



elete Athlete Profile: Gavin and Shelley Phillips, Ultra-Distance Desert Runners and International Adventurers



There is hardly a dull moment for husband- and wife- athletes and global adventurers, Gavin and Shelley (nee Michelle Burke) Phillips. Gavin and Shelley, native Australians, have lived on three continents and have traveled to more than 50 countries. They now live and work in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia—Gavin as a private flight instructor and Shelley, a swim instructor and school secretary. In March 2008, the Phillips' will compete in the Marathon des Sables (MdS)—a seven-day, 150-mile, water-rationed desert footrace in the world's harshest desert, the Sahara. Through their participation in MdS, the Phillips' are raising funds for Facing Africa, a charity dedicated to treating and eradicating noma, an infection that strikes young children and adults in sub-Saharan countries. **elete** is sponsoring Shelley and Gavin during the MdS. In our new profile, we talk with Shelley and Gavin about the upcoming Marathon des Sables race, living in Saudi Arabia with the Bedouins, and why they hydrate with **elete Electrolyte Add-In™***.

Bio: Gavin Phillips

Born: 20 June 1965, Harrogate UK
Raised: Sutherland Shire Sydney NSW Australia
Living: Tabuk Saudi Arabia
Profession: Flight instructor
Fun: Diving, underwater photography, Arabic, travel, distance running and cycling.
CV: Australian rep. Dragon Boating, 1985-88; Cross-country running 1994-2000; Ocean outrigger marathons 2000-03; Master's Games 2002 –Dragon Boating; Half and ultra-marathon racing 2004-07.

Bio: Shelley Phillips

Born: 28 September 1967 Taree NSW Australia
Raised: Taree NSW Australia
Living: Tabuk Saudi Arabia
Profession: School secretary and Swim instructor
Fun: Diving, French, website design, travel, distance running, swimming, and cycling
CV: Australian rep. Duathlon 2005; Cross-country running 1994-2000; Triathlon and duathlon 1996-2005; Ironman Australia 2001; Master's Game 2002 Dragon Boating; Shark Island Ocean Swim 2004, Half to ultra-marathon racing 2002-2007.

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A photo of Gavin and Shelley Phillips pictured during a training run near their home in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia in preparation for Marathon des Sables. (Photos courtesy of Shelley and Gavin Phillips.)

Tell us a little about the Marathon des Sables race.

“Marathon des Sables (MdS) is one of the toughest desert endurance footraces on the planet. The race, which is run over seven days from March 28 to April 7, 2008, involves the equivalent of six marathons or 150 miles [240 km] in 40° + Celsius heat [equivalent of 104° Fahrenheit or higher]. Each day, the race is divided into legs of roughly 25, 34, 38, 82, 42, and 20 kilometers. Water is rationed to 1.5 liters each checkpoint, and there are approximately 12 kilometers between each checkpoint. So, disciplined drinking is vital to our safety.

In addition, we will carry all of our equipment needed during the seven days including our meals, hexi stove, clothes, sleeping bags and mats, headlamps (one of the race’s legs covers more than 70 kilometers, which will necessitate running at night), compasses, and anti-venom, which we’re required to carry. The terrain is tough: We will be running and walking over uneven, rocky ground not to mention that 15 to 20 percent of the race terrain involves sand dunes.”

You are both competing in Marathon des Sables to raise funds for Facing Africa. Can you tell us a little bit about Facing Africa and how you came to be involved with that charity?

“When we decided to take part in the 23rd running of the MdS in March/April 2008, we also decided it would be first test in our infant www.hurt2help.com, not-for-profit, fundraising scheme. Our plan is to combine our travels with an adventurous, somewhat masochistic, need for a challenge and create interest in people, the press, and companies alike. In doing so, we hope to raise funds for worthy charities in the vicinity of our chosen endurance event. Simply put—‘We will hurt to have you help!’ First on the list is the Marathon des Sables, with a further event planned to follow every two years.

We chose Facing Africa as our beneficiary for our first event because of its close ties with the U.K. entrant scheme, which we used to enter the race. After finding out more about the disease noma, and the work Facing Africa undertake, it felt very right to help them further by our own efforts. (Cont’d next page...)



Photo Above: Several patients and families awaiting treatment at the Noma Children's Hospital in Sokoto, Nigeria—one of the hospitals supported by Facing Africa—that treats young victims disfigured by noma. (Photo republished with permission of Facing Africa)

"Facing Africa is an international charity dedicated to the prevention and cure of noma (*cancrum ornis*), an acute gangrenous infection that affects the face. Noma strikes mostly young children. Noma begins as ulcers, which if left untreated, develops into gangrenous infections that then envelop the lips and cheeks resulting in severe facial disfigurement, functional impairment, and, in many cases, death. Infants and children severely afflicted with Noma are at increased risk for death because they are so badly disfigured that they are unable to breastfeed or eat. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 140,000 new cases of noma occur each year mainly in sub-Saharan countries. Of these only ten percent survive, which means 126,000 people die each year from this horrible disease.

Facing Africa is a charity involved in organizing and sending four annual expeditions consisting of a team of maxillofacial surgeons, anesthesiologists, and nurses (who donate their time) to perform reconstructive surgery on survivors of noma. It costs around £ 40,000

(equivalent to \$82,179.90) to cover the cost of travel and medical supplies. Each team spends two to three weeks at the Noma Children's Hospital in Nigeria and performs an average of 50 to 70 operations."

What is your goal with the Marathon des Sables and Facing Africa?

"For us, as well as the huge personal achievement we hope to gain through completing such an enormous challenge as the MdS, we are determined to raise as much money as possible for our chosen charity in this event, Facing Africa."

One ultra-endurance desert racing team elete has sponsored—Team Illinois—stated that one cannot possibly comprehend the suffocating heat and arduous conditions in these desert races. How do you find the physical, mental, and emotional strength to do it?

"We are living and training in the exact desert terrain and temperatures in which the MdS is set each year. If you look at our blog on our web site [<http://www.hurt2help.com/blog.htm>] you can get an idea of our 'summer of fun' in the desert. It's been impressive to see how one's body adjusts to heat extremes. I read once in Mike Stroud's *Survival of the Fittest* how very quickly your body adapts to temperatures changes, and, certainly, we seemed to cope very well with temperatures well over 40°C.

The sweating/cooling system is a miracle to behold, really. The key here is to stay hydrated, and this is obviously where **elete Electrolyte Add-In™** fits into our training and racing plans. (Cont'd next page...)



Above: Shelley and Gavin Phillips pictured during one of their many weekly 4.20-hour training runs with their water bottles filled with what else—pure electrolyte water made with elete!

In the MdS, the first real challenge is water management. Our water supply is rationed, and really we must not take in more than about 1 litre per 1.30 hour. The second challenge comes at the end of the day where with no a/c to retreat to, one must readjust to normal body temperatures and no shower! Interesting to say the least.

Physical strength? You need to train for it. We started in early 2007 increasing our mileage, time on our feet, strength and endurance base. The plan is that by the time the race comes around there will be no surprises.

Mental strength? Speaking for myself [Shelley] for a moment, I think this is something that I am proudest of. I am very tough mentally. It is hard to express, but I think I basically enjoy undertaking something incredibly physically challenging and drawing pleasure from it.

I see no point casting ahead to how hard or how tough or how terrible something might be...if that is the case, how are you ever going to get there and enjoy it? I rather see myself in the challenge and enjoying all of it...THAT is the reason I can do it.

Emotional strength? To me, this means mental strength. If you are focusing on what you want and enjoying the journey to get there, how can you not be strong, strong, strong?"

**What is a typical day like for both of you?
How does one prepare exactly for a race of this type?**

"We seem to have been preparing for this race forever! The event is so oversubscribed that we actually signed up for it in mid-2006!

Apart from our training schedule, there is also loads to organize with getting (tricky when living in Saudi), testing and adjusting kit, nutrition, and water usage. That has meant a lot of time on the Internet researching, chatting, and generally learning—very time consuming, but essential. We are getting there now though.

We both work full-time, but Gav's day is particularly hard both physically and mentally. He starts at 7:30 a.m. and, as well as managing the training section and all the paperwork that entails, he flies fast jet sorties once or twice per day. Each sortie is over an hour and is basically a workout in itself. *(Cont'd next page...)*



Pictured Above: Not an uncommon sight in Saudi—a CUV (Camel Utility Vehicle). Photo taken by Shelley during a bike ride near their home in Saudi Arabia.

He sweats loads and has to drink a lot of **elete**-filled water to top up his fluid levels before he even comes home to train. Couple this with summer temps well over 40°C and you can see we need to be on top of hydration at all times.

My job is as local school secretary starts at 7:45 a.m. with morning playground duty and the supervision of 43 primary school children. I also like to keep us on top around the house, run our website, and do as much fundraising work as I can.

We both train after work and on the weekend, five days a week. After a lot of research, we are following a program based around two key long sessions a week plus shorter strength-based sessions. For example, we are now up to a 4.20 hr run/walk with 7kg packs next weekend with a 2:30 hr mid-week session plus cross training, cycling, and swimming. This builds to a peak of a double session of 4hr + 8 hours with a full pack (hopefully about 12kg) over two days by mid Feb and then we taper...yeah!!

Our preparation has always been based around long, slow, regular build-up, and staying on top mentally. We so regard mental toughness as a

key feature in this race that we recently forewent a “cushy” relaxing holiday for ten days trekking the high Andes in Peru. Certainly challenging and definitely good preparation for being uncomfortable, tired, poorly fed and having to get up the next day and do it all again.”

In terms of nutrition, what are the indispensable products or strategies you’ve found that give you an edge over the other athletes?

“Indispensables: **elete** and **Tablytes™**; breakfast (porridge and banana) and energy gels. You **MUST** keep eating and drinking.

Our main challenge is to be able to trim our packs full of food down to the minimum while still being able to perform to the maximum...energy to weight ratio is important, but so is taste. Food has to be able to settle well on your stomach.

This is a key benefit of **elete**—virtually tasteless and lightweight yet packed with the essential minerals to keep your body functioning to the max. A perfect combination.”

What is the biggest factor in terms of winning a desert endurance race, and, likewise, what is the biggest obstacle?

“Hmmm...our primary aim is to cross the finishing line on Day Seven in one piece, having enjoyed the experience and raised money for, and awareness of, a very worthy cause in Facing Africa.

Otherwise, coping with the heat and balancing your pace to water intake. This is a multi-day event and you have to ‘back up’ repeatedly. You need to ‘dose your effort’—to not kill yourself on the first day by going too fast, but not going so slow either that you spend unnecessary time in the heat. Best possible pace with best possible water consumption is the key. *(Cont’d next page...)*



Above: Every day is an adventure for Gavin and Shelley. Above, pictured at Table Mountain in South Africa in 2006.

What is the next event you both plan to participate in?

"That is under fierce debate. I would love to ride l'Alpes d'Huez so why not ride the Guide Dogs for the Blind challenge—something like ten mountain passes in ten days? Gav isn't so impressed with that one but says he will be my support crew. We will see. Gav is more inclined towards the Mount Kilimanjaro Challenge: A six-day ascent/descent, two-day mountain bike circumnavigation, and then the marathon on Day Nine.

Little-known fact about you both?

"We are pretty much open books really. Though most people don't know I meditate or that Gav loves a chick-flick."

Both of you lived in Australia for most of your lives, but recently moved to Saudi Arabia? What prompted that change and how has the transition been?

"The change is down to a new job for Gav and the opportunity for us both to continue the grand adventure that is our life. Living in Saudi gives us the opportunity to be 'global dwellers' rather than purely Australians. Here we have the joy of

traveling anywhere in the world three or four times a year, seeing, doing, and experiencing amazing things, as well as living day to day somewhere kind of whacky and very frontier.

Tabuk (our town) is basically the third world packed with Bedouin farmers, goats and camels in trucks, mad drivers and women in black...always something incredible to see taking place, ya know? And on the weekend, we load up our Yukon and head to the desert for running, riding, camping, or diving on the deserted Red Sea coast. Our life is an adventure and we love and appreciate every day of it."

How did you find elete, and how do you both use the product?

"elete came recommended by an Australian triathlete friend of ours. We first used elete in the 2004 Dead Sea Half Marathon in Jordan. It was the perfect add-in for our Camelbaks®** with no nasty after taste, settled easily on our stomachs and proved vital in the dry training and racing conditions in keeping our hydration levels high. We loved it straight away."

What are some of the benefits you've noticed using elete?

"For me [Shelley], I have noticed a decrease in muscle cramps in my calves, but even more impressively, nagging headaches have disappeared with the extra hydration we are getting from adding elete to all our water plus taking Tablytes to bump up our mineral levels.

Gav says for him he simply notices that he feels stronger and better for having added elete. It is just a general feeling of well being increase if that explains it to you.

We both noticed a definite endurance level increase—almost as if the elete maximizes the



value of your water—super important to us when our water is rationed.”

What should others know about elete Electrolyte Add-In?

“I would say that water is for life and not only for exercise. If everyone were to increase their water intake and add the essential minerals in **elete**, they would feel the benefit immediately.

This is particularly important to anyone doing sport because of the risk they have of dehydration but really everyone, everyday would benefit from adding **elete** to their diet.” ■

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