



Noel stops to change trainers and receive some fluids from crew member Kim Lewis.



Kim Lewis, Noel Hanna, Joan Hanna with cameraman from documentary film crew.

Noel battles sandstorms

to be first Brit past the post

▲ Noel Hanna takes a quick break for a photo opportunity.



A SUPERHUMAN effort from Dromara man Noel Hanna recently saw him first past the finish line out of the British entries in the Death Valley Challenge in America.

Finishing the race in 10th position overall has proved to be a tremendous achievement for the local ultra-runner.

Noel, from Brookside Road, admits that he would have been pleased with simply a finishing time due to a knee injury he has been carrying for some time.

"The first 12 hours were quite difficult but after that I found myself settling into the race.

"However, my knee started to play up around the 83 mile mark and I had to drop my pace for the last fifty miles," said Noel.

He went on to say, "If it wasn't for my knee giving me problems, I believe I had a realistic chance of finishing in the top five."

DEMANDING

Described as one of the most demanding and extreme ultra-marathons, the Death Valley Challenge covers three mountain ranges for a total of 13,000ft of vertical ascent and 4,700ft of descent, with runners having to compete in temperatures of 130-140 degrees.

To make matters even worse the start of the 135

supplied with changes of clothes and drinks, but also monitoring his health very closely, as it has been known in the past for runners to suffer renal failure (kidney failure) and even death.

EXHAUSTION

The fact that last year's ladies winner and record holder had to drop out of the race along with 13 others due to heat exhaustion shows exactly how demanding the challenge really is.

"The heat really was unbearable," said Noel.

"I had to keep my spare clothes in an ice box to keep them cold and when I put them on they even had ice hanging from them," he added.

This proved to be an ingenious method of keeping Noel's body temperature down in the extreme heat.

Noel finished the race probably in a better condition than most of us would after a jog in the park.

"I was tired and my feet were a little swollen but apart from that I felt great," he said.

Not resting on his achievements, Noel is already looking to his next challenge which comes in the form of the Eco-challenge in Patagonia, Argentina.

"I'll be captaining an all-Ireland team which consists of four others,

myself, another man from Belfast and two from the South.

It is a ten day challenge and consists of such disciplines as cycling, mountain biking, canoeing, running and ice climbing," explained Noel.

DOCUMENTARY

Noel is also set to become a star of the big screen when a 'fly on the wall' documentary of the Death Valley Challenge is released next year.

Noel explained how he was followed by a camera crew for most of his time in America.

"The crew had already travelled to Dromara to get some background footage of myself at home and in training.

"But when I was in America they followed me around constantly and during the race they travelled in the van with the crew," he added.

The opening shot of the film shows a runner who attempted the Challenge in 1992 sacrificing water carriers in favour of a video camera.

The runner fell ill and began to hallucinate, but despite recording himself, he eventually died at the roadside.

These scenes have obviously no fear for Noel as he is determined to return to Death Valley to better his 10th position.

Report by
John Hooks

mile race was held up for four hours due to freak flash floods. Then seven hours into the race competitors had to deal with sandstorms.

"Apparently this kind of weather is unheard of in this part of America.

"The race being held up meant that we were starting in soaring heat rather than in the cool temperatures before sunrise at 6.00am," added Noel.

Recording a finishing time of 39 hours, Noel only stopped for approximately two hours to rest and change clothes.

"I came across a motel after about 72 miles where I was able to have a shower and get refreshed."

Noel's crew consisted of his wife, Joan and ultra-marathon expert Kim Lewis.

They had a very important role to play during the race not only keeping Noel



Noel at the after race party with competitor Maria de Jesus.



Noel with ladies winner Angelica Castenada.