

Summit Success for Intrepid Becky

A librarian from Braunston has raised thousands of pounds for charity by successfully climbing Mont Blanc — the highest mountain in Western Europe.

By Gemma Ibbotson

Located in the Alps mountain range, Mont Blanc stands 4810m high and lies on the border between France and Italy. The permanently snow-covered summit gives the mountain its name, which means 'White Mountain' in English. Those tough enough to reach the top are greeted not only by breath-taking views, but also by dangerously low temperatures and ferocious winds.

Becky Arnott, 32, has recently returned from conquering this majestic mountain, and her feat has raised an astonishing £14 000 for charity. Becky has always enjoyed family

walks in the countryside, but climbing Mont Blanc was significantly harder than anything she had ever done previously. Before preparing for the challenge, she had never climbed higher than 1000m and she had never been on a mountain in the snow.



Becky on her way up to the summit of Mont Blanc, displaying her new skill with ice axes. Despite the difficulty of the ascent, she still had a smile on her face.

"My feet felt as though they were stuck in cement and I began to doubt that I could reach the top."

"I knew that it wasn't going to be a walk in the park," joked Becky. "I did some training on snowy mountains in Scotland and I hiked up two smaller mountains in the Alps to

get used to the kinds of conditions I would face on Mont Blanc. I also had to learn how to walk on snow using crampons — spikes that fit to the bottom of your shoes — and an ice axe. This was tricky at first because it was much more technical than anything I was used to." Training complete, Becky set off on the gruelling two-day climb in early April.

"Becky had prepared well for the challenge, but even experienced mountaineers can find Mont Blanc a real struggle," explained Jean-Claude Durand, a mountain guide who accompanied Becky. "The climb is demanding and dangerous, and bad weather can turn a safe situation on its head within minutes. The high altitude is also a major problem because the higher you climb, the less oxygen there is, making it more difficult to breathe. Many people feel sick or dizzy as a result."

"I did find the altitude the hardest bit," agrees Becky. "I spent some time high in the mountains to let my body get accustomed to it, but all that climbing was tough going. As we tackled the final ascent, my lungs were burning, my feet felt as though they were stuck in cement and I began to doubt that I could reach the top. Thankfully, Jean-Claude kept encouraging me and I was spurred on by remembering the children at Holden Park. I cried tears of joy as we arrived on the summit."

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It is the patients and staff at Holden Park Children's Hospital who will benefit from Becky's epic achievement. Becky's young nephew, Kamal, spent three months there last year and Becky was keen to give something back to the hospital. "Kamal received brilliant care at Holden Park and thanks to everyone there, he made a full recovery."



It's easy to see how Mont Blanc (the 'White Mountain') gets its name. The beautiful summit is permanently covered in snow.

"I was speaking to one of the nurses about wanting to help the hospital, and he mentioned that they were trying to raise some money to create a new garden space. That was the spark of inspiration for climbing Mont Blanc."

The staff at Holden Park are understandably delighted — not least because this is one of the largest amounts of money ever raised for the hospital by one person. In the garden which the money will help to create, the children will be able to play, sit outdoors and relax and even help the staff do some gardening to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers. Staff are hopeful that access to the outdoors may reduce the children's recovery time, as well as make their stay more enjoyable. "We'll be able to offer more activities to help the children build up strength and distract them from their problems," said a nurse from Holden Park.

"I never dreamt I'd raise so much money!"

Becky was taken aback by the amount of money that was donated. "People gave so generously," she said. "I'd like to thank everyone who donated — I never dreamt I'd raise so much money!"

Becky's challenging ascent certainly seems to have caught people's attention. "I can't even imagine trying to climb such a big mountain, so Becky's willingness to do this for charity made a real

impression on me," said Patricia Ohuruogo, a local councillor who donated to Becky's cause. "I was thrilled when I heard that she had been successful, and it's wonderful that she has managed to raise so much money."

Following her fundraising success, Becky is planning to attempt more challenges to support Holden Park in the future. We wish her all the best in completing her next quest — whatever it may be!

Holden Park needs to raise more money — and you can help.

- Come to the cake sale at the hospital on 24th May from 11am to 2pm.
- Join in the 5km charity fun run around the Holden Park grounds on 15th June from 10am.



If you would like to get involved, contact Holden Park's Fundraising Manager, Sam Napier.

