

Strides

in the right

Direction

An intrepid young woman from Exeter, Tess Shellard is trekking 1293 miles over 54 consecutive days from John o' Groats to Land's End – the entire length of the UK - to raise £10,000 for a network of family planning clinics in remote villages in southern Madagascar.

Tess, 27, started her trek on May 13th, covering as many as 35 miles on the longest days of the route. There will be no days off to rest until she reaches Land's End on 5th July. Although Tess has previously hiked and trekked on five continents this event will be – by nearly a thousand miles - her biggest challenge to date.

She was moved to take on this fundraiser when she heard of the groundbreaking approach marine conservation charity Blue Ventures is taking to support a rural African community.

Tess said: "It's impossible not to get swept up in the excitement of the work they're doing."

She explains: "At first glance it's surprising for a conservation charity to be setting up clinics but it makes perfect sense. Fish stocks are being depleted and the reefs damaged in large part because the fishermen are struggling to provide enough food in the midst of a population explosion."

Before Blue Ventures developed this project, villagers living in and around the village of Andavadoaka had no access to sexual and reproductive health services. They were struggling to find enough



Strides

in the right
Direction

food to feed their children and keen to have smaller families.

“Conservation work on the reef would be doomed to fail without supporting the villagers to overcome the underlying cause of their crisis. By providing family planning to those who want it, and education on conserving their coastal resources, the community now has a chance of being able to feed itself for generations to come.”

Given the potential impact of the Blue Ventures project, the funding needs are very small. The clinics immediately improve health care for families and provide careers for local people involved in delivering services. Most importantly for Tess, the project helps to empower the local women.

“I hope I can raise as much money as possible to help ensure Blue Ventures can continue its inspiring work and hopefully take it to the many other villages that would benefit from this sensitive and intelligent approach.”

Blue Ventures believes that with the right knowledge, developing coastal communities can live in harmony with their marine environments. Their pioneering, integrated approach to conservation and sexual and reproductive health enables far more effective achievement of the project's objectives than could be achieved if these projects were carried out in isolation.

You can sponsor Tess and follow her trek's progress at www.themightyjogle.co.uk.

Madagascar has one of the world's fastest growing populations, with an average fertility rate of over 5 births per woman and nearly half of the country's population currently under 15 years of age. Only 1 in 5 women in union has access to contraception despite government programmes to promote family planning.





In the remote coastal regions where Blue Ventures operates, access to sexual and reproductive health services is even more difficult. As a result, girls often have their first child as young as 11 and women are having up to 16 children. Infant and maternal mortality rates are very high. The rapid growth of coastal populations, whose doubling time is approximately 10-15 years, poses a severe threat to the future sustainability of the country's extensive coral reefs and other marine habitats, upon which the livelihoods, culture and future economic wellbeing of coastal communities depend.



Tess regularly hikes in and around Devon and despite loving her exotic treks abroad she is very keen to explore the rest of the UK. She trained for the trek with plenty of long runs and hikes but is far from complacent about the challenge that lies ahead. Tess is joined by fellow hikers fundraising for St Margaret's Hospice in Somerset and volunteers will be driving a support vehicle to regularly meet up with them.