

Hollis hits peak form in the Himalayas



HIGH HOPES
Paul Hollis prepares for his challenge

By Andy Tong

ATHLETICS: A RUNNER with local athletics club Tunbridge Wells Harriers set himself an uphill task when he took part in the Himalayan 100 Mile Stage Race challenge – and finished in third place.

Paul Hollis relished the opportunity to take part in the gruelling challenge, often described as the ‘most scenic race in the world’.

Organised by Himalayan Run and Trek, it offers spectacular views of Everest and many other iconic peaks such as Lhotse, Makalu and Kanchenjunga.

The total elevation gain was 28,054 feet, around a thousand feet short of climbing Everest itself.

An officer with the Metropolitan Police, Paul recorded an overall time of 24 hours and eight minutes.

He said: “I’ve never done anything so amazing or daft before. I had never competed at altitude or in a multi day event. I couldn’t believe I finished third.”

The race takes place over five consecutive days, with different distances set each day including a marathon - the Everest Challenge - halfway through.

Paul had already run 11 marathons over 11 months this year in preparation for the event, in locations as diverse as London, Berlin and Shepton Mallet Prison.

He has also done some of his training in a

simulated altitude environment to help acclimatise to the testing conditions, when lower levels of oxygen affect performance.

The first day saw an elevation gain of nearly 3,000 metres over 24 miles, at the end of which Paul was in second place.

“I was excited but terrified to finish day one in second place,” he said. “It was brutally tough with 11,000 feet of altitude gain. I thought, had I gone off to hard?”

Awe-inspiring

“There were athletes from many countries and of many different abilities. Some took on the event as a trek, bringing poles with them that I became envious of as they swore by them for climbing - there was a lot of that!”

Day two’s 20-mile section saw Paul confronted by a local resident. “I came around a bend to be faced with a yak. There was a wall one side and a sheer drop off a cliff the other.

“I chose the wall side and was extremely pleased that the yak showed no interest in me whatsoever.”

Both the first two days ended at Sandakphu, 11,815 feet up. “At that height breathing was hard and the nights were cold.

“The views up took away the little breath I had,

and seeing Mount Everest from there was just awe-inspiring.

“But the surface varied so much, and sadly far too much time was spent looking at my footing instead of the scenery.”

The third day was the marathon, which involved running through jungle and encountering monkeys and wild horses. Paul suffered a fall on the highly technical descent and slipped back to third place.

“The surface was wooden steps, planks of wood over streams, ravines made from water that had run down the mountain and some extremely awkward steps on which I took a tumble.”

The final two days saw the athletes stay in local villages and enjoy the relative respite of 13 and 17-mile runs respectively, although there were several climbs.

“Both sides of the road at the finish were lined with the local schoolchildren who had come out to cheer everyone home.”

Paul was raising funds for the charity Cardiomyopathy UK, which raises awareness about diseases of the heart muscle and supports people suffering from them.

He has raised more than £4,000 for the charity in various running events so far. For more information visit cardiomyopathy.org



UP AND AWAY
The elevation gain was over 28,000 feet

3 course dinner
with Scottish entertainment
£28.50 per person