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Comments for The West Australian

PERTH MEN FINISH GRUELING RACE ACROSS DESERT FOR SKIN CANCER

Six Perth men have completed a gruelling seven-day, 250 kilometre individual foot race across some of the toughest terrain and one of the most brutal climates in the world to raise money for the Scott Kirkbride Melanoma Research Centre (SKMRC).

Brothers Garry, Patrick, Michael and Jamie Prendiville, along with family friends Bill Biffin and Mark Dawson finished the Gobi March on Saturday to raise funds for skin cancer research at the SKMRC.

The event – also known as “The Race of No Return” - wound through mountainous terrain in Western China with altitudes reaching 3,000 metres across rocks and barren terrain, small, but steep mountains, grassy oases, freezing rivers and villages so ancient that the only mode of transport is by donkey.

Each of the 190 participants from 26 countries around the world were required to be fully self-supported and carried all food, water, medical gear and clothing required to complete the course.

With the team motto “Make pain your friend” - Team Prendiville certainly endured extreme pain over the seven days of the race. In temperatures soaring as high as 45 degrees, the team members suffered everything from altitude sickness, blisters, and groin injuries to uncontrollable vomiting nausea and dizziness. One of the team members even developed a blister below his toenail and was required to have his toenail drilled to pop the blister!

In an online blog posted on the Gobi March official website, Jamie Prendiville wrote about the pain endured by the team.

“Day one – hard, day two – harder, day three – harder, day four – the hardest day of my life...,” he wrote.

“Day four – the most spectacular scenery ever with the 'gateway to heaven' – the only problem is that to get to heaven first you must die. The climb to the summit was unbelievably hard and at one stage I could only go 12 steps at a time without bending over and resting.”

On top of the pain, the team was dealt their fair share of obstacles including several sandstorms that wiped out their tents, a scorching climate and cultural differences best summed up when the boys observed a local man eating a live snake!

According to Michael Prendiville – who kept an email diary throughout the event - day five was the toughest day and involved racing across 80 kilometres in a feat which took the team 24 hours to complete, but brought out the team’s spirit and camaraderie.

“I do remember looking around and thinking to myself that this has been one of the most unforgettable days of my life,” he wrote.

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Day four saw the team sore, battled and blistered with the older members of the team, Garry Prendiville and Billy Biffin, suffering immense pain and in an amazing display of comradeship, the younger members of the team took most of the older team members' loads to make it lighter for them.

In his online blog, Jamie Prendiville summed up day five.

"The team spirit was superb with the younger two, Critta (Michael Prendiville) and Bada (Patrick Prendiville), electing to stay off the pace to support the older guys," he wrote.

"Garry (Dog) was in so much pain he needed somewhere between seven and 10 injections, in that 24 hours, into the Iliotibial bursa of both knees. Bent Beak Billy Biffin had severe nausea, dizziness and eventual vomiting and this combined with the inability to take in any oral fluid made his chance of finishing very poor.

"He tooth and nailed it through and with the help of the excellent medical crew (including myself) finally got to the line."

In an online blog also posted on the Gobi March official website, Patrick Prendiville described day five of the event and in particular he described the amazing effort by Billy Biffin.

"Let me say most people would have died if they had experienced what he has over the past 36 hours," he wrote.

"Billy almost did..... suffering from a strained groin injury, plied with pain killers and antibiotics, and debilitated by nausea and low blood pressure, he practically walked the 78km without being able to hold in any food or water and dry reaching every hour or so.

"I can't begin to explain the sequence of events that took place during the week to produce the hardest day of all of our physical lives."

Team Prendiville are now "de-blistering" in Bali and waiting for their feet and joints to reduce back down to their normal size as they plan their next challenge!

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