

# Take a hike



Fall 2007

## Because it's there: blazing a trail to Everest Base Camp in a TrailRider

The BCMOS TrailRider is going to be a familiar feature on the foothills of the world's tallest mountain this trekking season.

Two separate TrailRider expeditions by mountaineers with significant physical disabilities are being made to Nepal's Everest region between November 2007 and March 2008.

With one wheel and "Sherpas" back and front, the TrailRider has been described as a cross between a rickshaw and a wheelbarrow. It is a specially engineered wilderness access vehicle that has twice summited Kilimanjaro and also allows countless school outings and family afternoons across Canada.

Pippa Blake, of Victoria, BC, and her 14-strong Rise Above Barriers team take a three-week trek in the Nepal Himalaya in November. Starting at Lukla (2,860 m), a short flight from Kathmandu, their itinerary takes them up to Base Camp (5,380 m).

Blake, speaking just before the trek, outlined that her main concerns were keeping warm and dealing with fatigue. MS has affected her circulation, making the 57-year-old particularly prone to cold; she also tires easily, but aims to take things slow.

It is a poignant trip because Blake had been all set to trek in Nepal 20 years ago, but work intervened. She figured she would get another chance, but was subsequently diagnosed with MS "and ended up in a wheelchair." But Blake's grown-up sons intervened to finally make the dream reality.



Pippa Blake



Eric Bjarnason



Highlights: Everest, roof of the world – within reach!

### BCMOS – our year

British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society (BCMOS) operates an intensive summer program – and also has TrailRiders for rent year round (\$10/day).

The 2007 season saw 90 program hikes. These included regular Wednesday-to-Friday outings at Vancouver's Pacific Spirit Regional Park, weekend theme hikes to various locations and overnight treks to Golden Ears Park. These camping trips involved two or three people with disabilities.

Of these 90 hikes, 32 were by people new to the TrailRider, and 21 by children. An additional 15 people rented TrailRiders to explore their own destinations.

BCMOS once again took part in the Rick Hansen Foundation's Wheels in Motion event, held at PNE Playland. In addition, the TrailRider was displayed for two weeks at Mountain Equipment Co-op in Vancouver. BCMOS was also involved with the BC Parks activity day in July.

This year also saw the launch of the gliding program, with 40 flights – see Page 2.

"I have always loved the mountains," she said. "The Himalaya is the ultimate – the ultimate clear sky, the ultimate mountains.

"This is my dream. I rather let it go because

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## Everest – Cont. from Page 1

I thought it would never happen.”

Blake, who formerly worked as a ski instructor so she could be in the mountains, has a highly skilled team – two physiotherapists, a paramedic and other skilled professionals – that has made seven mini-expeditions, including difficult BC hikes, in preparation.

As a legacy of their journey, the Rise Above Barriers Society will donate Blake’s Black Diamond TrailRider to Recreation Integration Victoria so that others with disabilities on Vancouver Island can use it year-round to experience wilderness parks and vacation spots with their family and friends.

This is going to be followed by an unrelated expedition to the same destination. North Vancouver firefighter Eric Bjarnason, who is also a member of North Shore Rescue, heads out in March on a 23-day trip that takes in both acclimatization time in Kathmandu and R&R in the jungles of Royal Chitwan National Park. He has two BCMOS clients confirmed, but can take more TrailRiders to meet demand.

Bjarnason first got involved with BCMOS in 2001, when he began planning Jim Milina’s 2002 CORD expedition to Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, East Africa. It was the first wheelchair expedition to summit.

“I hurt my back years ago, climbing in Bolivia,” said Bjarnason. “I wondered what would happen to me if I was disabled and not able to go out into the backcountry. I came up with the idea of taking someone with disabilities climbing, and contacted Jim.”

The experienced climber can take other TrailRider users with him to Base Camp, and also plans on running TrailRider expeditions through Africa and South America. Bjarnason’s website is <http://couragetocarryon.com> - call him at: 778-338-3019.



Down to Earth: BCMOS arranged 40 flights during summer 2007.

## BCMOS reaches new heights

The latest BCMOS adventure got off the ground this year: gliding.

The program, which ran from May to September, used Vancouver Soaring Association’s facilities at Hope Airfield. Thirty people with significant disabilities enjoyed 40 flights, with half getting to take the controls for a while.

Participants were transferred into a glider, which was pulled aloft by a Cessna L-19. Once the towrope was jettisoned they flew high above the towering Cascade Mountains, enjoying flights of between 45 minutes and an hour, including an aerobatics option – a loop.

Gliding program coordinator James Willetts, who is quadriplegic, flew a glider for the first time last year, and since then has been urging others with significant disabilities to try the sport. “It puts smiles on people’s faces – and that’s my reward,” he said. “It’s a rush.”

Participant Dan Andrews, a quadriplegic following a heli-logging accident in January, described his flight: “Absolutely incredible. It brought me up when I was feeling down. The view was incredible.”

Fellow flyer Sid Evans described his two loops as “real sweet.” He said: “It was 100 per cent freedom. You are up there with the eagles. The last thing you think about is that you are a quadriplegic.”

Jo-Anne Burleigh, resident therapist at Vancouver’s GF Strong rehab hospital said activities like gliding are vital to the well-being of patients recovering from spinal cord injury. “If people have been active in the past, it’s important to get them back to doing things to show them that they still can be active. It exposes them to the opportunities that are out there – there are so many possibilities, so many things to try. We encourage people to participate.”

[bcmos@disabilityfoundation.org](mailto:bcmos@disabilityfoundation.org) 604-688-6464 ext. 117