

GREAT WALL OF CHINA TREK

OCTOBER 2007

This fundraising trek was undertaken by Stuart Holmes on behalf of St Peter's Trust and Robin House on behalf of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen. Stuart was Immediate Past Master and Robin is Clerk of the **Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers Livery Company**.

Stuart writes:

"We flew to Beijing in a party of 60 trekkers organised by Classic Tours, paying all our own expenses, thus permitting all money raised to be channelled to the charities. Classic Tours proved to be first rate and we were soon in buses travelling to the North of Beijing to the first 'lodge' near a reservoir.

Day 1 Mutianyu - After the (daily) warm-up exercises, we started up hill through farms and orchards, catching our first glimpses of the Great Wall far above. The path became gradually steeper and we eventually arrived at the Wall. (Stuart is on the right)



We climbed some very steep steps which was good training for the days to follow. The weather was perfect with clear skies and 20 degrees C. We soon felt the weight of our rucksacks, filled mostly with bottles of water and a packed lunch. The Wall stretches for over 6000 km and was built to keep out the Mongol hordes to the North. The watchtowers are built at a distance apart of two arrow flights in order to cover all sections of the Wall. After 5 hours

walking we descended via a metal toboggan run one mile in length to the coaches below to travel to the next lodge. **Day 2** was a “training day”.

On the 3rd day we set off on foot from the lodge through the town and climbed up through a village and fields onto an old part of the wall. This was very different from the first day. The wall was narrower without any side protection, was crumbling away and overgrown with weeds. There was a sheer drop on both sides but we managed to avoid falling into the thorn bushes below. Some members of the party suffered from vertigo and had to be led by others.

With 60 people in the group the faster (younger) ones at the front had to wait for those (older ones) at the back to catch up. However, the guides made it impossible for anyone to be left behind.

This section was the most arduous but also the most rewarding. We started each day from where we had finished so we could look back and see the Wall snaking away over the mountains, knowing we had walked every step of it. We could also look ahead and appreciate how much more we had to complete! 2 hours into the first of these days, the strain began to tell from the unending and uneven steps but we kept going by remembering the charities we were supporting and our generous sponsors.



Physically, this was a demanding 5 days of trekking for an average 6 hours a day. We found a second wind on the third day and felt pleased that we had spent our time in training, although nothing had prepared us for the extent and variety of the steps.

Amazingly in the most difficult places, picnic lunches would appear out of nowhere. Large hard sandwiches with rather sickly fruit drinks were more than welcome! The food at our accommodation – no way could they be referred to as ‘Hotels’ was very predictable. Fortunately the Chinese beer, *Tsing Tao*, was very drinkable. Some evenings we would have

talks about China and Chinese customs – we now know that when the soup arrives, a Chinese meal is over! We were told that the Chinese pride themselves on having invented four very useful things – gunpowder, the compass, paper and printing.

At the end of the fourth day, some of us traversed the valley over the river by sliding down a wire. The final day began at 5 am when we trekked in the dark, up the steepest section of all, up 1200 steps to a height of 3000 feet to arrive at the top in time to see the sun rise over the mountains. On this day we were accompanied by army guards who were reportedly concerned that any gathering of foreigners might create a demonstration when the Communist party was having a conference in Beijing. When we arrived in the centre of Beijing to go to a restaurant for lunch, the entrance to it was up an escalator. Never had an escalator seemed such bliss!

Fundraising

This trek clearly caught the imagination of many and we were humbled by the generous donations which came in from all sides. To date over £10,000 has been raised for St Peter's Trust.

Second Week

Having flown all the way to China, it seemed a pity not to see more of it. We flew with 30 members of the trekking party to Xian to see the Terracotta Army and with 5 others to the amazingly exciting City of Shanghai. It was interesting too to see the preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. We wondered whether they would be ready on time!



This was truly the experience of a lifetime and we are most grateful for the unexpected and generous support that we received. *Stuart Holmes.*”

The Trustees are indebted to Stuart for his stalwart support – so far he has raised over £10,200. Thank you, Stuart.