

## LIFE STORY

*It happened to me...*

# 'I RAN A 156 MILE MARATHON'

**Kerry Sutton, 44, lives in Bath with husband, Mark, 44, a technology consultant, and their children, Andrew, 12, Maya, 11, Isla, six, and Oliver, four**

“As I pounded across the sand, the sun scorched my back and my limbs felt like lead. Just a few days earlier, I'd been doing the school run with my kids. Now I was in the Sahara desert tackling the toughest race on earth, the Marathon des Sables.

The daddy of all marathons, you run 156 miles (251km) in six days over inhospitable desert terrain. Temperatures reach 50°C plus, and in the 28 years since the event began, three people have died competing.

I've always been sporty, but I never imagined I'd run an ultra marathon. As a full-time mum of four, exercise was something I fitted in around the kids, grabbing an hour at the gym or running in the evenings.

Then, in August 2011, I watched a TV show about Olympian James Cracknell taking part in the Marathon des Sables a year earlier. I was intrigued. I'd never run more than 10km, but I was confident that if I put in the training, I'd be mentally strong enough to handle it. So, I paid the £3,000 entry fee and signed up.

Some people thought I was crazy. My husband, Mark, was concerned about the health risks, but he saw how determined I was and supported my decision.

To prepare, I built up to running four hours a day, six days a week. I had saunas fully clothed to get my body used to high temperatures, ran in all weathers and hobbled home when I'd pushed myself too hard. The training was tough, but I knew I'd have no chance of completing the race otherwise.

In April 2012, I flew to Marrakesh, then took a bus to base camp in the desert. It was daunting, but I knew I'd put in the training, so I was ready for it. There were 887 people taking part, around 150 of them women.

We spent the first day filling out forms and checking our kit, before setting off the next morning. At the starting line, I wasn't frightened, just excited and full of adrenalin. With my rucksack packed with protein shakes



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## Btw

The Marathon des Sables is the equivalent of six regular marathons.

During the 1994 race, Italian police officer Mauro Prospero lost his way during a sandstorm and wandered lost for nine days, losing over 30lb of his body weight.

and energy bars, I was off. I covered set distances each day - from 21 miles on day one to 50 miles on day five, when we ran through the night. We crossed huge sand dunes and endless salt flats at temperatures ranging from 44-51°C, and slept in tents.

I ran alone most of the time, just taking in the stunning scenery. There were moments when I almost cried with happiness as I couldn't quite believe I was there. But I had some dark times, too, like when I suffered horrendous cramps in my legs. I was in a great deal of pain and really missed my family - I felt so far away from them.

Every day got tougher. My blistered feet were wrapped in bandages, my skin was raw from the sand, my big toe nails had fallen off, and I felt delirious at times from the tiredness. But, despite 59 people dropping out, I never, ever considered giving up.

Crossing the finishing line on day six, I was utterly exhausted yet ecstatic. Out of nearly 900 runners, I'd come in 250th.

Since then, I've completed a second ultra race in the Peruvian jungle, and I'm doing another next year in Madagascar.

I'm so proud of myself. I set my mind to something that sounded impossible, and I did it. And that's the best feeling in the world. **F**



At the Marathon des Sables



Racing in the Peruvian jungle

