



REBECCA AND KERRYN AT THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Conquering the Great Wall of China

Diabetes NSW Ambassador Rebecca Harcourt shares her story of completing the trek for diabetes.

Walking up the steep ridge to reach the Great Wall of China, my breathing getting shallower, I laughed and said to our group: “now this is why I was meant to do more intensive training!”

Back in February when I'd signed up for the trek I knew I was keen for the challenge – personally, emotionally, physically. Diagnosed at the age of 31, I have lived with type 1 diabetes since 1999. I have always been determined not to let this disease deter me from seeking out adventures, if anything it has made me more adventurous.

Now here we were, the four of us – my cousin's wife Kerry who works at Westmead Hospital, a young couple from Canberra – Natalia

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fashionista and make-up artist, who also lives with type 1 diabetes and her partner Andrew who is finishing his dual degree in nursing and paramedics. When I'd first invited Kerry to join me on the trek she emailed me and my cousin (her husband) saying: “Stephen I'm going to China with Becky, you can go fishing”. I was thrilled Kerry was here, down to earth and also fit. We were going to have

some good laughs on this trek and already the rapport with the young couple was great, not least as it was Andrew's first time ever overseas and his excitement was palpable. At 6ft 4 and 6 ft respectively, Andrew and Natalia towered over us all and I joked how they only had to walk half as much as us because their strides

were easily twice as long.

Our local guide Lee, 66, had traversed this terrain his whole life and thought nothing of the 90 degree steepness of the hill, laughing as he used his scythe to cut through the bramble and bush. We quickly gained a great appreciation of the foot soldiers who had trudged these hills working over twelve hours a days under treacherous conditions to build the Great Wall which extends just under 22,000 kilometres. After a couple of hours we reached what was left of the Great Wall in this area – the crumbling stonework wasn't part of the tourist section. A few hours later, we arrived at our campsite and were treated to a feast of local cuisine cooked by the chefs who were accompanying us throughout our trek.



TREK FOR DIABETES GREAT WALL OF CHINA CHALLENGE

The following day we had to extend ourselves much further with what our guide had promised to be a more precarious challenge. This time however the walking came far easier, we had become accustomed to avoiding the loose stones and less intimidated by the steep, undulating terrain. When it was too steep to walk down I played safe and sat, skidding down with Lee shrieking with laughter as I managed to tear my well-worn trousers exposing bright pink pants!

Third day in, we all well and truly had our groove on. Kerryn, who clearly had been hustling us with kindness the first two days, would soar ahead with the young ones whilst I happily trekked at a solid pace enjoying the views and stillness of being out in the country. When we reached the last day of our trek we found ourselves back in tourist land where the Wall was well-restored and we were surrounded by many other travellers and trekkers. However, the terrain was no less arduous. At one point, where the slope was particularly steep for a substantial length, I remember asking Kerryn if she suffered from vertigo. My timing was clearly obtuse

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and Kerryn smiled with a look that could kill. Luckily for me she also showed me her tip of cascading the gaps along the wall at arm level where you could hold on, a tip that helped restore my ability to keep moving forward as at this stage there was no way back.

Coming home, I'm still reaping the rewards of feeling revitalised and way fitter. As a dietitian, Kerryn reminded me how a healthy woman's waist is 80cm. I estimated mine was 95cm and my goal was to be 85cm by Christmas. On our last day in Beijing we came across a funky store that peculiarly sold tape measures – here was my chance. Lo and behold, I surprised myself with my waist measuring 85cm exactly. I had reached my goal already! I quickly declared a new goal which was to reach 80cm by Christmas. Last time I measured my waist I was 82cm. I'm well on my way.



Rebecca Harcourt and Kerryn Chisholm did the Trek for Diabetes Great Wall of China Challenge in September 2015. They raised just under \$6,000 between them for Diabetes NSW through a series of fundraisers, seminars and workshops.

Thank you Rebecca and Kerryn!