

Adventurer crosses sands that conquered a king

Following in the footsteps of a lost Persian army, one man has crossed the Great Sand Sea, writes **Martin Penner**

INSPIRED by the legend of a Persian king and his lost army, Stefano Miglietti, an Italian adventurer, completed a 340-mile hike through the most isolated and arid part of the western Sahara yesterday.

The route that Signor Miglietti followed through the so-called Great Sand Sea — from the Farafra oasis in southern Egypt to the Siwa oasis in the north — has always been considered impossible for a man carrying his own food and water.

According to legend, Cambyses II, the Persian king, foolishly tried to take the same route in 523 BC, setting off with a 50,000-strong army.

Herodotus, the Greek author, writes that Cambyses and his men were swallowed up in sandstorms and never seen again.

Signor Miglietti, 38, who runs an electrical components business, was so fascinated by the king's ill-fated journey that he decided to try it.

Before setting off a week ago, pulling a 200lb cart loaded with supplies, he was warned by Tuareg desert nomads that his plan was madness.

Five days, 23 hours later, with blistered feet and severe stomach cramps, he arrived at Siwa.

A man of few words, he said simply: "I'm satisfied. I'm quite well and I went faster than I expected."

Needless to say, he found no trace of Cambyses's army.

The legend, as well as inspiring archaeologists to mount many fruitless searches in the desert, has come to symbolise the perils of the Great Sand Sea.

The region in the western Sahara is a massive expanse of dunes, continually beaten by wind and sand storms.

Even the Tuaregs avoid it because of the lack of water and its utter isolation.

Temperatures at this time of year vary between 0C (32F) during the night and 35C (95F) in the day.

Signor Miglietti, who covered between 50 and 56 miles a day, kept up his energy with dates, condensed milk and Parmesan cheese.

Marco Rosa, the doctor who prepared him for the adventure, said that the Brescia-

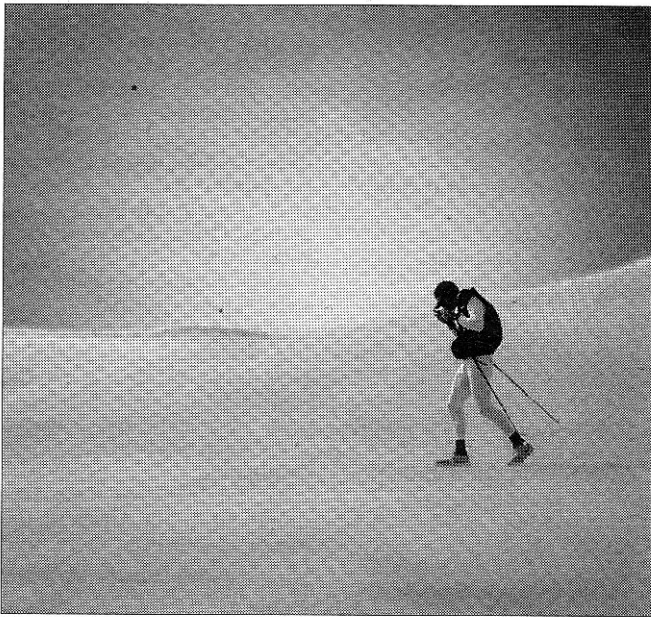
based adventurer was in good shape considering what he had just been through. "Sure, he's a bit tired. He's had serious problems with blisters on his feet and his abdomen is scarred by the belt he used to pull the cart," he said.

Signor Miglietti's exploit was sponsored by Brescia businesses and had no goal other than to prove that it could be done.

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 record for the Yukon Arctic Ultra, a 330-mile race across Canadian icefields.

NICOLA BARTESAGHI



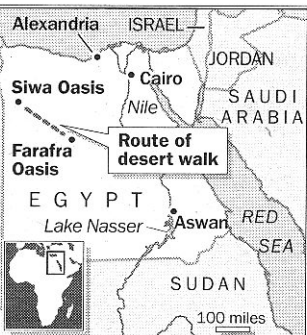
Stefano Miglietti, whose 340-mile walk surprised the Tuaregs

THE TIMES

No. 68609 ■ SATURDAY JANUARY 28 2006 ■ www.timesonline.co.uk

Printed in France 3MC

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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