

WHOLE WORLD OF WONDER

Tony Mangan's four-year, 50,000-kilometre global odyssey, which reached triumphant conclusion with October's Dublin Marathon, is unique in the annals of endurance running. Gavin McGuinness asked the Dubliner to reflect on a mind-boggling and leg-boggling adventure. Photos: Kevin McGuirk and Donal Glackin.

How have you adjusted to being off the global road?

I seem to be doing well. There's no sign of the much warned about withdrawal symptoms. The body is still very stiff and I'm walking around with a bit of a limp. Perhaps it will take a year to fully recover, perhaps I never will. My doctor doesn't know — he says he has many questions about what I have done but quite frankly science doesn't have the answers!

Describe the last lap around Ireland

It was wonderful; it always is when I get runners with me. The ones that came out were very enthusiastic and helpful. I am so grateful, especially as so many had to juggle babies and time off work. Also thanks to those that put us up in their homes and the hotels, as well as Siobhán Clifford, Jesper Olsen and Michael Gillan in particular. The only downside was I expected a lot more; in the North it was especially disappointing.

Compare the run to the elite ultra-racing you have done

I was able to feed off the confidence, mind strength and coping techniques I mastered during my racing career. It was great preparation. This was significantly much tougher than anything I had ever done, even tougher beyond my wildest expectations.

How would you describe the physical challenge?

In the last few months it became exceptionally difficult; every day was like being in the final few hours of a 48-hour race. That familiar 'mentally and physically shattered' feeling was omnipresent.

I was running tired for most of it. I reached my highest point of the run, 4,985 metres above sea level, in Peru. Remember I was running 7,000 kilometres in the Andes in winter with just a two-kilo backpack and no tent or sleeping bag.

It was a big ask every day getting out of bed to physically motivate myself, but easy to mentally motivate myself. Something like



this has to be made the most important thing of your life

How would you describe the mental challenge?

It was very tough mentally on many fronts. I suffered badly for not being able to source anyone to give me the backup I needed. I was spending too much time in communications trying to sort stuff out, like where to have my next pair of running shoes sent to. For example, I managed to find a contact in Bali, Indonesia, by asking some American pastors if they knew anyone in the area. That involved about 20 emails.

What are your immediate and long-term goals?

I will start thinking about the book while at the same time work on recovery, which includes mental recovery. The blog review (theworldjog.com) has to be done when I am in the right frame of mind. I certainly will never run as much, that's for sure!

Long term I need to work to pay the bills! I am now a professional motivational speaker who can also give entertaining talks on my global run, which has been a unique way to see the world. Anyone that wants to book a talk can email me (theworldjog@gmail.com).

Was your odyssey a spiritual event and are you a spiritual person?

Like many people I am very confused. If you look around, we live in such an amazing world. Often I felt as though I had a guardian angel looking after me, as I surely enjoyed the most extraordinary luck.

Having said this, when I see what's happening in the world I am becoming less and less a believer in organised religion. I often wondered why we bother with religion — if we need 'comfort', what's wrong with old-fashioned meditation?

Of all the places you've seen do you miss anywhere in particular?

I don't critically miss anywhere but I have a huge love for Colorado, where I lived for several years. Colorado was to me the most beautiful place in the world when I lived there and also the most beautiful place on the run.

What stands out in your mind now you're back?

The American poet Walt Whitman, in *A Song of the Open Road*, wrote: 'I am in step with my vision; As I tramp my perpetual journey.'

I was running through the Australian Outback late in the evening and listening to Handel's *Messiah* on my iPod. I had just run 70 kilometres that day and was full of energy; it was as though I had gotten a solar recharge. Despite my lingering fatigue, at this moment I was at one with myself.

At times like this I was so mentally charged I got mad ideas. I even wondered if



Family Reunion – mother Sheila, Tony, sister Ann Salmon and nephew Brian Mangan

My world run is dedicated to my mam, Sheila; she has had 25 chemo sessions but is fighting on strongly – the strongest woman I have ever known

about cutting a year off the run by not running New Zealand, Australia and southeast Asia.

But in the end I went back to my original plan, the way my global run was meant to be run — no regrets. So I flew back and continued from where I left off. Mam had been too sick to see me off to the airport.

I will never forget the sad look on her face as she lay in her bed when I was leaving for the airport. I thought this run will be run the way it was meant to be run or Mam would not rest in peace. I came home the following two Christmases, always wondering if they would be our last together.

That's why our reunion in Dublin Port was so emotional — I had effectively finished the run and if she didn't live the six weeks for the lap of Ireland at least we had this moment.

So far she is fighting on strongly. I know where I got my genes from — the strongest woman I have ever known. She has had 25 chemo sessions and we look forward to her 80th birthday in April.

Were there disappointments that stand out?
Not running Pakistan is my only real disappointment. The Department of Foreign Affairs put pressure on me not to run there for fear of the security situation.

I ran across India, touched the Pakistan border, and flew over it. I then restarted from a safe distance from the border with Pakistan in the Iranian desert.