

# THE TRIP THAT CHANGED MY LIFE ...

## BRAAM MALHERBE



This brave adventurer and runner is changing the world one smile at a time

Braam 15km before the end of his Great Wall of China run. The mountain he's on is the 'Old Dragon that drinks from the Bo Hai Sea'

**I**n December 2006 my running partner, David Grier, and I became the first people in the world to run the entire length of the Great Wall of China. We ran 4 218km in 98 days, which meant we covered just over a full marathon (43km) each day.

The rural northwest of China is extremely barren and vast. It often felt as if I was on another planet, in an alien landscape. Our hottest day in the Gobi Desert was 41°C and our coldest day in the mountains was -22°C. The average for the last month or so was minus 13. Our accumulated ascents were the equivalent of the height of Everest 14.8 times.

I had two reasons for doing the expedition: firstly, I work with children, taking them into nature where I share nature's lessons with them – the goal being to help them see their uniqueness and potential. My mantra is 'nothing is impossible'. When Professor Tim Noakes of the Sports Science Institute said he believed what we were going to do was physically impossible, I saw it as an opportunity to show children that if you believe in yourself and have big dreams, you can achieve anything.

Secondly, we took Operation Smile SA as our preferred charity and raised enough money to

fund corrective facial surgery for 54 children, who could literally smile for the first time. These children are born with facial disfigurements; while they often look ugly on the outside, they also feel ugly inside. They are ostracised and don't go to school. I will never forget a little girl called Michelle looking at her new face in the mirror as happy tears ran down her cheeks.

In 2008 David and I also became the first people to run the entire coastline of South Africa from the Namibian border to Mozambique – a distance of 3 300km. This time, with Round Table South Africa, we raised over R2 million. This translates into more than 400 children receiving life-changing surgery.

The journeys were truly life-changing and I've discovered a humility and gratitude I never had before the expedition. I am more aware of my ego than I used to be and tend to focus on bigger issues and not sweat the small stuff. Making a difference in the lives of others is something we can all do.

• At the end of 2010, Braam and other world-first adventurers embark on the Earth Challenge – a global expedition to address the climate crisis, and what we need to do to ensure a sustainable future for our children. [braammalherbe.com](http://braammalherbe.com) ●

### BRAAM'S PICKS

#### WHAT ADVENTURERS PACK

A multi-tool (like a Leatherman); a GPS (preferably a Garmin); good footwear – Adidas works well for both David and I; ear plugs, for a good night's sleep when there are snorers in the team.

#### SOUTH AFRICA'S COASTLINE

I enjoy the desolation and openness of the West Coast, but then the south and east coasts – with the Whale Trail, Otter Trail and warm Zululand waters – are equally spectacular.

#### HOLIDAY SPOTS IN SA

- I enjoy the divers' huts at Noup (in the De Beers diamond zone) on the West Coast. Dudley the owner gives a superb talk on fossils in the area. 083-286-7080, [coastofdiamonds.co.za](http://coastofdiamonds.co.za)
- Crawford's Beach Lodge at Cintsas, near East London, is stunning, with fantastic walks and excellent accommodation and food. 043-738-5000, [crawfordscabins.co.za](http://crawfordscabins.co.za)
- Wavecrest Resort on the Wild Coast boasts the most southerly mangrove swamp in Africa. 047-498-0022, [wavecrest.co.za](http://wavecrest.co.za)