



# ARCTIC TREK

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## A JOURNEY OF ENDURANCE, COURAGE, AND COMPASSION

**T**HANKFULLY, THE ICY GRIP OF FEBRUARY'S MID-WINTER WEATHER IS NOW A DISTANT MEMORY, REPLACED BY THE WARMTH OF SUMMER. BUT WHILE MANY OF US ENJOYED THE COMFORT OF HOME DURING THOSE FROSTY DAYS, A REMARKABLE JOURNEY UNFOLDED FAR FROM THE COSY CONFINES OF OUR HEARTHES.

In the heart of winter, when snow blanketed the landscape and frost painted the windows, a group of intrepid explorers, led by Breaking Strain Events, set out on an extraordinary trek through the Arctic. Among them was Abersoch resident Chris Astles, who initially joined the expedition thanks to the encouragement of his best friend, Phil Gray, who is also a part-time resident of Abersoch. It was Phil who originally signed up and invited Chris to join him on this remarkable journey.

The Arctic trek took place at the beginning of February 2024, with a total of fourteen individuals, plus staff embarking on the journey, of which seven took on the trek in support of The Joshua Tree. This group of seven, including Chris and Phil, braved the elements and ventured into the frozen wilderness, trekking through challenging conditions all in support of a charity dedicated to providing vital support for families affected by childhood cancers. As we now bask in the sun-kissed days of summer, their



PHOTO: AT THE FINNISH LINE



PHOTO: PHIL GRAY AND CHRIS ASTLES

impressive endeavour now serves as an inspiring nod to the boundless spirit of adventure that knows no season.

Amidst the breath-taking scenery of the Arctic Circle, the group navigated a challenging distance of 65 kilometres over the course of three days. Battling temperatures as low as -28°C and pulling heavy loads of equipment, they pressed forward, undeterred by the unforgiving conditions. Camping under the starlit sky in freezing temperatures became a nightly ritual, adding another layer of endurance to their already demanding adventure.

Before embarking on this formidable journey, both Chris Astles, a resident of Abersoch and Phil Gray, a part-time resident of Abersoch, underwent a gruelling 12-month training regimen to prepare their bodies and minds for the challenges ahead. Their training regimen was not only focused on physical fitness but also included essential first aid training to recognise the signs of hypothermia and frostbite, crucial skills given the extreme conditions they would face.

During the trek itself, the challenges were relentless for both Chris and Phil, testing their resilience every step of the way. Enduring bone-chilling temperatures, navigating through difficult terrain, and pulling heavy equipment across the frozen landscape pushed them to their limits, both mentally and physically. Yet, amidst the adversity, bonds were forged, and spirits remained high as they continued their journey through the Arctic wilderness.

Upon completing the trek, adjusting back to normal life presented its own set of challenges. Some participants, like Phil, encountered minor health issues upon returning, further complicating the transition. However, with time and support, they gradually adjusted back to their everyday routines, their experiences on the trek forever shaping their perspectives and resilience.

Despite the hardships they faced, the group's efforts were not in vain. Driven by a shared commitment to making a difference, together all seven participants raised an impressive total

of £72,300.59 in support of The Joshua Tree, with Phil making a significant contribution of £21,500.00 to this sum.

Chris has woven himself into the very fabric of Abersoch, establishing roots in this coastal haven since 2010. Having originally settled in Llanbedrog at the age of 9 and attended school in Pwllheli, his journey has been intimately intertwined with the landscape and culture of the region. Despite venturing far and wide to pursue a flourishing career in media across the globe, his heart always remained tethered to Abersoch. Now, in semi-retirement, Chris has returned to his beloved community, channelling his expertise into a new venture: constructing homes in and around the area.

Phil and his family have also immersed themselves in the beauty of Abersoch, becoming regular visitors since 1998, spanning 26 years. Drawn to the allure of this coastal gem, they have made it a cherished tradition to spend significant time in the area as Abersoch holds a special place in their hearts. Their shared affinity for Abersoch not



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only underscores their personal connection to the area but also serves as a reminder of the importance of community and connection in their lives. Lynne and Mike Maylor from the Egryn Hotel, along with Alex Badley from Abersoch Surf Shop, provided invaluable support to Phil for the trek. Their assistance and encouragement played a crucial role in ensuring the success of the journey. Together, they exemplified the spirit of community that makes Abersoch such a special place.

The Joshua Tree was chosen as the charity to support due to its dedication to supporting families affected by childhood cancers, providing vital services, and creating a nurturing environment. The Joshua Tree's mission resonated deeply with the team on multiple levels, inspired by their commitment to making a difference in the lives of those facing unimaginable challenges they knew that in choosing to support The Joshua Tree, their efforts would directly contribute to improving the lives of children and families facing the challenges of childhood cancers. Phil's personal connection to the cause was further solidified during a visit to The Joshua Tree's centre in Northwich, Cheshire, where he felt an instant connection



the community's commitment to making a positive change in the lives of those affected by childhood cancers.

Looking ahead, the team remains dedicated to supporting charitable causes and fostering community spirit in Abersoch and beyond. A clear testament to their unwavering commitment to philanthropy and adventure, reminding us that even in the face of adversity, there is strength in unity and compassion. Their Arctic trek may have been a singular journey, but its impact reverberates far beyond frozen landscapes, inspiring hope and igniting a spirit of giving that knows no bounds.



Find out more about The Joshua Tree here: [www.thejoshuatree.org.uk](http://www.thejoshuatree.org.uk).

upon seeing one of the children proudly sporting an Everton shirt.

Phil's company (launched in 2006), Watts Commercial Finance, is also deeply involved in charity work, hosting a sold-out charity dinner in aid of The Joshua Tree. Scheduled for Thursday, 25th April 2024, the event garnered overwhelming support, with all 240 tickets sold within 48 hours. Generous sponsorship from John Pass Jewellers, Together, and the Porsche Centre Wilmslow further underscores

Donate to the Charity Dinner here: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/watts-commercial-charity-dinner>.