

# Group plan to assault Kili barefoot

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MOST people would be delighted simply to summit Kilimanjaro.

But for a group of five young climbers set to take on the challenge on Tuesday to raise funds for Red Cross Children's Hospital, they are upping the ante - by doing it barefoot.

On Thursday, to help get them prepared, two of the five adventurers, Matt Botha, 32, and Camilla Howard, 29, did a barefoot climb up Table Mountain's Platteklip Gorge.

Botha, who has been barefoot for the past six months, said the key to a great expedition was "finding a fine line between the possible and the impossible".

And that's why they decided on the barefoot option.

On Monday the climbers leave for Kili, with plans to start their climb on Tuesday.

They plan to take six-and-a-half days to summit, then a further one-and-a-half days to descend.

Old Mutual is funding the trip, dubbed the Old Mutual Barefoot Kili Expedition.

"Thanks to them, we don't have to pay one cent for our expedition," Botha said.

One hundred percent of donations to their cause will go to help upgrade Red Cross's Poisons Information Centre. The hospital is the only institution in SA that gathers and collates information on toxic substances to help assure appropriate treatment in cases where they are



**TOUGHENING UP:** Barefoot climbers Matt Botha and Camilla Howard take on Platteklip Gorge on Thursday as part of their training for their fundraising barefoot climb of Kilimanjaro next week. They are raising funds for the Red Cross Children's Hospital Trust. PICTURE: LEON LESTRADE

ingested.

According to the Children's Hospital Trust, the hospital's fundraising arm, there are only two 24-hour emergency poison lines available to the SA public and medical profession - the one at Red Cross and the other at Tygerberg Hospital. Both use the Red Cross database.

"An updated database system with internet access is desperately required as the (existing) database is in danger of becoming out-dated and obsolete if it cannot keep up with the technological re-

quirements," the Trust said.

Botha said he knew the centre would use the funds raised in the best possible way.

Howard said the courage shown by the children at the hospital was inspiring: "These children are so brave, and it helps us show them that nothing is impossible."

Their preparations included spending time in ice chambers at temperatures as low as -18° C. Once they hit the icy parts of Kilimanjaro, the climbers hope that heat expelled through their feet

will help keep them warm. But they remain worried about potential inclement weather and altitude sickness.

"I'm relying on my guts and my grit," Botha said. "But cold is not an endurance sport. Once you've got frostbite, you're done."

Sean Disney, the team's sports doctor who wrote a thesis on barefoot running and helped develop a strategy to keep warm in extremely cold temperatures, actually did get frostbite while preparing for the climb.

"He is still pretty bad," Botha said. "He still has blisters, but we hope he'll be okay by Tuesday."

Botha added that weight was a huge factor.

"Standing barefoot on sharp rocks is hard enough, but standing barefoot on sharp rocks with a huge weight on your shoulders is much worse."

For Howard, the only woman on the team, she is out to prove she is "tougher than any boy".

● For more information see <http://barefootimpi.org>

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