

TOPtoTOP of

Say (Swiss) cheese:
Climate change
campaigning adventurers
Dario and Sabine
Schwoerer with Salina, 4,
and Adri, 2.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS HYDE



They're a Swiss family with so much passion for the environment that they set up a non-profit organisation TOPtoTOP in a bid to scale the heights of seven summits and sail seven seas across altitudes and climate zones. DENISE CARTER catches up with this dynamic family to find out more

On Wednesday evening, when I spoke with Dario Schwoerer, ski instructor turned world traveller, it was a tense time for his family.

Once more their trek around the world had come into difficulty. This time, Sabine, Dario's wife, who is expecting her third child, was about to fly to Brisbane for emergency care for her baby.

So instead of moving on with their trip this weekend to Darwin, the rest of the family will be in Cairns for much longer.

Dario was anxious about what lay ahead and wanted to thank Marlin Marina for allowing the crew to stay in the marina on board their boat, the Packamama

(which means Mother Earth in Incan), for longer than planned.

The family, under the patronage of the United Nations Environment Program, has been having an unbelievable adventure for seven years.

It all began when Dario was working as a mountain guide and taking a client up Mt Bernina near his hometown of St Moritz in Switzerland, and realised how little ice was left at the summit.

As a climatologist and high altitude mountain climber Dario had already written a thesis on the effects of climate change for climbers. He discovered there would be more crevices in glaciers, and more rock falls.

So he and his wife Sabine, a

nurse, decided to travel the world to highlight the problem and do something about it.

"We thought, OK, in our lifetime, in our working time, we would really like to do something for four years, something good for the planet and for other people," Dario said.

So along with their friends, they set up TOPtoTOP, a non-profit organisation with a mission of travelling the world using nature's power alone.

The organisation now has 120 active members in 33 nations.

From Antarctica to Africa, the couple has climbed the world's highest peaks, cycled on pushbikes with their children, Salina, 4, and Andri, 2, and sailed

using solar and wind power.

In each destination, they educate schoolchildren on the beauty of the planet, bringing films of their travels and pointing out climate-smart ideas they have found on their expedition.

Already, they have visited 40,000 school children, including 8000 in Australia.

Dario said he liked to emphasise the positive climate change experiences they had on their travels.

For example, in Vanuatu, the TOPtoTOP venturers met island people who preserved their food in double clay pots with water in between the walls that evaporates. They can keep their food for two weeks without

electricity in a hot climate.

But Dario has also found people suffering from the effects of climate change.

"There are people who live on islands in the Caribbean who live totally in harmony with nature," Dario says.

"Their islands have sunk so low that 60 island people have had to move on," he says.

"They are so connected to their island and then they have to move to another, and sometimes they find there's not enough fish, and they have to build their houses closer and closer together because there's not enough room."

The TOPtoTOP team also does clean-ups wherever they go.

In Cairns, on Walsh's Pyramid they did a clean-up, and when climbing Australia's peak, Mt Kosciuszko, they were prepared to clean up but found little to do.