

# Yarker runner prepares for 135Km arctic marathon

Anthony S.C. Hampton  
*Osprey News Network*

For many, winter makes the challenge of staying physically fit all the more difficult. For Derrick Spafford, however, the snow, ice and cold are part of the fun.

Over three days beginning on March 22, the 42-year-old Yarker native and father of two will participate in a 135 kilometre race based out of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

"It's always intrigued me, doing a race up north," remarked Spafford, who made the decision to compete last November.

He also loves running outdoors. "I've always been drawn to the trails, they've been my first love. I love being out in the woods. There is nothing better."

Rock and Ice Ultra, now in its second year, is a three-day marathon. Each night the participants, who run in a combination of shoes and snowshoes or cross-country skis, sleep in tents in temperatures expected to drop below -20 C. The prize for the first male and female contestants is a diamond worth \$2,800.

Spafford will run the race in snowshoes and his trail runners, for which he has special "light-weight crampons," the equivalent of snow chains for running shoes. Other specialized gear for the race includes a GPS transmitter and a sleeping bag rated to -30 C.

Although it might seem that staying warm was the most important part of running a

three day marathon in the arctic, Spafford is more worried about staying dry. "The most important thing is to make sure that you don't sweat. You don't want to end up with hypothermia." A combination of the proper pace and the right clothing will allow him to avoid this danger.

A race as serious as the Rock and Ice Ultra requires months of training, which Spafford and his spouse Sara Montgomery have undertaken together. "I have been running about 20 hours a week," said Spafford, adding that this includes "a long run on Sunday of five hours or so."

This year's snowy winter has also turned out to be an advantage. "It would have been a bit of a drag if it had turned out to be a winter last year. How the heck would I have trained for this?" Most of his training runs have been on the Cataragui Trail.

There is also a mental aspect to Spafford's training. "With this race it's a little bit different. You have to be in tune with your body a lot, making sure that you have enough energy."

Spafford usually competes alongside Montgomery, but this time she will not be able to accompany him. "I'm not going to say I won't worry," joked Montgomery, adding "it's pretty exciting. There is a part of me that wishes I could go." The two met through their mutual love of running. For their honeymoon they did a 150 km run from Ottawa along the



Derrick Spafford shows off just some of the gear he will use to compete in the 135 km Rock and Ice Ultra marathon in Yellowknife this weekend.

PHOTO: ANTHONY HAMPTON

Rideau Trail over three days.

Rock and Ice Ultra will serve as another milestone in a long running career. "I've been running since 1982," noted Spafford, continuing, "it has always been a big part of my life." In recent years he has increased the length of his runs to include ultra-marathons of 50 miles or more. "I have not taken a day off of running since 1989."

Spafford and Montgomery have been snowshoe racing for approximately four years. "It's a fairly new sport in North America, and it's the fastest growing winter sport."

It has been popular in Europe for many years and may soon become an event at the winter Olympics.

For those looking to get more exercise, especially through the winter, Spafford offered some advice. "Get out there and do something you enjoy doing. For me, I want to be outdoors. Even if the weather is lousy you can get a pair of snowshoes and go out for a walk in the woods."

For more information on the Rock Ice Ultra see [www.rockandiceultra.com](http://www.rockandiceultra.com) or Spafford's website [www.healthadventure.com](http://www.healthadventure.com).