

Naked ambition as rowers set to feel exposed on ocean waves

Pirates, sharks and whales are some of the challenges two Teddington men will face when they cross the Indian Ocean in a self-built boat to raise money for charity. But to top it off the pair will be doing much of the rowing naked. DAN MENHINNITT finds out why

Two Teddington rowers are planning to strip off for a perilous 4,350 mile trip across the Indian Ocean in a self-built boat to raise cash for charity.

Daring Roger Haines and Tom Lee will have to manage around 2.6m oar strokes during the mammoth challenge which will see them travel from the coast of Australia to Mauritius.

The pair will brave 50ft waves, 17 species of shark, 10 types of whale and even pirates – and they will do it completely nude for most of their 105-day journey in order to avoid chafing.

They hope to raise £100,000 for charity, as well as become the first duo to row across the Indian Ocean, the third largest in the world.

Roger and Tom will be one of 30 teams competing in the Indian Ocean Race 2009, and despite putting £30,000 of their own money into the contest they still need £40,000 for items including a medial kit, a life raft, insurance and food provisions.

They need businesses to sponsor them to help them raise money for Asthma UK and an educational trust in Sierra Leone which funds scholarships to attend Fourah Bay College in the West African country's capital Freetown.

The pair's boat, christened Dream It, Do It, took over 750 hours to assemble and measures just 23.4ft long and 6.3ft wide. They will be rowing 24 hours a day in alternating two-hour shifts.

Roger, 50, the captain of the Skiff Club and ex-Royal Navy diver Tom, 44, both from Broom Park, will set off in April 2009 with teams due to arrive at Port Louis, Mauritius, up to 105 days later.

Dad-of-two Roger said: "I'm very lucky to have such a supportive family."



Feeling cheeky: The duo practice for their journey

partner Amanda and crew mate Tom, without who I would not be able to realise what's been a dream for nine years – to row an ocean while leaving behind a legacy to help others

through the wonderful work of the charity Asthma UK."

Tom, a representative of De La Rue for Africa said: "I have had some challenges in my life, serving in Iraq in 2003, but this is taking things to a new level. My wife has been very supportive, although I know it will be difficult for her to manage our sons, aged six and eight, for four months. The boys are very keen to come with us."

Roger was inspired to fundraise for Asthma UK after suffering from the condition as a child. Tom wants to help the African project he helped create with the Bank of Sierra Leone in 2005.

This scheme picks the top stu-

dents from the government schools and offers them a full scholarship to the university in Freetown. The project is now in its third full year of operation.

They have already received sponsorship or donations from a number of businesses including Richmond Physiotherapy, PR Superstar, David Clulow Opticians and Nova Brick.

For more information on the race, go to indianoceanrace2009.com. To sponsor the pair call Roger on 07739 131 031.

Remember to take the sun-tan lotion: Roger Haines and Tom Lee aim to raise £100,000 for Asthma UK



Editor's view
Helen Barnes



Come and see how arty we are, Boris

If there is one thing that makes our boroughs stand out from the rest of the capital it is the arts. It is something that is open to people from all backgrounds and reflects the cultural diversity of the area.

Watermans Arts Centre in Brentford is recognised nationally for providing opportunities for Asian artists and cultural activities targeted at Asian audiences.

Then there is the annual Mela at Gunnersbury Park, open air concerts at Kew Gardens and Marble Hill Park, theatre in the grounds of York House as well as the mainstream shows at Richmond Theatre, many of them coming straight from the West End and attracting stellar casts.

Indeed, that is why this part of south-west London is home to so many artists, actors and playwrights – many of whom carved out their early careers in small amateur dramatic groups or at art colleges here.

So for London Mayor Boris Johnson to sweepingly summarise that art and cultural provision is "patchy" is something of a surprise.

We invited Mr Johnson to come and visit some of the venues and groups that have helped put us on the cultural map. But it seems we still have some way to go to persuade the Mayor to leave City Hall and swap the delights of the capital – which his new cultural strategy harks on about at length – to see the wealth of events and the commitment of arts groups based in our boroughs.

If there is one thing Mr Johnson should do it is to put his money where his mouth is and show financial support for arts organisations that are already feeling the pinch.

Earlier this year Watermans faced the prospect of having to drastically scale down its arts programme after being told its Arts Council funding was being axed. The arts centre had some good news earlier this month when the Arts Council confirmed a three-year grant – £240,000 a year – to fund Watermans' Asian arts programme.

Without it the projects would have been cut. And it is not just the big arts centres that need support. Smaller organisations, which are often the starting point for young artists, also need help.

There is some mention of financial aid in the strategy but it seems to place greater emphasis on bringing events from the capital out to London boroughs.

That is not a bad idea in principle, but where do we stand if that is the case?

Often the more affluent boroughs – which we fall into – are overlooked in these circumstances so I guess that means that our "patchy" culture will continue as it is.

And long may it continue.