

LIFESTYLE

Charity Challenge raises \$170,000

By Nancy Acton

In March, ten men and women, eight of them XL employees, embarked on the XL Charity Challenge, a 57-mile, 14-day trek to the base camp of Earth's highest point: Mount Everest in Nepal. Some were experienced adventurers, while others were complete novices. What united them was a desire to raise funds for the Bermuda-based Kathmandu Kids Club, which in turn raises funds for the ISIS Foundation's Nepal projects.

Months of training helped prepare the group for the physical and mental challenges ahead. They knew that such luxuries as comfortable hotel rooms, with showers and hot and cold running water, would not be part of the daily experience. Then there was the issue of navigating steep, rocky paths and endless steps, vertiginous suspension bridges, penetrating cold, and the effects of high altitude, but whatever personal reservations they may have harboured before the journey paled beside their common goal to help the 130 Nepalese children rescued from extreme poverty and now cared for in one of the ISIS Foundation's ten children's homes.

As so often happens, however, reality usually differs from what is envisaged. These are the experiences of four participants.

Christine Doughty raised approximately \$13,500. "Awesome" was the favourite term used to describe the scenery along the challenging 130-km route, with its steep up and down hills, and rough, dusty paths shared with sheeps and yaks transporting supplies to villages. The sheer size and majestic beauty of the mountain ranges, the swing bridges across great valleys, waterfalls and dramatic vistas impressed her deeply.

In terms of fitness, Ms Doughty says that despite the difficulties of training for altitude at sea level in Bermuda, she thought the group did a remarkable job of staying sane and healthy at greater heights.

"Once you get to 5,357 metres (17,575 feet) there was no way you wanted to do anything else except to get down — and fast!"

The last two days before reaching the base camp were particularly hard and strenuous, and required "determination of mind and body to just physically make it."

"You were so out of breath at that level that you had to be careful that the sheer exhilaration of taking in the magnificence of the surrounding mountains, and standing on the cold, hard Khumbu glacier, did not finish you off there and then," - Christine Doughty

"Most days were clear and started cool, warming by midday. As long as the sun was up, it was great. Once the sun went down, or behind a cloud, it got remarkably cold," - Mogan Kempe

and as long as you didn't take your clothes off you remained relatively odorless... but very long showers were taken at the hotel at the end of the journey," she says.

Apart from 'gypsy tam' for a couple of days into the trip, Ms Doughty was surprised to have no other physical problems, given the long hours of trekking, and the exhaustion from lack of oxygen and altitude, but confesses she "could have done with another set of bangs at times."

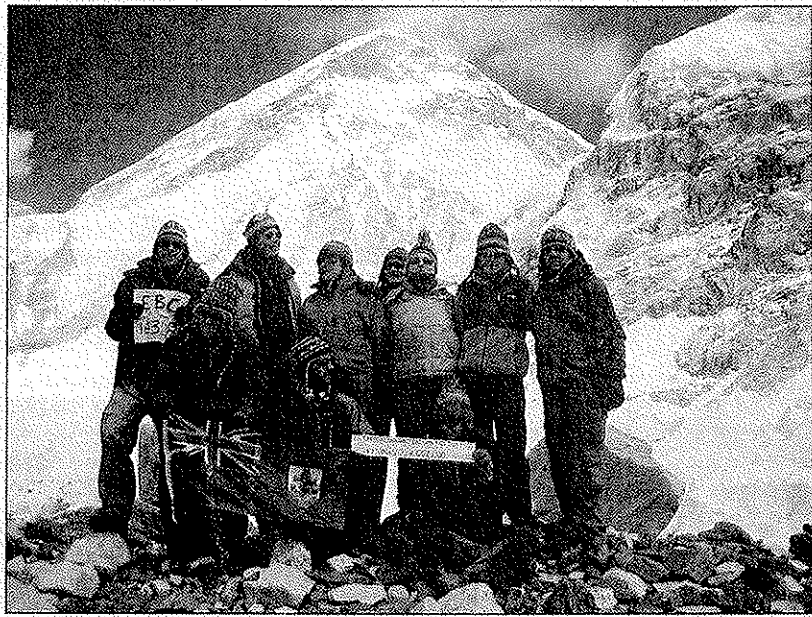
Unlike some in her group, she actually enjoyed the long swing bridges over deep ravines, but admits it was not a journey for the faint-hearted, or those with vertigo.

In terms of camaraderie, Ms Doughty describes her fellow trekkers as "a really great group" who shared many good laughs and mutual commiserations where needed.

"Our Sherpa guides and camp staff were wonderful, caring people whom we all got to know well over the 14 days," she says. "The cook baked us a cake the night we returned from the base camp with the message in bright red icing, 'Well Done Bermuda,' and again on our last night, also in bright red icing, 'Come Back Again!'"

She first saw Mount Everest from afar four days into the trek, and again at intervals as the group rounded other mountains. Enveloped in swirling clouds more often than not, it couldn't be seen directly from the base camp.

The best views were from Kalowath, a further 300m up, but I found the whole Himalayan range so incredible and magnifi-



We made 11 Bermuda participants in the 2008 XL Charity Challenge proudly show the flag at reaching Mount Everest base camp (17,575.46 feet) in Nepal. The group trekked 57 miles in 14 days to reach point. Participants raised more than \$170,000 for the Bermuda-based Kathmandu Kids Club.

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Funds to aid children living in poverty in Nepal and Uganda

The XL Charity Challenge group who trekked to the base camp of Mount Everest in Nepal have helped to raise an impressive total of more than \$170,000 for the Bermuda-based Kathmandu Kids Club. The Club raises funds for the Nepal projects of The ISIS Foundation, a Bermuda-registered charity which helps children in extreme poverty in Nepal and Uganda.

The eight XL employees — Lukas Ackermann (Zurich), Richard Goedger (London), Christine Doughty, Megan Kempe, Tonia Szeto, Roma Jedryszak, Cherie Simons and Roddy Gray (all Bermuda), plus two other Bermuda participants, Jennie Lee O'Donnell and Nick Pewter, set out on the 57-mile, 14-day trek on March 6, 2008, eventually climbing to 17,600 feet.

XL Foundation matched the same raised by XL employees and Gavin Arton, XL Capital Ltd's global director of corpo-

rate social responsibility, said the Foundation was pleased to have provided matching funds for the company's employee trekkers.

"It was a team effort to raise money for a great cause, and achieve personal physical performance goals. Congratulations to all on both accomplishments."

"We can't thank the team enough for their amazing efforts on behalf of the Kathmandu Kids Club," Kim Carter, president of the Kathmandu Kids Club, said. "It's one thing to raise money for a good cause, but quite another to do it the hard way, as they did."

"We are delighted that they got to witness firsthand some of the work being carried out by the ISIS Foundation in Nepal, and can see that every cent raised will be greatly appreciated and put to maximum use. We would also like to thank the XL Foundation for their generosity in donating

additional funds."

In addition to trekking through some of the world's most spectacular mountain scenery, the team visited one of the ten ISIS children's homes in Kathmandu, which they were fundraising for.

There they were met by the 130 children, aged four to 17, who are cared for by ISIS, and welcomed with flower garlands and silk scarves called 'katis' which had been blessed by the local lama. The children then performed Nepali dances in colourful costumes, and shared a meal with the team before showing them proudly around their home.

Anyone wishing to donate money to the 2008 XL Charity Challenge should visit website www.justgiving.com. For further information about the Kathmandu Kids Club and the ISIS Foundation, visit their website on www.kathmandukidsclub.com and www.isisbm.com.

supportive communities. Again, we were warmly greeted with smiling faces, singing and dancing, and lots of hugs and kisses as we departed for the airport in the late afternoon for the long, 36-hour return trip to Bermuda."

Asked if she would do a similar trek again, Ms Doughty replied: "I would certainly return to that part of Asia, but with a little more horizontal and less vertical trekking next time."

Megan Kempe raised \$13,850. Despite being happy with her advance preparations, she still found the going tough. She was expecting "just dirt roads" so was very surprised to find that not only was a portion of the trail laid with stone but also the sheer number of steps it had. Breathing an altitude was not as difficult as anticipated, although when she called her husband from the base camp he said it sounded as if she was on her death bed!

In terms of the cold, with hindsight, Mrs Kempe remembers it as "refreshing" but while on location admits it was "freezing", and she would have "traded anything for the heat of August in Bermuda."

"Most days were clear and

started cool, warming by midday. As long as the sun was up, it was great. Once the sun went down, or behind a cloud, it got remarkably cold," she says.

The group walked about seven hours every day, and met other trekkers on the way. Incredibly, Mrs Kempe's Red Sox baseball cap caught the eye of which they discovered they shared a mutual Bermudian friend.

In terms of the trek itself, Mrs Kempe says the height of the first bridge the group crossed was "scary, but the rest was exhilarating."

"I tried to look at the land on the other side, but got a total rush looking down, even if it was for only a split second."

Despite suffering very bad knee pain on the descent, she confirms the trek was definitely worth it.

"Seeing Everest was so exciting, I kept telling myself that I saw the top of the world. I found it all very awe-inspiring — how big the world is, and how small each of us really is."

Mrs Kempe has high praise for the group camaraderie, and misses seeing them all every day.

Not only would she do a trek again, but already she has begun to organize another Charity Challenge trek for 2009 to benefit the Kathmandu Kids Club, and says anyone interested in participating should visit www.kathmandukidsclub.com for further information.

Visiting the children's home in Kathmandu is something she will never forget.

"The children were inspiring. They had the most beautiful and hopeful smiles I have ever seen on anybody," she says.

Jennie Lee O'Donnell raised a whopping \$59,043 (and counting), which made her the group's top fundraiser, thanks to a full credit card and pledge form she created and mailed to family and friends. She attributes her success to fantastic donors, their appreciation of the work done by the Kathmandu Kids Club in Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world, and the unlikely prospect of a 40-year-old, relatively unfit, stay-at-home mother undertaking such a venture.

As for the trek itself, Mrs O'Donnell found the terrain "incredibly varied... and all very rugged."

"At times we climbed steep steps for hours at a time, and at other times we had to walk carefully to avoid slipping and sliding down steep, dusty trails," she remembers. "Some parts of the trail were narrow cuts into a mountainside, some would cross tundra-like high plains, while others had us clambering over boulders in a glacial moraine. Considering these trails are the only routes in and out of the area from village to village, it is little wonder that everything needs to be carried on the backs of human porters or loaded on to yaks. The only assets of burden rugged enough to survive in the tough climate of that altitude. Not even a wheelbarrow would make it on those trails," she says.

The "elevation gain" of the 11-mile round trip route was approximately 15,900 feet — a figure Mrs O'Donnell says was "deceiving, as many days we descended for a good part of the day and then climbed again to camp higher up by the following evening."

Her 16-week, pre-trek training programme stood her in good stead, while on route she says her fellow companions drank five litres of water a day, and incorporated up to 70 percent starch in their diet. A typical dinner included garlic soup (supposedly good for altitude), potatoes, rice, pasta, and vegetables.

The group rarely discussed how many miles they had hiked each day, talking instead in terms of hours. On a typical day they rose at 6 a.m., packed up the camp, and following a 7 a.m. breakfast were on the trail again by 8 a.m. Lunch breaks were approximately an hour long, with arrival at the next campsite being around 4.30 p.m.

Like other trekkers, Mrs O'Donnell found conditions en route "challenging."

"The triple whammy of cold, primitive camping conditions and altitude made the average of six plus hours of hiking very challenging, but the amazing scenery was distracting, the positive attitude of the guides infectious, and the support of our fellow team members motivating," she says.

The weather was "fairly consistent", with cold, clear mornings and cloudy afternoons.

"It was 50 degrees F when we arrived in Lukla, dropping to about 40 degrees F at night. After about a week, it snowed lightly — mostly at night — for the next four days. By the time we reached Gorak Shep, the camp closest to Everest base camp, it was closer to 20-30 degrees F in the day, and much colder at night. Any item in your tent which you didn't sleep with in your sleeping bag was frozen solid in the morning. The outside of your sleeping bag and the inside of the tent were covered in frost in the morning as well," Mrs O'Donnell remembers.

Meeting and conversing with other trekkers revealed their ages ranged from 20s to the 70s and many were making the journey independently. However, she was glad her group was led by experienced guides.

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Local group's charity climb

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Like the others, she too found the lack of bathing facilities challenging, "especially since it was extremely cold, and exposing any part of yourself to wash up in a freezing cold tent was a hardship".

"On the other hand, we were all wearing so many clothes, that the lack of hygiene was more evident to yourself than it was to others. We all had some interesting hairdos by the end of two weeks without shampoo."

Altitude headaches and nausea were a problem toward the end of the outward trek, and there were days when every step and all simple tasks, even packing her gear in the mornings, seemed monumental — so much so, in fact, that Mrs. O'Donnell worried whether or not she would even make it to the base camp.

"A positive mental attitude was the only weapon I had in my arsenal," she says. "The day we made it to base camp (altitude 17,600 ft), and the following day, when a group of us climbed even higher to the Kala Pattar mountain (altitude 18,200 ft), with its outstanding view of Mt. Everest and the surrounding peaks, pushed me to the very brink of my endurance. It took me over three and one half hours to climb to Kala Pattar in 12-inch increments — the length of my size ten women's boots. It was then physically grueling to climb down for an hour and a half and then hike six hours to the next campsite further down the valley — but it was an amazing feeling to have done it."

"Terrifying" is how she remembers the swaying metal suspension bridges crossing raging rivers hundreds of feet below. "All I can say is that a line of sharp-horned, cranky, heavily-laden yaks behind you gives you a huge motivation to keep moving."

Despite all the tribulations of this rugged fundraising adventure, the 20-year age range, and the different nationalities, the group ensured that everyone made it to base camp. They laughed about the 'bathroom facilities', lack of hygiene and privacy, and found delight in their Nepalese guides who, in addition to their professionalism and experience, were extremely cheerful and funny.

A distant, first glimpse of the peak of Mount Everest very early in the trek "fired up" Mrs. O'Donnell in the days and miles to come, and seeing it from the base camp was an emotional experience.

"Everest is a scary-looking mountain with all the snow blasted off its north and western faces by the incredibly high

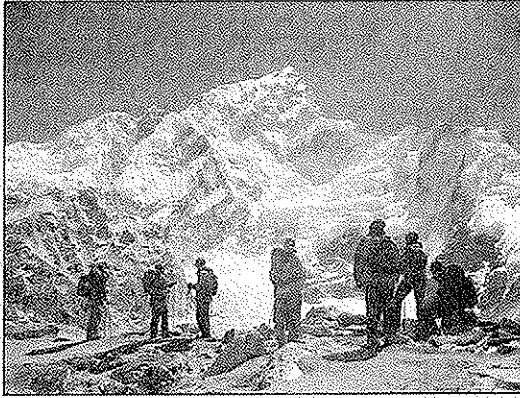


Photo by Lukas Ackermann

Wonders to behold: Participants in the XL Charity Challenge survey Mount Nuptse on arrival at the Mount Everest base camp (17,575.46 feet) in Nepal. The group covered 57 miles in their 14-day trek to raise more than \$170,000 for the Bermuda-based Kathmandu Kids Club. The Club raises funds for the Nepal projects of the ISIS Foundation, a Bermuda-registered charity helping poor children in Nepal and Uganda.

winds," she says. "It was hard when you looked at it not to think of all the many stone memorials to foreign climbers and local Sherpas that we had passed, all of them dedicated to those who died trying to summit Everest. Just being at the base camp and seeing the infamous Khumbu Ice Fall, which is the first hurdle to the summit, was very exciting and inspiring."

Given the chance, "this busy mother of three would return to Nepal tomorrow if my husband would agree to babysit".

"When my daughters are older, I hope to return with my family to trek again," she says. "I found Nepal an amazing destination, filled with incredible scenery and beautiful people. The trek to Everest base camp is a challenging hike with tremendous rewards."

Visiting one of the ISIS children's homes in Kathmandu was another unforgettable experience.

"We were welcomed by the children like royalty, with flower garlands and silk scarves called 'kata', which had been blessed by the local lama. It was very emotional, and many of us were moved almost to tears. The children performed local Nepalese dances for us in colourful costumes. Then, overcoming their shyness, they proudly showed us around their clean, cheerful homes, and introduced their caregivers as 'didis' (Nepalese for 'aunts'). The boys and girls, aged approximately four to 17, chatted with us in halting English, tugged at our hands, hugged us and played simple hand games.

"As we sat sharing a meal with these smiling and affection-

ate children it was hard to imagine the same 130 children in the squalid, desperate conditions in which they had been found just over two years before. The ISIS homes were truly homes, not institutions, with spotless, light, airy rooms, and walls filled with children's art, letters and schoolwork. The caregivers explained that the ISIS homes programme is so successful that it is currently being studied as a model for child care in Asia."

Nick (Yak Cheese) Pewter raised \$18,000. A man whose wit was apparently unimpaired by the altitude, remembers the terrain as "smooth, like a baby's bottom — all 130 kilometres of it".

He says his pre-trek fitness and dietary preparations might have proved more effective had he succeeded in his attempt to 'summit' McGall's Hill. In Nepal, he confesses his legs "felt like concrete", his head "pounded for hours on end", and his bladder "constantly felt like it was going to explode".

"Nicotine and Nepalese whiskey" allegedly helped him adjust to the thinner air and cold, while he was "under the impression that most of my ascent would be downhill and I had to purchase new footwear".

His remedy for conquering a fear of heights was "The Old Testament", while "Baby Wipes" helped him cope with hygiene issues. Unlike his fellow trekkies, Mr. Pewter claims he "was able to hang-glide most of the way. The rest of the group was not impressed". Group camaraderie was "like codfish and potatoes — a perfect combination", his memories will "last a lifetime", and

yes, he will "do it again one day".

Asked for his impression of Mt. Everest, he defers to the late Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to reach the summit: "It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves."

Yet it is the visit to the children's home supported by ISIS, and for which he helped to fundraise, that Mr. Pewter is at his most eloquent.

"The most beautiful, gracious children you'll ever lay your eyes on," he says. "Their eyes sparkled with joy when we met them, and it was then that I felt I had accomplished something bigger than the mountain."

• A special evening is planned for June 5 at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute, at which the above trekkers will speak. There will also be presentations by ISIS Foundation co-founder Audette Exel, and Claire Underhill, ISIS volunteer at the Kiwoko Hospital in Uganda. Delicious Nepalese food, wine and beautiful handmade items from Nepal and Uganda will also be available. For further information see today's Bermuda Calendar.

ANNIVERSARY CLUB

Congratulations to: Sonya Binns, of Rockaway, Southampton, who celebrates her birthday today.

Anthony Davis, of Smith's Parish, who celebrates his birthday tomorrow.

La-Verity Davis, of 16 Broom Street, Sandys, who celebrates her birthday today.

Austin (Cheesey) Hughes, of North Shore, Pembroke, who celebrates his birthday today.

Ethelyn M. Hughes, of North Shore, Pembroke, who celebrates her birthday today.

George (Captain Flight) Rogers, of Beacon Hill Road, Sandys, who celebrates his 83rd birthday today.

Hilda M. A. Warner, of Southampton, who celebrates her birthday today.

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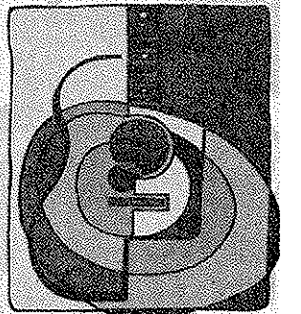
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Tickets can be purchased at the do
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5th Annual Bermuda Guitar Festi

All performances at St. Andrew's Church
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and online @ www.bazelltric.h



STUDENTS GALA CONCERT - 1st June @ 6pm
Held under the auspices of the Bermuda Sc



ONE YEAR LATER

HOPKINS REPORT RECOMMENDATION	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RESPONSE	BERMUDA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION COMMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dramatically improve the quality of teaching 	To date, the MOE has provided no clear recommendation or initiative to specifically address the quality of teaching in the classroom.	Teaching an- in the class teacher deve First Priori initiative. A) The MO clear, long professional empowers perform at th B) The MO administrati policies to. INSTRUCTORS