

A Blackpool man is limbering up for what's known as the world's toughest road race – 135 miles over 60 hours in scorching heat. **Jacqui Morley** meets Tim Welch

It ain't half hot, Tim!



The very name is enough to strike a chill in the hardest runner. It's popularly known as the Death Valley Ultramarathon. Death Race 2010-style, others call it.

Some 135 miles or 217km of gruelling non-stop running, over 60 hours, from Death Valley to Mount Whitney, in California.

And all in temperatures up to 130F (55c), the most demanding running race anywhere on the planet, according to organisers. Extreme running.

But some like it hot, far hotter than the conditions that have caused the latest hosepipe ban in the country's wettest region, the North West.

And, for Tim Welch, deputy chief executive at Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, so a man more suited to the soggy of the seaside humour, this is the defining race of his running career.

Taking his training very seriously indeed has caused some amusement to others – and turned quite a few heads on the Prom, in local parks, and various marathons organised locally.

Looking more like the Michelin Man than an athlete, Tim's been wrapped in many layers to try to replicate the conditions of the 2010 AdventureCORPS Badwater Ultramarathon which starts on Monday.

Few are in it to win it, but just to finish it, and it's an honour to be picked to join the elite of extreme runners.

This year's event features 39 Badwater veterans and 41 rookie, including Tim: die hard "ultra-runners" of every speed and ability, and athletes who have the necessary running credentials but are primarily known for their exploits as adventure racers, mountaineers, triathletes, or in other extreme pursuits.

They represent sixteen countries, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iran, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Romania, Switzerland, with the USA predictably fielding the most entrants, 46,



from 19 American states, followed by the UK with seven runners.

The youngest runner is 20-year-old Nick-ademus Hollon of San Diego, who finished the race last year, and the oldest is Jack Denness, 75, of the UK, an 11-time finisher who last completed Badwater at 70.

Tim explains: "It's just something I had to do. I didn't even dare tell my wife."

He's running for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, on behalf of his daughter Abigail, seven, a type one diabetic since been diagnosed as such at 20 months old.

"Unfortunately, the number of children with the condition continues to increase and

my daughter Abigail is one of over 20,000 insulin dependent diabetic children in England," he adds.

"That said, she continues to make me proud. She gets on with her life – and regards me as a bit mad for doing all this running for the appeal. She's proud of me too though. This is a lifestyle choice for me. It's not for her."

Tim hopes to raise £5,000 for the charity this year and has a dedicated web site at www.justgiving.com/abigailschallengesbadwater2010. His training diaries appear on www.abigailschallenges.org.uk.

Since 2001, Tim has regularly competed in ultra distance races and covered more than

1,800 miles in competitions, including four across the Sahara. The odd thing is he still doesn't consider himself a runner. "Not a serious one."

He's in it, he admits, to "push my own comfort zone. It's become personal. Me and the challenge, whatever I've sent my mind to. I get a bit obsessive about it."

To prepare his body for the gruelling heat, Tim has been running in as many layers as possible, and set up an exercise bike in his garage surrounded by heaters to raise the temperature up to almost 40 degrees.

He's run up to 100 miles a week, and took off to Spain this week for some further "scorchio" training.

He adds: "I've looked a bit strange of late and had some funny looks from people."

For the 10k run in Blackpool, he not only donned all the clobber but walked six miles to the race and then six miles back home.

Tim adds: "Long distance running really can be lonely. But for this premier endurance event I can count on a great support crew, there to help keep me going."

Badwater is an invitation only race limited to a maximum of 90 runners a year.

Entrants meet strict entry requirements to be invited. Covering 135 miles (217km) non-stop in a maximum of 60 hours from Death Valley to Mount Whitney, California, in temperatures up to 130F (55c) makes it the most demanding and extreme running race on the planet, covering three mountain ranges (up and down!) en route.

"It's the coming back down those hills I'm looking forward to," Tim concludes...

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FEELING THE HEAT: Above, last year's event in Death Valley and (left) Tim Welch and (far left) in full training gear

Pictures above: CHRIS KOSTMAN/BADWATER.COM

It's been another weird week, so join **WILLIAM WATT** for a round-up of the strange stories in the news from the past seven days...

Did you ever look at your teacher at school and wonder what they are like outside of the classroom?

Well, kids at Beal High School in Ilford, East London, had a bit of a shock after they discovered one had been moonlighting as a stripper. Benedict Garrett left his post at the school after children and staff found out that he was stripping in clubs and working as a "naked butler".

Mr Garrett, who uses the pseudonym Johnny Anglais, taught A-level politics at the school for three years.

It's always the quiet ones!



Over in the States, an eating champion was arrested after gate crashing a hot dog competition he had originally refused to enter. Takeru Kobayashi had to be wrestled to the ground by police when he leapt on stage at New York's Coney Island Fourth of July contest, apparently unable to resist the temptation to take part.

The Japanese six-times former champion was charged with trespass



MONDAY: Rob Stocks is Taking Stock

and assault. Hotdog eating, it's clearly serious business. Meanwhile, if you're planning on taking a dip in the sea this weekend, try and stay awake. A man who apparently passed out on a pool float at a Florida beach was rescued about a mile offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. The coastguard said they suspected the man was very drunk. He was still unconscious and wearing a life jacket when picked up by

a rescue boat. I wonder if he was wearing sun cream?

On a happier note, fair play to quick-thinking motorists who got their hands on their share of 10,000 euros this week.

Passers-by couldn't believe their luck after a truck carrying two million in coins overturned on an Italian road.

As the £1.6m load spread across the carriageway, following drivers stopped to scoop them up.

Police in Foggia said it was impossible to establish exactly how much money had been picked-up by the public, as lots of the one and two euro coins still remained on the road.

I'd give you the address of the road, but I'd hate you to beat me to it! And finally, part of my job here at

The Gazette involves interviewing Blackpool manager Ian Holloway. Ollie is a journalist's dream with his long answers and witty one liners.

But they aren't all like that. Holland boss Bert van Marwijk has displayed a dry sense of humour on several occasions during this tournament, and there was no exception at his press conference earlier this week.

He dealt with two questions from a Dutch news channel in short, sharp fashion.

Question one: Are you able to sleep before games. Answer: Yes.

Question two: What's your message to the kids in Holland who are biting their nails?

Answer: Don't do it. No nonsense.