. My mum used to tell me to eat it as a kid, but I'd spit it out – now I take packets of it wherever

I travel – and protein shakes!'

Sophie Coldwell, Team GB ITU World Triathlon medal winner and Zone 3 ambassador

'If it's a morning race, I try to keep it simple so as not to unsettle the stomach! Some plain porridge or toast and a banana is quite easy to digest and gives me a mix of slow- and fast-digesting carbs. My races are usually fast and furious, so carbs are definitely my body's preferred energy source for this!'

Joe Skipper, ITU Long Distance Triathlon World Championships medallist

'My pre-race nutrition will largely depend on where

I am racing in the world, and what I have access to. I like pancakes with syrup or, failing that, a bowl of cereal and fruit. And don't forget coffee!'

Nikki Bartlett, elite Zone3 triathlete and Pro Ironman competitor 'The stomach is usually churning a little before a race, so the last thing I want to do is overwhelm it with a huge meal. Since I'm racing over longer distances, I like a mix of fats and complex carbs, as my body needs to sustain the energy – not crash and burn! A two or three-egg omelette and some wholegrain toast or quinoa is perfect, and I may sip on an electrolyte drink close to the start, especially in hotter climes where I know I'll sweat more than usual.'

Andy Vernon, Great British long-distance runner, European Championships finalist and On ambassador 'For me it's keeping it simple but having something in the system ahead of training for 5,000m and 10,000m sessions. I have porridge with a cup of tea before my training.'

Damian Hall, record-breaking ultramarathon runner and ambassador for Inov-8

'Usually, if it's a morning race, it'd be porridge and a banana with a little nut butter and perhaps a bit of chocolate – and approximately 15 gallons of Yorkshire Tea (not all in the same bowl!). Before breaking the Paddy Buckley Round record last summer I ate a banana and a stale pain au raisin. Seemed to work. It's important to be flexible though and relaxed about it. A lot of my races are abroad, so you can't be sure what you want will be available. And many of my races are



Damian Hall

evening kick offs, which makes porridge seem a bit odd or unappealing. In that case it'll be something plain, non-experimental and easy to digest, like pasta or rice and vegetables, perhaps.'

Tom Marshall, Welsh 1,500m specialist who won European cross country gold on his GB debut in December 2017. He's a sub four-minute miler and Saucony ambassador

'The key for me is to replicate what I do on a race day in training, and for this to be the right sort of nutrition that I need for a good session. Where I can, this will include a high carbohydrate breakfast (four wheat biscuits with a banana or some fruit are my go-to), and a coffee. They're low in fat, low in sugar and high in fibre, making them easily digestible and a great source of energy. If I'm training/racing abroad and don't have access to this, I'll substitute for toast and jam. Both are simplistic, and my body has got used to this over the years of training. Ideally, this would be eaten 4 hours before a session – if I have a 9am session, I'll eat three wheat biscuits around 6am. For me, I don't train in a fasted state. I like to have something inside prior to a session.'

Ieuan Thomas, Great Britain International Steeplechaser and 2017 World Athletics Championships competitor

'On big session days, I try to use breakfast as a way to kickstart my carbohydrate intake for the day. I'm a big porridge fan on the morning of a session as it digests really quickly and provides a



Ieuan Thomas

GOLDEN RULES

■ Eat breakfast 2 to 3 hrs before the race. Make it carb-based, with some high-glycaemic carbs included (cereal, porridge and jam/honey, toast and jam, or cereal bars with yoghurt and fruit).

■ If you're running in a fasted state, ensure you're well hydrated. For longer runs, a drink with sodium in will be better retained by the body.

■ Some athletes are more sensitive to caffeine than others, so you should be a regular caffeine user or have tried it a few times in training first. A dose of around 150mg (double espresso) one hour before is a good level to start at.

■ Try this smoothie recipe: two scoops of Kinetica Banana Whey Protein, honey, a large banana, a handful of walnuts, a scoop of Greek yoghurt, 400ml of milk and 100ml of water/ice.

low-sugar, slow-release energy source. If my session is later in the day, I'll combine this with a carb-based lunch. My pre-race and pre-session go-to are a couple of peanut butter and jam bagels, about four hours before I'm due to start a warm-up. It's a case of finding what works for you, and not straying too far away. I usually travel with porridge pots if I'm racing abroad – it's the only way to guarantee a good race-day breakfast. I do my Sunday long run fasted, fuelled on a double espresso and a couple of energy gels during the run – something like

scrambled egg on toast with smoked fish is a guaranteed winner when I've got some extra time on a weekend.' 

'ON BIG SESSION DAYS I TRY TO USE BREAKFAST AS A WAY TO KICKSTART MY CARBOHYDRATE INTAKE FOR THE DAY'

– IEUAN THOMAS



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A QUICK CHAT WITH

JON GUPTA

Mountaineering athlete and Montane ambassador, Jon Gupta, has a spate of world records and is also the mastermind behind the incredible 'Project 7in4' – conquering seven peaks on seven continents in four months. Words: **Rob Kemp**

What are you currently training for?

I'm training to improve my personal climbing skills. This year I am taking a step back from leading so many big, high-altitude expeditions and spending more time in the UK and the Alps.

What does a training week entail?

I rarely have two weeks the same in my life, but recently I've been training a lot at the indoor climbing wall and at home. At the wall I train technique, strength and endurance depending on what I'm in the mood for. At home I have a homemade ice axe training wall. I struggle with self-motivation for training, so the home sessions tend to be sporadic.

What's your favourite pre- and post-race snacks/food?

Pre-event it would be a banana and fruit smoothie with oats, maybe a Snickers bar. I often stop mid-session for a cup of tea and cake before a second blast. Post-training would be plenty of fluid, sometimes a protein drink, peanut butter bagels and I have a slight obsession with Doritos!

What do you love about your sport?

The mountains are very special. I take equal pleasure from personal time spent in the mountains and the time I spend instructing and guiding. I feel very fortunate that I get to travel around the world and spend time in some of the most beautiful and remote mountain ranges.

What have been some of your biggest achievements?

Being part of the first team to complete the Yukon Arctic Ultra 430 miles in 2017 with my friend Tom Sutherland; completing the Bob Graham Round in 22:30 on a cold crispy November day; and standing on the summit of Everest with my client Steve Plain after I facilitated him smashing the seven summits speed record down to 117 days.

What has been your favourite event?

The Yukon Arctic Ultra. It took me two attempts to complete the race and there is nothing



'THE RACE WASN'T WITHOUT PAIN AND SUBSTANTIAL SUFFERING'

sweeter than returning a second time and being successful. The race wasn't without pain and substantial suffering, but we crossed the line 14th and 15th. Around 100 people started the race and less than 20 finished.

What advice would you give those wanting to get into climbing?

Do it! Climbing has changed my life for the better in every way. The physical side

of climbing is enjoyable, and in the early days you will see huge improvement which will give you confidence to keep going.

Who has inspired you and why?

In my early days of climbing big high-altitude mountains I was inspired by Ed Viesturs, the first American to climb all the 8,000m mountains without oxygen. I have read his book many times. In more recent times, Alpine athletes such as the late Ueli Steck, and Steve House have opened up a new generation of possibilities of what is achievable in the mountains.

What are your future goals?

They are split between stabilising my company Mountain Expeditions and improving my personal climbing and skiing to the level required to consider the British IFMGA scheme. Both are very exciting and time consuming but it's about finding the elusive balance. I am also trying to spend a little more time at home in North Wales. 

MORE INFORMATION

Having conquered Mount Everest three times, completed the first British Ski ascent of Lenin Peak (7,134m) and accomplished the second-fastest speed solo summit of Ama Dablam, Jon Gupta is the epitome of Montane's 'further.faster' ethos. Visit montane.co.uk

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