



# The American Men of the Gobi March

by Clare Morin

It was an all American scene at the front of the Gobi March this year. For the first time in history, one country dominated the podium and every day in the race was a battle among the leaders.

Adam Kimble won gold, finishing with a time of 25:39:33. This was Kimble's first 4 Deserts race. The 28-year old hails from Illinois where he works with an intriguing event company called Red Frog Events,





Adam Kimble

which organizes unique and fun races. Adam says he thoroughly enjoyed the setting in this far end of the Gobi and everything the weather gods threw their way. “It’s been beautiful to see the different terrain and weather conditions,” Adam commented the end of the Long March. “For this being my first stage race, I’m really happy with the way it’s going.” He said he felt humbled

by the powerful forces of Kyle McCoy and Ralph Crowley either side of him. “It’s been really tough. Everyday a different guy has pushed the pace and for the next leg, I’m just trying to hang on.” It has also been a lesson in anthropology, seeing up close the people who live in these areas. “The most memorable part of the race for me has been the

## The Rise of Endurance Sports in China

By Clare Morin

There were 28 competitors from China in this year’s Gobi March. Anyone from China will tell you that this is a very lucky number in the Chinese culture; it is also a surprising number. This was the largest group of Chinese competitors to compete in a 4 Deserts Race to date. It is a sign of the rising trend of ultramarathons in the country. The Gobi March is a 250 kilometer rough country footrace held in Xinjiang Province and organized by the 4 Deserts Race Series. This June, it took place with the largest number of Chinese flags ever seen in the field. Victor Cheng is based in Beijing and part of the 4 Deserts Race Series’ organizing team at this year’s Gobi March. He explains that ultramarathons are becoming a very real phenomenon in the country. “Enduring racing is becoming very popular,” explains Cheng. “People in China have more money and are looking for new things to do. They have already tried regular sports, and now that they have more money to spend, they are looking for new, different and interesting things to do.”

As 163 competitors congregated at the event hotel in Hami the day before the race began, we met Hu Xiaoyan. She was with a large group of fellow racers from Hangzhou as they stood in the competitor check-in, where their bags were checked for all the necessary food and gear needed for the seven-day, six-stage race. Hu told us that she took on her first race at the Sahara Race in Jordan in 2014, taking a break from her day job as the Vice President of a papermaking company. She thoroughly enjoyed the experience and came back for more. “I really like doing ultramarathons,” she says. Part of it, she points out, is the chance to get out into the vast outdoors, away from the busy urban centers. The popularity is also growing as a result of sheer word-of-mouth that races like these bring about. “Races in China are becoming more popular because friends who do races are telling other friends about the races. We hear about the races from other competitors who were in previous races.” This is certainly the case with Hu and her friends. A whole group of them here were former university

different environments and camps we've had, the kindness of the people and the richness of the culture." He adds that he has relied upon three things to get him through: "the strategy has been to run hard, listen to my body and enjoy myself."

For second-placed Ralph Crowley, this race has seen the 30 year old enter the 4 Deserts Club, having come fresh from

his second-place win at The Last Desert (Antarctica) in 2014. He came extremely close to being champion, finishing just five minutes behind Kimble. We spoke with Crowley after the Long March. "It's been going well," he told us. "The extreme conditions have made it very exciting. The extreme weather changes have also been the most difficult



friends from Xiamen University in Fujian province. "People in China are becoming more interested in sports in general, mostly young adults, some university students, but mostly young professionals," explains Hu. "It's a way for them to socialize. That's what we did as university students at Xiamen University and we continued to do sports together after we graduated."

This collective of university buddies turned out to be real stars of the race. As the 163 competitors from 40 countries moved into a grueling yet spectacular week of racing through a course that moved from sand dunes, to mountain passes, pastures and alpine lands, they encountered an astonishing mix of weather from snow showers in the opening days, to rainfall, searing heat and even a sand storm that caused race organizers to cut the race slightly short. Yet China's Team Xiamen University put in a dazzling performance—and came out the top of their field. The former classmates consisting of Zhan Youyi, Liang Xinde, Chen Yuzeng, Wang Zhongwen and Yu Guandi were the winning team and came in 35th place overall, a high ranking considering all the teamwork needed to keep the group motivated and moving at the same pace. They were followed by a second Chinese team, called My Band.

It was certainly a reason for some national pride for the large contingency of Chinese competitors at the awards banquet at the end of the week. However, when team captain Zhan Youyi stood up to accept the prize on behalf of Team Xiamen University, it became clear that his nationality was far from his mind. It turns out that a week spent out in the harsh elements of a desert has the effect of dissolving away all sense of national borders. Out in the wild expanses of a desert, one simply becomes a human pushing through all odds to make it through to the end. "The win isn't so important," said Zhan Youyi to his large crowd of fellow racers as they cheered him on. "We are like sisters and brothers now. We made it through the race together and that's the most important part."

thing so far, going from rain and cold to 45 degrees Celsius - the heat is challenging.”

For third placed Kyle McCoy, who was racing in his second 4 Deserts race here in China, it has been a week of steadily monitoring his body and getting his best possible performance. We found him at the end of Stage 2, in a camp in the courtyard of a Kazhak village. It was early in the evening with the sun shining and he was feeling “cautiously confident and aiming to be in the top 5”. “I’m focused on staying healthy and strong,” he told us. “I plan on sticking with Adam [Kimble] for the next stages as I have so far. The variations in temperature have been hard to prepare for, although the terrain



Kyle McCoy

here has been great. I’ve done the Atacama before and the temperatures there are more predictable, so it was easier to prepare for.” McCoy has a lot of experience being out in tough environments. He served as an officer in the US Army’s Joint Special Operations community (75th Ranger Regiment) and he was deployed four times to Afghanistan. He’s also been using this race as a fundraising vehicle, raising funds specifically for the Trust for Public Land,



which works with communities to make sure that land is protected with water. He will be making his community back home proud, as will all three Americans who conquered the Gobi this year. **AW**