

# Sir Ranulph Fiennes

Open the Guinness Book of Records and it's there in black and white, Sir Ranulph Fiennes is the world's greatest living explorer. Ran, as he likes to be called, has earned this title well. Amongst his many awe-inspiring achievements he counts the only successful circumnavigation of the globe on its polar axis, discovery of the lost city of Ubar in Oman, and, with expedition partner, Mike Stroud, was the first person to cross the Antarctic Continent unaided. Then there's his running. Since he began competing in his fifties(!) Ran has completed a huge array of endurance races including the nine day/night Eco Challenge in Patagonia, the High Peak Marathon (40 mile bog-trot), and the North Pole Marathon (26.2 miles in sub-zero Arctic conditions) – ranking high among the Elite in all. He got his best London Marathon time in 2001, 3hrs 30mins. Not bad for a 57-year-old. And then there's the small matter of the seven marathons, over seven days, on seven continents, which he ran in 2003.

Words by Julia Buckley

Today, at 64, Ran is still an incredibly strong runner, regularly tackling the windswept terrain around his home in Exmoor. Desperate to know what keeps him running long after many younger men would've folded and what training he does to stay in such great shape, we spoke to the world's greatest living explorer...

## Heart Attack

From October 26 - November 2, 2003 Ran completed the 7x7x7 (seven marathons, over seven days, on seven continents) event with his long-time expedition partner Dr. Mike Stroud – a punishing week of marathon running and transcontinental travel. The pair ran seven marathons in seven days on seven continents. Ran was 59. Four months prior to the event, Ran had just taken his seat on a plane at Bristol Airport when he suffered a severe heart attack. "I boarded the aircraft and settled down to read a magazine," he says. "I can remember nothing that happened for the next three days



and nights." Luckily for him, a couple of firemen recently trained in the use of a mobile defibrillator were on the runway and rushed to his aid. "Twice more on the journey to Bristol's Royal Infirmary and three more times in the Accident and Emergency unit I lapsed back into fibrillation." Ran was in a bad way. The consultant cardiologist who treated Ran later told him, "When you arrived at our ICU you measured 4 points on the Glasgow Coma Scale. The lowest the scale goes is Level 3, which Richard Hammond of Top Gear achieved after his car crash at 260 mph."

In his autobiography, *Mad, Bad, & Dangerous to Know*, Ran quotes the surgeon, Gianni Angelini, who performed his double heart bypass who wrote: "He was kept sedated for 24 hours... Then woken up... From then on it became rather difficult to manage him, since he virtually refused any analgesia, saying he did not have a great deal of pain. And that he wanted the tubes and lines removed as soon as possible because he had to walk up and down the corridor."

**"I think it's essential to keep running. If you don't run regularly it's very difficult to get started again. At my age, it's a constant battle with Isaac Newton!"**

## Going Seven for Seven

Mike Stroud, in his book, *Survival of the Fittest*, says he was sure the 7x7x7 event was doomed, until nine days after Ran's op he received a phone call from him: "How's it going? When will you be home?" I started.

'Oh, very soon,' he came back, a slight laugh in his voice. 'I'm just walking off the moor.'

Ran was determined to go ahead with the event and he and Mike chose the British Heart Foundation to receive the funds generated. With just four months to recover and bring his fitness up to scratch for the mammoth challenge, Ran began his training.

"I started to walk, very slowly, mostly on flat ground, and whenever I became breathless or felt giddy, I lay down on the ground until I felt better. Sometimes if I tripped on uneven ground, my chest hurt where the rib-cage had been slit open and it felt as though the wires had been torn."

His programme went as follows:

- 3 weeks after op: walk for 5 minutes with stops, lie down when giddy.
- 8 weeks after op: walk for 30 minutes, no stops.
- 12 weeks after op: jog for 60 minutes, no stops.
- 13 weeks after op: jog for 120 minutes no stops.
- 15 weeks after op: jog gentle (7 hour) marathon.
- 16 weeks after op: seven marathons, over seven days, on seven continents.

Amazing. Marathon one was in Chile, followed by the Falkland Islands, Sydney, Singapore, London, and Cairo before the grand finale at the New York City Marathon. Besides battling the exhaustion that any marathon runner faces, there was jet lag and dramatic changes in temperature and humidity to deal with. Ran still had the wires in place from his heart op and Mike suffered terribly with muscle damage and stomach problems, the pair completed all the marathons in under five hours except Singapore and New York.

"Crossing the line with Mike at the end of the New York marathon is the best memory I

have of any race." Ran says. "We both suffered immensely through those marathons, so to reach the end was an incredible relief."

## Partner Power

But what kept him on his feet through those 183.4 gruelling miles? Surely the thought of quitting must've crossed his mind – after all, in the circumstances no one could've blamed him for dropping out.

"The Singapore leg nearly finished us off," he says, "and yes there were times when I thought I wouldn't be able to carry on. But

**"I don't exactly spark with joy at thought of going out to run, I really have to push myself to get out there some days. And while I'm running all I want to do is finish..."**

Mike and I pulled each other along because we're both competitive. When it hurts and you want to stop, but you won't because you don't want to be the one to give in. My main hope usually was that Mike would break his leg or something, then we'd have to stop and it wouldn't be my fault. It was nothing personal, just what goes through your head when you're doing things like that. And I know he had the same thoughts.

"I'd recommend signing up to an event with a team or partner to anyone who needs a bit of extra motivation. Running with someone else and knowing you'll let them down if you can't keep the pace really helps with your training."

## Out on the Moors

At 64, Ran continues to run for two hours every other day in hilly terrain across the moors of Exmoor where he lives, never on tarmac. "I think it's essential to keep running. If you don't run regularly it's very difficult to get started again. At my age, it's a constant battle with Isaac Newton!

Clearly Ran has the edge in this fight, additionally he says, "I have a routine I do five days a week in the mornings,

which includes 30 press ups and 100 squats. It takes about 20 minutes."

"I don't exactly spark with joy at thought of going out to run, I really have to push myself to get out there some days. And while I'm running all I want to do is finish..." Most of us know what you're talking about there Ran!

"I keep looking at my watch, after an hour I should be at the 10 mile point, if I am then I'm happy, if not I push myself harder. I'm very competitive with myself like that. But when I finish and I get home it feels good and I'm glad I did it."

Ran also swears by stretching, "I stretch regularly, always after running. If you're not an elite runner I don't think there's much call to do it before you run, just start with a slow jog, but everyone should stretch afterwards. You lose flexibility as you age and stretching will help you to avoid pulls and strains."

## New Challenges

He's currently super-busy helping raise his two-year-old daughter, giving lectures across the world, and planning his next adventure. "I'm going vertical nowadays," Ran says of his recent climbing feats of the Eiger's North Face and an attempt at Everest - all in a bid to beat his lifelong fear of heights! His various projects have raised a total of £12 million to date for UK charities.

"I don't want to reveal what I'm doing next just yet, because I don't want the Norwegians to hear about it and try and get there first," he says enigmatically.

So no running races in the pipeline right now, "I may never compete in another marathon again," he admits, "but I will always run, I think it's essential for fitness and to keep me healthy."

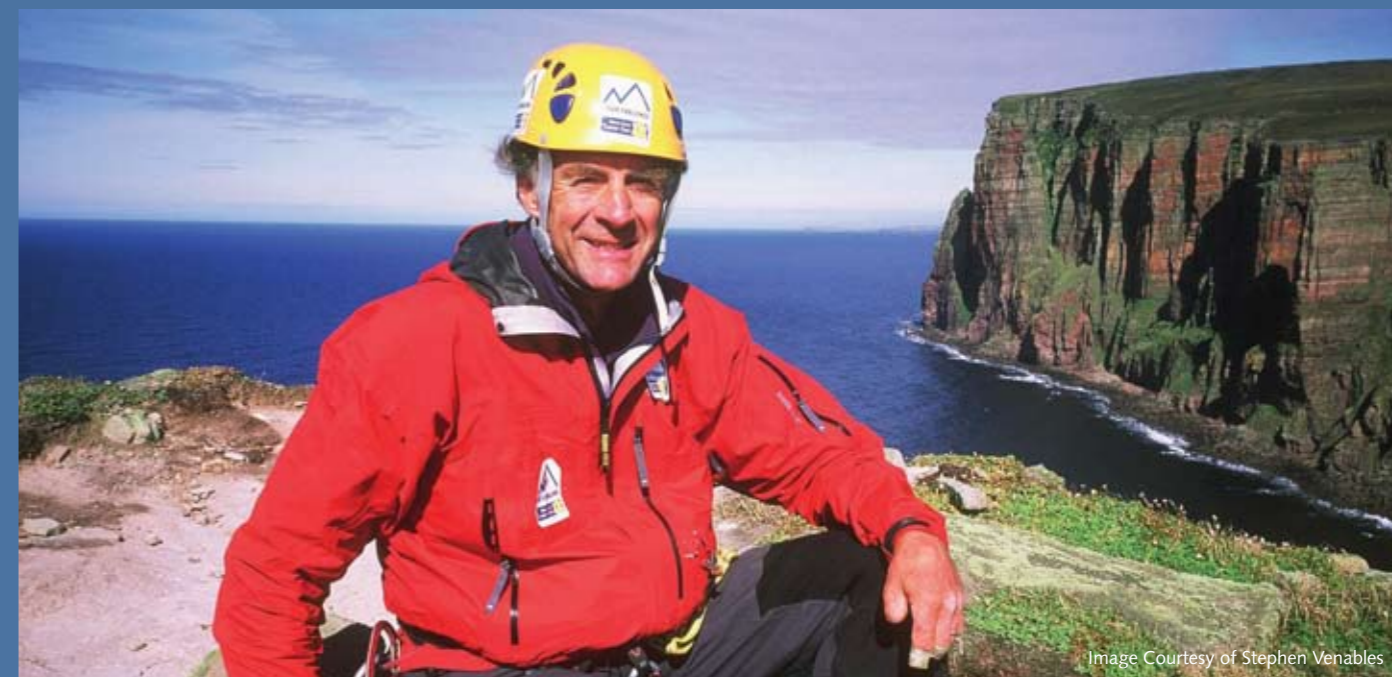


Image Courtesy of Stephen Venables