

New Campaign Launched To Take Trail Running To The Olympics

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CAMPAIGN MARKS 100 YEARS SINCE TRAIL RUNNING WAS LAST IN THE OLYMPIC PROGRAMME

British trail runners have launched a new campaign to take the sport to future Olympic Games by running 455km from London to Paris.

This summer's Olympics marks one hundred years since running off-road was an official discipline, with cross-country running, more commonly known now as trail running, the last of its kind at the Paris 1924 Games.

Now, in a campaign instigated by outdoor footwear company, Merrell (https://www.merrell.com/UK/en_GB/home), athletes from running clubs across the nation are calling on Olympic decision-makers to include trail running at future Olympic Games, starting with Brisbane 2032, the next cycle for new sports to be introduced to the programme.

They stepped onto the campaign trail by trail running in relay over 455km from London to Paris – arriving in the French capital on Sunday (14th) evening after four days of gruelling running, navigating their way from city to city.

Trail running has been catapulted into the spotlight in recent weeks following the historic completion of the infamous Barkley Marathons by British trail runner, Jasmin Paris, alongside fellow Brit Russ Cook completing an epic achievement by running the length of Africa. The sport is having a moment.

In recent history, trail running has been on a steep ascent of popularity to become one of the world's fastest growing sports, according to the International Track and Field Federation, with millions of people around the world participating in races, events, and recreational runs.

Now, fans of the sport believing it now deserves its place within the Olympic schedule.

Speaking from Paris after completing the challenge, Jimi Harrison, a member of the Keep On Keeping On running club, said: "We ran from London to Paris ahead of the Games to raise awareness that trail running continues to be overlooked as an Olympic sport. At Paris 2024, four new sports are being added that include breakdancing, surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing.

"We feel that new Olympic sports should reflect the trends and popularity of the current day and believe the time has come for trail running to be adopted at future Olympics."

He added, "The last four days have been tough, but the experience has reflected the spirit of the sport – a test of endurance, a sense of community and connecting to your natural environment.

As part of the campaign, Merrell has penned an open letter to representatives of the International Olympic Committee, International Trail Running Association and Brisbane 2032, calling on them to set the wheels in motion to include trail running at the Olympics when the Games go Down Under.

Simon Sweeney, marketing manager at Merrell who are behind the campaign said, "As trail running fans, we wanted to use our platform to help mobilise the international trail running community around a common cause.

"One that we firmly believe has been overlooked for too long – we're calling on Olympic organisers to end the century of hurt and give trail running its rightful place within the Olympic schedule."

The century long wait for an off-road running at an Olympics follows an infamous cross-country event at the 1924 Paris Games in which a difficult course combined with extreme weather conditions of over 40 °C and noxious fumes emitted from a power plant near the course, resulted in only fifteen of the 38 starters crossing the finish line.

After the event, both the Red Cross and local police spent hours searching for runners who had passed out on the course.

Amongst the racers that day was Great Britain's only finisher, Ernie Harper, who finished just outside of the medals in fourth place.

Harper's granddaughter, Jan Humphrey, supports the campaign and believes we owe it to the competitors of the ill-fated race a century ago to reintroduce running off-road.

"Ernie was a real trailblazer in every sense of the word – he was a natural runner and competitor – a true Olympian.

"We continue to derive pride from having an Olympian in the family and still have pictures from his adventure to the 1924 Olympics. Despite missing out on the medals and the testing running conditions, he was incredibly proud to be part of the Olympic movement.

"He went on to compete in two further Olympics, winning a marathon silver medal in Berlin in 1936. I've no doubt he'd be actively backing the campaign to bring trail running to the Olympics in 2032 in Australia where he emigrated and built a family."

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About MERRELL

Founded in 1981 in Vermont, United States by Randy Merrell and ClarkMatis, Merrell is now the world's No. 1 rugged outdoor footwear brand* with products distributed in over 190 countries. Merrell products are built on our heritage of quality and performance. Our stylish product and innovative technologies deliver ready to wear comfort and performance.
[www.merrell.com \(https://www.merrell.com/UK/en_GB/home\)](https://www.merrell.com/UK/en_GB/home)

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For sample request, high-res images or further information please contact the Brandnation Team: 0207 940 7170

lola@brandnation.co.uk / 0207 940 7183

stephen@brandnation.co.uk / 0207 940 7274

bogdan@brandnation.co.uk / 0207 940 7170