

ACTIVE

# HE'S GOT THE WORLD AT HIS FEET

Tony Mangan is running the equivalent of 1,200 marathons on 'the most daring expedition of the millennium'. He talks to **Richard Oakley**

**A**t Cayambe, an agricultural service town in highland Ecuador, the Quisato sundial marks the spot where the Equator crosses the country. The giant circular platform and its bright orange 10m-tall post are a magnet for tourists seeking the ultimate holiday snap from the middle of the world.

On February 28, Tony Mangan, a former construction worker from the Liberties in Dublin, could easily have been mistaken for another backpacker when he posed on the spot, but he is anything but. In his picture, Mangan is wearing running gear and the distinctive green-and-blue singlet of Metro St Brigid's athletic club — a clue to the extraordinary way in which the 54-year-old arrived at the landmark.

Since October 25, 2010, Mangan has been running around the world from east to west, also heading in a southerly direction, and completing an average of more than a marathon each day. Forrest Gump, eat your heart out.

"The most daring expedition of the millennium" — as his website describes it — started the day after the Mangan ran the 2010 Dublin marathon. His task should last four years and the plan is to finish in time to take part in the capital's marathon on October 28, 2014. Mangan hopes to run 52,000km, or 1,230 marathons, more or less back to back.

So, how is it going so far? "I'm in great form," Mangan says from Ecuador. "I can't believe that I'm living this great dream. I have some injury issues but have learnt how to deal with them. My secret is that I don't run fast. I run as I feel, nice and easy."

Mangan takes two to three days off each month and uses the time to organise his trip or sleep, sometimes under bridges or in car parks in the case of the

latter. Normally, he rests in hotels or homes, whose owners sponsor him by giving him a night's accommodation and a hot meal.

"It's a tough challenge and understandably I have very tiring days," he says. "At night I have a lot of blog and email work to do. Can you imagine completing a marathon each day then going into the office until late and getting up shattered the next day to do it again? I'm not complaining, I love it, but it's not easy."

Mangan ran through Ireland to Dunquin in Co Kerry, the most westerly spot on the mainland. He flew to Canada and continued running from Cape Spear in Newfoundland, the easternmost point of North America. The list of his completed countries includes America, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador. By the time he arrived at the Quisato sundial, 16,000km had been clocked up.

The expedition has been difficult and Mangan has decided to try to avoid big cities. "Most people think the biggest danger is wild animals, but it's traffic. In some areas there's no hard shoulder, only slippery gravel and falling rocks. One small trip and it will be all over."

Mangan's run through Central America took place during the monsoon season. "There were flooded roads with ankle-deep water, mudslides and high drops." In Colombia he was barred from entering a 4.5km tunnel on foot, so travelled over the mountains. "I was lost with no food." He struggled in the searing heat of east Panama and the Baja desert in Mexico, where he became badly dehydrated. "I also had some energy crises in the Andes, but then I never missed a beat when I was in the Rockies."

On March 30, Mangan entered Peru for what will be one of the most extreme legs. To cross the country he will run

about 2,800km, including through the desert. "Colombia was a tough mountainous country, Ecuador was tougher and Peru will be even tougher. Towns and villages will be scarce, and water might be an issue. It could also be dangerous because there are armed bandits in this area. I'm going to take all necessary precautions."

He often does a double commute, staying in hotels and running from them during the day before returning at night by bus. The next day, he travels back to the point where he had stopped running and begins again. "This allows me to take very little with me. In the risky parts of Peru, I'll leave my passport and all essential kit in the hotels. I'll use two half-worn-out pairs of runners and will carry a small amount of cash. God help my poor suffering family when they read this."

Mangan, whose mother, Sheila, and sister, Ann Salmon, live in Dublin, says he "probably would have got married and settled down" had he not discovered running. He is single and has no children. "Things are tough enough," he says.

He has had two "time outs" from his challenge since it began. He took a month off after completing his run across America in May, and returned to Ireland. He then went to Los Angeles to see two concerts by U2. He is a music fan and the band's song Walk On is one of his favourites. On December 1, Mangan flew home from Panama to make a surprise visit for his sister's 50th birthday. "I had initially planned to stay until the 12th, but with all the good cooking there I extended it to New Year's Eve."

This round-the-world trip is not Mangan's first. In 1978 he read

Mangan near the finish of the Dublin marathon in 2010, and, below left, at Quisato sundial on the equator in Ecuador

Dervla Murphy's Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle, and cycled across Europe to Iran, in time for the Islamic revolution. While there, he ran out of money and twice had to sell his blood plasma. When the borders reopened, he reached Afghanistan — six months before the Russians invaded. He eventually made it to North America, via South Korea, before coming home in December 1979 and getting a job as a computer technician in Finglas.

Mangan has since enjoyed extended cycling holidays in countries including Iceland, Cuba and Egypt. The "journey runner" did not take up his sport until he was 29, when a girlfriend encouraged him to join Metro St Brigid's. He completed his first marathon in 3hr 9min, and was hooked.

In 1994, the Dubliner emigrated to Colorado and worked as a photocopier technician, moving into construction later. While there, he took up mountain ultra-running

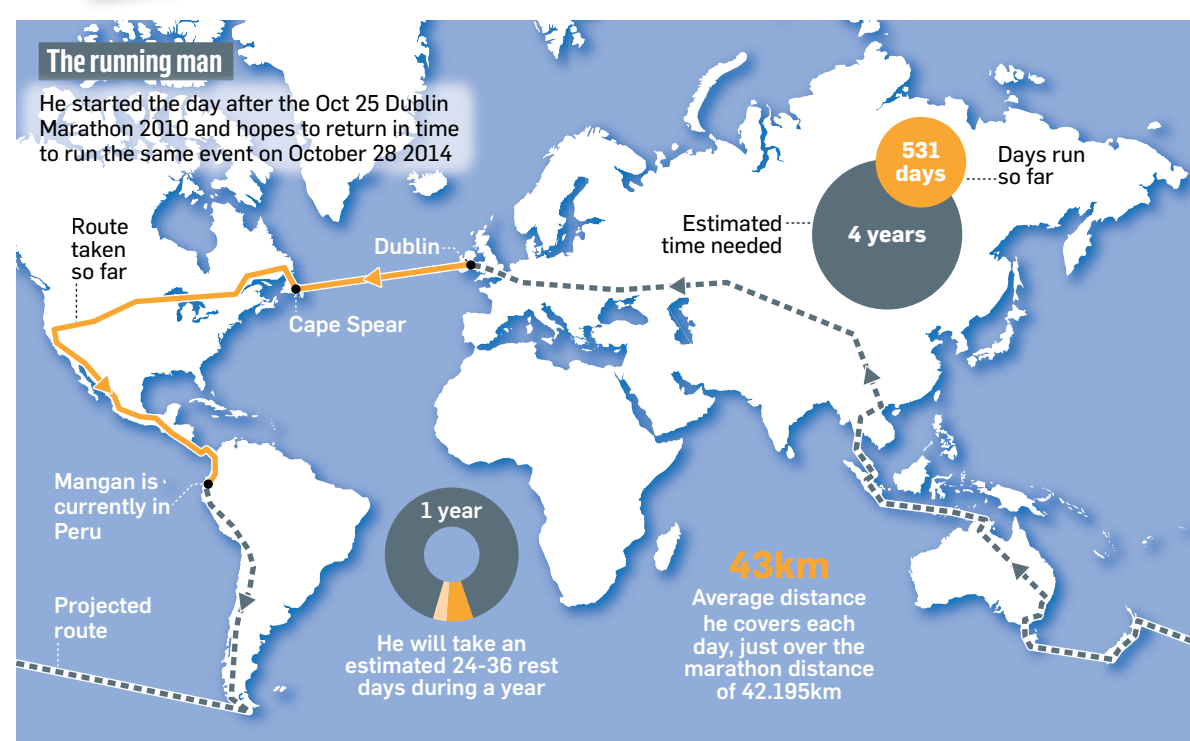
— long-distance races involving 50km or 50-mile routes. In 2002 he returned to Ireland and tried to break distance and endurance records. Mangan ran 426km in the Czech Republic in 2007, setting a world indoor-track record for 48-hour running. A year later he broke the world 48-hour treadmill record by completing 405km at an exhibition for the Longford marathon. The current world trip had been on Mangan's mind for 20 years before he started it. When he was made redundant from his building job in July 2010, he added his final pay cheque to his savings and sold his car.

He has a good sense of humour and is confident he will complete the trip "barring serious injury or illness". Asked whether he thinks any other part of his trip will be as difficult as Peru, he picks "the signposts in China". His advice to others: "Don't wait 20 years to live your dream."

Mangan is raising money for Aware, a charity supporting people with depression, aware.ie. He is also seeking sponsorship for his trip. More details on theworldjog.com



Mangan has experienced varied climates on the 18 months of his trip, taking in Newfoundland, top, Maine, above, and Honduras, left



## Get the Gear

Protect your equipment, prove you did the task — and keep dogs at bay



**Montane Lite-Speed H20 Jacket**  
Amazingly, Mangan is not sponsored by a runner manufacturer, but gets support from Irish stores including Great Outdoors and Runways in Dublin, and John Buckley Sports in Cork. Mangan rates the Montane jacket as one of his most important pieces of gear. It's light, hooded and suitable for numerous activities. €79, [greatoutdoors.ie](http://greatoutdoors.ie)

**Panasonic Lumix DMC-FT3**  
You'll need photos to prove you did your solo challenge. Mangan says he uses a cheap camera, but for an all-action, lightweight point-and-shoot, it has to be this one. It's rugged and has GPS, a compass, altimeter and barometer. €349.99, [camera.ie](http://camera.ie)



**Chariot Cougar 1**  
Mangan is sponsored by Chariot and uses a modified version of its three-wheel sporty child-carrier to transport his equipment. He sometimes pushes the buggy, called Nirvana, or fills it with the gear he needs and posts it ahead to be reunited later. €500 (estimate), [chariot.eu](http://chariot.eu)



**Dog Dazer II**  
If you're running across Latin America, you'll need a dog repellent. Canines find this one uncomfortable but not harmful. Mangan was sent it by Sir Richard Beresford-Wyllie, owner of Dazer International, and says it has the effect on dogs "of an AC/DC gig on a granny". €32, [amazon.ie](http://amazon.ie)



## Adrenaline Fix

Races to get the blood flowing

On Saturday 600 competitors, including a member of Sunday's writing team, will take part in the **53 Degrees North Wicklow Adventure Race** in Glendalough. The main race includes runs to the summits of Djouce and Spink, and a kayak in Lough Dan. Sunday's **Sligo Try a Tri** in Sligo town is ideal for beginners, consisting of a 250m swim in an indoor pool, a 10km cycle and 4km run. Competitors in the **Great Island 10-Mile Road Race** in Cobh will wear black armbands to mark the centenary of the Titanic's voyage. Organisers of **Pedal 2 Poland** need cyclists for their 11-strong team. The 1,500km charity ride starts in Dublin on May 30 and arrives in Gdansk on June 12, shortly after the start of Euro 2012. [wicklowadventurerace.com](http://wicklowadventurerace.com), [sligotriathlon.ie](http://sligotriathlon.ie), [greatisland10.com](http://greatisland10.com), [irishtriathlon.com](http://irishtriathlon.com), [facebook.com/pedal2poland](http://facebook.com/pedal2poland)