

I never THOUGHT I WOULD...

From cycling across three cities to digging a fish pond in Africa: how three women's achievements went beyond their wildest dreams



Teresa, right, and Debbie, a fellow volunteer

"The aim was to provide a source of nutrition and income for the community"



TERESA WICKHAM, 65, is married and lives in Kent. She is an adviser to Sainsbury's and runs her own consultancy, TWW

Communications. But taking part in the Farm Africa fish pond dig was like nothing she'd ever done before.

Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that, at the age of 65, I would be standing in the Kenyan countryside virtually up to my knees in mud, digging a fish pond. Not any old pond, but a 300 square-metre pond. It was one of the most amazing and challenging things I have done in my life.

It all began with an invite to a meeting last October from Judith Batchelar – Sainsbury's director and Farm Africa trustee – with 18 other senior women from across the food and hospitality industry.

The idea was to support the Food For Good campaign that Farm Africa was launching to fight food hunger in Africa, by enabling African farmers to help themselves. The aim was to build a pond with a group of Kenyan

women that would then provide a source of nutrition and income for the community for years to come.

Prior to Christmas, I hadn't given much thought to what I'd committed myself to. However, once into the new year, and with constant reminders from my husband that I was going to be the oldest by a considerable way and that I might damage my health, I began to worry.

The time grew nearer. A week before we were due to depart, having had the relevant jabs and bought enough medicine to supply a chemist, a goodie box arrived from Sainsbury's, containing clothes and other necessities. So, with slight trepidation, I embarked on the journey to Kenya with my 14 fellow diggers, all much younger and fitter.

We flew to Nairobi and met up with Judith and the Farm Africa team. The following day, we flew to Kisumu in Western Kenya, and from there, we

travelled on to Bumala – a remote village where the dig would take place. We had a short stop at the hotel, where we got to know the team running it very well, and nothing was too much trouble, including washing our muddy boots for our departure. Amazing, and it captured the spirit of everyone we met.

Then on to the dig – where we were greeted by Faith Buluma and her husband, who owned the 25-acre farm where the pond was being dug, and women from the Afula Co-operative, who welcomed us with the most amazing songs. I felt this is what I had come for, to meet and help these wonderful women. We were assigned our spades and hoes, and walked down to the site about 15 minutes away.

The site had been pegged out for us and looked vast. I wondered how we were going to dig this area a metre down in just three-and-a-half days. Kitted out with gloves, waterproof trousers, shirts, hats and masses of sunscreen, we set to work, digging and then piling the earth/mud on to rice sacks, which were carried by two women and dumped on the sides to build the walls.

For the next three days, we rose at 6am to beat the heat. We worked for eight hours with plenty of music, singing and laughter. We finished the pond on the fourth day and held a celebration meal. Shopping and cooking the meal was an adventure in itself – especially getting fresh meat direct from the slaughterhouse.

We left with a finished pond, which needed to be limed, then filled with tilapia fish. The fish will be harvested in eight months, giving the women an income to build another pond, plus some finance to pay for their children's schooling, something of great value in Kenya and perhaps something we take for granted in the UK.

Was it worth it? Yes, it was amazing to make a difference to women who have less than us, but also to learn a lot from them about how to enjoy life. Next year, we're planting trees. Anyone want to join us?

Visit farmafrika.org.

making a difference

"We wanted an adventure, but walking 54 miles in 24 hours seemed impossible"



CLARE NUGENT, 44, lives in Edinburgh with her husband and sons, aged eight and seven. She is studying for a PhD part-time.

She did the Caledonian Challenge.

When a friend mentioned he'd completed the Caledonian Challenge in 2011, which meant walking 54 miles in 24 hours across the Scottish Highlands, it sounded fantastic. The aim was to raise money for Foundation Scotland, which awards grants to local charities. We were always talking at the school gates about how we needed a push to get exercising, so the other mums and I talked it over and four of us decided to register as a team.

None of us had walked as far, and finding out only 650 of the 1,000 starters had crossed the finishing line in 2011 was far from reassuring. We only had six months to train so every Friday, we'd do a ten- or 20-mile walk after dropping the kids at school. And when the boys had swimming lessons and football matches, I'd do 50 lengths of the pool, and walk laps of the park. It was exhausting and, at times, I'd wonder why we were putting ourselves through it.

We had to raise a minimum of £400, so we held a coffee morning sale and hired a swimming pool for water pistol fights. We raised around £6,000, including sponsorship.

We started at Gairloch and the views were breathtaking. But it

Finding out that many people hadn't finished the walk wasn't very reassuring

The last seven miles were the hardest. We wore head torches, but we still kept falling over rocks. When we crossed the finishing line at 5am, 21 hours and nine minutes after we started, we hugged each other and squealed. But really all we could think about was sleep.

We swore we'd never do it again, but three of us registered for a second attempt this year. We couldn't believe it when we did it in 17 hours 52 minutes. You never know what you're capable of until you give it a try – and now I can't wait for round three!

See caledonianchallenge.com. >>



Clare and her walking friends



Team effort: volunteers and locals worked together