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143

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p83

Strength coach Stefanie Corgel has a 10K PR of 42:52.

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Tim Hewitt, the ITI course record holder, demonstrates his winning setup.

THE HARDEST ULTRAMARATHON you've never heard of—the Iditarod Trail Invitational—traverses roughly 1,000 miles through the Alaskan wilderness in February and March. Since 2000, just 15 runners have completed the route between Wasilla and Nome, and of the five or so participants who line up each year, fewer than half finish (all entrants must first complete the 350-mile version to prove their winter survival savvy). Dragging 35- to 55-pound sleds, competitors use GPS, maps, and advice from locals to follow the sporadically marked Iditarod Trail (the same one the mushers, who start a week later, follow). They cross mountain ranges, black pine forests, the frozen Yukon River, and iced-over stretches of the Bering Sea, restocking food supplies along the way in isolated villages or from three ski plane drops. Cutoff time in Nome is 30 days. Racers must hit 20 designated checkpoints and are allowed to go off-trail to shave miles between those points. Bailing out mid-journey requires schlepping to the nearest village—which can be up to 100 miles away—and paying for a bush plane ride back to Anchorage. This year's race starts February 26. Its seven participants will average 35 to 40 miles over 12 to 14 hours each day and finish in roughly 25 days. "The type of people who enter—if you tell them something is really, *really* hard, they'll want to do it even more," co-race director Bill Merchant says. "The Iditarod Trail can be the most beautiful place in the world or the most intimidating." Turn the page and see for yourself.

NO DOGS ALLOWED

At the **Iditarod Trail Invitational**, the humans do all the work. Here's how and (best as we can tell) why. By **KIT FOX** Photographs by **BRIAN KALDORF**



COLD CALCULATIONS

SO WHAT DO YOU NEED to survive 1,000 miles in the Alaska tundra? **Tim Hewitt**, a 62-year-old lawyer from Greensburg, Pennsylvania, has a pretty good idea. Hewitt has completed the Iditarod Trail Invitational an unsurpassed nine times in the past 15 years, and he set the course record of 19 days, nine hours, 38 minutes in 2016. He's entered this year's event as a cyclist. Not surprisingly, the 40 pounds' worth of stuff that has kept him alive is durable, warm—and very light.



SLED (SEE PAGE 77)

Hewitt's handmade sled is 24 inches wide and 48 inches long, weighs 3.5 pounds, and is made of ultra-high-density polyethylene. (He named it "Cookie" after a husky in a children's book.) He pulls it using a home-made hip-harness that's connected to the sled by a rope covered in flexible PVC pipe for protection against the elements.

1 / BASE LAYER

For 20 days, Hewitt's tights and long-sleeve top never come off. Once he finishes, they go straight in the trash (to his wife's relief). Over his tights go insulated and shell pants.

2 / NECK GAITER

"This is one of my secrets," he says. "Your neck is where your core heat is going to escape from because all the blood that goes through your neck. If you add clothing there, your whole body will warm up." So when his feet get cold, the gaiter goes on. On his head go a cap, up to two balaclavas (including one that's windproof), a headlamp, sunglasses, goggles, and lip balm.

3 / FOOD AND DRINK

In 2010, Hewitt pulled all his supplies for the entire trek (as opposed to having drop bags along the route). His sled weighed 110 pounds, 20 of which was crunchy peanut butter. In a typical day, he torches nearly 15,000 calories, and consumes at least 8,000. He also carries drink mixes, freeze-dried meals, jerky, bars, beans, nuts, candy, gum, and chocolate.

4 / FOAM SLEEPING PAD

Sleeping atop his sled saves Hewitt time pitching a tent, and the pad is a necessary buffer. He'll park the sled perpendicular to the wind and sleep in three- to four-hour increments. If it's too cold, he'll continue moving to keep his core temp up. Perpetually exhausted, he's been known to fall asleep standing upright.

5 / DOWN PARKA

Because down makes him sweat, Hewitt wears this only when he's not moving or needs to raise his body temperature. Upon waking, he'll often throw on the parka and run with his sled until he's warm enough to get fully dressed and packed up. "I

put my freezing shoes on and don't try to lace them, I don't try to organize anything, I just get moving," he says. He typically wears some combination of a lighter-weight jacket, fleece, and/or vest.

6 / GPS

Natural barriers like creeks and hills cause the trail to meander, which can make using a GPS frustrating. Hewitt often relies more on personal experience and advice from locals. But when he got stuck in a blowhole at night, it was his GPS that got him out.

7 / SNOWSHOES AND POLES

Both help him navigate snow up to six feet deep.

8 / DOWN SLEEPING BAG

Hewitt's bag is functional to -60°F, but that doesn't mean he's toasty when it gets that cold. It just means he "won't die." Most mornings, Hewitt has to shake off the ice that forms when his body heat permeates the outer shell of the bag.

9 / TRAIL SHOES

Hewitt wears two pairs of Drymax socks and insulated sole inserts, so

his Montrail trail shoes are one size bigger than his running shoes. He wears gaiters over his shoes to keep the snow out, and on the bottom of each sole, he installs 10 carbide screws for traction. One year, he sliced a quarter-inch layer of skin from one of his toes after it turned black with frostbite midrace. Now more sensitive to falling temps, that toe signals that his body is about to get (really) cold.

10 / CAMP STOVE

It takes Hewitt 30 minutes to melt enough snow to create 100 ounces of water, which lasts him 24 hours. His kitchen also includes a titanium pot and lid (and spork), an insulated mug, white gas, an insulated water bottle holder, and three packs of wind- and waterproof matches.

11 / MITTS

To regulate his temperature, Hewitt constantly removes one or both of his outer mitts in a process he calls "heat dumping." The liner stays on—a lesson he learned after losing "a good amount" of skin after his bare hand brushed a metal gas can. ❧



MAKEUP BY SHANA LOHEI, STYLING BY DEREK SVITKO