



Himalayan 100-mile race: tough terrain, high altitude and breathtaking scenery



Paul Freary: used strength, stamina and solid strategy to win

THE HIMALAYAN 100-MILE STAGE RACE IS AMONG THE MOST CHALLENGING ON THE GLOBAL CALENDAR, AS PAUL FREARY REPORTS

# SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

**N**OW in its 26th year, the Himalayan 100-mile stage race follows a path laid by the Aga Khan in the early 1900s. The Khan never made it to see his completed road, which traces the border between the Darjeeling region of northern India and neighbouring Nepal as his advisors said it would be too dangerous.

If he had he made the trip there is no doubt he would have stood in wonder at the sight of four of the five highest mountains in the world being visible from the same place. Mounts Everest, Kanchenjunga, Lhotse and Makalu would greet us in all their glory on our third day in the mountains, but first we had to get to the best viewing point.

## Day one: Maneybhanyang (6600ft) to Sandakphu (11,815ft) – 24 miles

It was only after three hours were showing on my watch that the full magnitude of this event hit home. The longest time I had previously been on my feet was at a spring marathon where I struggled to a 2:56

finish, having hit the wall at around 21 miles. With that in mind as well as the extreme altitudes at which we were running I had decided to keep an eye on both my pace and heart rate, with the latter being the deciding factor given the effect altitude at which we were now running can have.

Having started at a height twice that of Snowdon and spent what felt like most of the day relentlessly climbing, the altitude, incline and terrain were all taking their toll on the body. I was experiencing a tingling sensation in my arms and when signing in at the various checkpoints I noticed my fingers had become swollen, but after taking a lead early in the day I kept to my plan of remaining below 150 beats per minute on my heart rate monitor in order to operate effectively.

Finishing in just over four hours at around midday, the temperature was still only a few degrees above freezing, but it left the rest of the day free to recover from what had been the longest time I'd

ever spent running and with the undulations had included almost 8500ft of climbing.

As the day went on the rest of the field finished, with it perhaps dawning on some of the 65 starters the mammoth task they had undertaken, finishing in darkness and after over nine hours on the mountain trail in now freezing conditions.

## Day two: Sandakphu-Moll-Sandakphu – 20 miles

A cold start and cloud hid the mountains from view as we set off on day two. The harsh, rocky terrain taking us on an out and back course that would still manage to batter the muscles with over 3000ft of climbing along the rollercoaster track.

Mr C S Pandey, the race organiser, was keen to point out that the event was as much about experiencing the very best of nature as it was about racing and the helpful staff along the route ensured everyone could do this in a safe manner as they took care of the runners at the various aid stations offering water and

food ranging from bananas to potatoes.

I had decided to simply take onboard water from the checkpoints, choosing my own carbohydrate drink for a source of fuel along the route, (see my race kit checklist) a decision which would save me a little time and also mean I was taking on a measured amount of fuel in a manner that I was used to.

## Day three: Sandakphu (11815ft) to Rimbik (6350ft) – marathon

After an early start to what we hoped would be a magnificent sunrise we were greeted with a slight covering of snow on the

ground, this making the setting even more picturesque.

We did get some glimpses of the mountains but it was only after around a mile into the race that we turned a corner and were greeted by the most amazing view of a sunlit Mount Everest and the other highest peaks on the planet that the race came to a momentarily standstill as athletes gazed in amazement at the magnificent giants.

The route today would retrace the previous days first 10 miles before taking an out and back section of path that climbed to a peak before plunging for the final eight miles down

the mountain side through villages and encampments, thick undergrowth and rocky channels so steep that at points it felt like abseiling would have been a better option.

The racing had become a battle between myself and an Argentinean, Mariano Ontanon. In the previous two days it was obvious he was clearly a faster downhill runner, being half my age, he threw himself down the steep descents without a care in the world, where I took a somewhat more considered approach.

Today was his opportunity to cut my overall race lead advantage. Something which, in the final eight-mile descent, he went about with gusto.

At one point as we neared the mountain valley, the road had been washed away by a monsoon only a week previously. The devastation was terrible, houses and trucks were now just fragments scattered on the steep hillside and boulders the size of small houses lay in the river below. We crossed the river over an old bridge that had been brought back into service after the steel and concrete

Peakier blunders: four of the five highest mountains in the world



Runners faced a big mental and physical test

