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VOLUME 8 ED31 // AUTUMN 2019 // AU/NZ

◊ THE MAD MISSIONS ◊

Double Take

HEYSEN + LARAPINTA

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TRAIL CREW
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Antarctica NO ROOM FOR COLD FEET

**MICK HOGAN HAS NO INTEREST IN GETTING FASTER. HE JUST WANTS TO SEE
AS MUCH OF THE WORLD AS HE CAN, INCLUDING THE VERY EDGES OF IT**

WORDS: VERA ALVES IMAGES: THIAGO DIZ / DIZZ MEDIA



. WORRYING ABOUT THE COLD WASN'T GOING TO WARM UP THAT ICE DESERT

Mick Hogan ran his first marathon in 2008 on a drunken bet, so you'd be forgiven for not anticipating that he'd end up chasing ultra finishes in the most remote deserts on Earth.

Fast forward ten years from that drunken bet and he's crossing the finish line of a 250km race in Antarctica, of all places, with his eyes firmly placed on his next big desert adventure, in the Atacama, Chile, and no signs of hanging up the extreme running shoes anytime soon.

Yet, despite this tremendous grit and very obvious determination, Mick comes across as the most chilled out bloke in Aussie ultrarunning. There seems to be no method, just madness. And yet... it works.

His job as an engineer in the northwest of Australia means that he travels across the big country every two weeks; two weeks of work followed by two weeks off back home in Brisbane. Even if you discount the toll that all that travel has on his body (and there is a toll), there's no denying that neither location is ideal to train for a run that occurs in sub-zero temperatures.

So what do you do when you can't really train for the challenge? Well, you kind of just accept your fate. For Mick, some runs in the sand replaced any kind of snow or ice running practice. Running in extreme

heat- we're talking high 40s - had to replace running in extreme cold. He learnt to train for one extreme by coping with the other.

No amount of running on sand could have prepared him for what he experienced in Antarctica - and this is both a good and a bad thing. Because he didn't train with snow shoes, he just packed up his old Altras and they did the job as much as any shoe will do the job before becoming waterlogged. Once that happened, he just accepted that he'd have freezing feet for the rest of the day.

Talking to Mick about his Antarctica experience is almost a lesson in mindful running. He didn't worry about all the things that could go wrong and, by not worrying, he managed to get through them. Worrying about the cold wasn't going to warm up that ice desert anyway, was it? He just knew he was embarking on a grand adventure and, while his training methods were a little...non-existent, he knew he was going to enjoy every bit of it.

"It's a race that's tough to get to," he says of the Antarctica chapter of the 4Deserts series. "And then, once you're there, on the ice, it doesn't really get any easier."

When people think of Antarctica, they think of having to acclimatise of running in extremely low temperatures. For Mick, that wasn't the big issue. The big issue was the wind. "But as long as you've got

the right gear, you'll be alright."

If you're not dealing with a freezing gale blowing on your face, you're probably focused on the fact that your shoes are waterlogged. And yet, deep on the edge of the Earth, that stuff doesn't actually matter.

"The scenery is spectacular and just changes by the hour."

I ask Mick for strategies on how to cope with waterlogged shoes and any other issues one might come across when attempting something as mad as an ultra in Antarctica.

"You just know when you get there," he tells me. "Don't do what Mick did." This from the man who carried no spare shoes sounds like sound advice. But, in the end, he did do it.

But why?

IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

The answer to that question has nothing to do with scenery or extreme weather or even endurance running. It runs a lot deeper than that. Mick got into long distance trails as a way of bonding with his sister, who lived in London at the time.

"I first started doing it as a way to hang out with my sister. She was into it and she lived in London and I was in Australia,

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IT'S SPECTACULAR. ALMOST TOO MUCH TO TAKE IN, TO BE HONEST.

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so we'd catch up in different parts of the world. She did Sahara 2010, then convinced me to do Gobi 2012. It seemed like a good idea," he recalls.

"I hadn't done anything since my marathon in 2008 but I had 12 months to train so thought 'I can do that'."

There was never any strict training plan, just a crazy way of seeing the world with his sister who he didn't get to see much otherwise.

Injuries, house moves and other life occurrences meant that, when it came to Antarctica, there was barely any training at all.

When it was time to head to the frozen continent, he'd run 500km total for the year.

"The next thing you know, I was going to Antarctica."

You know what they say about best laid plans right? It's a good thing this wasn't one. In fact, there wasn't much of a plan at all.

"I just wanted to go to Antarctica, to be amongst it in a way you'd never expect to be amongst it."

When it comes to seeing places like this, says Mick, the running is almost just a byproduct of the whole experience, more of an excuse for being there at all. And the frozen continent did not disappoint his expectations.

"The scenery changes a lot. One day the wind is up and you have horizontal snow and you're freezing, the next day you get zero wind and blue skies, running around a 1.4km loop, with switchbacks up the top and then back down for 11 hours. Each day is very different. You can be surrounded by ice fields, ice walls, and every time you go to the top, it's like going for the first time. It's spectacular, almost too much to take in, to be honest."

Did it suck? A bit at times. In fact, if we're being honest, a lot of that running around loops would be a pretty dismal way to spend your time if it wasn't for the scenery, especially without proper training. But a bit of suck doesn't hurt.

Mick says he knew what he was in for and he'd made peace with the fact that there'd be low moments.

"Three weeks before we left for Antarctica, it was my 40th birthday. I'd gone to Tasmania to run with my sister and couldn't because I was injured so, instead, I drank a lot of beer and ate a lot of lamb chops. I realised there was nothing I could do about it."

So he went anyway and took things literally one step at a time. Ultrarunning is, to this day, something he does to connect with people. Not just with his sister anymore – although it's still a good excuse for the two siblings to meet up somewhere exotic and run some trail –

but also with other like-minded explorers like him.

"Sometimes when I still struggle, I think why do I still bother? But I absolutely love it. I love the people. It doesn't matter who you are when you're out there, you're all just covering the same ground, struggling together, it doesn't matter your social status. It's just a deeply personal battle. The people at the pointy end are phenomenal athletes but it's a personal battle for all of us," he explains.

Running ultra-long distances, for hours, sometimes days, at a time "teaches you to compartmentalise stuff, to put things out of your mind".

And that's what Mick plans to keep on doing, but doing it on as little training and as many beers and lamb chops as his body allows.

The next goal is to finish the 4Deserts race in Atacama, the only one left in the series for him.

"2020 is the plan. This year is about getting fit and not breaking the body."

RUN

