

Quite a feat, filling the shoes of her ancestors

Patricia Glyn's adventure turned into a journey of self-discovery

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Adventure journalist Patricia Glyn spent four-and-a-half months last year walking 2200 kms from Durban to Victoria Falls, following the route her great-great-grand uncles took in 1863. For copies of her book, *Footing with Sir Richard's Ghost*, email patriciaglyn@wol.co.za

In addition to your walk you've climbed Kilimanjaro twice and spent three months at Everest Base Camp. Where does your adventurous spirit come from?

I was born and brought in Zambia and we were always out in the wild. But it was a question of losing my job in broadcasting and having to reinvent myself ... and I thought, well, let me do adventure journalism, and write and make movies about what I enjoy doing.

You were lucky to have those ancestors, then!

I know! Can you believe it? The diary had just been sitting there, in the family, winking at me all these years and I never looked at it. Even after my aunt lent it to me I used to dip into it and it was quite gory – the hunting stuff is quite gory – and there it all was.

Discover Health (Glyn's sponsor) estimated that its three million steps from Durban to Victoria Falls – how accurate is that?

It was about three million. You can work it out easily after you get your pace. One step at a time, you know what they say.

What was the furthest distance you covered in one day?

About 43km. I'd trained up, so that I could do back-to-back about 30km a day. The wagons (used in 1863) moved between 25 and 35km a day, six days a week but in the end (sticking to that) plan didn't work because my guys were never getting a break and neither was I. That's when I decided to renege on the old timetable and do in five days what I had been doing in six and that's when I had to up my distances to anything from between 35km to 43 km a day. So that's a marathon, five days a week.

It's important to keep your pace moderate and not try and do it too fast, otherwise the body does break down.

We Homo Sapiens were designed to walk. We women are very good at endurance and we get fitter and fitter and fitter.

How did you stay motivated during training?

Training is boring. Especially doing 30km or 40km a day in Jo'burg. I suppose it was the knowledge that every day I trained, I'd have a better chance of finishing, and I'm just so driven that I knew I had to, had to, had to finish. I'll never do it again like that. You cannot do it all, and I think that's why I was losing my cool so often.

What did you eat during the day?

I ate a lot of refined carbohydrates which is why I lost precisely 1kg! I cannot recommend it as a diet. When you camp for four-and-a-half months you need stuff that lasts well in boxes and can be easily transported so it was pasta, rice, bread – we used to make fresh bread every day. I was still a carnivore then, so I ate sausages and chops and things like that ... Lots of fruit and then just try and vary things, otherwise you get bored with the same food every day.

How many pairs of shoes did you go through?

I took two pairs and I was still wearing them for months after the expedition. Over half the expedition was in deep sand and shoes don't wear too badly in deep sand and also I'm a big believer in orthotics and podiatry – you have to go to a podiatrist, get them to analyse your gait and get inserts put in your shoes which are correct for your frame. Then, not only do the joints not wear out, but neither do your shoes, because your tread is correct.

Deep sand can't be fun to walk in?

Doing 35km a day in deep sand, like above the high-tide mark on a beach, gives you thundering calves and quite big thighs, too. Your muscles build up quite a lot, but then you sit down and write a book and the muscle goes, and the waist expands. Suddenly you've got your mother's body, and you wonder what the hell you did. Anyway, I'll get walking again and it will all go – hopefully.

How did you feel when you reached the end?

Terrible, terrible, terrible – I got very badly depressed for about five months and some of it was lack of endorphins, which are very happy hormones, and you've got those eight to 10 hours a day when you're walking and you come back to urban life and its horrendous. The people are very nice in Jo'burg, they're dynamic and visionary and they're energetic, but it's just that the noise levels are just too much and the insincerity – you can see it a mile away. All the stuff that's been hidden from you before is suddenly very clear.

You get back to town and things are very complex. ... just getting through daily life is a complex matter.

What did you miss most about the trip once you got home?

Sunrise and sunset – just golden starts and golden finishes to every day. Birdsong obviously and trees – trees were all I had out there for hours and hours on my own. They become your confidantes and friends ... *Ja*, trees, dawns and sunsets.

What did you most miss about home while you were on the trip?

I'm so comfortable out there, I love bucket showers and digging a hole to have your morning constitutional and I'm very comfortable in a tent. I like having minimal gear. I missed my cats, not much else.

What was the worst weather to walk in: rain, wind or heat?

I think probably rain and I was so glad that my ancestors went in the winter because I didn't have any of that. To put up your tent when it's raining and have everything wet and mud everywhere is just not funny so I was very glad we didn't go in that weather.

What did you learn about yourself on the trip?

You know, you surprise and delight and disappoint yourself continually out there. You are stretched to the absolute limit, so you're seeing the most heroic behaviour you're capable of and also the worst.

Learning to bite your tongue when it really matters and when it's so hard to do. I was so astounded by what I could do because ... navigation, GPS, stuff like that - I didn't know how to do that. I didn't know I could walk unarmed in Big Five territory and not be so scared I was going to cry and turn right back.

On every single section of that walk the bar was getting raised. I started off in an urban area and it just got wilder and wilder and wilder. Every week I'd have some new challenge and get terrified out of my wits and think 'I'm not going to be able to do this' and find that I could.

That's the wonder of learning that you can do anything you set your mind to ... Either that or you come home with your tail between your legs, and I'm far too proud.

You took a lot of film footage, too – what will you be doing with that?

Karin, my filmmaker, is in America at the moment trying to sell the movie and I'm just about to try and get a producer on board here.

Interview by Lesley Byram