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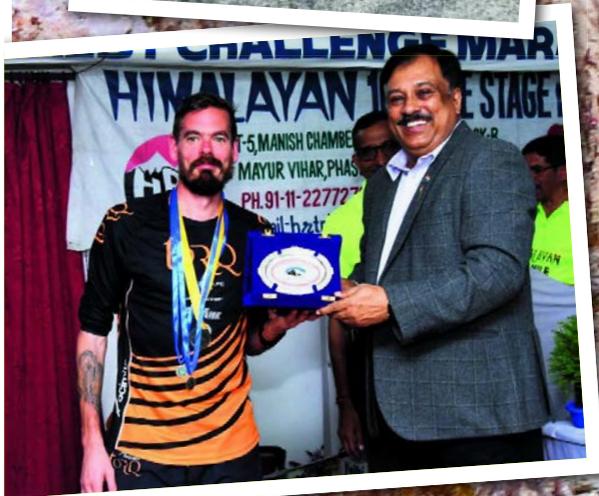
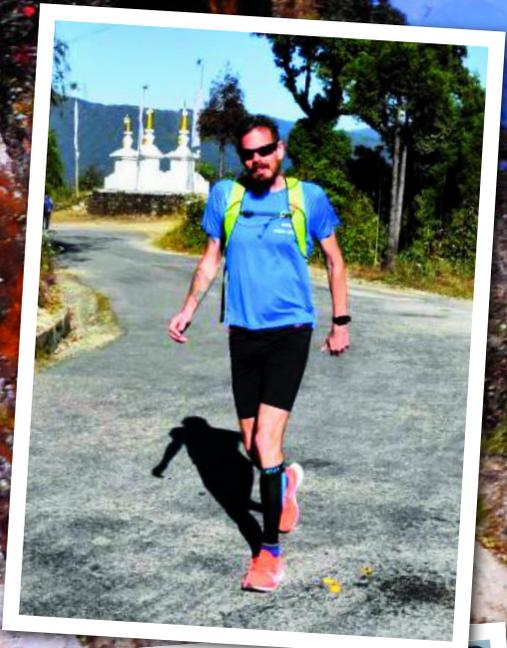


**GRIPPY SHOES THE BEST NEW GEAR FOR 2019 WARM JACKETS**

## HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

### 100 MILES IN FIVE DAYS

This race is similar format to the Tour de France in that the Himalayan 100-mile Stage race involves running roughly 20 miles a day and your final time is calculated at the end of the week. You stay in mountain huts each night so don't have to carry any kit. The race takes place every November.  
[himalayan.com](http://himalayan.com)





HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

**HIMALAYAN 100-MILE**

# On top of the world

Five years ago Phil Martin was a smoking, drinking non-runner. Today he's a 2hr 31min marathon runner and winner of the Himalayan 100-mile stage race

Words Phil Martin

It was difficult to judge who was more surprised. Me, a resident of the vast expanse of the UK's flatlands known as the Fens, who was all of a sudden leading the Himalayan 100-mile stage race, or the red panda minding its own business after appearing from nowhere in front of me.

Seconds before we'd both trotted around our respective corners, both very much in our own world and both unprepared for what we were about to encounter. There I was descending at pace from the forest and while in front of me, ambling along, was the panda

doing what pandas do. There was a surreal double take before one of us scarpered and the other (me) was jolted back into life as one of my fellow competitors flew past unaware of what had just unfolded.

Back to the job in hand. Tackling 100 miles over five days in a stage race up and down the most demanding terrain on the planet.

The Himalayas are everything you can imagine and more, with soaring mountains, wildly fluctuating temperatures, amazing wildlife and a wonderfully inviting culture.

Unsurprisingly the race, set in the North East Himalayas, is regarded as one of the world's most challenging and toughest endurance events, soaring in parts to 12,000ft above sea-level. I had put in some hard miles in the Peak District as part of my preparation and naturally I'd done some research, but the scale of the challenge I'd taken on only began to dawn on me as we arrived at the race base camp in the remote Himalayan hill town of Mirik. It was here, after what seemed like a never-ending upwards bus journey on treacherous roads surrounded by tea →

## HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

As ever, trail running is all about the scenery



### PHIL'S RACE KIT

"As part of my race package, Black Diamond supplied me with a set of Distance FLZ trekking poles. I hadn't used them in a race before but was keen to give them a go as they can save up to a third of your energy. After a great first day, I actually gave them to another competitor – 62-year-old Rainer Kauczor from Germany who didn't have any poles and had been using makeshift poles he'd fashioned from fallen tree branches. I thought they would be of more benefit to him, and so it proved. On my feet I wore Salomon S-Lab Sense 7s and was more than happy with the cushioning and precision they provided."

estates and lush vegetation, that I realised I was at the highest point I'd ever been in my life. And it was here that we caught our first glimpse of snow-capped mountains. Kangchenjunga, the world's third highest peak, cutting a breathtaking figure in the distance only served as a reminder that over the next five days we would be going higher.

From the research I'd done I knew that day one would likely be the toughest day we were to face, with 40km of running to complete and overall altitude gain of over 10,000ft, it was sure to be a baptism of fire. The alarm clock went off at 4.30am, and we were off to the race start point by 5.30am. There was a sense of nervous anticipation in the air, with everyone keen to finally start running.

After an eternity of climbing and reaching around 10,000ft, complete with magnificent, endless panoramas, we began a long sweeping downhill, losing the valuable height we'd just gained, such is the beauty of this event.

#### A question of altitude

Between 10,000 and 12,000ft I was really starting to flag, feeling tired and dizzy, and really starting to doubt

whether or not I'd make the end of the stage. Or for that matter, if there was even going to be an end.

It was worth it though. We were actually above the clouds, and it's not every day you can say that on a run. However, despite the undoubted beauty of the landscape I have to admit the first day was very much a mental battle rather than a physical one.

All I kept focusing on was moving forwards, putting one leg in front of the other. Finally, up ahead I was informed that the finish was just around the corner and I managed to drag myself over the line.

Within minutes of crossing the finishing line I began to shiver and the fantastic race support team ushered me, freezing, towards my accommodation for the next two nights to warm up – a rather basic wooden mountain hut with a bed and little else.

There are no creature comforts at 12,000ft, but I was swiftly brought a large bucket of boiling water to wash myself and get warm again. I then wrapped myself in some warm clothes from my race bag, which had been deposited in my room by the support team, before going to refuel and cheer on the other competitors.



## Feet in the clouds

The course is challenging but the scenery makes it all worthwhile. Much of the race takes place in Sandakphu National Park, which is the only place in the world where you can see four of the world's five highest mountains at the same time. Running along the trails surrounded by the imposing figures of Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, and Kangchenjunga somehow makes you forget about the pain in your legs. It's not only the beauty of the snowcapped mountains that have earned the course the reputation as being the world's most scenic; it also traverses through isolated jungle, pine forests and small settlements where you're always greeted with smiles and cheers. It offers you the opportunity to rub shoulders with some wonderful wildlife such as yaks, wild ponies and even a red panda.

Somehow, five days of being completely separated from the real world, with no phone signal while staying in unheated huts with no running water, and a hole in the ground for a toilet is a small sacrifice to enjoy everything this race has to offer. I met people from all four corners of the world, from different walks of life, who all share a passion for adventure and running on the trails. **TR**

## TRAINING TIPS

# Getting ready for hills

Phil picks out three key workouts that helped him prepare for the 100-mile stage race



SHOULTS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO\*

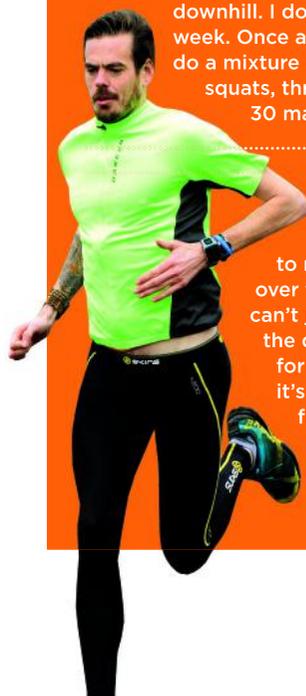
## 1 HILL REPEATS

There's a local hill that I use on my lunchbreak to do 20-30 minutes of continuous hills. Up and down as many times as I can before jogging back to the office as a warm-down. I also took a trip up to the Peak District National Park and ran to the summit of Kinder Scout.



## 2 CORE STRENGTH

Core strength is hugely important; it helps you maintain great form working up and downhill. I do this twice a week. Once a week, I also do a mixture of lightweight squats, three sets of 30 maximum.



## 3 LONG RUNS

If you want to run 100 miles over five days you can't just turn up on the day and hope for the best, so it's important to fit a long run into your schedule each week.

**SCOTT**

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