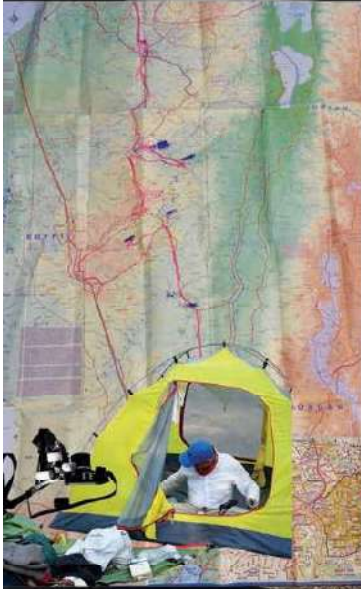






Handwritten note: "Handwritten note: Middle East. Writing in Arabic on the wall of a building in the Sinai Peninsula. The photo was taken in the Sinai Peninsula. The photo is a photograph of a building in the Sinai Peninsula." The photo is a photograph of a building in the Sinai Peninsula.



Dettagli itinerario

Partenza	Arrivo
12:55	17:10
20 Agosto 2017	21 Agosto 2017
19 Azz.	Mosca
San Geronimo 111	Shcherbatskaya 5110
Terminal: 3	Terminal: F



THE GUIDES



MEHRDAD GHAZVINIAN

is the number one desert expert in Iran - also known as the Desert Fox – and a well-known name throughout the world for his expertise in Iranian deserts and in particular the merciless Dasht-E-Lut. He is also known as the ‘Father of Iran Desert’ and many desert guides have trained under his instructions.

In the 1990’s he and his brother Babak, were the pioneers to enter the Lut Desert and are responsible for exploring and drawing the maps that are still in use today.

Mehrdad has crisscrossed the Iranian deserts with many people following in his tracks. He is also an avid hunter and likes skiing down the 600-meter-high Mega Dunes in the Lut as well flying with a paramotor.



FABRIZIO ROVELLA

was born in Turin, also known as ‘the Man of the Sahara’ is one of the leading Italian experts in in adventure travel in the Sahara Desert. He has been a leader in the sector for more than 25 years both in Tamanrasset (Algeria), more recently, in Chinguetti (Mauritania) where he now is the reference point between travelers and local populations.

He is the owner of “Sahara Mon Amour”, a travel agency that organizes trips and itineraries with evolved safety standards and which well embodies its philosophy in its name.

He collaborated to the publication of several books and guides with, among others, Mirella Tenderini, Roberto Parodi and Sofia Gallo.

He writes articles for various specialized publications, among which we mention “QXQ Evolution” and “Erodoto 108”.



SHEIKH AHMED MOHAMMED AL-JEBALI

is the ruler of the Jabaleya tribe, one of twelve Bedouin tribes in south Sinai Peninsula, and is responsible for the security of St Catherine’s Monastery –one of the oldest existing monasteries in the world. The Jabaleya tribe has guarded the monastery since the sixth century, A.D., when they came from Montenegro, Serbia and the Western Sahara in Egypt. Sheikh Ahmed is progressive in outlook and mentality – when elected, he abolished the tradition of ‘Sheikh for life’ and established a 7-year term; he banned child marriage, forbid female genital mutilation in his tribe and extended it to most of the 23 Bedouin tribes in the Sinai; he also put women to work –first in their homes, then establishing a factory for them in St Catherine. Sheikh Ahmed grew up under the 18-year Israeli occupation, played with Avner/Abunar Goran’s (see below) children, speaks fluent Hebrew and is still close friends with them.



AVNER GORAN

is a world-renowned archaeologist who was appointed Chief Archaeologist in the Sinai Peninsula after Israel captured it in the 1967 war. He moved his family (and his Baby Grand piano) to the rugged Sinai mountains where, for 18 years, he studied Arabic and got to know, and was ‘adopted’ by the Bedouin families. He and his team uncovered the civilization of Nawamis, the forefathers of the Bedouin, who established homes in the Sinai in the 4th millennium B.C. – before the pyramids were built. Some of the buildings still had roofs on them, making them perhaps the oldest roofs ever found. When Israel made peace with Egypt (1982), he oversaw the transfer to Egypt of all the archaeological artifacts uncovered in the Sinai during Israel’s occupation. He lives in Jerusalem, where he writes and is the Israeli representative for the Abraham Path Initiative, which aims to unite people of all faiths around the experiences and example of the patriarch.



MAX CALDERAN

is the world's number one Extreme Desert Explorer; he graduated in Sports Science and held managerial roles at major pharmaceutical companies. A multifaceted athlete and holder of 13 world records, he boasts, among the many honors, the Medal of Civil Value awarded by the President of the Italian Republic and the appointment as UN Ambassador for the protection of the Asian cheetah.

The national television channel, Rai Sport, made a documentary, "Beyond the Limits", about his life in sports and in 2014 Al Jazeera World produced the documentary "Son of the Desert" about his extreme exploits.

Most notable among his record explorations is the 120 km covered in 24 hours in July 2013 with sand temperatures close to 74 °, with no water and food. In 2016, he was the first man in the world to travel, in Oman, the Tropic of Cancer (437 km in 90 hours) and in the United Arab Emirates (365 km in 128 hours).

On February 2, 2020, he created a new chapter in the history of exploration by becoming the first human being ever, to cross, alone, on foot, the 1,100km of the largest sand desert in the world: The Rub Al Khali Desert, in the Empty Quarter in Saudi Arabia. The "Calderan Line" will be added to maps as well as history and geography books.

EXCERPT FROM 'INHABITED DESERTS' JOURNAL

Iran, Dasht-E-Lut desert,

22 September 2017

Third trip to Iranian deserts.

A moonless night in the Dasht-E-Lut desert, Iran, 7:30pm; 2000km from Teheran, about 600km from the closest asphalt road. It is pitch black; if there were no camp fire I would not be able to see my hand. In the desert night it is not dark, it is black. There are no lights in the distance, no point of reference. My small head lamp throws just enough light for me to write in this journal. It feels like midnight. Although exhausted I must put down today's events lest I forget them.

We completed this morning's dawn shoot at the 'Star Dunes' and Mehrdad Ghazvinian, my incredible guide and friend drove 6 hours for us to arrive at the 'Lut's' 'Mega Dunes' (500m high) at 3:00pm. We have been traveling for 8 days in the 51,000 square kilometer Dasht-E-Lut desert in central Iran. This is my fourth trip.

The temperature has cooled off from this afternoon's 45 degrees. It must be a cool 35(!) degrees. Once here I waited a few hours for the light to be perfect to capture the immense dunes from their summit. I looked up at them and was daunted by their size.

I had seen images of these dunes but never imagined them to be so incredibly tall –taller than the Chrysler building in New York or the Eiffel Tower in Paris...

I should have known better when, in Teheran, I saw Mehrdad load his snow skis onto the roof of our vehicle. He looked at me and, with his characteristic, fearless, laugh explained he had skied down these dunes several times: "The first time, I did not wax my skis correctly and I got to the bottom of the dune my skis had melted from the heat. They had become paper thin! I had to throw them away and get new ones!"

Very few people (civilians and military) have ever been this far into the Lut desert --and fewer still have climbed to the top of the dunes. I needed to reach the top by 4:30pm in order to wait for the sun to set low enough for the shadows to transform the landscape into a mysterious, luscious, canvass. After collecting my equipment (a Leica M6 and a Nikon Nikonos, made for underwater and heavy-duty sand, Ilford 400asa film, water bottles, safety whistle, toilet paper, extra t-shirt and camera cleaning tissue) I climbed into our large truck.

Mehrdad had deflated the tires more than usual and upon my signal backed our vehicle about 1.5km into the 'flats'. One last mischievous laugh and he gunned the truck straight toward the gigantic dunes –note: these dunes do not have a gradual rise but are very steep from the onset. When we hit 110km, which in the desert seems to be twice the speed, I felt we were going to slam into the wall of sand. I held on. I was, of course, terrified on the inside but, not wanting to give my buddy fodder for stories once back with his buddies, I pretended to be nonchalant.

Mehrdad, one of the best and most experienced desert experts in the world, and definitely the best in Iran, knew what he was doing and we ascended the dune almost vertically.

Through the windshield I saw a sliver of sand at the bottom and the rest was filled with the blue, cloudless, sky. Bewildered we did not flip backwards the truck climbed at a steady pace. I could see the ridge approaching and considered the ordeal almost over when, suddenly, our truck sank into the sand and came to an abrupt stop. Mehrdad secured the vehicle, and announced we had arrived.

The top of the dune seemed miles away. "What do you mean we have arrived?" Laughing he replied: "It is not much...about 200 meters. You walk the rest of the way." It had never dawned on me that I would be schlepping to the top. But, I was here, I chose to be here. It was my mission. I collected my gear and had the good sense to add another bottle of water to the back pocket of my vest. I only really understood what I was getting myself into when I gingerly alighted from the truck and...sunk 40cm into the scalding sand. I shrugged any negative thoughts and grabbed the walkie-talkie Mehrdad handed me: "You might need this...". He laughed again and I swear I had homicidal thoughts...

The incredibly steep climb was even harder than I expected because my feet sank as though I was treading through deep powder snow. The difference is that sand is heavier. Every step was a huge and fatiguing effort. Within minutes I was drenched in sweat and exhausted. The constant sipping water and sheer determination enabled me, 30 minutes later, to reach the ridge. Utterly exhausted I just sat there, hyperventilating and sipping water.

I finally looked at the interminable expanse of dunes and had one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. The magnificent, endless space with the grace and elegance of the dunes' heights and valleys combined with the knowledge of being in the epicenter of a universe that was millions of years old, underscored by the unimportance of the span of sapiens' existence on earth, was an exhilaration I had never experienced before. I could simultaneously sense my insignificance and the exceptionality of the experience. Tears just rolled down my cheeks...

But I was here to take photographs and I needed to focus on that.

I needed to find the right position to shoot from because once the sun begins to descend everything happens very quickly --photographs are about looking and 'seeing' and in the desert that is enhanced because of the vastness and variety of the landscapes. It is important to allow one's eye to wander without an endgame. That is the only way the photographs "come to you", "find you"...

I lay down at the very edge (the edge of the dune is similar to a cliff). Below me, in what seemed extremely far, my friend was smoking a cigarette while listening to classical music... How different our reactions were: he, who, with his brother Baba, had mapped the 51,000 square kilometer Dasht-E-Lut desert in the 1990's (before anyone else in the world, including the Iranian armed forces), was blasé and I, the novice, was having a life altering experience!

All that was necessary now was to wait for the sun to be at the right angle and the light to be delicate enough to bring out the mysteries of the desert. I was ready.

I was Zen.

Everything was perfect.

And then everything went wrong.

At first, I felt a welcome breeze on my back yet, within seconds, it developed in to a wind. I turned to see the sky was filled by a wild, violent, un-stoppable brown sand storm racing towards me. It moved at lightning speed. I was so gob-smacked my Leica M6 slipped from my hands and fell into a cavity into the sand. Literally, the time it took me to look down it disappeared, sucked under (and one can only really understand this if one has knowledge of desert sand storms)! I frantically dug for ten or fifteen eternal seconds until I luckily found the leather strap, pulled and scooped out the Leica, shaking all the sand out of it --attempting to use it.

Nothing. It was stuck.

The shutter did not work, the rewind did not work, the focus dial did not move, the f-stop on the lens was jammed and the shutter speed was also blocked. My essential tools of work, the LeicaM6 and the 35mm lens were dead. I was royally fucked.

I became incredibly anxious thinking of all the money investors had advanced me, all the effort it took to get here and I would have nothing to show for it. 2000km (in a straight line by air) from Teheran, a four-day trip by land, and I had no back up body! I had 9 more days planned and they were essential to the project and without the Leica it simply was not possible to do any real work.

Meanwhile the wind and sand were whipping my face, filling my ears, my nostrils, my eyes...and, slipping through my clothes, going into every corner of my body. Angry with the deserts Gods, with myself, the world, I stood against the storm, defiant and screamed *à la Fitzcaraldo*:

"You will not stop me! No way! I will go forward!"

I hid the camera under my shirt protecting it with my work vest remembering the situation was dangerous for, during storms such as this one, sections of dunes suddenly collapse. Dunes have been known to move 70 or 80 meters in protracted sand storms. I simply shoved that thought out of my mind. It was unacceptable.

The swirling sand made a dense ochre colored wall and I could barely see Mehrdad or the vehicle. I used the walkie-talkie to ask him to bring the large wool blanket we had in the truck as well as several 2 liters of bottled water (the sand and water in my eyes had practically glued them shut. I could see through fissures) as well as my small, manual, air-pump. My friend grumbled a bit but grabbed the material and, the wind and sand blizzard thrashing his body, he slogged up to where I was. I was amazed how easy it seemed for him to cover in a few short minutes the same distance I did in 20 mns! The first thing he did when he arrived was yell at me: "You idiot! One never sits on the ridge of a dune as it is the place where the wind is strongest!" It was useless to reply that I had never had been on the ridge of such a huge dune before --not to mention a world class sandstorm... I moved back 5 meters and it is true the storm was not as thrashing. Lesson learned.

He covered me with the very large wool blanket which became a sort of tent. It was 35 degrees centigrade outside, I could not imagine how hot it was in the thick, airless, wool "tent". I didn't care. I needed to get the Leica functioning again.

I immediately washed my eyes so they would open fully; I then poured water in my nose and, coughing, flushed out the sand stuck in there. I rinsed my mouth spitting out globs of sand. I even poured water into my ears and managed to wash the sand out of them. I was baffled by how much sand had entered my orifices in such a short time. I wondered how much had made it into my lungs...

Feeling a bit better I adjusted my head lamp, rinsed out my soaked bandanna and, ignored the sweat pouring into it as soon as I put it back on. "Drink Pepper..." I kept on repeating to myself. "...keep hydrated, that is the most important thing!..."

I proceeded to dismantle the Leica. First, I took off the lens, turned the camera upside down and watched sand, lots of sand, pour out of the hole it is affixed to. I then attempted to rewind the film but it too was jammed. I proceeded to open the back of the camera, ripped out the role of film and watched, amazed, as more sand poured out. I didn't care about the lost images, I needed to find a way to repair the camera.

I took the little air pump (round at one end and a thin long sprout at the other) and, for about 25 minutes I meticulously sucked out the sand from every corner of the interior –although I could not imagine it would work again. I blew with my mouth, I sucked grain by grain out of the camera and prayed and vociferated in frustration but did not give up. I kept on repeating: "It is German made, it is a like a tank, it must work, it will work!"

Suddenly the shutter speed dial began to jiggle. At first it was rough but the more I pumped, blew and sucked, the looser it became. After another 15 minutes I could go from 1' to 1000' of a second! Miracle! I focused on the trigger button for another 10 or 15 minutes using the same system and it too suddenly functioned! There was hope! Next was the wedge to rewind the film. It tougher and took more work. I literally removed single grains of sand –one by one. Regularly I took my bandana off my forehead, rinsed the sweat and put it back on. The heat was insufferable but that was the least of my problems.

After more than one hour under this thick winter wool blanket, the body of the camera was finally working. I then focused my attention onto the Zeiss 35mm lens.

The distance-measuring tumbler would not rotate. It was stuck on infinity. I found a hotel sewing kit in my pocket –I always take them because they feel useful...

I slid the sewing needle under the tumbler of the lens and removed 6 grains of sand –I actually counted them! That did the job: it moved. It was stiff but I could now focus from 1.5 meters to infinity. I also knew that once I was able to use the compressor in Mehrdad's car I would be able to remove the rest of the sand. I reassembled the camera and lens and, after a prayer, tried it: success!

I thanked all the Gods I know of –from Shiva to Allah, not forgetting the Olympian Zeus and the Roman God, Mithras!

And I was never as glad as then to have a German made camera, a Leica, rather than a Japanese one, such as a Nikon. Had my camera been a Nikon it would have been ruined due to the delicacy of the interior mechanisms –and so would I.

I loaded the camera again and lifted the blanket ready to photograph the dunes in the setting sun...but it was too late. The sun had set and all that was left was the afterglow. The evening's work was lost BUT my camera worked. I was euphoric.

As I sit here recounting this afternoon's story, I believe that, somehow, I was paying for my arrogant attitude toward the desert. An attitude of 'certainty' and 'taking the desert for granted' –this was my fourth trip to Iran, and I had been to seven other countries, about 20 deserts, for a total of almost 60 days... yet I had forgotten the basic rule: humbleness.

One needs to be modest, unassuming and unpretentious in the desert. One needs to always be respectful in the desert. One needs to consciously remember our, man's, insignificance in the desert. I had tried to 'force' my way' to 'push through' the sand blizzard. I had wanted to defy and control this particular moment with nature and not respect her.

I had forgotten that our worth as Sapiens, is less than a grain of sand. A grain of sand proved it was more powerful than I --it blocked my working tools, tested my ability to understand.

Man is a Guest in the desert. Man can never truly control the desert because, through its wrath, the dunes, the winds, the land movements, destroy architecture, obliterate cities, smother and forever destroy in just a few hours, everything in their path; the desert can reverse time and alter shapes --in short it can do what it wishes. The moment man forgets this and behaves, well, pretty much like he does everywhere in nature, the desert will lash out and destroy everything in its path.

That was the lesson I learned today. It is a lesson I will never forget.

John R. Pepper

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Gianluca Marziani, Kirill Petrin

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fotogramma24@gmail.com

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fotogramma24@gmail.com

For all Social Media, Special Projects, print availability
and general information please contact Tanya Fokina at:
info@johnrpepper.it

Per tutti i Social Media, Progetti Speciali, disponibilità di
stampe e tutte le altre informazioni per favore contattare
Tanya Fokina: info@johnrpepper.it

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