

Expedition

Running on Empty

The Badwater Ultramarathon in Death Valley – 135 miles of desert and mountain ranges, and temperatures up to 130°F (54°C) – is the ultimate endurance test.

1 What is the Ultramarathon?

It is regarded as the most demanding and extreme race on earth and this year it takes place on 12 July. According to race director Christ Kostman, “an ultrarunner seeks out epic races in dramatic environments in the harshest conditions.”

2 Are all ultrarunners crazy?

The Londoner who attempted it in a furry rabbit suit won't be back, but a streak of madness fuels all the runners. British entrants include Jack Denness, back for his 11th race this year at age 69. His crew motivates him with the promise of a Murphy's Stout. “They often hold one just out of his reach,” says Kostman.



Ultramarathon contestants head up Mount Whitney in California

Then there's US Marine Major Curt Maples, serving in Iraq this year, but a beloved Badwater racer. “Two years ago he charged across the finish with a flag in one hand and a full-size sword in the other,” recalls Kostman.

3 What's the route?

Through Death Valley (282ft below sea level), across a couple of mountain ranges and 8,360ft up Mount Whitney, all before the 60-hour cut-off time. Competitors trot along melting tarmac roads through the blasting hot air of Colfin Peak, Funeral Mountains, and Dead Man Pass – some of the most 11 places in the US.

4 How do the runners cope?

Completely worn out, sleep-deprived, severely dehydrated runners tend to hallucinate. “Runners have seen UFOs, women in bikinis on rollerblades and wild animals,” says Kostman, “as well as landing planes, pianos and dinosaurs.” Also, their trainers dissolve, and their toenails pop like popcorn. (“It's brutal!”) Each runner is trailed by a support crew, most in air-conditioned mini-vans, but even the crews suffer.

5 I heard that, one year, a Japanese doctor observing the effects of heat on runners passed out herself ...

“People pass out in Death Valley just getting out of their cars and walking across parking lots,” says Kostman.

13 there are no aid stations handing out water along the way. “The volunteers would end up in hospital or dead themselves. It's just too hot out there.”

6 So why do it?

According to Kostman, it's "the connection with nature, the love of the support crew, the challenge of the most hellish race course that's brutal, yet incredibly beautiful. Many seek to do the race again and again, wanting another dose of this immersion in life, the Zen-like focus, the absence of all distractions beyond moving forward." Despite the alleged loneliness of the long-distance runner, Badwater is a very sociable event; there's much mutual respect and support within the 'Badwater family'. It's certainly not for the prize, because there isn't one, although those finishing in under 48 hours receive the 'Holy Grail' of ultrarunning: the Badwater Ultramarathon belt buckle.

7 So some runners do actually finish?

Indeed. Back in the mid-70s, when Al Arnold accepted a bet that he couldn't run across Death Valley and up Mount Whitney, the very idea seemed ludicrous, (and actually his first attempt ended when his running mate collapsed and had to be submerged in a tub of ice in Furnace Creek Ranch). But he succeeded in 1977, as have many since. Marshall Ulrich of Colorado has a record 11 finishes, while the fastest finish records are held by Anatoli Kruglikov at 25:09:05 and the remarkable Pam Reed, at 27:56:47. Those who don't make it, keep trying.

Sorrel Downer

Information on the Kiehl's Badwater Ultramarathon, visit www.badwaterultra.com

- 1p 9 What, according to the first paragraph, makes the Ultramarathon in Death Valley “the ultimate endurance test”?
- A mainly the climate
 - B mainly the distance
 - C mainly the terrain
 - D the combination of A, B and C
- 1p 10 “Are all ultrarunners crazy?” (aline 2)
→ Het antwoord op deze vraag is ‘ja’.
*Citeer (= schrijf over uit de tekst) het **deel van de zin** waaruit dit antwoord blijkt in de uitwerkbijlage.*
- 1p 11 Kies bij 11 in aline 3 het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.
- A common
 - B elevated
 - C inhospitable
 - D touristic
 - E unexplored
- 1p 12 “Runners have seen UFOs, women in bikinis on rollerblades and wild animals.” (paragraph 4)
Kostman mentions this to stress the fact that
- A many of the runners experience strange things because of the heat.
 - B most runners start the race with serious physical problems.
 - C some competitors are under the influence of drugs while running.
 - D spectators can do the strangest things to support runners.
- 1p 13 Kies bij 13 in aline 5 het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.
- A In contrast
 - B Likewise
 - C Therefore
- 1p 14 What is it that makes runners want to take part in the race ‘again and again’ according to paragraph 6?
- A They are determined to achieve everlasting honour.
 - B They hope to get into a specific emotional state.
 - C They keep on hoping they might win the first prize.
 - D They want to show off their excellent physical condition.
- 1p 15 How did the marathon across Death Valley first start according to paragraph 7?
It started because of
- A a challenge.
 - B a local tradition.
 - C a medical test.
 - D an accident.