

Merrilees on the Great Wall of China

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By Aroha Merrilees, New Zealand

In 2014 I got an email from New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation (NZBCF), describing a fundraising adventure and a trip of a life time to trek the Great Wall of China. And you only had to do a little bit of fundraising to qualify for the trip.



I have always been a strong support of NZBCF, but I had never done anything other than a small donation each year. So a little bit of fundraising sounded like a good idea. How hard could it be? And the Great Wall has been one of those bucket list items that I have been wanting to tick off for a very long time. So the Pink Ribbon Trek sounded like an awesome adventure to accomplish both.

Breast cancer is a subject that is close to home. My grandmother (on Mums side) died from breast cancer at the age of 62. My Mum, Jean, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012. And with the support of family, friends, & NZBCF, Mum is a breast cancer survivor!

Mum is also a keen adventurer ... which is probably where I get it from. So I asked her if she wanted to join me on this challenge ... knowing it would be an enthusiastic Yes!!!

So ... let the fundraising madness begin!!!

We spent 9 months fundraising. It was a little bit stressful to begin with ... thinking "what have I gotten us into". But once we got started, everything just flowed. We started with online donations to get the dollars rolling in. We had 2 very successful Movie Nights, that were so much fun. A BBQ fundraiser. And topped off with a hilarious Quiz Night. It was a lot of hard work, but very satisfying. And a great way to make family & friends aware of NZBCF and the good that they do.

Mum also had a very good friend who nominated her for a radio competition (ASB Good as Gold on the Mike Hosking breakfast show). Mum was selected and our fundraising was boosted by \$3,000. What an amazing achievement for Mum!!!

In total we raised over \$10,000 for NZBCF. And with the help of our fellow trekkers, we raised a grand total of \$126,000.



Now comes the fun part ... we got to go to China and conquer the Great Wall!

It was a long trip from New Zealand to China. Made fun by meeting our fellow trekkers on the way. Some in Auckland, NZ. More joined at the stop-over in Singapore. And again when we finally arrived in Beijing, China.

We trekked for five days on the Great Wall of China. Its hard to find the right words to describe the feeling of being on the Great Wall. Not only because the Great Wall is an amazing wonder of the world, but the roller-coaster of emotions brought out by the views, the history, the people of China, and the amazing group of ladies that I was traveling with. And because I was able to do this amazing trip with my Mum!

Each of the five days we experienced a different terrain. Totally restored touristy sections, broken rubble over grown with vegetation, big & small stairs going straight up & straight down, holding on to the wall because its so steep, and the astonishing views of seeing the Great Wall continuing into the horizon.

It wasn't a race, it was an experience. And what an experience it was!!! We created life-time friendships and memories with the most remarkable and wonderful bunch of people.



So would I recommend fundraising for a charity? Most definitely! Its so rewarding to be able to do some good. And heart-warming to know so many people will benefit from the efforts of a few. And would I recommend going to the Great Wall of China? Yes yes yes! Photos can be amazing but its nothing to seeing it for real!

And a big thank you goes out to our sponsors and everyone who helped and supported us. We could not have accomplished the fundraising without that support. We cant thank you enough!!!