

FUND-RAISING

Hospital's care is rewarded as dad reaches new heights

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A father-of-four has reached new heights as he scaled the highest mountain in the Alps to thank the hospital that cared for his children when they were born.

Tom Stokes, of Abbots Bromley, braved the extreme cold and the chance of altitude sickness to tackle Mont Blanc, in the Alps, to raise money for the maternity units at Queen's Hospital, in Burton, and Samuel Johnson Community Hospital, in Lichfield, where his four children were born.

Eldest child Oliver, who was born premature, had extra care at Queen's Hospital when he had to return after he contracted meningitis at three months old.

The 37-year-old is no stranger to climbing having grown up near the 1,085 metre high Mount Snowdon in North Wales. This time he pushed himself further by climbing the mountain, which peaks at 4,089 metres.

Mr Stokes, a member of the Old Bromsgrovia Expedition Club, said the adventure was no mean feat even for a seasoned climber, but it had been a life-long ambition to climb Mont Blanc so he was determined to complete his challenge.

His efforts paid off as he smashed his £2,500 target by raising £3,000 and hopes that it can now go a step further and reach £4,000 with promises of donations.

He said: "I was very fortunate with the weather and everything went according to plan. I had spent the last 16 to 18 months getting prepared to go and it was going well but then I moved house and we had our fourth child, Axel, in June, who was again looked after by Queen's Hospital.

"I flew out on the Sunday and we were up by 6am on the Monday for altitude training and set off on the Tuesday. On the Friday we did the last bit in one go - we were climbing for around eight hours.



Tom Stokes, pictured with Dan Thornton of Mountain Tracks, has climbed Mont Blanc for the hospital which cared for his children.

"I did the trek with Mountain Tracks and would not have been able to do it without them.

"My tour guide, Ollie Allen, was around 45 with 30-odd years of experience. I spent full days attached to him by rope and I think you learn more about someone in those six days than people I have known for 15 or 20 years.

"Physically, I found it relatively straight forward. I did have some aches in my thighs and blisters but physically it wasn't too bad; I was quite confident.

"I did get a bit scared on some of the ridges as I kept thinking that I have four children dependent on me, so I was a bit concerned and it was scary at times but I had my guide with me and I cannot thank him enough.

"I feel like I could do it again. I am raring to do something like the Matterhorn Mountain, on the border of Italy and Switzerland. I am hoping to do it in 2020 as it will be my 40th year and I have time to raise a higher figure for the hospital.

"I am very humbled by the generosity and support I have received prior, during and after reaching the summit itself."

Mr Stokes was supported by his family business, John Stokes Ltd.

To make sure he was at his optimum fitness level, he had one-on-one training each week with former Irish bouldering champion Jonny Argue, based at Boulder Central, in West Bromwich, and he also underwent personal training.

PEAK THAT INSPIRED MOUNTAINEERS

Mont Blanc, meaning "White Mountain", is the highest in the Alps at 4,808m (15,774ft) above sea level.

It lies in a range called the Graian Alps, between the regions of Aosta Valley, Italy, and Savoie and Haute-Savoie, France. The first recorded ascent of Mont



Tom and Dan on Mont Blanc.

Blanc was on August 8, 1786, by Jacques Balmat and doctor Michel Paccard, which marked the start of modern mountaineering.

The first woman to reach the summit was Marie Paradis in 1808. In 1886, future US President Theodore Roosevelt led an expedition to the peak.

FUNDRAISER

David takes road run a step further

A widower will host a second vintage road run in memory of his late wife - and this year he aims to take it one step further.

David Hallam organised the first Mavis Jean Memorial Road Run last year to remember his wife, who died of heart failure in April, aged 72.

This year, he will do a sponsored walk across the same route - just two days after the road run, and having not long had a major knee operation.

This year's road run will involve 20 vintage tractors, steam engines motorcycles and lorries travelling through Tutbury, Hatton, Scropton and Sudbury before heading back to Klondyke Mill, in Draycott in the Clay.

It will be on September 10, the day before what would have been Mrs Hallam's birthday - and Mr Hallam will tackle his sponsored walk on September 12.

Midlands Air Ambulance responds to 2,000 cases every year, and needs to raise £7 million annually to keep its three helicopters in the air.

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