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## ITALIAN ACHIEVES HISTORIC DESERT CR



(ANSA) - Rome, January 27 - Italian adventurer Stefano Miglietti has just completed an unprecedented 550-km walk across one of the world's most arid deserts. The 'Great Sand Sea' in the western Sahara is a massive expanse of dunes, continually beaten by wind and sand storms. Even Tuareg desert nomads avoid it because of the total lack of water and the utter isolation.

Miglietti, 38, on Thursday became the first person ever to cross the region alone and on foot. For just under six days, he pulled his water and supplies behind him on a 200-pound cart.

The Italian followed the route that Persian king Cambyses is said to have attempted in 523 BC, when he left the Farafra oasis in southern Egypt with a force of 50,000 men.

According to Greek author Herodotus, Cambyses and his men were engulfed in a storm and never seen again. The legend of the 'Lost army of Cambyses', as well as inspiring many archaeologists to mount fruitless searches in the desert, has also come to symbolise the perils of the Great Sand Sea.

"The mystery surrounding this journey has always fascinated me," said Miglietti before he set off on January 20.

Miglietti, who runs an electronic components business in Brescia, trained for his desert crossing by running through the hills near his village pulling a tractor tyre behind him. Temperatures in the Sahara at this time of year vary between zero celsius during the night and 35 degrees in the day. Miglietti planned on covering about 80-90 km each day, walking up to 20 hours non-stop.

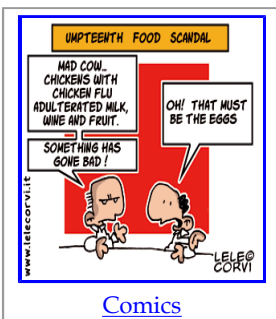
Shortly after arriving at Siwa, almost six days after beginning his journey, he called his wife in Brescia to let her know he had made it.

"He said he had stomach cramps and terrible blisters but otherwise he sounded fine. I knew he'd get there," she said, adding that she was used to his daring exploits and had stopped worrying long ago.

Miglietti's exploit, which is sponsored by several Brescia businesses, was a race against time as well as a test of endurance. He had enough food and water with him for seven days and no more.

The former skier and mountaineer is no stranger to adventures of this kind. In 2003 he became the first man to cross the Murzuq desert in Libya alone and in 2005 he set a new record for the Yukon Arctic Ultra, a 530-km race across Canadian icefields.

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