



Sahara on foot

By Jade Lawton

BEACONSFIELD'S Alex Williams may be crazy - or just plain determined.

Mr Williams, 51, is preparing for a gruelling six-day, 243km trek through the Sahara Desert next April — the Marathon des Sables.

Set in the searing heat of Morocco, the marathon is known as the toughest foot race in the world. It has claimed the lives of two participants.

Completing the ultramarathon, which is the physical equivalent of five-and-a-half normal marathons in a row, is all the more challenging for Mr Williams, who will tackle the heat and humidity with the added burden of Type 1 diabetes. And he is paying an entry fee of almost \$4500 for the privilege.

"Any fool can try to walk across the desert - but with Type 1 diabetes it is near impossible," Mr Williams said.

A computer technician, he is the only Australian he knows of preparing for next year's event.

The idea came to him when he saw a report on the 2008 race in a metropolitan newspaper.

"I thought, I have to do that. Step one was to ask permission from the wife. She gave it the OK, and I started investigating.

"I like personal challenges, I certainly don't like sitting around vegetating," he said. Mr Williams, who

was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 17, hopes his trek will inspire others living with the condition.

"I want to show other people with Type 1 diabetes that they can live a full and healthy life, and that their life can be as good as or better than anyone else's," he said.

He also hopes to raise funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF), which aims to find a cure for Type 1 diabetes.

"If I can get on Oprah, I will. I want people to realise that Type 1 diabetes is different to Type 2 diabetes," he said.

Mr Williams now has about 30,000 supporters on social networking site Facebook and a regular audience on his blog, which he updates almost daily.

There are no showers or toilets along the course, with participants advised to take relief behind sand dunes. A change of clothes is discouraged as it adds precious weight to the backpacks, which must weigh in at less than 15kg.

Mr Williams described the desert as "like the surface of the moon" with nothing but water checkpoints dotting the horizon.

"I'm in the middle of the desert. I've got nobody looking after me; I'm entirely in control of my own destiny," he said.

"I lived in Saudi Arabia for five years, and I have walked across the desert in



Alex Williams will participate in the gruelling 'Marathon des Sables' next year. He will carry an Australian flag on his backpack for the duration of the race. 26275

Picture: Meagan Rogers

55-degree heat, so I understand how it can affect you."

He will survive on fruit strips, olive oil and peanut butter during the trek, keeping a careful watch on his blood-sugar levels.

Mr Williams has been training with walks across Casey and Cardinia, travel-

ling as far north as Dewhurst and as far south of Clyde. "The flies are definitely worse south of the highway," he joked.

People can follow Mr Williams' progress on the following website address: http://train2gain.biz/My_Sahara_Stroll_2010/home.