

Ready for the World

Web-posted Apr 11, 2004

Local traveler to participate in adventure that will have her spanning the globe

By TRACY WARD

Of The Daily Oakland Press

She's ridden camels across the Gobi Desert, raced behind sled dogs in the Arctic and climbed Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro, so a little three-week travel adventure around the world should be a breeze, right? Not exactly.

Carole Herdegen, a Bloomfield Hills travel writer and photographer competing in this year's GreatEscape2004: The Global Scavenger Hunt, will be circumnavigating the globe, going from Los Angeles to New York the long way - 10 countries across four continents - in just 23 days.

Think "The Amazing Race" meets "Survivor," but with five-star accommodations.

"I don't think it's going to be easy," says Herdegen, a grandmother of six.



Carole Herdegen sits in her Bloomfield Hills home, in a room adorned with photos that she has taken from around the world. -**The Daily Oakland Press / JOSE JUAREZ**



She hasn't met her travel partner in person yet, although the two have talked on the phone. Travelers have almost no information about where they will go - they won't even know their first destination until they're onboard a 747 over the International Dateline.

Herdegen has to carry what she packs, so she'll pack light. Her one extravagance? Protein bars for energy and her comfortable old workout tennis shoes, which may not survive the return trip.

The race, with 25 two-person teams, starts Tuesday and ends May 9 in New York City.

GreatEscape is the brainchild of William D. Chalmers, a traveler writer and previous winner of another round-the-world race.

Chalmers, in an interview from Santa Monica, Calif., said he decided to start his own race in 2000, but as a charity event, to raise money for charities in different countries around the world, such as UNICEF, CARE and Doctors Without Borders.

In the GreatEscape, competitors pay to compete - about \$8,000 - and raise additional money for the charities through pledges.



Herdegen shot this photograph on one of her trips from around the world. -

The event, unfortunately, was canceled in 2001 after 9/11 and canceled again last year because of the war in Iraq and the SARS outbreak.

Glory, not money

Competitors this year will have to solve clues, track down items in a giant scavenger hunt and maneuver in countries where they don't speak the languages. Prize money was awarded in previous years, but this year, it's been taken off the table, he says.

"Money does really strange things to people," Chalmers says.

So should competitors fear something like "Fear Factor" challenges?

"They'll be going to places where bugs are served on a daily basis, where snake is served, dog is served," he says.

There may be karaoke, elephant rides and belly dancing in their future, but he can't say for certain.

"There is nothing death-defying - this isn't an athletic competition, it's really a challenge of the mind," he says. "It's up to them to use savvy and strategy."

In Thailand, once, he asked competitors to find a white elephant. Trouble was, there were no white elephants. One intrepid team spotted one Chalmers didn't know about on a billboard, snapped its picture and earned points towards winning.



Carole Herdegen has collected photos, books and brochures related to her world travels. - **The Daily Oakland Press / JOSE JUAREZ**

To know more

For information about the GreatEscape race, to apply as a competitor or learn about the GreatEscape foundation, visit their site at www.globalscavengerhunt.com.

Chalmers wouldn't give any hints about the secret destinations, except to say competitors for obvious reasons would not be traveling through the Middle East, and no "Axis of Evil" countries.

Experience counts

Competitors stay in lush accommodations, with gourmet food, hot showers and laundry service. Every night, they'll meet at 10 o'clock for drinks and to compare war stories, he says, adding parts of the GreatEscape are being filmed for a documentary.

Hundreds of people apply to compete. Few have Herdegen's experience and few are selected to participate.

"We get people who go to Florida and Cancun," Chalmers says, "but if we dropped them in the middle of Delhi for three days, we'd never see them again."

"Some people think it's a TV show. We kind of look at them and roll our eyes."

Herdegen was just notified three weeks ago that she was selected, so she hasn't had a lot of time to raise money for the charities. She hopes friends and acquaintances will step forward to help out.

Her travel experience should help. At 5-foot-2, she's petite, but tougher than her manicured nails might lead strangers to believe. She works out every day, cycles and skis.

When her husband, now retired, worked for GM, they lived overseas for 18 years in four countries. Her kids were raised in British schools.

Since then, she has traveled around the world, eating roasted guinea pig in Peru ("It was crunchy and very well done," she remembers).

In Australia, while camped for weeks in remote parts of aboriginal Australia, her host offered her green ants for a snack - living green ants.

"I had it in my hand and his little legs were going and he was squirming about and I could not eat it," Herdegen says. "They're supposed to taste like lime."

She has already traveled much of the world - Bhutan, Borneo, Zaire, Egypt, Cuba, New Guinea, Iran, through rainforests and across tundras, counting dolphins in New Zealand and helping to save bandicoots in Australia as an EARTHWATCH volunteer.

And then there was Kilimanjaro, perhaps the biggest challenge - until now.

"I saw it in peoples' eyes - they thought, she's never going to make it at that rate," Herdegen says of her ascent up the great mountain.

But she did, all the way to the summit, more than 18,000 feet up.

As for the GreatEscape, her husband and her friends may think she's a little nutty, but she's up for the challenge. She'll catalog her adventures along the way on her Web site, www.travelsite.com, where Friends and well-wishers will be able to monitor her progress in the GreatEscape.

The reward won't just be in finishing, it will be in winning. She's determined.

"I really want to be known as the World's Greatest Traveler," she says.