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# COMMUNITY

## Ready to climb way to childhood dream

### Bell set to tackle Mount Kilimanjaro

By **Stephanie Thiessen**  
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

**L**iving in the often stifling heat of Saudi Arabia, 11-year-old Tricia Bell hadn't seen snow for years.

So when she took a trip to Kenya with her parents and looked up to see the white-tipped peak of Mount Kilimanjaro, she felt something stir within her.

She wanted to reach out and touch it.

"I was so intrigued by it; it stayed with me," she said.

She read all she could about Africa's highest mountain, and when a teacher asked students in her class where they'd want to go if the sky was the limit, Bell immediately replied, "Mount Kilimanjaro."

Two decades later, the Milton resident doesn't feel any differently — except now, she's about to accomplish what she previously only dreamed about.

#### Grueling trek awaits

On July 28, Bell will start the long trek up the Tanzanian mountain with about 36 other people as part of the 'ROAR (Realize Opportunities to Advance Research) Up Kilimanjaro 2006' fundraiser for the Canadian Foundation for Infectious Diseases (CFID). Money raised will go toward education and research initiatives.

It was her mom who first told her about the fundraiser. "My mom called and said, 'You've dreamed of this since you were 11. This is your opportunity to do it for something good.'"

The idea she could do something she's always wanted to while helping raise money for a worthy cause appealed to her, Bell said, and she jumped on board.

The location of the climb is significant because of the high incidence of infectious diseases in Africa and, in particular, the AIDS epidemic. Each person participating in the fundraiser has committed to raising at least \$5,000. Bell has set a goal of \$10,000 and so far has collected more than \$8,000.

Not everyone can climb a mountain. Being in top physical shape is important, and it's something Bell works on nearly every day. She often trains at the gym for three hours after work — two hours of cardio, one of weight training.

The climb up Mount Kilimanjaro — which is more than 19,000 feet high — will take five days.

The guide who'll be taking the group up the mountain lives in Oakville, so the group meets often to train together and discuss any

obstacles they might be facing.

Thinking of the physical challenge she's undertaking gives her butterflies, Bell said, explaining the most exciting day will also be the most physically strenuous.

On August 2, the group will awake at midnight and climb the final few hours to the top, just in time to watch the sun rise. The climb will become more and more difficult as they near the summit due to reduced oxygen levels, and they'll only be able to spend about two hours at the peak for that reason. They'll then descend 9,000 feet in nine hours.

One of the interesting aspects of the trip will be the varying weather, said Bell who, interestingly enough, is a field producer with The Weather Network. The group will trek through five different climatic zones, meaning Bell will need to pack t-shirts, a winter coat and everything in between.

"We have to be prepared for absolutely everything," she said, explaining the summit can be minus 26 degrees C, a startling difference from the warm weather at the base.

"It'll start off warm, and then end up really cold. But I'm Canadian, I can tough it out," she said, laughing.

#### Educational experience

Since taking on the challenge, Bell said she's learned more about infectious diseases and has become passionate about the importance of education. Infectious disease — which runs the gauntlet from influenza to SARS to AIDS — is currently the leading cause of death worldwide, she said. People have to know what they can do to limit their spread — whether it's washing hands more often or getting a shot for Hepatitis before leaving for vacation, she said.

With just a few weeks to go — she leaves July 23 — Bell said she's excited, but extremely nervous. There's always the fear in the back of her mind she might not succeed, she said. "I don't know what to expect. It's the unknown — I'm jumping in with both feet, hoping for the best."

Though Bell has yet to climb the mountain, the support she's received from family, friends, her teammates and even strangers who've made donations on her Web page have already made this "one of the most incredible experiences in my life," she said.

"Finally, after 20 years, I'm about to fulfill a dream I had as an 11-year-old girl."

To contribute to Bell's fundraising efforts, visit [www.researchid.com/en/ROAR/](http://www.researchid.com/en/ROAR/) and click on her name.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at [sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com).



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

**AIMING HIGH:** Tricia Bell is among a group of Canadians set to climb Mount Kilimanjaro later this month as part of a fundraiser for the Canadian Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

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