

FORMER KOOTENAY WOMAN TREKS TO EVEREST

TO INSPIRE OTHERS WITH DISABILITIES TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAMS

Former Kimberley residents reached Everest Base Camp (5350 m) on November 14th at approximately 1 p.m. This might not seem like such a great achievement except that one of them cannot walk and is permanently in a wheelchair.

Pippa Blake had always dreamed of making this trek. All the arrangements had been made in 1986 when she and her sons, Jasper and Oliver were returning from New Zealand. They had to put the plans on hold when the National Ski Academy offered Pippa a job that was to start immediately. At that time Pippa did not feel too concerned, she felt that they could do it another time.

Unfortunately, Pippa was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1991, and shortly thereafter was confined to a wheel chair.

Jasper and Oliver never let the dream die, always reaffirming that the trek to Everest Base Camp would happen.

Pippa put the dream aside as the boys' lives became increasingly busy and her MS took hold of her body and her life took a different direction with other pursuits; performing with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, Sailing, taking courses at the University of Victoria and painting with acrylics and water colours.

In the meantime, the boys, still pursued the dream, along with Ollie's girlfriend, Kristina Rody. In November 2006, Ollie and Kristina made contact with a highly recommended Sherpa, Lhakpa and his wife Doma, in Nepal. In order to accommodate Jasper's Ironman schedule in Hawaii in October 2007 they booked the trek for Nov. 2, 2007. Fortunately, November is an ideal month for trekking in the Himalayas. Although it is very cold the skies are usually crystal clear.

The journey immediately began to take on a life of its own. Kristina put her life on hold to become the Expedition Co-Ordinator. The team of 3 quickly grew to eventually end up as a team of 14, with included Kimberley resident Nick Leinweber and Cranbrook resident Doreen Peebles.

The Rise Above Barriers Society was formed. It became apparent that the recently upgraded TrailRider would be the most comfortable method of transporting Pippa to Everest Base Camp. The team purchased a second hand Black Diamond TrailRider which is to be given to Recreation Integration for their use after the trek.

Throughout the year, the team ran mini expeditions and modifications were made to the TrailRider to improve the performance they could anticipate on the gruelling trek ahead.

On November 2, 2007, the team flew from Kathmandu to Lukla on Yeti Airline's Twin Otter Aircraft. The TrailRider was assembled and the group set off immediately. Pippa and her entourage created quite a sensation as they travelled through the villages.

The expedition was carefully paced by Lhakpa to ensure that the group moved safely, adjusting to the altitude changes as they climbed higher to Everest Base Camp. The trek took 21 days instead of the usual 14 days.

The terrain became increasingly more challenging, great demands were made on people's inner resources. The team worked exceptionally well together, sharing a similar sense of humour and great respect for each other. The guides and porters added strength and support to the team.

The final ascent to Everest Base Camp was brutal. The team's energy was sapped but they pushed on and they all arrived at Base Camp. Joy and emotional release was shared by all - their mission was accomplished.

The hope of the Rise Above Barriers Team is that by advertising this feat, others with disabilities will be inspired to follow their dreams. For more information about our society and to see pictures of the trek please check the web-site at www.riseabovebarriers.com. Tax receiptable donations can be made through the website.