



Desert Champions Converge in the Valley of the Whales For the Sahara Race 2011



(29 September 2011, Hong Kong) – A cast of 4 Deserts champions will be converging in Egypt on October 2, as the seventh edition of the 250-kilometer Sahara Race kicks off in the historic Valley of the Whales.

Four of this year's competitors have earned first place positions in previous 4 Deserts races, including Mehmet Danis, a Turkish-Canadian who won the Atacama Crossing (Chile) in 2009 and was leading the field at the Sahara Race in 2009 before he became sick.

He will be up against American competitor Eric LaHaie, who won both the Gobi March (China) and the Taklamakan Ultramarathon in 2009, as well as British contender Dan Parr who claimed first place in the Gobi March (China) in 2010. Italy's Paolo Barghani, who won the Sahara Race (Egypt) in 2009, also enters this year's field, but this time as part of a team.

The Sahara Race is one of the four races in the world renowned 4 Deserts series, which takes competitors through some of the most remote and spectacular deserts on Earth. The annual, six-stage course takes place over seven days in Egypt's historic Wadi Al-Hitan, or Valley of the Whales, so-named for its ancient fossils that scatter the desert floor.

This year's race is breaking records for the number of Asian competitors taking part; of the 153 competitors expected from nearly 40 countries, the largest number of participants hail from Korea, followed by Taiwan and Japan—signaling a sharp increase in the popularity of endurance footraces in the region.

As RacingThePlanet Event Director Samantha Fanshawe states, "We look forward to returning to the Sahara Desert for our seventh year and welcoming so many from Asia to the Valley of the Whales. It's going to be a great competition at the top, but is always exciting to see new challengers."

This year's course will have many contrasts: from rocky plateaus, to golden, red and white sand dunes that can scale more than 122 meters in height, to stony expanses, dried-up riverbeds, the occasional oasis and even running around some desert lakes. Competitors will finally cross the finish line at the Pyramids of Giza.

As a self-supported race, competitors must carry all their equipment and food for seven days through this challenging terrain with only water and tents provided, forcing them to go beyond the limits of their physical and mental endurance.

A total of three teams are taking part this year, including the remarkable, 17-person Chio-Tian Folk Drums and Arts Troupe from Taiwan, who embark on the race in a bid to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Republic of China—complete with a larger-than-life mascot which they will be carrying along the entire course.

As always at RacingThePlanet events, a strong charitable intention is fuelling many of the competitors as they head out into the desert. In addition to many personal charitable pledges, the event is officially supporting Operation Smile, a charity that provides free surgeries to repair cleft lip, cleft palate and other facial deformities for children around the globe. RacingThePlanet have donated a total of US\$550,000 between 2005 and 2010, towards the charity's missions in Egypt, Vietnam, Namibia and China.

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About the Sahara Race 2011 (2 – 8 October 2011), www.4deserts.com/sahararace

The Sahara Race is one of the four races that comprise the world renowned 4 Deserts series of 250-kilometer rough-country footraces. The race takes place in the historic Wadi Al-Hitan area of Egypt's Sahara Desert, the largest non-polar desert in the world. Wadi Al-Hitan, or Valley of the Whales, is an ancient shallow sea where competitors pass fossils believed to be whales that died 40 million years ago.

About the 4 Deserts – www.4deserts.com

The 4 Deserts is the world's leading endurance footrace series, a unique collection of world-class races that take place over 7 days and 250 kilometers in the largest and most forbidding deserts on the planet.

Competitors must go beyond the limits of their physical and mental endurance. Racing self-supported in the most inhospitable climates and formidable landscapes, they must carry all their own equipment and food, and are only provided with drinking water and a place in a tent each night to rest.

The series, named again by TIME magazine as one of the world's Top 10 endurance competitions, comprises the Atacama Crossing in Chile, the Gobi March in China, the Sahara Race in Egypt and The Last Desert in Antarctica.

For media and press enquiries including access to photos please email info@racingtheplanet.com.