

# BEN FOGLE

**Ben Fogle. What should we call him – a TV presenter, writer, adventurer, ultra-distance runner, explorer, all-round action man?! Anyway, when we met him he'd just returned from another punishing endurance event, this time a trek to the South Pole. But, of course, it was his running that we were most interested in...**

Words by Julia Buckley



**Have you always been a keen runner?**  
No, not really. The first time I can remember enjoying running was at cross country at school. I got quite into that... Although that might've been because there was a girl I liked who did it rather than anything else. I didn't really get into running regularly before I started training for the Marathon Des Sables.

**The Marathon Des Sables is a 156 mile running race across the Sahara desert – not usually the sort of thing to appeal to a non-runner! How did you end up entering that?**

It was a last minute thing... Actually some friends said I wouldn't be able to do it and I just had to prove them wrong. Looking back I don't know where I found the confidence, but somehow I knew I could do it and I think that was really important in getting through it.

**But you must've needed to be ultra-fit as well...?**  
I did train really hard, but I registered late and only had a couple of months to prepare. A race like that, it's mostly about mind over matter. Sure it's a massive physical challenge, but it's so much more - you've just got to keep finding it in yourself to put in more and more effort even after you

**“I eat all the wrong foods – that's one of the reasons why I run!”**

think you're done. People talk about hitting “the wall” in marathons, in an ultra-run you come up against a much bigger obstacle than that. But you keep going. The people around you help because everyone there has a unique story and their own reasons for being out there, you run with some amazingly inspiring people. When you've completed it you feel like a winner – even if like me you're one of the last to finish. Just getting through a challenge like the MDS gives you such a boost - after that you find you have a much greater belief in yourself and what you can do.

**Running Free columnist Stuart Dyer is taking on his first Marathon Des Sables in March. Do you have any advice for him?**

For me the biggest problem was my feet. I got the most horrendous blisters you can possibly imagine, they were really painful. If Stuart has tougher skin on his feet than I did he might be

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alright, but I'd recommend a weekend at the beach running along the sand to toughen up his feet.

**Do you now have super-tough feet then?**

The MDS definitely toughened them up, I've now got a thick layer of padding on my feet, which has come in handy. During the South Pole Race I was the only one who didn't get blisters, which was nice. It'd be good to try the MDS again and see how my feet hold out next time. I think I'd like to do it again, maybe when I'm about 50, that'd be interesting.

**What about nutrition for your endurance events – do you keep to a strict diet?**

To be honest, I'm the worst person to talk about diet. I eat all the wrong foods like crisps and chips and stuff like that – that's one of the reasons why I run! When you get to your mid thirties you start realising you can't just eat what you like and expect your body to stay trim. I noticed I was starting to get a belly, so that was a main reason for me to start running regularly. It definitely helps keep me in shape. Training for the MDS was great because I had to eat huge amounts of food just to have enough energy for the training – the payoff was I had to run for up to five hours per day, but I did get to eat a lot of pasta!

**As part of your training for the South Pole race you ran the London Marathon last year, how was that?**

The London Marathon was very hard. A lot of people thought a road marathon would be easy for me because of the endurance races I've done, but I think I was more scared of that than anything else I've done. In a road race there's nowhere to hide, you can't discretely drop out at a big event like London and everyone looks to see what time you finish in.

**Well, you probably know what we're going to ask next then...**

My time? I can't really remember, I think I finished in about 4hrs 1min. I was really pleased with that, I'm not a natural marathoner, so for

me it was a good time. The thing was though, I trained with my South Pole expedition partners, James Cracknell and Ed Coats, and when I saw how much fitter they were than me, it was a real wake up call that I had a lot of work to do over the 12 months before the expedition. They both finished in under 3 hours.

**A minute over four hours is still a very respectable time, especially for your first marathon. Do you have any advice for RF readers taking on their first marathon at London in April?**

I'll give them a great piece of advice that was given to me and which I made the mistake of ignoring: You've got to put the hours in on your feet. Spend as much time as you can running. I got fooled into thinking I could get by with a lot of cross training and cardio in the gym, but it's just not the same. You've got to get your legs used to long distances. The other thing is, and this applies to any race including – actually especially ultra-runs – don't go belting off full pelt from the start line. It's tempting, especially at a big race where there

are cameras flashing and crowds cheering, but if you use all your energy up at the start it'll come back to bite you later.

**Every long distance runner has their own reasons for running, what are they for you?**

It's difficult to explain why I chose to take on the challenges I have. I did the London Marathon purely to train for the South Pole and because my expedition partners were doing it, but it was a fantastic experience. As for the ultra events, I think it's because I'm not really suited to marathons or any other sports, this is something I know my body can be good at. Well, I'm not exactly good at them, I don't win or anything, but I can go the distance and I'm not all that competitive, I feel like a winner just for crossing the line.

**And what's next?**

I'm not sure. I'd definitely like to do the London Marathon again. If I've recovered from the South Pole race in time for the 26th of April, maybe I'll even give it a go again this year. **RF**



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