



Peaking at 70

By Bill Tyler

I have a severely autistic nephew and have always wanted to see Machu Picchu, the 'lost' city of the Incas. So in May I did a three-and-a-half day trek on the Inca Trail in Peru to raise funds for the National Autistic Society.

Thank goodness I did some hard training, just to build up strength, because there is no way you can acclimatise in England for the 4200m (13,780ft) of the highest pass on the Trail. After two days getting used to altitude in the old Inca capital of Cusco, deep in the Andes at a height of 3,400m, our party of 28 set out on a route now carefully controlled by the Peruvian authorities to prevent visitor numbers damaging the trail itself and the ecology around it.

Dead Woman's Pass

Almost outnumbered by porters, who carried all the camping gear, equipment and food, the group soon started to spread out as the trail steadily climbed up to Dead Woman's Pass, the highest of the three main passes. The uneven steps and inclines and rarefied atmosphere made progress quite slow on the steepest parts, especially when carrying 5 or

6 kilos of gear in a backpack. Some trekkers were affected by altitude sickness – one had to be carried down on a stretcher made from tree branches – but everyone suffered from shortage of breath.

I found this fairly daunting but, at two weeks short of my 70th birthday, I still outpaced some of those well under half my age! The scenery is magnificent, especially the cloud forest and the Inca fortifications and sacred sites. Almost cloudless skies meant sub-zero temperatures at night; morning starts at around 6.30 were decidedly chilly.

Awestruck

Although fascinating and in the most romantic setting, Machu Picchu was almost an anti-climax after the exhilaration of the trek itself. However, watching sunrise from the Inca Sun Gate, high above the ruined city, was magical; all of us were awestruck and a bit emotional.



At the top of Dead Woman's Pass

So far I have raised over £13,500 and hope to make it £1 for every 1ft of Dead Woman's Pass (13,780). You may have already put something in the collecting box at C W Andrew Pharmacy but if you would like to help me achieve my target please send a donation to NAS c/o 22 Southern Road, N2 9LE.

My allotment

By Sheila Armstrong

For me one of the great things about having an allotment is the feeling you don't have to dig out every single weed. We all know now that untamed areas of any garden attract wild life – are a positive bonus in fact – well that's how we justify them. It's the slightly dishevelled look that appeals to me. Not that you won't find immaculate plots, with fruit, flowers, vegetables and ponds, not to mention sheds, composts, polytunnels, wildlife gardens, bees, and sometimes a flourishing social life. Some of these (except for the social life) even attract set-up grants. More details from the numbers below.

As well as the fairly therapeutic exercise of digging, you have somewhere to take all that vegetable waste from the kitchen – your communal, or individual, compost heap; so you won't be fined by the council for not recycling enough.

Growing fruit and vegetables side by side with experts who give you advice and camaraderie in equal measure if you're lucky, is another of the benefits, as well as having really fresh food to take home.

So that's eco-friendly on two counts; Brownie points for recycling; fresh vegetables, air and exercise; taking a bit of profit from the supermarkets. Not forgetting the organic option. It's not surprising allotments are having a resurgence, witness the number of times allotments have featured on the television in the last year. And for people without gardens but a compulsion to grow things, they are a lifesaver. So an evening spent on the allotment after work is

relaxing, full of the feel-good factor.

Space available

Despite the proposed increase in charges from April 2005, there are still allotments available on some of Barnet's 50 sites. Those interested should contact Ted Green, Secretary of the Federation of Allotment and Horticultural Societies in Barnet on 01707 876 075, or Colin Nash, Allotment Officer for Barnet on 020 8359 7384, or colin.nash@barnet.gov.uk.

Walking for life

How many of us take walking for granted? Going from A to B, arriving without taking the time to enjoy the journey.

On the first two Mondays of each month the Walk for Life scheme encourages enjoyable walking in East Finchley as a way of maintaining your health.

Meeting at 10am in front of the café opposite the tennis courts in Cherry Tree Wood, the route for the walks makes the most of our local woodland treasures. A lap of Cherry Tree Wood and then of Highgate Wood exercises the body and stimulates the senses. Amid the birdsong you can see the leaves, blossom and flowers developing and changing, as you breathe in

the fresh scented air.

If you are among the estimated three-quarters of the nation's population who do not get enough exercise, these walks could be a great way to start.

The hour-long walks are free of charge and led, come rain or shine, by enthusiastic, trained volunteers, Chris Ward and Patricia Orr.

Personal challenge

Chris has recently completed a slightly more daunting walk. The Three Peaks Challenge involves reaching the top of the

highest peaks in Scotland, England and Wales in just 24 hours. Chris, who is the park keeper at Cherry Tree Wood, had sought sponsorship to scale Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowdon.

The aim of the challenge, which took place at the end of June, was to raise money to buy a modified vehicle for a close friend who was left paralysed by a horrific domestic accident last year. With a group of friends, Chris managed to complete all the climbs in 23 hours and 42 minutes.

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