

Gobi the dog athlete

Dion Leonard is followed by a dog across the desert on an ultra-marathon.

- A** I had just finished the first stage of a seven-day ultra-marathon in China when I saw 'Gobi' for the first time. It was a cold night and I'd walked out of the yurt I was staying in to get some hot water when I noticed her next to the campfire, a scruffy little dog getting food from people. This surprised me somewhat. These races are about self-sufficiency – you carry your food for the week and the situation would normally have to be pretty desperate for someone to give any away. I thought: 'There's no way I'm feeding it.'
- B** This race was important to me. I'm 42 and after three years of competitive ultra-distance running I wanted to win. Normally my wife runs alongside me and we're quite sociable, but when it's just me I concentrate more on the race. I'd taken up running several years earlier, partly because my wife, Lucja, seemed to get so much out of it. This was a 200-kilometre race across the Gobi Desert – one of the most challenging I had attempted. It was mentally and physically demanding.
- C** The day after spotting the dog I would later name 'Gobi', I stood at the start line. I was nervous because we were racing over the extremely hilly Tian Shan mountain range. I looked down and there was this little dog with these big beautiful brown eyes looking up at me. There were a hundred runners and I thought it had better get out of the way or it'd get squashed. The race started and I forgot about the dog. Soon after, I was running along, aware of the little shadow at my feet. We ran into the mountains and I didn't see her for some time, but I jumped a small river crossing and heard a dog barking. I thought: 'Ah, the dog's not going any further. Someone else can help it.'
- D** I reached the mountain top, and the first checkpoint. People stared and started cheering the dog. I thought: 'That's a long way for a little dog.' When I reached the finish line for the first day stage, in fifth place, people said: 'The dog has followed you all the way.' I hadn't called it, or whistled at it. I didn't even know it was a she. That evening I went to my tent. She came too and lay down next to me. Then I got thinking about what must have been going through her mind. She'd crossed that river, she'd climbed that mountain, such a massive job for a little dog. Gobi ran close to a marathon that day. I dished out my food to her.
- E** The next day there was a massive river to cross: rushing water, chest-high. I heard her whimpering on the bank. There was no way she could have swum across. There were two runners ahead of me. I stopped thinking about the need to prove myself and turned back to get her. I realised that if I didn't stop to help Gobi, no one would. I put her in my arms, warily, in case she bit me. She relaxed completely, and closed her eyes. She knew she was safe. I thought: 'Ah well, I'll come in third.' But, flushed with happy togetherness, towards the finish we raced past the others. It was the best day ever. From that point on, Gobi was my constant companion. On the final day, I came in second but I wouldn't have cared had I come first – it was magnificent. My wife saw pictures online and said: 'It's the first time I've ever seen you smile at the end of a race!'

Tip! All sections of the text are used in the answers.

Test 2 Exam practice

Reading and Use of English • Part 7

- 1 Read the instructions, the title and subtitle, and quickly read the text.
Answer the following questions:
 - 1 Are the writer and the runner the same person or different people?
 - 2 How does the writer feel about the dog at the beginning and at the end of the text?
- 2 Follow the exam instructions, using the advice to help you.

Tip! If you have a general understanding of the text first, this may give you some help in answering the questions.

You are going to read an article about the effects of tourism on local people. For questions **43–52**, choose from the people (**A–E**). The people may be chosen more than once.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

In which section does the writer

decide not to take responsibility for the dog although it is following him?

43

fear that the dog may hurt him?

44

comment on other people's observations of the dog's actions?

45

appear to be less generous towards the dog than some other racers?

46

say that personal circumstances gave him an improved chance of coming first?

47

say he was inspired in his running by the dog's presence?

48

express his concern that the dog might be accidentally harmed by the other runners?

49

first become aware that the dog had made a decision about which person to stick with?

50

risk losing his place in the race for the benefit of the dog?

51

imply that the racers have to be very well prepared?

52

Advice

43 The writer decides not to take responsibility for the dog in more than one section, but the detail about following him is only in one.

44 There are two references in the text to being hurt, but only one refers to the writer.

45 Look for a reference to other people commenting on what the dog does.

46 This is about the writer's changing attitude, which you have identified on your quick read of the text.

47 From your quick first read of the text, you will hopefully remember which section mentions the runner's personal circumstances.

48 Find the reference to the writer being inspired by his running.

49 The writer expresses concern about the dog in more than one section, but only one mentions the possibility of the dog being harmed.

50 From your quick read of the text, you have identified the writer's changing attitude, so this should help you.

51 The writer only talks about his place in the race in one section.

52 Think about the running situation – what would an ultra-distance runner need if he was running all day?