



## First female runner set to finish extreme ‘4 Deserts’ race series

November 04, 2016 By Julie Kailus [🌐](#) [🐦](#) [G+](#)

Last month, endurance-running ace [Jax Mariash Koudele](#), 36, of Park City, Utah, and Hood River, Oregon, won the women’s division of the grueling Atacama Crossing race in Chile, placing fourth among all contenders.



Definitely as grueling as it is starkly beautiful. Photo: Courtesy of Scott Manthey/Molly Becker

But that win has become part of something larger: an inspirational attempt to become the first woman ever to complete the [4 Deserts Grand Slam Plus](#), a series of five 250-kilometer (155-mile), week-long foot races across the world’s most inhospitable terrain in Namibia, China, Chile, Antarctica and a fifth location that changes each year (Patagonia in 2017).

Only three men have completed the Grand Slam Plus in the series’ 14 years.

“You are on your own in the roughest, toughest terrain in world,” says Koudele of the fully self-supported, intentionally grueling running routes. “There are no paths, just flags in the desert. Some of it looks like something on the moon or like Mars.”

After hallucinating her own death while running in 130-degree heat in the Gobi Desert, where she made history as the second-place finisher overall, on Nov. 15 Koudele leaves for her final race in a different place: the biting cold of Antarctica.



When you are running for something bigger than yourself, the impossible can come within reach.  
Photo: Courtesy of Koudele Photography

Just getting there will be half the battle. The long, jerky boat ride to the frigid continent in some of the roughest seas on the planet is notorious for leaving athletes strapped to the porcelain god, ensuring serious cases of dehydration before the final race even starts.

When it does, participants will be running on snow, in wind, alongside penguins. Carrying all their own water and protection from the elements, racers are only provided supplementary hot or cold water and typically a tent to share with up to nine other people. In Antarctica, racers are afforded the luxury of sleeping in boat cabins with one other mate.



Deep inside, you don't do it unless it's still fun, right? Photo: Courtesy of Scott Manthey/Molly Becker

But the challenges don't seem to faze Koudele. She's overcome all kinds of obstacles, from twisted knees to veering off course to losing important pieces of gear in airports.

She's made rookie mistakes from lugging an over-weighted pack to puking all over a Sri Lankan desert in the pulse of 99 percent humidity — and still finished races.

“So much of this is about dealing with enduring and not freaking out when things go wrong,” she says. Excelling in the face of adversity, for some cause beyond herself, runs deep for Koudele, a lifetime runner who started running 5Ks at age 5.

At the time, Wonder Woman was her idol. “I've always had this dream to do something to heal the world, to inspire people,” she says. “All my life I've followed that dream.”



To inspire others, often you must reflect on what drives you most. Photo: Courtesy of Koudele Photography

However, Koudele wasn't even sure what that looked like until recently. At first she was just trying one 4 Deserts race to qualify for Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc, a single-stage marathon in the Alps.

That goal fell to the wayside when she realized that a few social-media feeds about her passion for raising money through running for people suffering from Lyme disease turned into an outpouring of support — and a cause she knew could inspire an attempt at the 4 Deserts Grand Slam Plus.

Her goal is to [raise \\$10,000](#) for the [LymeLight Foundation](#). This is enough to fund one medical grant for a patient's IVs and other treatments, currently not covered by insurance.



Jax Koudele has made her share of mistakes, but mistakes are what prepare you for the biggest future challenges. Photo: Courtesy of Scott Manthey/Molly Becker

Last year alone, five good friends of Koudele's were diagnosed with Lyme disease, now considered the fastest-growing infectious disease in the world. "All of a sudden you are in bed and your whole life is shut down," she said.

"This is something that really personally touches my heart."

Running long distances in inhospitable places is nothing compared to not being able to get out of bed. It's a matter of perspective — and passion.

She says, "I just want to be an inspiration."

Follow Koudele's journey on Instagram at [@wonderwomanjax](https://www.instagram.com/wonderwomanjax).

<http://www.grindtv.com/fitness/first-female-runner-set-to-finish-extreme-4-deserts-race-series/#a8QDA0FPP9Hj3xu9.97>