Transatlantic rowers reach Barbados completing epic 3,000 mile voyage

Monday 3 February, 2014

At 1.48pm GMT, on Saturday February 1st, 50 days after setting off from Gran Canaria, two friends from Shropshire arrived safe and sound in Barbados after rowing 3,000 miles, across the Atlantic Ocean, completing their Rowing 4 Research challenge.

Harry Martin-Dreyer and Alex Bland left their successful London jobs to take on one of the most physically and mentally demanding tests of human endurance to raise money for Birmingham based charity Cure Leukaemia and JDRF, the type 1 diabetes charity.

Family and friends travelled out to the Caribbean island to give the intrepid duo, who have negotiated treacherous waves, sores, blisters, extreme heat, exhaustion, boredom and sharks, a magnificent welcome. The boys have received tremendous support throughout their voyage with thousands of emails, tweets and good luck messages and they have kept their followers up-to-date with their progress with weekly blogs and even a festive photo on Christmas Day!

Despite the obvious travails they faced on the vast and unforgiving seas, they managed to keep their sense of humour and have been able to appreciate the enormity of their achievement, “I think both of us are in agreement that this experience has challenged us in more ways than we could have ever imagined and the predominant sense of excitement that we now feel is combined with a great sense of relief. Relief that all the things that could have gone wrong have not and relief that, where numerous others have failed, we have succeeded” stated Alex in their final blog.

Upon arrival, both Alex and Harry were wobbling on their feet and walking into pillars as they acclimatized to the stability of dry land. Harry said “the sensation is a little like jet lag, it is a huge relief to not have to do any more rowing and I cant wait to sleep in a bed. A huge thank you to everyone at Port St Charles for making it such a special arrival, your burgers are the best!” Alex followed him with, “It’s quite surreal to be on dry land once again and the reception we have received in unbelievable as is the knowledge that we have made it 3000 miles in a rowing boat – although I’ve been told I might have to do it again having failed to catch a fish.”

Adding to an already emotional moment for everyone present, Harry then proposed to his girlfriend Lucy Plant on the Port St Charles harbourside with a diamond ring he had kept with him during the entire voyage. Thankfully, she accepted his proposal and the celebrations began in earnest!

Their Rowing 4 Research challenge, sponsored by London’s Hotel Rafayel, has raised over £141,000 for the two charities. The boys named the boat ‘Alexandra’ after Harry’s mother, who was treated by Cure Leukaemia’s co-founder Professor Charlie Craddock at Birmingham’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital and who sadly passed away in March last year. Alex’s brother, Ross, suffers from type 1 diabetes hence the reasons behind their chosen charities.

There has been plenty of interest across the media with coverage in the London Evening Standard, a mention on Chris Evans’ BBC Radio Two breakfast show, live interviews from the boat on BBC Radio WM, TV coverage on BBC Midlands Today and weekly updates in the Shropshire Star. Ben Fogle, who completed his own Atlantic crossing with James Cracknell in 2005, sent a message support and they also received video messages from Warwickshire and England cricketer Jonathan Trott and Cure Leukaemia Patron and England One-Day International coach Ashley Giles.

James McLaughlin, Chief Executive of Cure Leukaemia said, “we have the utmost admiration for Harry and Alex. Their drive and determination to complete this remarkable challenge is truly inspirational for everyone connected with Cure Leukaemia. The money they have raised will significantly help give leukaemia patients across the West Midlands hope as we continue our efforts to help find a cure for this terrible disease. On behalf of the charity I’d like to extend our heartfelt thanks for their staggering efforts.”

Michael Connellan Senior Media Manager for JDRF said: “Harry and Alex have proved themselves phenomenal fundraisers as well as athletes. Among the long list of heroic challenges that people have undertaken to support type 1 diabetes research, this stands out as something truly exceptional. Their magnificent journey is taking us closer to finding a cure for type 1 diabetes, a condition which affects 400,000 people in the UK alone.”

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About Cure Luekaemia

Founded in 2003 by Professor Charlie Craddock, Cure Leukaemia helps to bring pioneering drug and transplant treatments to blood cancer patients throughout the Midlands. The charity helps finance the world class Centre for Clinical Haematology at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, to fund life-saving clinical trials to treat terminally ill leukaemia patients. To date, Cure Leukaemia has helped to treat over 4000 patients by leveraging over £21m worth of revolutionary drugs and funding crucial research nurses to administer these trials.
Without the expert research nurses to ensure patients are constantly monitored and cared for; these trials would not run. The aim of Cure Leukaemia is to raise money to fund more research nurses at centres across the Midlands and provide world-class treatment for its patients. Only by funding more nurses in more hospitals, can more leukaemia patients benefit from access to potentially life-saving treatment. Currently, Cure Leukaemia has nurses at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, Sandwell and Dudley, Stoke, Worcester, Coventry, Warwickshire and Birmingham Children's Hospital.
Cure Leukaemia celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2013 by launching the Cure Leukaemia for Kids appeal, raised in excess of £125,000 from runners in BUPA Great Birmingham Run and established new corporate partnerships with Deloitte, The Binding Site, OGL Computer and Hotel Indigo.

About type 1 diabetes
· Type 1 diabetes is a chronic, life-threatening condition that has a life-long impact on those diagnosed with it and their families. JDRF exists to find the cure for type 1 diabetes.
· Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition which cannot be prevented, and is not caused by lifestyle factors such as diet and exercise
· People with type 1 diabetes rely on multiple insulin injections or pump infusions every day just to stay alive, until we find the cure.
· It normally strikes children and stays with them for the rest of their lives.
· Type 1 diabetes affects about 400,000 people in the UK, 29,000 of them children.

About JDRF
JDRF exists to find the cure for type 1 diabetes and its complications, and is the world's leading charitable funder of type 1 diabetes research. At a global level JDRF volunteers and staff have been responsible for raising over £1 billion to support type 1 diabetes research since the charity's inception.
www.jdrf.org.uk

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