

CHARITY NEWS

ONE DOWN, ONE TO GO

Hugh Williams-Preece has completed his 50 marathons in 50 days challenge. We caught up with him to find out the highs and lows – and ask 'what next?'

HE WAS attacked by an angry farmer, chased by a savage dog and left his passport on a bench in Spain: for Hugh Williams-Preece these are some of the memorable moments from his epic challenge to run 50 marathons in 50 days, a challenge that began on March 3rd and ended last month in Trafalgar Square, four days before the Virgin London Marathon.

You may remember we caught up with Hugh before his challenge began. The former Gordonstoun pupil had been training hard, but with no real running background – he described himself then as “a very slow runner” – he said he expected to finish each stage in around six hours, much of it peppered by walking breaks.

Now, anyone who saw Hugh complete his 47th marathon during the inaugural Brighton Marathon would be hard-pressed to describe him as 'slow': amazingly, having already covered a whopping 1,200 miles across some unforgiving terrain on the Continent, Hugh zipped round the course in 3hrs 47mins, testament to how far he'd come, his mental reserves and his rapid improvement as an endurance athlete.

“I really enjoyed the whole experience,” says Hugh. “I was very nervous beforehand, and the first week was full of trepidation as I was battling recurring injuries. I didn't know what the outcome would be. But, after that, I got fitter and stronger and things got better as I progressed. By the end, I felt like a machine. And what really helped was that I was generally cheerful each day. It was a very positive experience.”

The 50 in 50 Challenge was borne out of an idea Hugh had when visiting



Hugh taking his last ON shake before run 38

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his wife's parents in Portugal. It was simple enough: run home from there, some 1,300 miles, and raise funds and awareness for charity. That charity was Marie Curie Cancer Care – and Hugh was determined to raise as much money as possible to support Marie Curie Nurses, with a particular focus on providing upwards of 1,000 hours of nursing care for Wendy and Sarah, two nursing ambassadors based in Sussex.

His initial target was £20,000 – a target that has since been revised to £50,000 after it soon became clear that what he'd set out to do had captured the hearts and minds of people who knew him. As *Running fitness* went to press, Hugh's Just Giving page showed more than £33,000 had been raised – and counting.

“We smashed our initial target and are now trying to do another event with Marie Curie to push on to the £50k mark,” says Hugh. “Unfortunately, this challenge has given me the bug. We're now looking at a crossing of a very hostile desert in China, which could be a world first if crossed in a particular way.”

Looking back, Brighton was the real high point for him. “The crowd was so uplifting,” says Hugh. “The Marie Curie cheer stations were great. It was my first official marathon and I felt really strong. It was our first day back in the UK having spent 46 days in Portugal, Spain and France.”

There was only one day when his usual sunny disposition was challenged, when he lost his passport, his insoles and his Camelpak. It was also hailing, and to make matters worse, he took a wrong turn and ended up running up a mountain with a 4,000ft elevation – and when he came down, he still had 16 miles left to go! “That was a tough day,” says Hugh. “Still, there were some funny moments, like when I took a 'bathroom break' in what I thought was a communal hedge only to find out it was someone's back garden, the owner of which then chased me with a rather large rake!” And what he really hated each day was stepping into an ice bath at the end of each stage!

One thing that got him through was listening to music. “I listened to music all the time,” he says. “I had a Sony Walkman and never took one step without it. This was my salvation.”

So how did he do it? “It was all about the mental challenge,” says Hugh. “It was all down to mental resolve.” It's certainly something he'll need on his China challenge – should that go ahead. Something tells us Hugh will be more than up to the task. **RF**



Hugh Williams Preece crossing the finishing line in Trafalgar Square

→ For more details on Hugh's epic challenge, visit www.50in50.co.uk To find out about fundraising for Marie Curie Cancer Care, visit www.mariecurie.org.uk