

My China Challenge:

Walking the wall in aid of cancer



Amanda and husband Richard brave the Great Wall in aid of breast cancer



An emotional ending to a long and hard battle



Amanda & team conquer one of the many near vertical stairways

Having conquered a personal and devastating journey with breast cancer, Amanda Power recently returned from China after hiking 139 344 footsteps along the majestic (but gruelling) Great Wall of China. Husband Richard and her were part of a diverse group of 32 South Africans, ranging in age from 37 to 61 years, who travelled to Beijing in order to take part in an 85km hike along the Great Wall...

'My personal goal was to raise awareness for women like me whose lives have been irreparably changed by cancer at a young

age (I was 35 when diagnosed). I felt it important to spread public awareness about this dreaded disease, and somehow help others who have been diagnosed, or who are living with breast cancer.

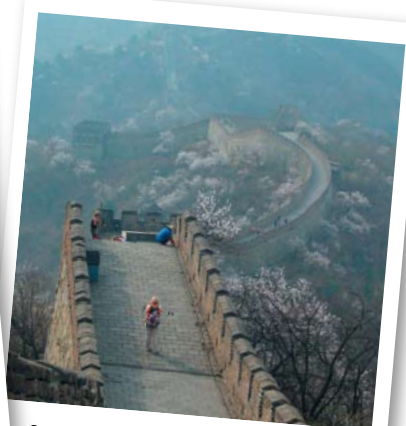
I feel proud to have accomplished my goal, although I didn't do it alone. Many affected young women, who have come into my life over the last two years since my initial diagnosis, helped me along the way – after all, I did the hike for them, carrying their remarkable spirits along with me on this journey of awareness. Of course there were so many others just as important – people who participated

in this Challenge with me, my parents and family who were always there to support and encourage me to continue the fight, my devoted friends and dedicated doctors...

China's hidden treasures

The Great Wall is an indescribably magnificent structure filled with the history of many Chinese dynasties. While hiking along the Wall, it was incredible to think that it has survived, having spanned almost 2 000 years of construction and de-construction by the human race – possibly this is what makes it such an awe-inspiring and iritual experience.

Having survived years of infertility, the loss of two children and finally the fight with breast cancer, Amanda Power and her husband Richard walked the Great Wall of China – all to raise awareness and funds for breast cancer patients across Southern Africa. Here she shares her diary...



On top of the world, the Great Wall in all its splendor

prepared us for this great challenge! It still feels so strange to be here; I can't believe that so many months of preparation and our sponsor's generosity has enabled us to take part in this life-changing experience. The start of today's hike was from a remote village named Jinshanling, at the best preserved part of the Great Wall. The Wall starts from the Wangjinglou Tower in the east and ends at Longyukou in the west. It has five main passes and 67 watchtowers. It's amazingly scenic! The Wall itself lived up to all of our expectations – it really is so impressive to the eye!

Today's discovery: one doesn't walk the Great Wall, one climbs it! We ended our hike in the quaint village of Gubeikou, which is located along the Yanshan Mountain Range in the north-east of Miyun County (approximately 190km from Beijing). This section of the Great Wall is the bastion protecting the northern gateway to the capital and has 143 watchtowers, many of which are famous cultural relics.

Monday, 6 April: Trek Jinshanling to Simatai

This morning we enjoyed a hearty breakfast at the lodge before today's early departure. Today we hiked a full day on the Wall – with weather so mild and warm. Many parts of the Wall had uneven broken steps and loose rubble, we had to keep our eyes on our feet can't afford to slip and break an ankle!

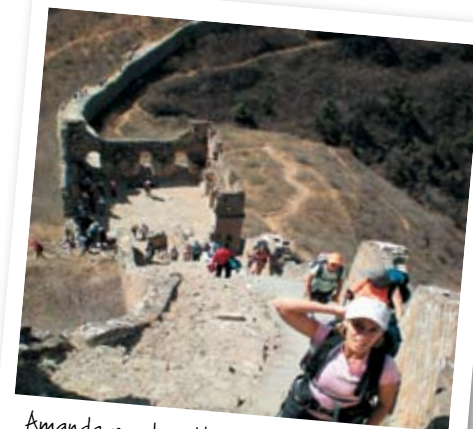
At the end of a long, hard day's climb we descended into the Simatai Valley. The Simatai Great Wall stretches about 5km from the Wangjinglou Tower in the east and connects to the Jinshanling Great Wall in the west. It has 35 beacon towers. Washing clothes and off to bed!

Tuesday, 7 April: Trek Simatai to Gangfang

Today we trekked back to the Simatai area of the Great Wall thereafter continuing our hike to the highest point on the eastern section, where we were able to see some spectacular views! After a three hour wal, we then moved off the Wall and through Gangfang village where we were able to meet and exchange gifts with the village children. A very rural setting indeed!



Heads down and climbing!



Amanda reaches the top of another 70% incline – an astounding accomplishment!

Our accommodation in various lodges along the way was on the whole clean but basic. It took a while to get used to Chinese ablutions but we weren't complaining – we were lucky enough to be able to have a hot shower at the end of each tiresome day! The food the lodges provided was always abundant, with a good selection of meat (mostly pork and chicken) and vegetables – although often we weren't sure just what it was we were eating!

I recorded the highlights of our journey in a diary I kept along the way:

Sunday, 5 April: Our first day's hike Nervous but excited.

I hope all of our training has adequately



Amanda and Richard admire the view from one of the world's seven wonders...

Wednesday, 8 April: Trek Wuzoulou Mountain

Enjoyed a day's trekking through the Wuzoulou Mountain Nature Reserve, the last part of the Wall area built in the Ming dynasty. Today's trek started at 300m above sea level and rapidly rose to 1 000m. What a challenging trek! We climbed up-hill for at least three hours, through slippery shrubbery and forest. Enjoyed lunch alongside one of the watchtowers – what views! I'm trying to take pictures in my mind so I'll never forget the beauty of this country.

Thursday, 9 April: Trek Black Dragon Pool Park

Today we hiked the very scenic Black Dragon Pool Park, parts of which looked like a set from a movie scene – so picturesque. The trek began on local trails as we ascended to the other side of Wuzoulou Mountain. Once again lots of loose rubble and rocks underfoot. Passed a very iced-up river with about 60cm of rock-hard ice! We ascended the plateau at the top of the gorge and then climbed down into the beautiful Black Dragon Pool National Park.

Friday, 10 April: Trek Mutianyu

Our sixth and final day's trek. The Wall at Mutianyu has been renovated and has some of the best views of the whole Challenge winding through great mountains and high ridges. There are 22 watchtowers on this part of the Great Wall.

In general, team moods were sombre as today's trek was our final challenge. Gone was the enthusiastic 'pounding of pavements' we had known for the previous five days. No-one wants this amazing journey to end. No-one wants to leave the Wall which has found a lifelong place in our hearts. As we climbed the 436 step Heavenly Stairway (with its steep incline of approximately 70°) in our final ascent, emotions ran high. What a magnificent ending!

Forming lifelong friendships

In some ways it was amazing to reach the end of our challenge, to be able to stand and look back on the ups and downs we had just conquered. This was an immense physical achievement, especially with a body that's been bruised and battered by the dreadful effects of chemotherapy.



The end of the road: Amanda and team achieve their mission

But there was also far more than this – there was an incredible feeling of pride and fulfilment, almost a completeness to the end of a long and hard journey, both on this challenge and with cancer. I certainly took the time to say, 'Right, Cancer, you have ruled my life and my mind for two years now – it's time to set me free and let me live my life'.

As a team we enjoyed champagne and took group photos at the top, then took a toboggan ride down from the Great Wall to the car park below. What a treat for our tired and aching legs! Each of us experienced the Great Wall differently. We came home having been introduced to diverse emotions and opinions, which only made our journey more interesting.

Of course, our hike wasn't all hard work; we also had plenty of fun, mostly provided by one particular hiker who entertained us with her antics and endless production of champagne, wine and the like along the way. She was never without her sherpa in tow – who she often alerted by a mere blow on her whistle! Another now dear friend, always managed to produce her dainty teacup, kept in its original packaging, for her cappuccino during our mid-morning 'tea' break on the Great Wall!

We also found the Chinese sherpas to be a great form of entertainment, and what incredible fitness levels they have! They hiked most days with us, only to have to hike home at the end of a long day (while we were thinking about who was going to be first in the warm shower!).

An end brings new awareness

We will never forget the remote parts of China we passed through. We have a new respect for the villagers of rural China, who lead a tough life – it really brought home how truly blessed we are to come from a country as beautiful as South Africa.

Within our team, we had the common bond of cancer, which as devastating as it is,

helped form the beginning of many valued friendships. Richard and I feel honoured to have been a part of such a varied group of people, many of whom we have grown to respect and honour purely for their determination to conquer life's challenges for something they so truly believe in.

By completing this very special fund-raising event, we managed to raise over R750 000 for the various charities involved. The public's generosity was (and still is) endless and we are proud to say that funds are still coming in. This Challenge has shown us that we can make a difference to the lives of people affected by breast cancer and in doing so celebrate the courage of survivors (and their families) affected by cancer.

On a personal level, it was wonderful for me to have my Richard, by my side. What special memories we are so lucky to have to hold on to, and how wonderful to know that together we can overcome any challenges thrown across our lives' paths. We will never forget how we battled, what mountains – literal and otherwise – we climbed in our attempt to raise a message of hope for cancer sufferers worldwide.

Amanda is currently raising funds for for St Luke's Hospice in Kenilworth Cape Town. If you would like more info on how to help out or are battling breast cancer and need emotional support, feel free to contact Amanda on 083 799 6443 or email her at amanda@nanoson.com.



My tower of strength, Richard, and I building happy memories