



RUNNING: SEAN KENNY talks to Tony Mangan, who is jogging around the world for the charity Aware

PHOENIX PARK, early 1990s: Stride after effortless stride he runs. The endorphins are firing and whizzing, coursing pure joy through his veins. Tony Mangan feels as though he could run around the world. It's a fanciful notion, a passing whim plucked from the ether, to which it will soon surely return.

Except that it doesn't.

The idea lingers. It follows him around, eventually takes up permanent residence in his mind. He nurtures the notion, feeds it and watches it grow. "When I got that thought into my head, it's never left me for more than five or six waking hours."

Finally, in July, he found the door of opportunity ajar. Having worked in construction, he applied for and received voluntary redundancy. It was time. Rent the house, raid the savings. The dream packed up its cases, moved out of his mind and onto the road. The World Jog began with his participation in the Dublin Marathon on October 25th. If all goes well, and it is an 'if' of monumental dimensions, he will complete the global circle by running the same race in 2013. Three years, five continents, 42,000 kilometres by foot.

A few fleeting glimpses of the formation of Tony Mangan, ultra runner. Pounding 40 laps out round the track at Sundrive Park in Crumlin, 18 and burning in the mid-70s (he dates it by Bohemian Rhapsody on his transistor radio). Jogging to football training sessions in his 20s, injuring an ankle, missing the footie, the sudden dawning that he misses the means of travel much more. Clocking a marathon best of 2 hours 38 minutes in his 30s.

In 1994, he emigrated to the US, settling in Colorado, a state that stretches skyward across great swathes of mountain. The Rockies stood there looking down like a taunt, great bunched fists of implacable rock. He ran them, of course. His big dream was forming still, crystallising in the cool thin air. He would order world travelogues so obscure they had to be delivered to his library from Federal stores in Washington, DC.

By 2002 he was back in Ireland, entering 24-hour races. That's a solid day's sapping slog, punctuated only by brief breaks. Wait, there's more. Forty-eight hour races, a concept surely dreamt up in a moment of purest masochistic madness, were next.

"The reason I started doing 48-hour races was to make 24-hour races seem shorter by comparison in my mind. But I discovered I was more competitive at 48-hours. In March 2007, I went to Brno in the Czech Republic to an indoor 48-hour race. I won it (breaking the world record, with a distance of 426.178kms). It was the race of my life to be honest. I had no expectations. I went over on a Ryanair flight, wearing the shoes I ran in. I got some kind of divine inspiration I guess."

It was the first recorded occasion on which anyone had run over 200kms on consecutive days. Let's run those numbers again, dwell on their brutal toll. He ran 223kms one day, and then, now he was warmed up, just kept going, covering 203kms the next day in a near-continuous loop. He was 50 years old.

"After these races, especially 48 hours, it's like a week-long hangover. Even when the stiffness is gone you feel mentally fatigued."

His legs stood this test, and others. Running the globe acquired an urgency as he got older. "I was reading lots of very obscure travel books, about people who'd walked around the world, run across Australia. I emailed some of these people, like a Canadian guy who's shortly finishing an 11-year walk around the world. Three of these people had

stayed in my house when they were in Ireland. So I was feeding it, and they gave me some inspiration."

The broad quixotic sweep of the expedition was all very fine, but there were nuts and bolts to be considered. "The problem 20 years ago was that we didn't have any of the kind of buggy I'm using. You had to use a backpack. There's cumbersome stuff like sleeping bags, tents, apart from clothes. Unless you had a crew it wasn't really possible. This stroller is designed for parents who want to go for a jog and bring their kids with them. But this has been hijacked by people who have walked around the world."

Using this stroller, christened Nirvana, he could carry his worldly goods in relative comfort.

And so the day arrived following fevered edgy months of preparation. After the marathon, he crossed Ireland to Dunquin in Kerry, to within a single careless footstep of the Atlantic. Ten days, a merry jaunt of 380kms. The next, current, leg takes him across North America, the three eastern Canadian provinces of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, followed by a roughly diagonal path across the US and down into central and South America.

Advantages of jogging alone through Canadian winter: hospitality of locals, native confection by name of Big Turk, starkly beautiful vistas. Disadvantages: scything wind, occasional absence of drinking water, tendency of Royal Canadian Mounted Police to presume buggy being pushed by jogger along highway hard shoulder contains baby. He chronicles it on his blog at www.theworldjog.com.

"There's not one single day that I've considered it a chore. I bounce out onto the road. I love it. Part of me did wonder whether I'd do it, because I'm 53 now and it gets harder every year."

He's been covering around 40kms a day, sometimes more, since he began running in Canada on November 9th. Is he fatigued?

"Hills can be tough, half an hour or 40 minutes up, and they're only pimples compared to the Rockies or the Andes. There'll be periods of tiredness, of course. But I've run 68kms one day. Went out the next day and there was zero stiffness. When I did 20-mile training runs for marathons I'd feel it in my legs the next day. So, my body's adapting to it."

Adapting, hustling, surviving, a lone traveller stalking the Canadian countryside. Some nights he's had a bed, some not. His funds simply don't stretch to paid accommodation. He's slept in a fishing cabin, under church steps, in family homes, camped, simply bedded on his tarp. He does whatever he must, because he is driven to this and has no

choice but to accept that he's utterly exposed to the will of strangers. So far, enough milk of human kindness has flowed.

"They're incredible people. Just zany. They're very obliging, give hospitality. Total strangers give me donations for myself or the charity (he is collecting for Aware). A drunk guy in a pick-up gave me \$20 and told me, 'Go get yourself some beers, and cop onto yourself!'"

You could paint a desolate picture, of a single speck traversing the frozen arteries in the heart of the Canadian winter. Is it lonely? "No. I'm not in a relationship. The last few years I was probably avoiding relationships. I've resigned myself to the fact that this is the most important thing in my life and everything I do is centred around this. And I meet people all the time. My passion and drive keep me going. If there's any downside to this, they outweigh that."

The road ahead looms hugely in space and time. It will twist and it will dip. The whole expedition is unknowably vast. Part of its epic romance. Part of its menace.

"I think about the trip when I'm running. I'm about three per cent of the distance and I'm still in this tiny corner of North America; it's nothing on the map. I think, 'My God, I'm in an area that's English-speaking too; what's it going to be like when I get down into Central and South America or through China?' But I can't really think too much because that kind of stuff wears you down. You've got to take one day at a time."

He leaves a trail of his savings in his wake. Even Spartan living costs, and his sponsorship is minimal. His will, though, is fierce. He is determined not to be run off the road by money.

"There are people who do these trips on almost nothing. If you're willing to cook rice and porridge and you stay out of restaurants and hotels and you camp . . . I don't have to do that now, but when the time comes I can. I'll get around. Money won't stop me. If I have to max out my credit card I'll do it."

He had a tattoo inked on his left arm prior to his departure. It comprised The World Jog logo and the legend 'Start: Dublin 25/10/10'. Below this the word 'Finish' and a small blank canvas of skin onto which he would etch a huge dream.

LONG WAY AROUND: Tony Mangan's World Tour

DUBLINER Tony Mangan (53) has broken numerous world records in ultra running. Among his achievements are establishing new records of 426kms for a 48-hour run in the Czech Republic in 2007, and of 405kms, the greatest distance covered over 48 hours on a treadmill, established in Longford in 2008. He was also the first athlete recorded as running over 200kms on consecutive days. Over a 15-month period between 1978 and

1979, he cycled around the world.

His global expedition, The World Jog, began with his participation in the Dublin Marathon on October 25th this year.

It is moving from west to east, commencing in North America, before proceeding to Central and South America and on to Australia, Asia and Europe before returning to Ireland.

Mangan's current goal is to complete a distance of around 42,000kms over a three-year period of near-continuous travel. This involves running roughly the distance of a marathon per day. Mangan is collecting for the depression charity, Aware.

Donations can be made at www.theworldjog.com where his progress can be tracked via a GPS-linked map.

– **Seán Kenny**