



5,500 MILES ACROSS THE USA
AND BREAKING ONE OF THE
WORLD'S TOUGHEST RECORDS

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JAMIE McDONALD



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ADVENTUREMAN: RUNNING AMERICA

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PART 1

THE US OF A RUNNING START

I was watching the rain bounce off the Pacific Ocean. Large droplets hit the surface of the water and pounded down on the ragged limestone rocks that were scattered among the waves. Beyond the thick rain, through a haze of grey, I could just about make out an island and the silhouette of fir trees springing from its peak. An onshore wind blew and – stood at Cape Alava, the most western point in the continental United States – I was the first to feel it against my skin. I was wearing my brand new green, yellow and red “Adventureman” suit, but the cape of the suit was so wet and heavy that it couldn’t peel itself from my back and do what capes should do – take flight. Feeling less than superhero-like, I looked down at my feet slowly sinking into the soggy sand and shivered. “This is tough,” I grumbled under my breath, wishing I’d worn something more than a thin layer of fancy dress. But it was my own fault. Anyone else who’d decided to start a 6,000-mile run across America in the middle

of Washington state's rainy season would have seen this coming. Let's just say, I'm not much of a planner.

Perhaps my naivety would be understandable, but I need to fess up that this wasn't my first adventure-running rodeo. In 2014 I'd run 5,500 miles across Canada dressed as a superhero and raised money for children's hospitals. At the time, I thought that was the end of my adventures. But I soon realised that everything is a journey – and when one finishes, another begins. It wasn't long before I decided that I wanted to continue what I'd started in Canada and do another trip in North America. This time, I was going to run 6,000 miles (the equivalent of 230 marathons) from Cape Alava, in Washington – the most western point in the continental United States – all the way to the most eastern point, West Quoddy Head Lighthouse in Maine. I had a year on my visa and my mission was to raise as much awareness as possible about the journey and take in as many donations as I could. And, just as I'd done in Canada, aside from raising a load of money, my mission was to connect with as many children's hospitals as I could within a year.

In an attempt to maximise the chances for fundraising, I decided on a route that was a “U” shape, or as I liked to describe it – a smile. It would mean I was going coast to coast but passing through America's deep south, running through 24 states in total. To say that I'd bitten off more than I could chew was an understatement. That morning by the ocean was the first time I'd donned my brand new Adventureman costume – cape and all – and I was feeling slightly guilty about cheating on “The Flash”, my old superhero suit I had worn on

my previous adventure running across Canada. But I thought, “I’m probably living every little kid’s dream right now, dressed as my very own superhero.” And I was going to need every ounce of my superhero powers to complete this challenge.

Cape Alava had made its own power known, but perhaps noticing the grimace on my face it had one last trick up its sleeve. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a glimmer of light. The sun was fighting back, pushing the clouds away, as if to say, “Not today.” Mist began rising from the beach, as the island offshore now revealed itself in shades of green and I felt a golden light warm my face. This was it. This was the moment. I pulled out my camera, pressed record and poured out all my emotions: the pressure of expectations, wondering whether I was physically capable of doing this run and the fear of letting people down. I went to stop recording and realised I hadn’t actually pressed record in the first place. Not the best start.

I was nervous as hell. Fortunately, I was still supercharged with emotion, so I hit record – yep, it was actually recording this time – and went again. This time I was even more emotional; fears, hopes and worries pouring out with even more intensity, I looked around at the amber light spreading across the beach and signed off the video with a promise, “I’ll just try my best.”

It was now or never. I stepped forwards and put my hand in the Pacific Ocean, the salty water dancing around my fingers as if to say, “I’ll be right behind you.” A jolt of adrenaline rippled through my body and my only thought was that it was time

to run. And run like a lunatic I did! I took off from the water's edge and sprinted as hard as I could for 30 metres, letting out all my nervous energy, until... I blew my engine, could hardly breathe and had to stop. As I was doubled over trying to catch my breath, cool sea air filled my lungs and I thought, "Yeah, brilliant fitness, Jamie! You're totally ready to run 6,000 miles across freakin' America."

On the plus side, after my beach sprint, I only had 5,999.9 miles to go. And as I settled into my pace, it felt like I was "up and running" for real. I strode away from the Pacific Ocean and left the beach behind to join 3 miles of rugged trail, which led back towards the main road. The trail bobbed and weaved through lush rainforest, and I tried my best to enjoy the fresh scent of the trees. But even being surrounded by all that green couldn't keep me calm. I was feeling completely overwhelmed.

Three miles later, I left the trail and I spotted a familiar face stood at the side of the road. It was my friend Ted Eisele – who of course I'd nicknamed "SuperTed".

"Hey there, superhero – how's it going?" asked Ted.

"Well, SuperTed, it's going and that's about it," I grinned.

I'd first met SuperTed six months earlier in London, when I'd been invited to speak at a conference for Microsoft. Ted's official title in the company was director of business development at Microsoft, but to my non-corporate brain that just meant he held the position of: Pretty Big Deal. Ted lives in Seattle. He had really connected with my story after I took to the stage, so when he found out that my next adventure was

going to be running across the US, he offered to support me at the beginning of the run and had gone one step further to say he wanted to join me and run a portion of the first day of the journey.

SuperTed let me run the first few miles alone from the beach and was waiting with Caesar in the car park. For those of you who don't know, Caesar is a baby stroller, kind of my "Wilson", my running buddy – a constant companion, but instead of having a baby in it, it was filled with all of the things I needed to keep me going, like my tent, sleeping bag, clothes, water and of course... peanut butter. I felt bad about Caesar not accompanying me on to the beach, but, hey, he was just too fat to lug over the steps and rocks.

"I'm gonna run a half-marathon with you today, thirteen miles," said SuperTed as we unloaded Caesar from the car and set his wheels down on the road. "I've only ever run nine miles before, so it's gonna hurt," he continued. I was impressed that SuperTed had decided to set himself his own challenge, but I was just glad that he was there at all. In the midst of the nerves and the tornado of emotion swirling in my mind, it was nice not to be alone.

As we set off together, I was now pushing Caesar for the first time and running down an open road, surrounded by evergreens, and memories of Canada came flooding back. Unfortunately, my fitness from that journey hadn't flooded back too. Everything felt forced, a struggle. I'd forgotten how heavy Caesar was and how brutal it was to shove him along. It was like pushing a freight train and the shock to my lungs was

so big it had me panting like a dog. I began to feel ashamed of myself. I was supposed to be a “superhero adventurer”, I had a cape to prove it, but in that moment I felt far from that – I felt as if I was running for the first time in my life. Somehow, I’d forgotten how uncomfortable being on an adventure really was – both mentally and physically. I was struggling to believe I could even make it through the next mile. My legs chipped in and began wailing. “Bloody hell, Jamie. Not again!” they cried. So, I chatted back to them. “Afraid so, legs. Quit moaning. You’re back on duty.”

Ted seemed to be struggling too, but we were soon distracted by the wall of green that directed us away from the ocean. The fir trees were packed so tightly you could barely see more than a few metres into the woods. All we could hear was the tippy tapping of our footsteps and the remnants of that morning’s rain dripping from the branches. When SuperTed had clocked up 6.5 miles from the car (enough to make it part way towards his half-marathon), he packed me off with a giant hug and headed back. It had been great having some early company, but after SuperTed left, the rainforest of the Pacific Northwest unleashed its rainy season fury. It had lulled me into a false sense of security with the sunshine, but now the voice of the rain god was booming. “Buckle up, son,” it said, “there are a lot of miles ahead.” I gripped Caesar tightly. My body felt tense. My brain was catastrophising with every stride. I looked manically from side to side, noticing that most of the scattered houses had signs out front that read “No trespassing!” It felt like people out here didn’t have many visitors, nor did they want any.

Time whizzed by as fast as my thoughts and I realised that somehow I'd hit 20 miles. It was all downhill from here, not for the road, but for my tiring body. Fortunately, SuperTed had caught up in his car and seeing my shattered expression asked, "Where you sleeping tonight, Jamie?" To be honest, I hadn't thought too much about it. I had my tent packed away in Caesar and that was going to be my boudoir most nights, so I just shrugged. SuperTed wasn't having that. On the way to Cape Alava we'd seen a house selling jelly jam which had us both licking our lips. It wasn't far from where I was on the road at that moment, so Ted suggested the jelly jam house could be a good spot to try and spend the night. It sounded good to me – and tasty.

Stumbling towards the house, my legs were so tired that in the last few steps it felt like my feet were actually stuck in jam. I was exhausted. It was my first long run in years. As I approached the house, SuperTed was already wooing Wanda, the storekeeper. I noticed he'd even given her my first book, *Adventureman: Anyone Can Be a Superhero*, in a bid to win her over – well, that and to let her know that I wasn't a complete lunatic. It seemed to work, Wanda smiled and said, "You can pitch your tent in my garden." I looked outside, the drizzle had now turned to hard grey rain. My heart sank at the thought of having to put up a tent, but with no other option, I said awkwardly, "Okay, thanks, Wanda."

SuperTed hugged me goodbye again and wished me "good luck", before heading back home to Seattle. For the first time, I was flying solo. As I set to the task of setting up the tent, I noticed Wanda had an open garage with two cars and, more

importantly, a roof. Anything was better than putting my tent up in the pouring rain. I thought I could just roll my sleeping mat next to the cars and sleep outside, it wasn't ideal, but I'd stay dry.

At that point, Wanda's husband Darryl came outside and said, "I'd rather you slept at the front of the house."

I thought, "Oh no, he probably thinks I'm going to steal his man tools."

"Oh, is it a better sleeping spot?" I said, trying to put his mind at ease, but also thinking, "Bugger, I was just getting excited about the idea of the garage!"

Darryl walked me around the front and pointed to a vintage caravan and said, "My son used to sleep in this twenty years ago. You can sleep in it if you like, it's a pretty nice caravan."

"A caravan?" I gasped. "That would be lovely, Darryl!"

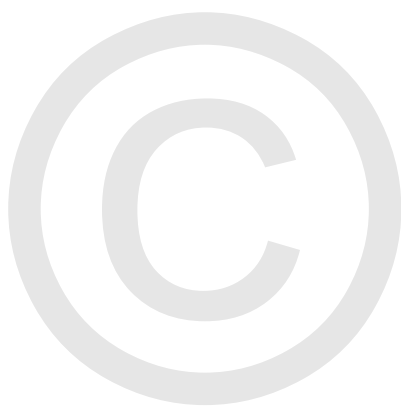
Darryl went inside, connected up the electrics and put the heaters on. I'd completed my first marathon *and* nailed a caravan – it was better than anything I could have imagined. As I cosied up inside while the rain battered on the roof, I set about tucking into my rations. But as I cracked open a can of tinned fish, I realised I'd forgotten to bring a spoon. A SPOON!? Caesar weighs 80 kilograms – a large proportion of that was my tinned food – and there wasn't even a tiny spoon in there. More top-notch planning, Jamie.

I sheepishly trudged through the rain to ask Wanda and Darryl for one.

Wanda laughed at me and said, "Here, kid, here's a spoon, a bowl of pasta and a hot sandwich to go with it." Then added, "Fancy a gin?"

I didn't need asking twice and after downing it in a flash, my first-day nerves evaporated. As my tired body sank into their armchair, thinking I needed to get to bed, I looked at Darryl and said, "Thank you, this is so kind."

He replied with a smile, "This isn't kind. It's human."



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