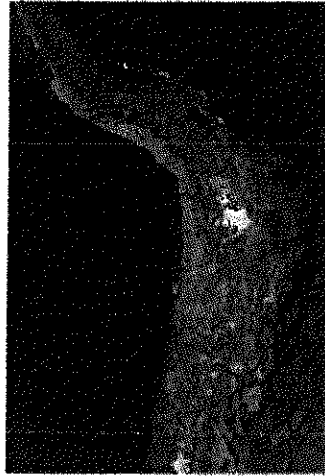


42. **Desert Racing** Lexile: 1070

When South African runner Ryan Sandes showed up for his first race in the 4 Deserts series in 2008, he was not expected to win. The then 27-year-old had only been running for three years. He was fit and had won a few South African races, but he was an unknown in the global and competitive world of ultrarunning. In March of 2008, Sandes entered the 4 Deserts Gobi March, a 155-mile trek in and around the Chinese areas of the Gobi Desert. His surprise victory raised his profile overnight and gave him the incentive to push himself harder. Sandes entered and won another race in the series, the Sahara Race, in the same year. In early 2010, he entered the Atacama Crossing in Chile, his third race in the series. He won once again.

Sandes's performance in those races scored him an invitation to compete in the racing series' most extreme leg—the Last Desert race in Antarctica. Sandes, with his eye on winning all four of the races in the series, trained for the Antarctic conditions by running in a large freezer. Temperatures in the freezer could be set as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius (minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit). A fan was adjusted to simulate the wind chill Sandes would experience during the race.

His preparation scheme worked. Sandes placed first in the Antarctic contest. By the end of 2010 Sandes had become the first runner to win all four races in the grueling 4 Deserts race series.

The races in the series are multi-day self-supported races of 250 kilometers (155 miles). Each race lasts one week and is made up of six stages. Self-supported races mean runners have to bring along all the food and gear they will need. Meals are not provided. Runners wear backpacks. Water and emergency medical care are provided by race organizers as well as nightly lodgings. Runners must arrive at the camp where they sleep in communal tents each night.

Competing in these races is not only about being a fast runner. It is also a test of a competitor's ability to survive extreme conditions. The races are set in some of the world's harshest environments. Each poses unique challenges.

One of the races of the yearly 4 Deserts series is held in Chile's Atacama Desert. The Atacama Desert is a plateau in South America wedged between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains. It is the driest place in the world. The race here starts at an elevation of more than 3,000 meters (9,850 feet) and takes runners on several ascents and descents. Runners not only face loose rocky terrain, but they must battle the energy demands of high-altitude conditions.

The Gobi Desert is the fifth largest desert in the world and the largest desert in Asia. It lies in China and Mongolia and comprises several distinct ecological and geographic regions. The 4 Deserts Gobi March race sticks to the grasslands of the Chinese province of Xinjiang.

No desert race series would be complete without an event in the iconic Sahara Desert, the world's largest hot desert, where sand dunes can reach a height of 180 meters (590 feet). (The Sahara is the world's third largest desert, coming in after the Antarctic and the Arctic Polar Regions.) Dehydration and heat exhaustion are two of the biggest health concerns for runners in this race.

These three races are open to all competitors. Only the Last Desert race is reserved for qualifying runners. The Antarctic race is the only staged event held on the “frozen continent.” This race is staged on the Antarctic Peninsula and its surrounding islands. Weather conditions are erratic, so planning the racecourse is put off until the last moment. Competitors and crew are housed in a ship that transports runners to the start of each stage every morning.

In the year when Ryan Sandes raced the Antarctic course, he ran across volcanic craters, black sand, and snow. He even encountered a penguin colony. Towards the end of the run, he was neck and neck with Italian runner Emanuele Gallo, but Sandes eventually won and went on to become the face of South African ultrarunning.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Where was Ryan Sandes's first race in the 4 Deserts Series?
  - A) Gobi Desert
  - B) Sahara Desert
  - C) Atacama Desert
  - D) Antarctica
  
2. What does the author describe in the passage?
  - A) how Ryan Sandes trained for the Sahara Race
  - B) planning the racecourse for the Atacama Desert race
  - C) the grueling conditions runners experience in the 4 Deserts races
  - D) the ecosystem of the Gobi Desert
  
3. Temperatures in Antarctica can fall as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius. What evidence from the text supports this statement?
  - A) The Last Desert Race in Antarctica is the most extreme of the 4 Deserts series.
  - B) Sandes trained for Antarctic conditions by running in a freezer that could be set as low as minus 20 degrees Celsius.
  - C) The freezer had a fan to simulate the wind chill Sandes would experience in Antarctica.
  - D) Sandes won the Antarctica race because of his training regime.
  
4. Which quality should "ultrarunners" have in order to be successful?
  - A) stamina
  - B) humor
  - C) kindness
  - D) intelligence
  
5. What is this passage mostly about?
  - A) how the sport of "ultrarunning" is gaining in popularity
  - B) training regimes used by pro "ultrarunners" to prepare for the 4 Deserts races
  - C) the 4 Deserts "ultrarunning" racing series and the first runner to win all four
  - D) the weather and terrain conditions that make the Sahara Race particularly challenging

6. Read the following sentences: "The Antarctic race is the only staged event held on the 'frozen continent.' This race is staged on the Antarctic Peninsula and its surrounding islands. Weather conditions are **erratic**, so planning the racecourse is put off until the last moment."

As used in the passage, what does "erratic" mean?

- A) even
- B) unpredictable
- C) rugged
- D) consistent

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The races in the Gobi Desert, Sahara Desert, and Atacama Desert are open to all competitors, \_\_\_\_\_ the race in Antarctica requires an invitation to compete.

- A) so
- B) then
- C) like
- D) but

8. In addition to running speed, what do the 4 Deserts races test?

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9. Each of the 4 Deserts races poses unique challenges. What are the challenges posed by the Atacama Desert and the Sahara Desert?

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10. Why might the Last Desert race in Antarctica be reserved for qualifying runners instead of being open to all competitors like the other 4 Desert races? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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