



SILK ROUTE ULTRA (122 KM)

Informative handbook

Thursday 10th September 2026



Beyond All Limits (5370m)

Train Hard, Arrive Early: Respect the Mountains



Whether you are a returnee or a first-time SRU participant, here's a checklist to ensure a safe run!

- ✓ Read this informative handbook in its entirety.
- ✓ Please check our [website](#) and social media accounts for regular race updates.
- ✓ Schedule to arrive in Leh at a minimum of 15 days ahead.
- ✓ **Ensure that you are in Leh on 29 and 30 August and visit the Ladakh Marathon Expo for bib collection.**
- ✓ Once you have arrived in Leh please ensure to contact the Ladakh Marathon Team.
- ✓ Ensure that you have undergone the medical check in Leh which is for your own safety.
- ✓ Ensure you have proper clothing as per our mandatory checklist.
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with the route map of this challenge.
- ✓ Ensure that you have provided the organizers with emergency contact and medical details.

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1. About the Silk Route Ultra

The Silk Route Ultra is widely considered one of the most brutal footraces on the planet. Covering 122 kilometres (75.8 miles) through the stark, high-altitude desert of Ladakh, India, it is designed to push human limits to the absolute edge.

a) The Historical Journey to School

The Silk Route Ultra follows a path deeply personal to the founder and race director Chewang Motup Goba. Fifty years before it became a paved highway or the world's highest ultra-marathon, this rugged trail was a lifeline of pure survival. As a young boy traveling from the Nubra Valley to boarding school, Motup Goba had to walk this exact route to reach Leh. What elite runners now attempt to conquer within a strict 22-hour cut-off was originally a gruelling, self-sustained three-day foot journey across high mountain passes—braved long before the era of modern vehicles, satellite forecasts, or thermal gear.

b) What makes it the ultimate test of high-altitude endurance narrows down to below four brutal realities:

1. The Oxygen Deficit (Cruising Above 4,000 Meters)

The physical distance of 122 km is hard enough on flat ground, but more than **60 kilometres** of this race takes place entirely above an altitude of 4,000 meters (13,123 feet). At the race's peak—the Khardung La pass—participants stand at **5,370 meters (17,618 feet)**. At this height, there is roughly **50% less effective oxygen** in the air than at sea level. Every single breath yields half its normal value, making your lungs burn and forcing your heart to work twice as hard just to maintain a slow jog.

2. Radical Elevation Gain

The race starts at 7:00 PM in the village of Kyagar in the Nubra Valley, sitting at roughly 3,100 meters (10,120 feet). From there, it is a relentless, exhausting uphill grind. Participants must climb well over 2,300 vertical meters (7,500+ feet) to reach/cross the Khardung La before throwing their battered knees into a punishing, steep descent all the way down into the town of Leh.

3. Absolute Climate Whiplash

Because the race kicks off in the evening and spans through the night into the next day, participants face severe environmental shifts such as:



- (i) **The Desert Night:** Temperatures in the valley and early climbs drop below freezing, sometimes plummeting to -14°C as you approach the high mountain passes, often accompanied by biting winds, or high-altitude snow.
- (ii) **The High-Altitude Day:** Once the sun rises over the high-altitude desert, the UV radiation is fierce. Participants go from freezing in heavy thermal layers to sweltering under a relentless sun, risking rapid dehydration.

4. Unforgiving Cut-off Times

The brutal **22-hour strict cut-off** to complete the 122 km course. To even reach the finish line, you must clear tight checkpoints along the way. For instance, you must reach/cross the punishing Khardung La top within 16 hours of starting. If your body slows down due to the altitude, the clock will ruthlessly end your race.





2. Course Description, Weather and What to expect

Majority of the course is on asphalt-paved road surfaces. However, certain sections between Khalsar and Khardung Village on the Nubra side, as well as South Pulu on the Leh side, feature rough roads. Also, due to the high altitude, the course is subject to unprecedented climatic conditions. In past years, participants have experienced rain and snow conditions with extreme temperatures. Additionally, the Leh-Nubra highway undergoes regular widening by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), as a result, some stretches remain unpaved. Participants of this ultra race should be prepared for any such eventuality.



Participants can expect temperatures in Kyagar to be about 8° to 14° Celsius at start time of 7:00PM. As you start running and ascend to Khalsar, temperatures will drop to around 7° Celsius. Temperatures will drop further as you ascend to Khardung and Khardungla pass to 2° Celsius. In case of bad weather, temperatures can go as low as minus 10° to 14° Celsius. As you descend from Khardungla top to Leh, the temperatures should go up to about 10° to 15° Celsius or more, depending on the weather conditions.



3. Elevation Profile

From/To	Distance (km)	Elevation gain/loss (m)	Stage
Kyagar to Khalsar	27.6	124	I
Khalsar to Khardung	22.4	711	II
Khardung to Khardungla top	32.2	1395	III
Khardungla top to South Pulu	14.3	-707	IV
South Pulu to Mendak mor (turn)	12.1	-651	V
Mendak mor to Finish point	13.4	-512	Finisher

4. Altitude and Acclimatisation

Running at an altitude tests the limits of one's endurance, hence proper acclimatisation becomes imperative. Altitude gain affects everyone and depends entirely on one's body condition as some acclimatise very fast and some take several days. With proper acclimatisation, altitude should not be an issue, which is why we recommend participants of this challenge arrive at least 15 days ahead of race day to prepare themselves. And once you have arrived in Leh, do not train too hard, too soon, and maintain the pace. For more information on altitude sickness and running, we recommend that all participants read the following articles.

[Healthy in high Himalayas](#)

[Altitude training for everyone](#)



5. Preparation and Tips

We hope you are training diligently and embracing the unique demands that this ultra race entails.

- **Discipline:** Disciplined and rigorous training sessions will help you mentally prepare for this extraordinary race. Training should consist of schedules with an emphasis on building endurance, strength and mental resilience. Incorporating interval training in your regimen will help you adapt to the elevated conditions we experience in Leh. Finally, arriving in Leh 2-4 weeks ahead of the race day will help with altitude adaptation.
- **Matching the Pace, Not the Ego:** If you choose to run with a buddy or team up with a fellow participant on the course, you must align on a sustainable, aerobic pace. Do not let a faster participant drag you into a heart-rate spike that causes you to blow up later. Conversely, be willing to ease off slightly to keep your partner within a safe zone.
- **The "A-B-C" Verbal Check:** Silence in the dark can breed dark thoughts. Establish a simple rule with your running partner to check in every mile with a verbal confirmation. Ask each other simple questions to check for high-altitude confusion (HACE): *"What was the name of the last checkpoint?"* or *"How much water do you have left?"* If their answers are slurred or slow, you know it's time to flag down a support car.
- **Sharing the Wind and Light:** If the headwind is brutal on the climb to North Pulu, take turns drafting. Have one participant take the lead for 10 minutes to block the wind while the other follows closely behind, then swap.
- **Differentiate Pain from Injury:** High altitude will cause discomfort—your muscles will burn, your lungs will ache, and you will feel profoundly tired. Accept this as part of the tax the mountain demands. However, if you feel a sharp, structural pain in a joint, chest tightness, or a sudden loss of balance, that is an objective warning from your body. Listen to it and slow down.
- **A Note on True Strength:** Being mentally strong at 17,000 feet does not mean being reckless. The strongest runners are the ones who can look at the mountain calmly, acknowledge their vulnerability, and make calculated, intelligent decisions to protect their well-being. If you find yourself entirely alone in the dark, remember that every single volunteer, support vehicle, and marshal on that road is a part of your extended team. You are never truly isolated.



- **Navigating the Psychological Shadow of the Dark:** In extreme conditions, isolation amplifies every minor doubt. A slight ache in your knee can feel like a structural failure; a gasp for air can trigger sudden panic. Stay calm and change how you process your surroundings.

When the vastness of the mountain pass feels overwhelming, shrink your world. Stop thinking about the 40 kilometres left to run. Focus entirely on the small pool of light cast by your headlamp. Tell yourself, "*I am just running to that next boulder,*" or "*I am just taking 50 strong paces.*"

Fear and anxiety spike your heart rate, which consumes precious oxygen you can't afford to waste. Every 15 minutes, conduct a calm, logical head-to-toe check.

- *Are my shoulders tense and up by my ears? Drop them.*
- *Am I clenching my jaw against the cold? Relax it.*
- *Is my breathing rhythmic or shallow? Deepen it.*





6. Race Protocols

1. Participants must always follow instructions from the organiser, race officials, course Marshals, and volunteers. The organizer reserves the right to disqualify participants who refuse to follow instructions from the race officials.

2. Interacting with Biker Road Marshals

Biker Road Marshals constantly patrol the mountainous highway to monitor participant safety and manage course integrity. They are equipped to handle emergencies and communicate directly with medical teams. However, as certain stretches of the course lack network coverage, emergency support may take time to reach you. Should an issue arise, we advise you to remain calm and practice deep breathing while support is on the way.

- The Active Check-In: Whenever a biker Marshal passes you or pulls up alongside you, give a clear, intentional visual signal. A simple thumbs-up and a verbal "I'm okay" lets them keep moving to check on other participants.
 - Never Hide Distress: If you are feeling dizzy, disoriented, or nauseous, do not try to pretend you are fine when a Marshal rolls past. If you look like you are weaving or stumbling, they have the authority to halt you for a mandatory medical saturation check. Be completely honest about your physical state.
 - Emergency Signalling: If you are in trouble between aid stations and a biker marshal/support vehicle is approaching, use your mandatory safety whistle or wave your headlamp/arms across the road to command their attention immediately.
3. Participants must conduct themselves in sportsmanlike manner and respect race officials, fellow runners, and the local people of Ladakh.
 4. All participants are to refrain from display of political, religious, or racial propaganda of any nature on apparel or gear worn or used by participants during the race(s). Any participant found in violation of this rule will be disqualified.
 5. During the race if a participant is found boarding any of the support vehicles, he/she will be disqualified.
 6. Use of portable/supplementary oxygen is not permitted. Participant will be disqualified if he/she is found using supplementary oxygen.



7. Participants must run/walk the entire course on their own strength. Friends, family can run to join the runner starting from Shanti Stupa to run alongside them up to the entrance of the main market in Leh. However, if a participant receives physical support to move forward from a pacer or spectator, it results in automatic disqualification.
8. Selfie sticks, GoPro mounts, or any camera rigging that is not attached directly to the head or torso are banned on the course of all six races.
9. Littering is strictly prohibited. Please carry out your empty gel sachets and energy-bar wrappers or dispose of them in bins at aid stations.
10. If the vitals of a participant are found to be abnormal before starting or during the race, then our medical team will have the right to pull you out of the race. Their decision is final and binding.
11. No family member/friend/support crew is allowed to accompany or stay with participants in Kyagar Village. If a participant travels to Kyagar Village in advance for acclimatisation, then he/she will have to return to Leh and report to the NDS Stadium on Wednesday 9th September at 8:00AM for race briefing and travel together.
12. Participants must be present in Leh and report at the NDS Stadium for race briefing to travel together with fellow participants.
13. Please ensure that timing chip is fastened securely to bib. Your net running time can only be measured if you step on the timing mats laid out at the start and finish line. Likewise, you must step on all mats laid out enroute the marathon course. You will be disqualified if your intermediate times are not recorded.
14. "Participant safety is of utmost importance to us" - the medical check-up is organised with this in mind. A pre-medical check-up for participants will be held in the morning of 10th September in Kyagar. The organiser reserves the right to disallow/disqualify any participant who is known or suspected of being physically unfit. At any point, should you feel unsure of your ability to complete this challenge or physically not well, we recommend you take advice from our team.



7. Bib Collection, Race Kit and Participant Benefits

Bib collection details:

- Dates: Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th August 2026.
- Venue: NDS Indoor Stadium Leh.
- Timings: 10AM to 5PM
- **NO BIBS WILL BE GIVEN AFTER THESE DATES.**
- Participants must collect their bibs in person and bring a photo ID. Bibs will not be issued to anyone other than the registered participant, and no authority letters will be accepted for this purpose.
- This is a timed race with timing chips.
- Each participant receives two bibs, one for the front and one for the back.
- Please make sure bibs are pinned properly and visible throughout the race, otherwise disqualification will occur.
- Please ensure that timing chip is fastened securely.
- Your net running time can only be measured if you step on the timing mats laid out at the start and finish line. Likewise, you must step on all mats laid out enroute the marathon course.
- **You will be disqualified if your intermediate times are not recorded.**

Race kit and participant benefits:

- Race Day T-shirt by **PUMA**
- Running jacket
- Beanie cap
- Ultra sun hat
- Upper and lower inners
- Arm sleeves (for sun protection)
- Bags for layering on/off





8. Reporting, Race briefing and getting to the Start line

- Reporting and Race briefing date: 09 September 2026
- Reporting time: 8:00 AM
- Reporting place: NDS Indoor Stadium, Leh

Day 1: Wednesday, 09 September

Drive from NDS Stadium in Leh to Kyagar – vehicles will leave at sharp 9:00 AM. Drive 120km across the Khardungla pass and reach Kyagar by 1:00 PM, a journey of about 5 hours. Participants need to carry light packed lunch and water for the day. Overnight accommodation is in hotel inclusive of high tea and dinner. Kyagar is at an altitude of 3100m which is lower than Leh.

Day 2: Thursday, 10 September

Today is race day, so take it easy. All meals are included for this day starting with breakfast, lunch and followed by an early dinner. Pre-medical checkup is conducted by official race medics this day in the morning. If at any time you are uncertain about your ability to complete this challenge or if you feel unwell, we recommend seeking advice from our team.

Report time at start line is 6:30 PM.



Participants are requested to bring only a small overnight bag and running items. No suitcases and extra bags will be allowed on the bus. Should any participant wish to store luggage, they are welcome to do so at the Marathon office in Leh, and this needs to be dropped and collected by themselves. No family member/support crew is allowed to accompany or stay with participants in Kyagar.



9. Drop Bag Submission details and layering on/off locations

The submission timeline of drop bags is:

- **Submission Date:** Wednesday, September 9, 2026.
- **Location:** NDS Stadium Grounds, Leh (during the official mandatory race briefing.
- **The Process:** This is where you submit your layer-on/layer-off bags designated for **Khardungla Top** and **South Pulu**. You are expected to carry only your absolute essentials for your overnight stay in Kyagar (Nubra Valley) prior to the 7:00 PM start on Thursday, September 10.

There are three locations to Layer on/off during this race:

- Khardung Village
- Khardung La Top
- South Pulu





10. Race Day Information and Cut-off

- Race Day and Start Time: Thursday, 10 September 7:00PM
- Start Line: Kyagar
- Finish Day and Time: Friday, 11 September 5:00PM
- Finish Line: Main Market, Leh

Cut-off time: Stage-wise cut-off is as under. Please make sure that you step on timing mats located at each cut-off point.

Cut-off Points	Cut-off time	Stage
Khalsar Village	11:00 pm / 4 hr	I
Khardung Village	3:00 am / 8 hr	II
Khardungla top	11:00 am / 16 hr	III
South Pulu	1:30 pm / 18 hr 30 min	IV
Mendak mor	3:00 pm / 20 hr	V
Finish point	5:00 pm / 22 hr	Finisher

Operating at extreme altitudes in a harsh mountain landscape means that safety is entirely dependent on your communication with the race network. On the Khardungla highway, you are never truly isolated because of deployment of a highly active network of mobile logistics support, including dedicated Biker Road Marshals. Treating these marshals and aid station crews as your lifelines keeps you safe and moving forward efficiently.

All support along this route will be withdrawn from various stages after respective cut-off time has lapsed.



11. Aid Station Log-In Discipline and Support during the race

➤ Aid Station "Log-In" Discipline

Every time you enter an official aid station or checkpoint, you are entering a zone of accountability. **Ensure Your Bib is Read.** Even if you are rushing or just refilling your hydration pack, make sure the race officials at the timing or tracking desk clearly see your front bib number. They log your arrival and departure times to track your progress up and down the course of the race. State your Intentions: If you plan to spend more than two minutes at an aid station—such as changing your footwear or layering on/off, briefly tell a volunteer: "I'm changing my shoes, I'll be out in five minutes." This keeps the crew from worrying if your tracking log suddenly stalls.



➤ Aid Station Support facilities

Hydration and Aid stations will be located at every 7km interval from start point to the village of Khardung. From here on hydration / aid stations will be located at every 5km interval and shared with the participants of Khardungla Challenge. There will also be mobile units along the course of the race providing drinks and snacks. Hydration & Aid stations will provide with:

- Water - refill facility - by our hydration partner **BISLERI**, participants are requested to bring out their own hydration packs and bottles
- Energy drinks served in biodegradable cups by our energy partner **FAST&UP**
- Snacks are free of plastic wraps and include fresh fruits, dates, boiled potatoes, salt, jaggery etc.



- **Toilet facilities** along the course are environment friendly dry pits. Medical facilities along this ultra-marathon course are provided by the Indian Army – XIV Corps, Ladakh Scouts Regimental Centre, ITBP and the Administration of UT Ladakh.

- **The Strict Rule on Toilet Breaks & Wandering Off**

The terrain along the route consists of steep drop-offs, loose scree, and hidden mountain hazards. Wandering off the paved or marked road can quickly turn dangerous.

- Stay on the Main Road Shoulder: If you need to stop for a bathroom break, do not wander far from the highway. Moving behind distant rocks or dropping down steep embankments removes you from the direct sightline of patrolling biker marshals and medical cars. If you lose your footing or slip on a loose rock out of sight, nobody will know where to look for you.
- The "Drop-Bag Screen" or Aid Station Toilets: Use the designated toilet facilities available at major aid stations and checkpoints whenever possible. If you must go between stations, stay close enough to the road shoulder so that your running vest or headlamp remains visible to the course traffic.
- Inform Your Buddy: If you are running with a partner, always tell them if you are stepping aside for a break. Have them wait on the road shoulder to maintain visual contact and signal a Marshal if you take an unusually long time.
- Always remain alert to the sounds of support vehicles. Keep your ears free of headphones or music so you can instantly hear a support vehicle approaching from behind on narrow switchbacks.



Facilities along the course of the Khardung La Challenge are supported by the Indian Army - XIV Corps, Ladakh Scouts Regimental Centre, ITBP and the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.



12. Mandatory Gear (Non-Negotiable)

You must always carry these items with you on the course (or wear them during the night/summit sections).

Item	Specifications	Purpose / Rule
Hydration Pack / Vest	Minimum 1.5L to 2L fluid capacity.	Refill-only race. No single-use plastic water bottles are given on the route. You must carry your own hydration pack.
Two Official Race Bibs	One pinned to the front, one to the back.	Must always be visible. Altering, folding, or covering the bib results in immediate disqualification.
Headlamp with Spare Batteries	High lumen output (200+lumens recommended).	Silk Route Ultra starts at 7:00 PM (overnight run).
Windproof & Waterproof Shell	Technical jacket with an adjustable hood.	Protects against sudden blizzard squalls and biting mountain wind chills at 17,618 ft.
Thermal Insulation Layers	High-quality synthetic or merino wool upper and lower inners.	To withstand sub-zero temperatures (dropping down to -5°C or even -14°C in severe storm years).
Warm Winter Cap / Beanie	Fleece or merino wool covering the ears.	To prevent rapid head heat loss on the high mountain passes.
Warm Gloves	Windproof or thermal material.	Essential to prevent finger numbness during freezing night or high sections.
UV Protection Sunglasses	High-quality lenses (preferably with a strap/chum).	Absolute must to protect your eyes from intense high-altitude UV rays and snow blindness if the pass is covered in snow.
Whistle	Attached to your hydration vest.	For emergency signalling if you are disoriented, injured, or facing severe altitude sickness.



13. Participant Assistance and Finish Line Policy

The Finish Line is at Main Market, Leh.

15. **Self-Propelled Progress:** Participants must progress under their own power (walking, jogging, or running). Being carried, dragged, or physically supported by pacing partners, spectators, or anyone else to advance toward the finish line is strictly prohibited and may result in disqualification. Friends, family can run to join the runner starting from Shanti Stupa to run alongside them upto the entrance of the main market in Leh. However, if a participant receives physical support to move forward from a pacer or spectator, it results in automatic disqualification.
16. **Official Assistance:** Race volunteers and medical staff are permitted to provide physical assistance only within the final few hundred meters of the race.
17. **Crossing the Finish Line:** Regardless of any volunteer assistance provided in the final stretch, participants must cross the finish line entirely on their own feet.
 - All participants must respect the finish line area and ensure that celebrations do not interfere with other participants' finish line experience.
 - There will be Doctors and Physiotherapists at the finishing area to take care of participants.
 - A sumptuous hot lunch is served at the finishing area by our hospitality partner **The Grand Dragon Ladakh.**
 - Podium finishers are felicitated at the finish line, and all finishers will receive a Finisher medal.





14. The Power of your Impact

Your participation in the Ladakh Marathon has a direct impact on the local economy and represents something much larger.

- Direct Financial Assistance: The tourism and agricultural seasons in these high valleys are incredibly short. The income generated from hosting Ladakh Marathon runners goes directly into the hands of local families. Even if the amount seems small to a traveller, it provides critical financial support for winter supplies, heating fuel, and children's education.
- Sustainable Sport Tourism: By staying locally and cooperating gracefully with the basic conditions, you help prove that mass athletic events can positively lift remote communities without destroying their environmental integrity.
- When you stand on the start line in the freezing dark, you won't remember the lack of a modern shower. You will remember the incredible warmth of the local family who wished you "Julley" (the Ladakhi greeting/blessing) and handed you a cup of hot tea before sending you up the mountain.

