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Marathon Man does it again, this time in Australia

By Mary Conroy

MORE OR less fresh from his winning assaults on the North and South Poles, city man Richard Donovan has won the intriguingly titled Poor Man's Comrades Marathon in Sydney, Australia as he continues on his bid to run seven ultra marathons on seven continents for the GSPCA and GOAL.

Just as the Republic of Ireland team were limbering up for their clash with Spain, Richard ran and won a nine-hour race departing from the steps of Sydney Opera House.

With a race slogan 'No fees, no prizes, no aid, no wimps!', Richard selected the event because he felt it captured the spirit of Australia and the challenge he has set himself for 2002.

The race is of just under 90 km length, follows the Old Pacific Highway from Sydney to Gosford, beginning at the steps of the Sydney Opera House, crossing the famous Harbour Bridge, and continuing on a gruelling uphill course to Gosford.

After eight hours and 48 minutes running, Donovan and Australian Kieran Thompson finished the race together after leading the field for much of the race.

Both athletes had set a brisk pace over the first 10 miles before making the arduous climb along the remainder of the route.

Brother Paul Donovan said this week that Richard felt "remarkably well" after his run at the weekend.

"It is the longest one he has run so far this year, and although he has run further distances in the past, the fact that there is no aid for runners along this race made it quite tough," he said yesterday.

With two continents behind him now — Antarctica and Australia — Richard is aiming to run ultra marathons in South America, North America, Asia, Africa and Europe.

Ultra marathons are longer than the standard marathon distance of 26 miles, and are usually held in harsh climates.

The Himalayan trek, for example, will be run at 14,000 feet. Paul and his Indian-born wife are hoping to take part in the race also, and will be helping out as much as they can as the year continues.

“As gruelling as running the races and training for them are, helping out with the fundraising and some of the administration is a way of lifting some of the burden off Richard.”

Wife Caroline opted to travel to Australia with Richard for the Sydney run. Wisely, for the North and South Pole treks, she remained at home in Galway city.

Next up for Richard is the Vermont 100-mile Endurance Run in the USA.

Said Richard himself this week: “At least the Vermont race shouldn’t have endless ascent, but on the downside, it will be nearly double the distance.”

Donovan’s bid to run seven ultra marathons on seven continents is in aid of the Galway Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Third World charity GOAL. Donations to A/C Seven Continents, Bank of Ireland, Salthill, sort code: 90-38-40, a/c number 4572 6438. — *Mary Conroy*