

# Cyclists track their way across a vast expanse of desert with the help of Thuraya satphones

## Case Study:

**BRAK**  
(Biking Rub' Al Khali)

## Products:

Thuraya XT-LITE

*"The Thuraya phones are very light and very reliable, with amazing voice quality," said Maxime. "I was often interviewed from the middle of the desert by MTV Lebanon, our media sponsors, and they said the voice quality was as good as they had ever heard over a phone, let alone a satellite phone. So much that I enjoyed listening to the evening news via satellite while waiting for my time to come on air, live."*



### Dynamic duo

BRAK was the latest in a long line of ultra-challenging expeditions undertaken by **Maxime Chaya**. The first man from his country to reach the summit of Everest, in 2006, he has now completed the Seven Summits challenge by climbing the highest peaks on all seven continents. He is the only person ever to have achieved the 7S, skied to both poles and rowed across an ocean.

**Steve Holyoak** is an experienced endurance athlete. In 2015 he captained Great Britain's foremost ultra-runners to World and European Team Golds at the IAU World Championships.

Although his epic journeys have so often involved snow, ice and water, for his latest challenge Maxime Chaya swapped the cold and damp for dry desert heat.

The Lebanese adventurer teamed up with Steve Holyoak, an endurance athlete from the UK, to become the first men ever to cross the vast and hyper-arid Rub' Al Khali (Empty Quarter) by bicycle.

For their three-week BRAK (Biking Rub' Al Khali) expedition in November - December 2016, the pair went equipped with two XT-LITE satellite phones provided by Thuraya.

These satphones were essential items of kit. Without them it would have been impossible for Maxime and Steve to stay in touch with their support team from this beautiful but remote and dangerous desert.

The BRAK route began in the UAE at Abu Dhabi and took them across the border

into Oman, and then south west to the finish at Salalah – a distance of 1,453km. Cycling up to 100km per day and camping each night among the sand dunes, they used their Thuraya satphones to update their support team and sponsors at every opportunity.

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With a color display and a GSM-like menu, the easy to use Thuraya XT-LITE is ideal for on-the-move situations. It is the most compact satphone on the market and, at just 186g, added minimal extra weight with each man already carrying more than 15kg on his bike.

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### Location updates

Perhaps the most important task for the Thuraya satphones during BRAK was to communicate Maxime and Steve's exact location at the end of every day. Like its cousin the Thuraya XT-PRO, the Thuraya XT-LITE allows users to create and manage GPS waypoints, which can be used to navigate from a fixed position to other locations with great accuracy.

Steve says: "We aimed to send our GPS location around 5pm each day, so our team would know roughly when to expect the message. Doing this on the Thuraya XT-LITE was very simple. After switching the unit on and getting the GPS signal all I had to do was select the location option under the navigation menu and send it to the selected recipients via SMS."

The support team would then send a short message back to the Thuraya satphone confirming their receipt of the information. "This gave us the confidence that they were fully aware of our location and status," says Steve.

### Tracking for survival

GPS was also essential when it came to placing supplies. Maxime and Steve drove the route in advance to bury caches of water and food in the desert at predetermined locations. Having taken precise GPS coordinates, they were easily able to find the vital supplies when they returned weeks later on their bikes. Their daily location messages during BRAK included a code for whichever cache they had reached that day e.g. M15 – the 15th main food/water cache.



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The caches were only one part of the pair’s meticulous pre-expedition planning. They also drew up detailed procedures for every eventuality, including how to find each other again if they became separated in the desert – using the GPS waypoint function and voice capability of the Thuraya satphones to reunite.

Power for the satphones was never a problem. “Since we only turned the units on when we wanted to use them the batteries seemed to last forever,” says Maxime. “I carried a fully-charged spare but never had to insert it.”

With all this planning, it is no wonder Maxime speaks of BRAK as effectively

comprising three expeditions: the desert crossing by vehicles to place the caches, the bike ride itself, and a second journey by car to pick up unused water and food.

The final mopping-up operation is dear to the hearts of Maxime and Steve because they believe passionately that expeditions such as BRAK should leave no trace. “Take nothing but photographs and leave nothing but tire marks,” says Maxime. “The Empty Quarter is a wonderful natural resource and should be treated with respect by everyone who is lucky enough to visit it. We are determined to set a good example by not leaving anything behind, even buried in the sand.”

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reliant on them. For me, the only downside was having to part company with my Thuraya at the end of the expedition!".

Thuraya phones: [www.thuraya.com](http://www.thuraya.com)  
BRAK: [www.maximechaya.com](http://www.maximechaya.com)

