

Cape ultra runner sets a hot pace

Hout Bay's Ryan Sandes carving a niche for himself in the world's toughest races

BY DEREK WILSNAGH

Look for an extreme series dubbed 'The Race Of No Return,' taking place in the 'driest, hottest, windiest and coldest places on earth'... and you are liable to bump into Cape trail running sensation Ryan Sandes.

Never heard of him? Don't be embarrassed, the 26-year-old has been running for barely two years.

Why the fuss? Well, at his first desert race attempt he won every stage of the six-day Gobi March in China, averaging 50km a day in searing desert heat and life-threatening conditions, covering stages varying from 20km to 80km while carrying all he needed to survive in a 10kg backpack. Left eating his dust were some of the most esteemed ultra runners in the world.

Sounds amazing? You bet! In fact so much so the Sport Science Institute have hauled him in for tests, making a heat chamber available to him to train for his next race and initiating a series of variables in order to work out just how on earth he did that.

How did it come about? Well, to cut a long story short: Fairly fit playing rugby at flank for UCT, Sandes thought it would be "cool" to try the Knysna Marathon. He loved it and switched to trail running because he liked the ambience.

He then heard of the 4-deserts race series and reckoned he'd found his calling. Armed with an Ian Waddle (of Iron Man fame) training programme - after all, bar rugby and a bit of waterpolo at SACS



EXTREME STREAM: Ryan Sandes (inset) leads the field along a dry river bed in the Gobi March desert race in China. Picture: RACING THE PLANET - WOUTER KINGMA

stages I would rather have collapsed and died than given up. "It's a mental thing. Maybe you just have to have a couple more dead brain cells than anyone else!"

Sandes says blisters and dehydration are the biggest enemy, but recovering before the next day's stage is just as vital. "You sleep in tents they provide with about 10 other athletes and my big problem was the snoring. I couldn't sleep. But, after the Long Run, I slept!

"It is a self-supporting race so you carry your food, clothing, emergency kit - all they give you is a tent and 1.5 litres of water every hour or every 10/12km, and two litres when you finish. So it's not a hell of a lot of water they give you. "Nutrition is very important and I have stuff you mix like a pancake batter in your kitchen and that helps a lot. Its full of protein, calories and so on. Sandes, who forked out R60,000 from his own pocket to take part in the Gobi, now has a financial sponsor in Cape Kingdom, which he says is a huge relief. "They make anti-inflammatories from Buchu (herb) which I found works well. It is a product of natural fynbos."

For training, Sandes does two gym sessions of full body training a week, and a lot of running, preferably at midday temperatures, and twice in the heat simulator. "It's a bit boring, I prefer running on trails, But you've got to do what you've got to do!"

"I go to the physio once a week because he can pick up if there is a problem developing and what's causing it. He then

prescribes an exercise to strengthen that area."

His next event is the Sahara Race in Egypt on October 26, which is why Ryan is doing a lot of running on Noordhoek Beach.

"I hear it's (the Sahara) a lot more sandy than Gobi and heat makes you a lot more fatigued. I did some intervals in the simulator and your heart rate takes a lot longer to recover. It's stuffy and more difficult breathing."

Sandes has a list of races he plans to conquer: "The 4desert, all four legs. I can only do the Last Desert in Antarctica in 2010, as it takes place every second year. Then there's the Trans 63, a 833km non-stop race in the Sahara, and the Badwater marathon through Death Valley in the US.

"That's supposed to be the toughest ultra-marathon in the world. The route is along a road, and apparently your shoes start melting if you don't run on the white lines.

"A few people do this for a living and it has crossed my mind. But it is quite risky - you could be running and snap your ankle quite quickly and that could be the end of it."

Outside of running? Sandes grins: "I don't have much of a life. As a student I enjoyed, either working or training (he's a quantity surveyor).

Born in Cape Town, he has lived in Hout Bay most of his life and after school took a year off and went to America to travel. He returned and took a degree in construction studies, and now works for property developers.

didn't have any niggles and everything balanced out. A race like that is about 60% mental and 40% physical and you have to train for that. I find it quite cool setting a big goal for myself and achieving it, but there was one stage on the long

first choice, but being there was actually awesome. "A lot of the running was on dry riverbeds which suited me, some of it like our mountains here, but quite rocky, and some of it sandy.

"Luck went my way... I

ping up his weekly 40km to between 100 and 200km too hastily, incurring an over-use injury to the tendon that runs between the hip and knee, and he had to miss that race, instead going for the Gobi.

"It wouldn't have been my

run (80km stage, where the heat soared to 45 degrees) I thought I was going to pass out.

"I think I won because my attitude is to never, never give up. You just put one foot in front of the other and keep going no matter what. On those long

