Cancer patient to take on four day mountain climb to thank hospital for treatment

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A leukaemia patient is set to take on the biggest challenge of his life by tackling a gruelling four day climb up a 1km sheer cliff face in California.

Scott Soithongsuk, who has chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML), and his girlfriend Jo Robbings, will attempt to climb the infamous route known as The Nose on the mountain El Capitan Yosemite National Park.

The couple will be raising money for Imperial College Healthcare Charity, which fundraises for Hammersmith Hospital in West London where Scott receives treatment. They are due to leave the UK on 8 October and aim to complete the climb within their three week trip.

Scott, 29, said: “I’m hoping to inspire others who are living with cancer to encourage them to dream big. Completing the climb will feel like such a massive achievement. I know climbing the Nose is going to be harder than anything I’ve done before, but I’m willing to give it my all. I believe that if you’re truly passionate about what you do, you’ll simply pick yourself up again if you get knocked down. I wouldn’t risk my life for something that that wasn't so deeply rooted in me.”

Chronic myeloid leukaemia is a blood cancer that affects the myeloid cells, when the body creates too many mature white blood cells. It usually develops very slowly, and for the majority of people with the cancer, can be managed through daily medication.

“When I was first diagnosed in 2007, my doctor told me to take it easy and opt for a simple, peaceful life, which really frustrated me because I had so many things I wanted to do,” said Scott, who is now based in Luton.

“The previous medication I was on meant permanent tiredness, muscle fatigue and a lot of sickness, including anaemia. It was something you just had to grin and bear. I’ve managed to adapt to my new medication, but it still means being more tired than normal, so I can only climb at weekends. I wake up, go to work, come home to nap, wake up, eat then go back to sleep. There’s been so many times when I was just tired of being tired.

“It was down to my brother and sister literally dragging me out of bed that I rediscovered my love for climbing. My mum worries about my health, but she can see how much this climb means to me.”

The infamous Nose is a highly demanding climb comprising 31 pitches up the sheer face. Few people who attempt the climb actually reach the top, but Scott, who started climbing at university, is relishing the opportunity.

“I get butterflies in my stomach every time I think about it. I’ve never climbed back to back for four days before. We’re aiming to climb about 300m a day and we’ll be sleeping each night in the open air on a rock ledge, something we only tried for the first time a few weeks. When it comes to the real thing, we’ll hopefully get some good weather," he said.

"The thought of getting to the top puts a huge smile on my face. I’ve had to learn a lot of new skills as part of my preparation and will be finally realising something I’ve dreamt about but never thought was possible. We have to factor in things like jet lag, bad weather plus the fact we’ll both be getting increasingly tired with each day as we’ll be carrying all of our food and equipment as well as sleeping rough. We’ll need more and more rest the further up we go.

“We decided to do it back in January when we heard some friends were heading to Yosemite. It’s not something you would describe as a walk in the park, especially when any activity at the moment is a challenge.”

The couple have raised £260 so far for Imperial College Healthcare Charity’s Blood Fund, which supports the department of haematology at Hammersmith Hospital. Scott’s partner Jo, came up with the idea of making a video in support of their challenge.

To sponsor Scott and Jo and to watch their video, visit www.justgiving.com/fundraising/scojo-imperial

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