

Three-Man Team Hikes Japanese Mountains to Raise Money for Mine Clearance

An expedition in 2001 that led three men through the mountains of Japan raised money and awareness for landmine clearance.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Introduction

In February 2001, two men set off from the United Kingdom on a journey scheduled to last 265 days. They planned to be the first to climb all of the Hyakumeizan—Japan's 100 mountains—as part of a 4,000-mile continuous walk. What makes them different from other mountain climbers? Their mission was not only to successfully complete the hike, but also to increase awareness about landmines and raise money to "clear a path to a safer world."

The Team

The hiking team was made up of three members. Tom Fearnough and Paul Briffa left the UK early in February and started the actual expedition on February 12. The third member of the party, Ben Davies, started out in mid-March and met with the others on the 21st. All three members of the team enjoy the outdoors and are avid hikers, so they willingly accepted the challenge of the Hyakumeizan. Tom was born in Japan, so he was returning to some of the places he saw as a young child.

The Journey

The Hyakumeizan are considered a "must do" by many Japanese climbers. The route spans 4,000 miles, and the team planned to complete the journey in approximately 265 days (80 mountain days, 150 walk days, 35 rest days). The

mountains average 7300 feet in height, the highest being Mt Fuji at 12,388 feet. Although the team hoped to keep the use of transport to a minimum, ferries were needed on three occasions. Transport was also used to get to the start point of the walk and return from the end point.

The trek took the team through a variety of environments, including the south's semi-tropical islands, the Japanese Alps' high peaks, Tokyo and Osaka's lively metropolitan areas, and Hokkaido's immense forests. Thus, they faced a wide range of climatic conditions, from snow-

storms to tropical typhoons, with the temperatures ranging from 5°F to 95°F.

The team kept a diary of their daily experiences along the journey, and they sent out e-mails through a mailing list to inform subscribers of updates. They posted entries for each day along their route detailing the events of the day. The diary, complete with pictures from various points along the course of the journey, can be viewed online at <http://www.unayouth.org.uk/landmines/diary.htm>.



Paul, Ben and Tom (L to R) pose on Mount Tanigawa, one of Japan's 100 mountains, which they hiked in a 10-month journey last year.

The Cause

While part of the team's goal was to be the first to climb all of the Hyakumeizan in a continuous walk without transportation, they hoped to do more than just that. Their primary goal was to raise money for mine field clearance through individual and corporate donations. Also, the team hoped to raise awareness of the landmine issue among the public through the attention their expedition would get from the media and the Internet.

The three members of "Japan's 100-Mountain Trek" walked to raise money and awareness for Adopt-A-Minefield (UK)TM, and for the Association for Aid and Relief (AAR Japan). This charity is currently trying to raise money for landmine clearance. The money they raised goes towards a landmine clearance program in Afghanistan run by the HALO Trust.

After learning of AAR Japan, the team decided that all the money raised in Japan from the beginning of September on would be donated to this campaign. One of the main reasons for doing so was that AAR's landmine campaign is well known in Japan, so people would be more willing to support it than the Adopt-A-Minefield campaign, which is based in the UK and the U.S. Also, since AAR is based in Japan, the team felt that they would be able to raise more money and publicity for landmine clearance there. However, donations raised outside Japan (and those raised in Japan prior to September) went toward "adopting" a mine field. The mine field and country that the team's trek will help to clear have not yet been determined. They will decide this once they know how much money they have raised.

The team's members are well aware of the threat posed by landmines and are committed to alleviating the suffering they cause. Tom saw the horrors of landmines first hand when he worked on his Master's Degree in Cambodia, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. Says Tom, "Many of us take for granted the freedom we have to climb mountains, hike through forests and wander off the beaten track. For those living

with the threat of landmines, these simple pleasures can cost them their lives. Cambodia is a country with a terrible past, and yet I couldn't help noticing life continues. When I visited the killing fields, I didn't leave dwelling on the atrocities of the past. It was the sound of children playing in a nearby school that had the deepest impact on me. The people of Cambodia have made a huge effort to put the past behind them. I felt the least I could do was to encourage people in the UK and Japan to help them to tackle the last hurdle, clearing the country of landmines."

Ben's passion to help alleviate the suffering caused by landmines is driven by what he calls "a more general humanitarian background." While he has not had any first-hand experience with landmines, his University background in Social Science gave him a desire to help others in need. When he learned about the trek from Paul, he was eager to make a difference by joining it.

Before setting out on the journey, Ben wrote the following in the team's diary: "I have chosen to do this trek and support Adopt-A-Minefield (UK)TM quite simply because it goes directly to the heart of the problem; it removes the landmines that kill and maim innocent people. It provides the opportunity for human beings to go back to making their life, and it helps provide the support needed by landmine survivors.

"I will not let myself slip back into that apathy that lets me glance over the problems of other human beings, I will not let the loss and destruction of life be something that is acceptable because it is inevitable. I have never had to face a war nor deal with the effects it has had on life after it has finished, but I am human. I am the same as that child in Cambodia and that man in Croatia, even though they are suffering in ways I find difficult to comprehend."

Conclusion

Although Tom, Paul and Ben were unable to finish climbing the Hyakumeizan, they still consider their trek a success. An excerpt from the last diary entry that Tom made before at-

tempting to finish the climb on his own sums up the team's perspective on their experience: "We all . . . had a shared goal: to raise as much money and awareness for landmine clearance as possible. I would like to thank all the people who pledged support to Paul and Ben. Your support has enabled us to raise enough money to do something amazing. Land will be made safe, houses will be built and children will be able to play outside without the threat of landmines." ■

*All photos courtesy of Tom Fearnough.

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The team enjoys their time spent on the summit of a mountain in the Japanese Alps.