

Resilience in Motion

What does it look like when two trail-blazing women attempt a traverse of 1000 miles (1600 kilometres) across the Great Himalaya Trail in one of the most uncharacteristically monsoonal and landscape changing seasons? The inspiring duo behind this undertaking? Samantha Gash and Dr Jessie Ling - who both share a love of the outdoors, running and creating a positive social impact. Here they reflect on the first two weeks of their trek.

By Sam Gash





IT WAS WHILE TRYING TO SLEEP, as landslides were rushing down the hills around us, when our incredible, challenging and inspiring run across 1000 miles (1600 kilometres) of Nepal felt almost impossible.

It wasn't just our fear for our safety as Nepal experienced one of its worst seasons in years and people around us lost their lives. It was the weight of the emotional exhaustion associated with our human desire for control that nearly broke us that night. As the landscape changed dramatically around us, so did our plans. And losing that control – that year of detailed and fastidious planning – was one of the first of many lessons on our Resilience in Motion trek along the Great Himalaya Trail.

We knew getting into this, that this experience would be about more than physical suffering – Resilience in Motion is all about sharing a purpose, collaborating and learning about mindset. It's also about supporting causes close to our heart – in this case Movember and World Vision Australia's work in Nepal. We knew it wouldn't be easy. This is a high-altitude traverse across some incredibly remote areas; in a part of the world known for extreme and unpredictable weather.

What we didn't comprehend is just how much it would change our mindset and that's what is most exciting, and difficult about this epic adventure.

For those who aren't familiar with the Great Himalaya Trail, it extends the entire length of the Himalayas, across the



incredible mountains of Nepal, Bhutan and India. Our goal was to focus predominantly on the High Route of Nepal. To even begin the trek is a journey in itself. Getting to Hilsa in Nepal was a carefully planned and executed mission involving numerous forms of transport; from multiple plane legs across Asia into Nepal, many days on foot, a few long car rides, some time spent in the tray of a truck and even a helicopter through difficult conditions, to arrive at our starting destination.

We had imagined and planned for our trek to start at the end of monsoon season. But torrential rain met us just a few days into our traverse, and the challenge we set out to embark upon at the start line ended up being dramatically different to what our trek's reality became.

Over the first few days, the weather held. We covered over 100 kilometres, reaching max altitudes of 4600 metres above sea level. We went from cold temperatures, to holding umbrellas in pouring rain, scorching temperatures and then clear skies. Our first set-back was Jessie becoming sick quite quickly by what seemed to be food poisoning on a climb to 3500 metres. She was vomiting heavily and passed out not long after we reached the top. Kind locals drove us to a nearby town, where we were offered safe accommodation during the Dashian Festival. It was a lucky fluke – vehicles and people who speak English in this part of the world are so rare. After some rest and medication Jessie came good, but this was just the beginning.

For some time, we had been grappling with little bumps which meant our plan A had to change to plan B – this we



were prepared for. Then it became clear that all of Nepal was now experiencing one of the worst weather systems it has faced in years. Monsoonal rain and heavy snowfall left the mountains and terrain severely damaged from landslides, avalanches and floods. Our decision-making process had to firmly point towards safety and survival. There was now an acceptance that a momentary pause was going to be part of the experience.

One day, whilst navigating our way down from a high pass, active landslides and sinking mudslides halted us in our tracks. We watched in fear and exhaustion as trees and boulders started to crash around us, leaving us no choice but to urgently seek refuge in a farmer's house. It was during this interaction whilst the power was out and sharing a cup of tea, that we learnt about the tragedy of these weather systems. At that point, landslides had destroyed a number of homes and devastatingly seven people lost their lives.

In a moment like this, the world of the traverse and driving to an arbitrary destination in the east is washed away in your mind. We were brought to the perspective that the lives and livelihoods of the Nepali people were lying in a fragile landscape. With the very limited communications from home, we took solace in the constant support of our families, friends, and our AIA Vitality, World Vision and Lululemon network. Despite the enormous amount put into supporting us to get here, no one wanted us to be at risk and all supported us to embrace a much needed resilient and flexible mindset.

We learned that it's in these moments, it's important to focus on what's in your control, versus the plan you created before



you had context. Surrendering to real-life circumstances was both liberating and challenged us to move away from a fixed mindset. Of course, this physical undertaking left us fatigued, however, it's been the emotion and mental toll that has been far greater. As an AIA Vitality ambassador and through the AIA Vitality program, I have been able to learn how to deal with change and I drew on this at these moments. We had to make hundreds of decisions on a daily basis, whilst not making progress in the literal sense. I had to give myself time to adapt, lower my expectations, take things one day at a time and focus on the little things.

As an athlete, I've learned these shifts and adaptations go against our natural wiring of relentless forward motion. But, as an endurance athlete and through my AIA ambassadorship, I've learnt the importance of leaning into an adaptable and problem-solving mindset, even if it makes you uncomfortable. It is in these moments of challenge and exhaustion, when resilience is built through the cultivation of a flexible and malleable mindset.

We're only two weeks in and we've been welcomed into the homes of countless locals who themselves have very little. During flooding and torrential rain, these families shared with us their homes, warmth, food and water. Walking into their homes, our minds felt emotionally exhausted, yet we felt an incredible connection to the generous and incredible people of this landscape.

Our journey so far has taught us the true lengths of what resilience is. How it can be stretched to ultimately help, protect, heal and evolve a person. It's been through pausing, accepting and removing ourselves from the world of our pursuits, that's given us the perspective we've needed. We still have many more kilometres in front of us and likely more challenges up ahead, but we're up for the challenge.



THE ATHLETES

Samantha Gash (right) is an endurance athlete, co-founder of Her Trails and Relief Run, ambassador of World Vision, AIA Vitality and Royal Flying Doctors Service. **Dr Jessie Ling (left)** is a General Practitioner, outdoor enthusiast and trail runner from Tasmania.

About Resilience in Motion

Resilience in Motion is more than just a run. Over 50 days, female explorers, Sam and Jessie, are undertaking a journey over 1000 miles (1600 kilometres) across Nepal's Great Himalaya Trail, navigating its remote, rugged and at time minimally defined trails. Through the lens of Sam and Jessie, the run is about sharing purpose, collaborating skill sets and cultivating a resilient community through honest storytelling. Together they are running to support two powerful social impact initiatives, World Vision Nepal & Movember.

To learn more, and to support Resilience in Motion, visit <https://resilienceinmotion.com.au/>