

Dromara runner set for Californian challenge

A 100-mile trek in the Himalayas would be more than most people would undertake in a life-time, but for one Dromara adventurer, it was just a warm-up!

Fitness instructor Noel Hanna leaves shortly for California where a 100-mile endurance run in 30 hours will make the Eastern endeavour he undertook last year look like a walk in the park.

Noel raised £18,000 in sponsorship for research into brain tumours at the Royal Victoria Hospital after the Himalayan stage race but this year he is competing for personal challenge.

The Dromara man will be among 170 athletes lining up for the Thirteenth Annual Angeles Crest 100-mile Endurance Run at the Angeles National Forest just north of Los Angeles. Competitors from Mexico, Japan and Canada will take on American runners in the renowned race in which Noel is the only representative from Northern Ireland.

ALTITUDE

Noel will fly to California with his wife six days ahead of the event on 26 September to acclimatise to the altitude and temperature.

Breakfast at 3.30am kicks off the harrowing day of the event followed by the 5am race start. Aid stations at 10-15 minute intervals provide water and food but Noel will carry a water pouch, power snacks, Vaseline and an extra pair of running shoes and socks in a ruck-sack.

Running through the night will challenge the experienced runner's agility and concentration. Finding your footing in the rough mountain terrain is no mean feat during the day, but at night with only the light of a torch worn on the head, the risk of suffering a sprain is greatly increased.

NIGHT RUN

Noel is happy to have found some company for the darkness trek.

He explained: "An American girl I met during the Himalayan race told me about this event. She said it's a lot harder because it's all run at the same time whereas the Himalayan one was over three days. She

asked me if I'd be interested in coming over to take part. She's not doing the whole race but she's going to run the night section with me."

This woman was the first lady finisher in the Himalayan race. The fact that she questions her fitness for this race speaks volumes about the challenge which lies ahead for Noel.

"The hardest aspect will be the change in temperature. It will go from the high 90's in the deep canyons to a cool 60 in the mountain passes," said Noel.

NATURAL THREAT

The obstacles the runners must face do not end with temperature and rugged terrain, however. The event organisers warn of "poison oak and rattlesnakes" during the day, and mountain lions at night!

"It doesn't really bother me at all," said Noel. "When you're doing a race like that you just switch off. You just concentrate on the finishing line."

In addition to the ten main races within the event, awards are allocated in time categories. All runners finishing within the 33-hour time limit will receive a Bronze Ram belt buckle. Noel hopes to finish in under 24 hours and claim a Sterling Silver belt buckle.

Noel's training regime has stepped up over the past few months. He hopes the hours he has spent running in the Mourne, circuit training and cycling will be enough to see him through the gruelling event. If successful, he will attend the awards ceremony shortly after the race ends, followed by a hard-earned barbecue and picnic.

TREATMENT

Noel aims to escape the ordeal with only sore feet to contend with. "The only

thing I can see myself needing treatment for is alcohol poisoning on the days after the race!" he joked. Noel will enjoy a well-deserved holiday in California after the race for "recovery and party" purposes!

Even after this monumental challenge, Noel still has a long way to go to satisfy his spirit of adventure and endurance. He is already planning to undertake a similar feat in the Sahara Desert next year.

"Some of my friends think I'm mad," he admitted, "but some of them can't even walk the length of themselves and at least I'm keeping myself fit!"

Noel certainly has a way of understating his worldwide physical achievements!

