

GOING TO EXTREMES

ACTIVE



DAVID TETT

Outen is rowing, kayaking and cycling across the world and hopes to be home for her wedding by 2015, while ultra-runner Mangan, below, plans to finish a four-year 'world jog' at the Dublin Marathon in October; inset below left, Ketchell; inset below right, Hibbert

It takes a special kind of resolve to gear up for a global challenge. Graeme Lennox talks to adventurers with epic ambitions



I WAS TOSSED AROUND LIKE A CORK FOR 36 HOURS IN 20-METRE WAVES AND HAD TO WAIT ANOTHER 36 HOURS TO BE RESCUED AFTER THE BOAT STARTED TAKING ON WATER

at Brands Hatch when my bike flipped and threw me off," he recalls. "The doctors were quite pessimistic about me ever walking without impairment, but rather than feel sorry for myself I decided to use it as an excuse to do something better."

In January 2010, he rowed 4,800km across the Atlantic single-handed in 110 days and went on to reach the 8,848m summit of Everest in May 2011.

Having weathered last month's polar vortex that brought America to a standstill, he's now crossing northern Spain while racing towards his goal.

"Cycling 160km miles every day for nearly 200 days has been a mental and physical challenge," he says. "The first three months were pretty easy, but there have been days that I just didn't want to get back in the saddle — for example, I was knocked off my bike by a tuk-tuk in Nagpur, India, and had a difficult time trying to find somewhere where it could be repaired."

"I'm pretty excited now, but not sure how I will feel when it's all over. Two months after I get back I'm running an Everest Base Camp trek. I'm going to write a book, and then

I'm rowing across the Indian Ocean in 2015."

Fellow Briton Sarah Outen is another adventurer hoping to have a significant 2014. In April 2011, she set out from London's Tower Bridge in a kayak and headed east in a bid to become the first person to circle the world using human power alone.

Her London2London: Via the World



expedition is an attempt to loop the planet by rowing boat, bicycle and kayak. In September she became the first woman to row solo across the North Pacific Ocean from Japan to Alaska. All this despite the fact that she still bears the mental scars of a first attempt in 2012, which ended with her being rescued from a typhoon, 1,000km off the Japanese coast. "I was tossed around like a cork for 36 hours in waves measuring 20 metres and had to wait another 36 hours to be rescued after the boat started taking on water," she says.

"When I got home I had flashbacks and spent a lot of time with my psychotherapist working through what happened. When I went back out last year I had voices in my head reminding me how dangerous it was last time, but there were magical moments, too."

Having overcome her biggest challenge, Outen proposed to her girlfriend, Lucy Allen, from the middle of the ocean by satellite phone. In April, she and fellow kayaker Justine Curgenven will return to

Adak Island, Alaska, to paddle the Aleutian Island chain. Her onward solo journey then involves cycling across Canada and rowing home across the North Atlantic in 2015, when she hopes her wedding will take place.

"It's another daunting challenge," she says. "There are times when I ask myself, 'what were you thinking?', but it's an exploration of yourself as much as the world. I look at the map and am amazed I've made it this far, but there's still a long way to go."

With the clock ticking and thousands of kilometres still to cover on his own global venture, Mangan is well aware that he faces a race against time to make it home for the start of the 2014 Dublin Marathon.

"Time is my biggest friend and my biggest enemy, but all I have to do is add a couple of hours onto the end of my day to make up the distance," he says.

"I think 2014 is going to be a massive year. When it's all over it's going to be strange. My dream, my baby, that I first thought about 25 years ago, is going to be taken away from me."

theworldjog.com, alexhibbert.com, jamesketchell.net, sarahouten.com

'There's crocodiles and hippos to contend with'

Mark Kalch, 36, from Queensland, Australia, is attempting to paddle the longest river on each continent, chalking up a combined distance of 35,000km in the process.

In 2007-8, he teamed up with Philip Swart and Nathan Welch to complete the first unpowered descent of the Amazon from source to sea. They took 153 days to complete the 6,678km journey from Peru to the east coast of Brazil.

"The first part was narrow and had a lot of white water, but as it continues the Amazon is 64km wide at points and it's more like being on an ocean," he says.

Now based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Kalch will attempt to paddle the length of the Volga, Europe's biggest river, in May this year but first he has to wait for it to melt. He will start northwest of Moscow and follow the river 3,645km through Russia to the Caspian Sea.

Paddling up to 12 hours a day, Kalch expects to take between three and four months to complete the challenge, which will see him pass large cities and areas of extreme isolation.

"Security is through the roof in Russia right now because of the Winter Olympics, but I can't wait to get out there," he says. "Once I start, I'm not going to be in any rush. I like to try to take in as much as I can while I travel along."

Having completed descents of the Missouri-Mississippi (at 6,083km, the longest river in America) and the Amazon, Kalch has five rivers involving a total of 20,000km to paddle before he achieves his goal, including the 6,300km Yangtze in Asia, 3,370km Murray-Darling

in Australia, and 6,650km Nile. "The most dangerous one will be The Nile. It starts off in Rwanda and goes through Uganda, South Sudan, and Egypt, before emptying into the Mediterranean."

"There's some extreme white water, plus hippos and crocodiles to contend with along the way."

"I look forward to the big trips, but there's a certain degree of nervousness, too. With any river, as soon as you relax too much that's when things start to go wrong."

markkalch.com



For most of us, New Year is a time when good intentions rapidly give way to temptation. If shifting a few pounds seems like an achievement, spare a thought for the elite band of men and women whose lofty ambitions go well beyond giving up chocolate.

For adventurers aiming to tackle global expeditions, January is a month for fine-tuning bodies and making last-minute preparations that could mean the difference between life and death.

At 9am on October 27, 2014, Tony Mangan plans to set out with thousands of runners along the 26.2-mile route of the Dublin Marathon. It's a race he knows well. The Dubliner first crossed the finish line in Merrion Square North in October 2010, but unlike his fellow runners, he hasn't stopped since.

Having completed the marathon, he travelled west, and three-and-a-half years later is 38,000km into an epic 50,000km journey around the world. Mangan has travelled from North to South America, across Australasia and through southeast Asia to northern India.

Averaging 50km a day, he has battled adversity every step of the way, from homicidal drivers to serious illness and over-zealous police. Last month he was in Ireland recharging his batteries and celebrating Christmas before

heading back out to India. "Four years is a long time to be away from home," he says. "It's been 11 months since I was last back and I have run 11,000km in that time. I needed a mental break as much as a physical one."

Mangan, 56, who started running only on the eve of his 30th birthday, is something of a natural. In 2007, he



broke the world indoor ultra-running record by completing 426km in 48 hours. Four years earlier, he ran 405km over 48 hours on a treadmill.

Naming his global journey "World Jog" was originally a tongue-in-cheek nod to the ultra-running community — those who take part in events longer than the traditional 42km marathon length — but in many ways it turned out to be the perfect title.

"I can barely keep up with a jogger now," Mangan confesses. "When I started out I was fine, but I've slowed right down. I'm chronically fatigued, but I push myself as hard as I can. I'm more or less at the limit, but feel I can maintain it."

Three-quarters of the way around the globe, Mangan is under no illusion about how lucky he has been to make it to this point. "I was nearly hit while on a pedestrian crossing in Sumatra [in Indonesia] and had nightmares where trucks were screeching to a halt just a few feet from me," he says.

"I'm an optimist, though, and consider myself very lucky. I had a bad dose of athlete's foot in Nicaragua, but happened to bump into a bunch of American doctors that night. I was

refused a visa for China and had to divert from Thailand to Myanmar [Burma]. A new border crossing had just opened two weeks earlier."

Even the close attention of Burmese law enforcement couldn't stop him.

"I was approached by two men on motorcycles claiming to be from the local police," he says. "I'd heard stories about bogus police robbing people, so I ran into a swampy field by the road and hid in undergrowth for two hours while they searched for me with flashlights."

"When the police eventually caught up with me a few days later and insisted

on escorting me across the country, I sang banned U2 songs as a protest."

For many adventurers, patience is a virtue that is in short supply and the frustration caused by delays can be as gruelling as the pain of the long haul.

Polar explorer Alex Hibbert and his team planned to start their challenge, the Dark Ice Project, on December 15, but the 210-day expedition from Qaanaaq in Greenland to the geographic North Pole had to be rescheduled for later this year because of fast-flowing ice, a lack of snow, and an influx of polar bears. "We are still in Greenland and are