**Cambridge International Examinations**
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

**FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH** **0500/23**

Paper 2 Reading Passages (Extended) **October/November 2014**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

**2 hours**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Reading Booklet Insert contains the reading passages for use with all questions on the Question Paper.

You may annotate this Insert and use the blank spaces for planning. This Insert is **not** assessed by the Examiner.

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## Part 1

Read **Passage A** carefully, and then answer **Questions 1** and **2** on the Question Paper.

### Passage A

*The narrator gives an account of his walk with a friend through the Californian desert.*

### Death Valley

The desert is hateful. In the desert, at high noon, there are no shadows, and the sun weighs on you with the weight of centuries. The land seems dead or dying, and the desert is like an ageing movie star, an eroded landscape under merciless light. It is not the heat, the great convection oven of desert valleys, that kills, so much as the ground temperature. In Death Valley ground temperatures as high as 90 degrees have been recorded. Don't fall here. Don't faint. A few hours lying on unshaded ground can kill very easily. It can literally bake the brain inside the skull. Even walking – slow, steady walking – can become painful. A burning plain is not kind to the feet and gives literal meaning to the word 'tenderfoot'.

Nick Nichols and I started walking through Death Valley in midsummer. My boots gave out on the first day. They were light ankle-high canvas affairs, and the glue that held the thick soles to the body of the boot had begun to melt. I took the boots off and doctored them a bit with some tape from the first-aid kit. This was a mistake. My feet had expanded a size or so in the heat, and I couldn't get the boots back on. After some sitting on the burning ground under the burning sun, it seemed a good idea to keep walking no matter what. I used my knife to cut several portholes in the canvas to make the boots somewhat wearable.

Originally, we had intended to sleep during the heat of the day, but our tents concentrated the ground heat and baked us until we felt woozy and barely conscious. It was safer to walk. So there we were, Nick and I, limping down the western flank of the Panamint Mountains under a cloudless sky at high noon. Little else seemed to live on the face of that burning rock and sand.

To pass the time, we began playing the Game of Living Things. We were moving due west, and Nick had the entire world to the south. The north belonged to me. One living creature was worth one point. I had seen a dull grey sparrow-like bird and was way ahead, one point to zero.

Suddenly a rabbit, grey as the dull desert rock, burst out from under some sage between us. It broke northwest, nearly crossed my path, then cut south into Nick's world.

'My point,' Nick said.
'That was *my* rabbit,' I pointed out. I noticed that my teeth were tightly clenched. '*I* scared him up.'

Half an hour later Nick said, 'The rabbit ran south. It's my rabbit.'

Half an hour after that I said, 'He ran north first.' The tape had come off my right boot so that the rubber sole flopped annoyingly. My feet were being chafed badly by the holes in the boots, and I was walking in a sore-footed shuffle, rather like Charlie Chaplin except that I had to lift the right foot high above the ground to avoid getting burning pebbles in between the flopping sole and my foot. If I had that shuffling, hopping walk on video, I suspect I'd be able to see some small comedy there. As it was, the sun had baked me sour.

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'So it's one to one,' Nick said some time later. I could feel the muscles bunching up in my back and found it necessary to shuffle-hop a hundred paces north into my own world and out of conversational range. An hour later, I heard myself shout, 'Just shut up about the stupid rabbit!'

* * *

The desert is lovely. At dusk, when the sun sets and the sky explodes into gaudy pastels, when shadows mirror the colour of the sky, when the breeze is a cooling purple caress, the desert is beautiful. We were eating, Nick and I, and laughing. It's amazing what the desert does to you: it focuses wants and needs. At noon I had wanted no more than shade and water. It was absolutely all I could think about, and I knew then that if I'd had a cool place to sit and a jug of liquid life, I would have been happy. Now, from outside our tent in the campsite, with both water and the blessing of night, I felt certain new needs creep into the equation. A soft drink would be nice. If I had that, I would be happy. A chair to sit on… A table with some proper utensils… A white linen tablecloth… A house with a pool….

## Part 2

Read **Passage B** carefully, and re-read **Passage A**. Then answer **Question 3**, which is based on both passages. Answer on the Question Paper.

### Passage B

*This passage describes a trip across a desert in Oman.*

### Walking across the Wahiba Sands

The lunar cycle was reaching its zenith this weekend. We had planned for months to find the perfect time for our desert crossing. We rose early the next morning and set a course east for the next 60 kilometres.

The Wahiba Sands are a desert in every sense. Hot, dry and entirely filled by wave after wave of steep-sided sand dunes. The dunes run north-south in parallel lines and our route would traverse them all, harder work than following one of the valleys. Our plan was to carry everything we needed to get us to the road on the far side of the Sands, then hitch back to our car.

We each carried 9 litres of water and three days' food. I estimated our packs to weigh around 17 kilograms, not heavy by military standards but enough to make us groan under the burden. Even before the sun had peaked across the horizon, sweat crept on to my brow as we struck up the face of our first dune.

There would be 26 such dunes to cross, each one up to a hundred metres high and two kilometres wide. It was hard to tell where one finished and another started once we were lost in a sea of rolling sand hills. It wasn't until we'd slogged up several that we remembered that, owing to prevailing winds, the dunes were always steeper on the western side.

The logic behind timing our trip to coincide with the full moon was that it would be bright enough to walk even when the sun wasn't up. Even now, in winter, it would be tough going to walk through the heat of the day, and doing so would waste precious water. So come midday, we rested under our tarpaulin in the shelter of a tree, then pressed on in the late afternoon and into the night.

We covered a disappointing 20 kilometres the first day. On the second, just as we collapsed at our designated lunch spot, the wind picked up. With wind in the desert comes sand. We battled to weigh down the guy-lines of our tarpaulin by filling plastic bags with sand, but it could not provide the necessary shelter. We ate a miserable lunch of dry bread with cheap cheese, grains of sand crunching in our teeth. Grit filled our eyes, our ears, and our nostrils. I covered my face with a scarf and managed to fall asleep, though I awoke shortly afterwards beneath a freshly created dune. It was not restful

to stay in the flying sand, but it was too hot to keep moving, so we had to settle for frustrated clock-watching while the sun slowly lowered.

After another six hours' marching, we were into the eastern half of the Sands. More greenery appeared and the dunes became less like orderly rows and more like an endless choppy sea. Camels roamed and goats grazed on scant plants. Lizard and beetle tracks abounded, and the wiggle marks of snakes were spotted between tufts of grass.

We each took hopelessly optimistic guesses at how long it would take to reach the distant pylon, and ended up walking for longer than the three estimates combined. As we crested each dune under the tranquil light of the moon, we would silently hope that it was the last, but every time our optimism was defeated by the sight of yet more dunes silhouetted in the distance. Fatigued and feeling more thirsty than ever, we pressed on without speaking, willing our legs up those short, steep sections of sliding sand that required tired muscles to work at double speed to make any progress. As 22.00 arrived and the eastern plateau failed to materialise, we made camp for another night.

*Copyright Acknowledgements:*

Question 1 Tim Cahill; Pecked to Death by Ducks; Random House/ Fourth Estate; 1993.
Question 3 Tim Moss; Crossing the Wahiba Desert by Moon Light; http://thenextchallenge.org/portfolio/wahiba/; 2011.

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