

Marathon des Sables 2014

“When running for 7 days through the Sahara Desert – it is a good idea to have the right kit and food with you. So after hundreds of hours of research I have (nearly) all of my kit and food purchased, weighed, tested and ready to go! I’m currently making some last minute tweaks to reduce the weight of my bag which I shall be carrying for the week, but for anyone who is interested in what I shall be taking with me, below is my proposed kit list broken down into five categories. Wearing, Camping, Luxuries, Food and Essentials. With the aim to keep anything non-essential to a minimum. As someone who usually packs lots of ‘just in case’ items this has been rather challenging!

Wearing (Running)

I feel this category has probably taken the least of my attention, with my primary focus on performance whilst always keeping an eye on the weight. Performance means breathability and good support whilst not being so restrictive as to cause blisters. I wanted my choices to also be durable enough so as to survive the week in good condition, in distant preparation for any future events I may take on.

Wearing/Running		
Item	Description	Weight (g)
Shoes	Zoot Ultra Kane 3.0	
Gaiters	Race Kit Gaiters	80
Bag	WAA MDS Ultra bag 20L	850
Compression	CompressSport Calf guards	38
Buff	High UV buff	41
Socks	Injini toe socks x 3	153
Bottles	WAA Bottles	178
Glasses	Oakleys + Wind Gasket + clear lenses	63
Poles	Trail Blaze Mountain King poles	304
Shorts	CompressSport Shorts	127
Watch	Casio simple digital watch	26
Tshirt	Raidlight Red Bamboo Technical	115
Cap	Racekit Cap	66
Arm Coolers	Sugoi Icefil Coolers	39
Windproof	DMM Sonic Smock	64

Camping

This section gets a little bit more complex, with a lot more compromises to be made. Every single item on the list has been carefully chosen, comparing the weight, comfort, performance and obviously price.

The rule of thumb for most endurance events, is that the more money you’re willing to spend the lighter you can get the same item with a similar level of performance. For example if you wish to have a higher level of comfort, (i.e. a nice warm sleeping bag) then as the weight goes down the price goes up.

Camping		
Item	Description	Weight (g)
Compression bag	Blue one	23
Compression bag	Red one	14
Towel	Microfibre Mini	37
Ear plugs	Custom made Earplugs	7
Silk Slippers	Swissair	23
Cooking pot	Titanium Esbit micro	13
Stove	Titanium 900ml	96
Spork	Titanium Spork	17
Pillow	Ultralight pillow	25
Sleeping Bag	Yeti Passion 3	578
Sleeping Mat	MiniMat	36
Raidlight Trousers	Desert Trousers	101
<i>NOK cream</i>	<i>NOK foot hardening cream</i>	
<i>Baselayer</i>	<i>YUAS</i>	185
<i>Kalenji top</i>	<i>Kalenji top</i>	229

Luxuries

These are things which aren't strictly necessary to complete the race, but should make the week more bearable. For me a camera with spare batteries is an essential item. I plan to take hundreds of photos and videos of the week, so I can look back on the highs and lows in years to come, and to show anyone who dares to ask what it was like.

Luxury		
Item	Description	Weight (g)
Camera	Nikon AW110	196
Camera Case	Neoprene Ultralight	26
Camera Batteries x2	Nikon Spare Batteries	42
MP3 Player	Ipod Shuffle	13
Headphones	Shure in ear SE210	

Essentials

These are all items I would consider to be essential for the race, the vast majority of them are compulsory items and must be carried at all times. The last 5 are things which are given to us whilst in the Sahara.

Essentials cont. overleaf

Essentials		
Item	Description	Weight (g)
Venom pump	Snake bite venom kit	33
Mirror	Emergency signalling mirror	20
Compass	Recta DT100	13
Knife	2 x EDCgear mini knife	16
survival blanket	Space Blanket	26
Head torch	Petzl XP Tikka 2	76
Suncream	P20 SPF 50	128
Anti Bacterial Gel	50ml alcohol hand gel stuff	59
Foot Tape		
Foot Care	Betadine 15ml (Iodine)	
Wemmi wipes	6 Wemmi Wipes	17
Cash	250 Euros	
Batteries	Spare Lithium AAA's	35
Foot Care	Alcohol pads	
Lighter	Lighter	16
Medical		
Documents	ECG Papers	14
Passport	Passport	29
Medical	Paracetamol	
Medical	Ibuprofen	
Medical	Uvistat SPF50 Lipscreen	13
Toothbrush	Toothbrush	7
Toothpaste	Toothpaste 20ml	31
Toilet	Toilet Roll sheets	
Toilet	Imodium	
Safety Pins	Safety pins x 12	
Gurney Goo	Foot Anti Friction Cream	39
Shoe insoles	Spare insoles Zoot standard	
Flare	<i>Emergency Distress Flare</i>	345
Map	<i>Map book</i>	122
Salt	<i>salt tablets</i>	
Water Card	<i>Punch card</i>	
Glow Stick	<i>Luminous Stick</i>	

Food

Now this is a category which has also taken a lot of thought and intensive background research. I have decided to adopt a more high-fat strategy as opposed to carb loading and fuelling myself on powders and gels which can be very heavy. This is because there is increasing evidence that the body can perform equally efficiently on a restricted carb diet during endurance events such as the MdS. The other reason is that fat has 8.8kcal/g whereas most carbohydrates and proteins have around 4.1kcal/g which ultimately means that for the same number of calories the weight of my food should be significantly lighter, with no detriment to performance.

However I don't plan on cutting out all carbohydrates completely as obviously the body will need some carbs for normal bodily functions. My dehydrated evening meal will provide the bulk of this, which will help to replenish glycogen stores through the night. Whilst the fat-weighted breakfast will prepare the body to prioritise the breakdown of fatty acids as the primary fuel source.

Below are two example days of what I shall be eating out in the desert, with the breakdown of the nutritional information.

DAY 1		6th April 33.8km						
Meal	Food	Weight	Kcal	Kcal/g	Kcal/100g	Protein	Carbs	Fat
Breakfast								
	Pork Scratchings	50	303.5	6.07	607	24.3	1.6	22.85
	Parmesan	25	107.8	4.31	431	9.5	1.0	7.25
	Chorizo	25	126.5	5.06	506	6.1	0.6	11
	Ucan superstarch	51	180.0	3.53	352.9	13	30	1.0
	Chilli Seeds	25	161.5	6.46	646.0	6.7	3.3	13.5
	Macadamias	25	190.5	7.62	762	2.0	1.3	19.4
	Total	201	1069.75			61.65	37.8	74.98
Run Snacks								
	Paleo Macadamia Bars	45	208	4.62	463	3.7	16.6	14.1
	Smokehouse almonds	25	156.75	6.27	627	5.1	1.93	13.8
	Macadamias	25	190.5	7.62	762	2.03	1.28	19.4
	Total	95	555.25			10.8	19.8	47.25
Dinner								
	Mountain House Salmon	183	1115	6.09	609	33	82.1	72.7
	Dried Apricots (potassium	20	38.2	1.91	191	0.9	7.7	0.1
	Total	203	1153.2			33.86	89.84	72.82
	Total	499	2778.2	5.57		106.31	147.44	195.05
						24%	33%	43%

Day 4		9th April 78km						
Meal	Food	Weight	Kcal	Kcal/g	Kcal/100g	Protein	Carbs	Fat
Breakfast								
	Scrambled Egg with Ham and Pota	166	843	5.08	508	48.5	45	50.8
	Smokehouse almonds	20	125	6.27	627	4.1	1.54	11.0
	Ucan superstarch	51	180	3.53	353	13	30	1
	Seeds	25	153	6.12	612	6.7	3.9	12.9
	Total	262	1301.4			72.24	80.44	75.65
Run Snacks								
	Paleo Macadamia Bars	45	208	4.62	463	3.7	16.6	14.1
	Honey Roasted Cashews	25	145	5.81	581	4.9	6.70	10.6
	Pork Scratchings	50	304	6.07	607	24.3	1.6	22.85
	Macadamias	50	381	7.62	762	4.05	2.55	38.8
	Total	170	1037.75			36.98	27.45	86.38
Dinner								
	Mountain House Salmon	183	1115	6.09		33	82.1	72.7
	Pork Scratchings	25	152	6.07	607	12.15	0.8	11.425
	Macadamias	25	190.5	7.62	762	2.025	1.275	19.4
	Total	233	1457.25			45.15	82.9	84.13
	Total	665	3796.4	5.71		154.36	190.79	246.15
						26%	32%	42%

The next step is fitting these 67 items and 3.4kg of food into a 20L backpack. I plan on strapping the sleeping bag and sleeping mat onto the outside of my bag for the first couple of days until some food has been eaten, and then hopefully cram some more things inside to prevent it from bouncing around. The total weight of my bag will fall somewhere between 7-8kg at the start line, which is similar to the weighted bag I have been training with so far.

Communication

There is a website which allows friends, loved ones and admirers to follow my progress each day. The address for this is www.marathondessables.com. Each day, the organisers list the day's results with times and positions.

James van der Hoorn”

As mentioned in the previous website post, James would greatly appreciate any donations to his chosen charity, Mencap. The easiest way to donate is to visit his Justgiving page at <http://www.justgiving.com/teamdesertchallenge> or you can text “TMDS50 10” to 70070 to donate £10.