

FITNESS JILL BARKER



PHOTOS: PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE

Markus Wiaderek, on trails near his home in Île Bizard, is training for the Yukon Arctic Ultra-marathon next month – that's 100 miles, pulling a sled loaded with gear. He had to quit the race last year because of frostbite. "I feel I should go back and finish it."

MARKUS WIADEREK has run seven ultra-marathons in 12 months. Why? He likes setting big goals – and achieving them

In the long run,
this guy's in heaven

spends hours outside, exercising in bitter cold, pouring rain or Montreal humidity? I tell him he just doesn't get it. Running gets in your blood. And when that happens, the urge to run outweighs the urge to stay warm, dry or comfortable.

For some, however, that urge to run takes on astronomical proportions. Take 40-year-old Markus Wiaderek, for example. His idea of nirvana is running a 74-kilometre loop through the Grand Canyon – a 10- to 15-hour effort depending, Wiaderek said, on how you feel that day.

If that's what Wiaderek does for fun, you've got to wonder what he does when he's looking for a challenge.

How about running 160 kilometres across the Yukon? In February. While pulling a sled loaded with 14 kilograms of gear. Now that's nuts.

Wiaderek doesn't think so. So what if he had to quit because of frostbite on his fingers and toes? And, so what if last year's race took place in minus-40 degree Celsius weather – the coldest it has ever been in the history of the Yukon Arctic Ultra-marathon.

"It's a very nice run, actually," said Wiaderek, who is planning on entering the race again next month. "I feel I should go back and finish it."

What other courses has Wiaderek tackled? In the last year alone, he has run a 78-kilometre trail run in Seaton, Ont., 160 kilometres in Sulphur Springs, Ont., a 53-kilometre run in the Adirondacks, a 125-kilometre race in the Alberta Rockies (aptly called the Canadian Death Race), and 160-kilometre runs in the Colorado Rockies and in Haliburton, Ont.

If you do the math, that's seven ultra-marathons in 12 months, or about one every seven weeks.

Not every race went as planned. Wiaderek had to drop out of the Sulphur Springs race, 135 kilometres into the run, due to breathing troubles – he had just got over a bout of pneumonia. He also didn't finish the Haliburton run because of a snake bite that he got on the course, which caused pain and swelling in his leg that lasted for days.

"Every time you run and you fail, it just tells you that you



Wiaderek says some of his running ambition is fuelled by his admiration for exceptional athletes.

cannot take things too easy," Wiaderek said. "You have to prepare and make sure you are healthy; otherwise you will fail. You learn those things."

By now, you're probably wondering what else Wiaderek does with his life. Well, he's married. His wife, Patrizia, also runs, but nothing close to the distances Wiaderek does. And he has twins, who are almost 6. In fact, he credits the kids for his transition from a cyclist to a runner to an ultra-marathoner.

"When I had the kids, 5½ years ago, we got one of those twin strollers and I started to run with the kids."

Initially he was happy running around half of Île Bizard, where he lives, while the kids slept. Pretty soon, however, he was tackling the whole island. So it wasn't a big leap when he decided to do a 50-kilometre race from the West Island to Mount Royal.

"I thought: Well, I'm already doing so many kilometres, how difficult will it be to do a little bit more?"

Turns out it was more difficult than he thought.

"It was one of those hot Montreal days in the middle of June and my stomach was upset," Wiaderek recounted. "I fin-

ished, but it hurt. It took me three months after the race to regroup and then I started running 50 milers."

And so an ultra-marathoner was born.

It was around this time that I first met Wiaderek. I interviewed him in 2006 for an article on ultra-marathons (defined as any distance longer than the 42.2-kilometre marathon distance). He has come a long way since then.

As Wiaderek's passion for ultra-marathoning blossomed, he created a schedule that allows him to spend time with his family, run his own company (he's CEO of a firm that builds machines for the aircraft industry) and train long hours.

He still runs around Île Bizard while the kids sleep, but without the stroller.

"Usually the kids go to bed at 9, so it's a good time (to run)," he said.

He runs until three or four in the morning, which he says keeps the day free to spend with the kids or working. If he's got a race coming up, he'll repeat the same run the next night.

"When you prepare for the long runs you need those 6-8 hour runs, back to back," he said. The nature trails on Île

Bizard are a few hundred metres from Wiaderek's home, which is where he runs 80 per cent of the time.

He regularly logs 100 kilometres a week, but boosts it to around 160 kilometres a few weeks before a race. So far, he's injury-free.

And now you're probably scratching your head and asking: Why?

Wiaderek admits he has done that himself. Basically, he's a hard-working guy who enjoys setting big goals and realizing them. He has been inspired by others who have done the same. In fact, he has a bulletin board in his basement with photos of inspirational athletes, mostly runners, who have done something spectacular. Terry Fox is there. So is Lance Armstrong and Torontonian Ed Whitlock, the only 70-year-old to run a marathon – 42.2 kilometres – in less than three hours.

His wife says he's a guy who does everything at 100 per cent. She also calls him a machine. My husband would call him nuts. I call him an inspiration worthy of anyone's bulletin board.