

Great Wall of China Fundraising Adventure

In April this year I decided to embark on a personal challenge to raise money for the MS Australia – ACT/NSW/VIC and participate in a 10 day hiking challenge on the Great Wall of China. Throughout April to July I held several events and with the support of many people we raised a total of \$5800 for the MS Australia – ACT/NSW/VIC.

Finally in September I headed off to China to begin my adventure. After 14 hours I arrived in Beijing. Our first day in Beijing was a free day to explore the city before meeting our tour group and having our first dinner together.

Our 2nd day in Beijing was spent sight seeing around Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. During the afternoon we boarded the bus to travel 2 hours to our accommodation which was at the foot of the Wall. We finally caught our first views of the Great Wall of China. What a sight, this is what I had been waiting for since embarking on this journey.

For the next four days we would walk on a different section of the Wall each day. All the preparations I had undertaken leading up to the trip had not prepared me for how steep the terrain was and the amount of steps that we would encounter!

The first day we hiked up to Tiger Mountain, this part of the Wall is untouched by modern tourists. This day was quite tough even though we didn't walk as many kilometres as the following days. The walk up to the wall was quite steep but once we reached the top the scenery was spectacular, we could see for miles. On the hike back down to the village we walked along side the Wall as it is very old and is crumbling away in spots.



On the second day we hiked on the Gubeikou/Jinshanling section of the Wall. It was during this section that we had to scramble off the Wall to avoid the local military. We had to negotiate overgrown tracks and walk through corn fields until we could get back on the Wall at one of the Watchtowers. This part of the Wall was overgrown in places and in its natural un-repaired state. It wasn't until the end of the 2nd day that we encountered other tourists. It was an amazing feeling to be the only people on this part of the Wall.



Our walk today started back on the Wall where we had finished the day before. This part of the Wall is Jinshanling/Simatai section. It was on this part of the wall that we had beautiful clear skies for the first time in China. This part of the Wall has lots of steps that are both steep and of various sizes. The views were again amazing and we could see the wall for miles in both directions.



On the 4th and last section of the Wall we hiked up to one of the highest watchtowers called Wangjinglou. This means the tower from which you can see Beijing which is 150 kilometres away. We started the hike at 4am so we could reach the watchtower for sunrise. It was a beautiful time of the day to be on the Wall and well worth getting up so early for. It was only on the way back down that you could truly appreciate how high we had walked. This section of the Wall was very steep with no walls to hang onto if you happened to slip!



After walking on the Wall for 4 days we then travelled back to Beijing where we boarded the overnight train for Xian. The next day we were to conquer Mt Huashan! After arriving in Xian we had a shower and something to eat before traveling 2 hours to the foot of the mountain. Mt Huashan is one of China's five sacred Taoist mountains and has an elevation of 2160 metres.

This was the toughest walk we had encountered as it was uphill all of the way with lots of steps. We started around 1pm and didn't reach the peak where we were staying until around 6.30pm. As we got higher up the mountain the path got steeper and there were sections where the steps were cut into granite slopes. At these sections there are chains to steady yourself and to help pull yourself up. I would hate to imagine what would happen if you lost your footing in these sections.



After spending the night on Mt Huashan we headed back down the mountain on the cable car. We were all happy to take the easy way down after the previous day's walk up the mountain.

Our next stop was the Terracotta Warriors. It is believed that the emperor that reigned from 221 – 210 BC had the life sized warriors created to serve as bodyguards to protect him in death. The warriors were re-discovered in 1974 by a local farmer who was digging a well. The 1000's of warriors all standing to attention was quite a sight, with amazing attention to detail.



Before heading back to Beijing on the overnight train we spent some time in Xian. One of the highlights in Xian was riding the 14 km perimeter on the top of the city wall. The wall is 40 ft high and was built centuries ago to keep any intruders out of the city. The view from the top of the wall shows very different sides of the city.

After arriving back in Beijing it was time for some shopping before heading home. The markets in Beijing are full of bargains but you need to be wary as the initial price is hugely over inflated so you need to bargain hard. It's all a bit of a game.

Overall the trip was a fantastic experience, the highlight being the 4 days hiking on the Wall. It still amazes me that a structure that was built 100's of years ago is still standing today. The views are spectacular and certainly well worth visiting.