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Taking on the mother of all marathons

A CAMBRIDGE runner is heading to Athens to run a marathon in aid of Alzheimer's Research UK.

Philippa Smith from Chesterton aims to raise hundreds of pounds for the charity based in Great Shelford, when she runs the Athens Classic Marathon on Sunday.

She will be joined on her Greek adventure by her partner Mark Johnson and spurred on by thoughts of her grandma, Eileen, who died from Alzheimer's disease four years ago.

The Athens Classic Marathon, with its challenging route, attracts thousands of runners from around the world every year.

The 26.2 mile route follows the original marathon course run by the foot soldier Pheidippides in 490BC. He ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the news of the Greeks' victory over Persia – and then dropped dead.

Philippa, who works for the Laboratory for Molecular Biology in Cambridge, said: "I really enjoy running and this will be my first marathon.

"The idea started when Mark and I visited friends in Greece earlier in the year. They told us about the Athens Classic Marathon and we decided to have a go.

"It's the perfect opportunity to do something positive and raise much needed money for more research into Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

"I was devastated when my grandma was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

"She lived with us when I was growing up and we were very close.

"She was the person who walked me to school every day and was always there to look after me when I was ill.

"It was sad to see her become confused and lose her precious memories. So much more needs to be understood about this cruel disease."

The 33-year-old said she is fundraising for Alzheimer's Research UK because "they're getting to the root of the problem".

She said: "Our friends tell us we'll get lots of encouragement along the way with spectators showering us with olive branches and shouting 'bravo'."

Miranda Mays, community fundraising manager for the charity, said: "We really appreciate Philippa's tremendous support by running the Athens Classic Marathon. Every £20 she raises will pay for another hour of pioneering research."

To donate visit www.justgiving.com/philippasmith or call the fundraising team at Alzheimer's Research UK on (01223) 843899.

rachel.allen@cambridge-news.co.uk



Philippa Smith

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