

Pandemic sees adventurer put his Arctic plans on hold



ADVENTURE: Paul Fosh taking part in a previous Arctic challenge

By Dan Barnes

EXTREME adventurer Paul Fosh has had to alter his plan to trek 430 miles across the frozen wastes of northern Canada in the spring due to the pandemic.

Until a few weeks ago Paul, managing director of Newport-based Paul Fosh Auctions, had been in training for the harshest ultra race on the planet.

But the property auctioneer has been thwarted in his bid to complete some 'unfinished business' in the remote and ice encased wilderness of northern Canada due to Covid-19 restrictions. Ultra athlete Paul, aged 53, who lives in Monmouth, is no stranger to the extreme demands of ultra events.

He competed in the Likeys Ultra in Canada in 2015, and was one of just eight to finish, coming fourth out of the 24 that entered.

He also completed the 300-mile Montane Yukon Arctic Ultra in 2016.

He was primed to take part in the 2021, 430-mile Montane Yukon Ultra due to have taken place in February, but the event has now been cancelled.

Mr Fosh said: "It's a great pity that I have to wait a little longer to have another crack Montane Yukon Ultra but I'm determined to be back."

"The cancellation of the event is completely understandable in the circum-



WORK: Paul Fosh at one of his firm's auctions, which since the outbreak of Covid-19 have successfully moved online

stances of the pandemic."

There had been hope that the venue for the gruelling event could be switched to another ice locked country.

"Sweden were thrilled with staging what would have been the first of its kind in the country and all was going well for the event in Swedish Lapland," said Mr Fosh.

"I was in training for the Canada event and switched with the Swedish event in mind. I had got all the latest kit for the event and had sorted out my training schedule but now have no event.

"I'm looking to find some-

thing on the scale of the Ultra to train for and complete in 2021 – mainly because I enjoy the whole business of preparation and taking part but also because I raise money through the event to help homelessness charity, Llamau."

Mr Fosh said: "I love the challenge, both physical and mental but know that probably less than a quarter of those entering the race will complete it.

"Over time, you become thrilled to be part of the small percentage that have entered and completed the race.

"I invest a lot of time, ef-

fort and money to get myself out there and I want to do myself proud. I don't ever want to fail at anything I do."

Competitors have 13 days to complete the challenge. The route crosses frozen rivers and lakes, while markers are regularly covered with fresh snow.

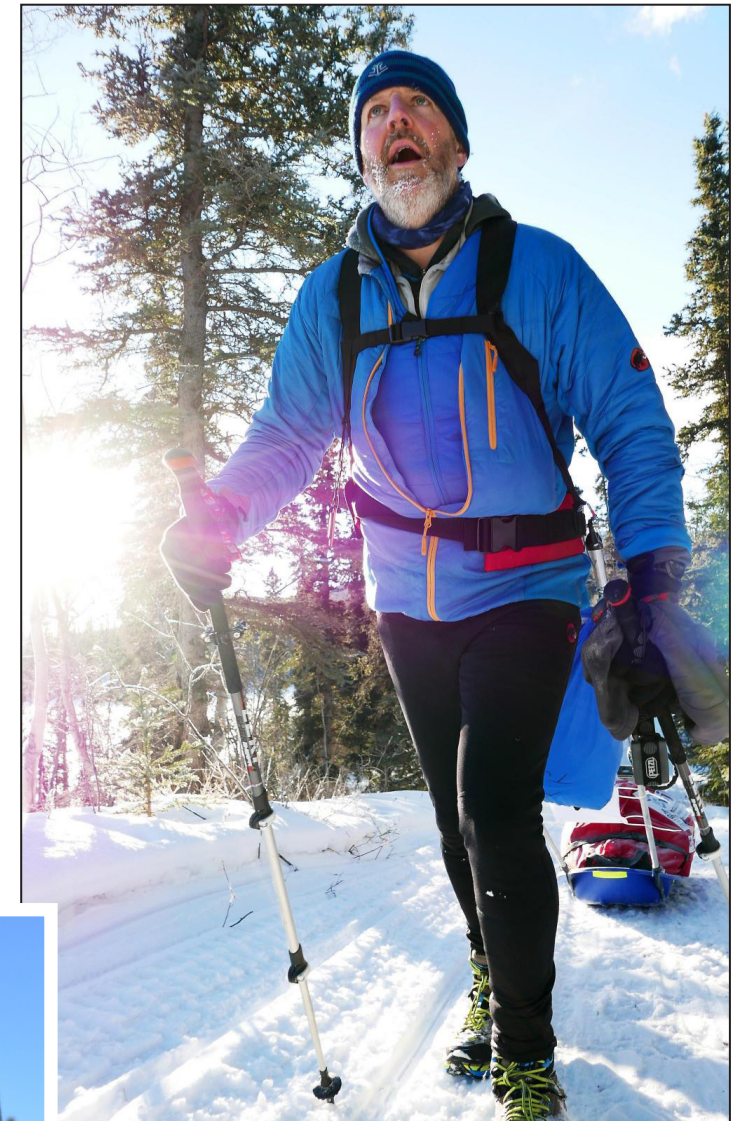
Frostbite is a constant peril hanging over every racer. One year an experienced ultra-runner from Italy lost part of both legs and an arm to the condition.

Between the checkpoints competitors are completely on their own.

"A lot of people underesti-



SIGHTS: Paul beneath the Northern Lights and inset, with his beard and moustache covered in ice



SNOW: Paul Fosh on a previous Arctic challenge



Fact file

- The 430-mile Montane Yukon Arctic Ultra is billed as the world's coldest and toughest ultra-marathon.

- The gruelling, unforgiving trek through snow and ice, with temperatures plummeting to as low as -40C, begins in northern Canada and ends close to the Alaskan border. Few entrants actually reach the finish line.

- The event requires the individual to look after themselves as they jog, walk and crawl over some of the world's wildest and coldest terrain. There can also be the threat of wolves or even wild bears.

- The ultra eventer must carry their own food, water, sleeping gear and emergency supplies on a sled – a 'pulk' – the entire distance of the epic race.

- Conditions are so brutal that in 2018 just one of the 23 competitors who began the full distance race made it to the finish line.



TRAINING: Paul training for a previous expedition pulling his pulk walking between Monmouth and Symonds Yat

mate the mental challenge of this Ultra event," said Mr Fosh.

"Walking in the daylight is much easier psychologically because you've got such fantastic scenery to look at.

But when you're walking at night, you could be anywhere. You've just got your head torch beam to follow.

"Competitors often complain of hallucinations amid the relentless wilder-

ness. I've 'seen' all manner of hallucinations and heard strange sounds.

"There are those of us that almost enjoy the pain, but if it was too easy there would be no pleasure at the end."

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