

## FROM SWITZERLAND TO BAGOT

### Fifteen minutes with Dario

The first time I met Dario Schwoerer (say: Shw-uerr-er), he invited me along to the National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day at Bagot community. Swiss-born Dario and Sabine, together with their two children, had just that week sailed into Darwin on the most recent leg of their global climate expedition - Top to Top - an epic journey to seven summits across seven continents, using 'only their own and nature's power'. Having visited Batchelor, Dario then went to Bagot, where he introduced himself to Sheila White and began to talk.

I sat transfixed - scribbling notes and watching as Dario seamlessly negotiated culture and language, all the while keeping track of his two young children happily bouncing in a jumping castle and snacking on wedges of juicy melon.

In fifteen minutes, I learned:

- about a Pacific Island fridge that keeps food cold for two weeks without using electricity
- how the women of the Caribbean constructed their solar cookers, including:
  - cost of materials (\$20)
  - top temperature (350°C)
  - length of time to cook a meal (twice the time of a conventional oven)
  - how to get maximum heat efficiency (using a parabolic curve)
- how the people of Ecuador (facing glacial melt and severe drought) now use a method called SODIS (Solar Drinking Water Disinfection) developed by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Zurich) to purify 'bad' water into 'sweet' using simple sunlight and old plastic drink bottles.

By this time, I could literally feel my brain bulging with a thousand possibilities. Dario then turned to me for 'our talk' for Classmate.

### Top to what?

Top to Top has two broad aims. The first is 'to take responsibility'.

Dario and Sabine feel it is unfair for people of the developing world (such as those in the Andes or on the islands of San Blas) to suffer because of the actions of the developed worlds (such as Switzerland and Australia). We have a responsibility, Dario says, to help the people of the poorer nations to adapt to climate change as, after all, we have added the extra carbon to the atmosphere - and they're the people feeling the worst effects.

The second aim is to 'collect good examples' of environmental actions, innovations and practices discovered during their travels - and to serve as ambassadors for these as they visit with schools and address community groups. The central idea here is that they don't hold all the answers, but they can help to move these ideas along, helping them take root in each country they visit.

Last but not least, they do a big 'clean-up' on each summit they climb. Oh, and they also take along donations of school materials.

Like many Swiss people, Dario speaks five languages, and because he values language as a tool, in Darwin he borrowed an Indonesian language book for their next stop.

### My office is melting

It was in the early 90s when Dario, a climatologist and International Mountain Guide, first noticed that his 'office' - a steep ice ridge known as the 'stairway to heaven' - was melting. Passionate since kindergarten about motivating people to climb and conquer mountains, then later married with fellow climber Sabine, it was logical for them to build this passion into Top to Top.

### Pachamama's crew

Top to Top is supported by the United Nations Environmental Program and the Swiss Government, and sponsored by

Victorinox and SGS. Seven years into their epic journey, Dario and Sabine are now halfway through their goal of sailing the world in their (borrowed) yacht. Halfway through climbing the seven highest summits across seven continents, traversing all climate zones, latitudes and altitudes, using only their own and nature's power.

And if I've been a little quiet on Sabine, she's been busy with a brand new member of crew. Nurse, climber, sailor, mountain-biker and climate educator, Sabine had already given birth to Salina (4) and Andri (2½) en route, but on 15 August, in our very own Darwin, Sabine gave birth to baby Noé, whose name (from Noah) was chosen for safe travels at sea.

After seven years of searching out, sharing and collecting great climate solutions, Dario is more optimistic about the future of our planet than ever. He feels that now the wider community is mostly 'awake' to climate change - and says it's time for solutions. Positive solutions.



Dario (holding Andri) talks with Sheila White (holding Ry) at Bagot



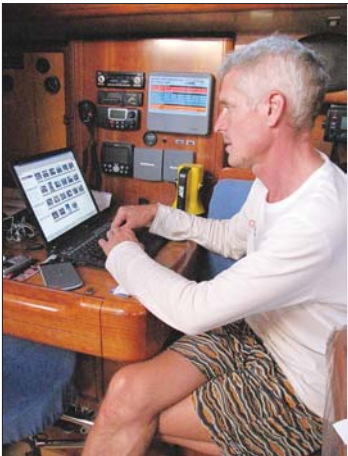
Fruit basket



UN flag



Andri (2½), Salina (4), Dario and Sabine



Dario writing an expedition report



Sabine and Salina



7-Summits non-stop round-the-world by human power and nature's force



Whale

## FROM BAGOT TO NIGHTCLIFF

With Top to Top available for schools, the first to phone was Nightcliff. Sixty-five Year 9 students shuffled into a regular classroom, shoulder-to-shoulder, wondering 'What's this about?' Then Dario started to speak. For more than an hour those students sat and listened in awed silence. I'm pretty sure even the geckos were silent.

When the Pachamama (Incan for Mother Earth) collided with a shipping container in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, they pulled into Chile for repairs. Here they learned Sabine was pregnant. Well behind schedule and with the boat badly damaged, most would simply go home, but Dario and Sabine decided to repair their wind and solar powered yacht with innovative renewable technologies, and to keep travelling onwards - now as a family. When Sabine rode her mountain bike to one iced mountain 'Top', she was eight and a half months pregnant. When they climbed Kosciusko, the children climbed too.

As the first Swiss boat to race the Sydney to Hobart, it's clear that Dario and Sabine are not your average greenies - they're avid 'can-do' sportspeople with a passionate respect for nature who want to show people what you can do without a motor.

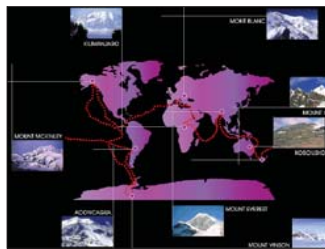
At one point, Dario set teachers' pulses a-racing when he told students that because adult's brains were filled up with experiences (which meant they knew a lot), it was students who had the greatest amount of brain space for creative and lateral thought. This went down rather well.

All students can take part in the Top to Top climate change essay competition - the prize, a trip to Europe with the team.

Teacher Krystal Smith said the visit tied in perfectly with current studies on globalization, world poverty and 'making a difference'. Class discussions had ranged from the pros and cons of big corporations and fast food, to the effects of these on the Third World and social justice.



Alfred Adjura (14), Katie Minchin (14), Rebecca Noakes (15), Eddie Payne (13), Nader Soliman (14), Nicholas Parry (14), Ruby Jones-Hayes (14)



Seven summits across seven continents



Year 9, Nightcliff Middle School

## FROM NIGHTCLIFF TO KARAMA

Then Dario heard from Karama, where eighty students from Years 3-6 happily sat on the carpeted floor - soaking up every word. At the end, a flurry of questions:

- Were you ever attacked by pirates? (Luckily, no)
- How much to buy the 130kph pushbike? (\$5000 but will reduce as more people buy)
- What do you do when there's no wind? (Row or stay still! This once happened for 10 days)
- What's the hardest mountain to climb? (Not Mt Everest, but Mt Vinson, Antarctica because it is hard getting there without a motor)
- How do you breathe on the mountain? (You can climb Mt Everest without extra oxygen in two days when you are fit enough and acclimatised.)

As an Energy Smart school, Karama's SRC are now trained by Planet Savers to monitor school power usage - so Dario's visit generated lots of discussion. Year 3/4 Behan created posters for Climate Action - showing what students understand and think about what's happening to their world. Their integrated program sees them exploring the causes and effects of global warming, and some possible ways to cool our warming earth.

350

The SRC are also organising Karama's response to - 350 - the International Day of Climate Action on October 24. This is the day to tell people why we must get carbon levels down to 350ppm (that's 350 parts per million) as urgently as we can.

(See 'Sources' for more information, and call 8922 2131 to let Classmate know what your school is planning for this event.)

Story by Susan Wills, images by Susan Wills and Top to Top



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## SOURCES

- <http://www.toptotop.org>
- <http://www.350.org>
- <http://www.topendtransition.groupsites.com/>
- <http://www.climateactiondarwin.org>
- <http://www.eawag.ch/medien/publ/sandecnews9.pdf>
- [http://www.mwc-info.net/en/services/Journal\\_PDFs/Issue1/FINAL\\_development\\_issue1](http://www.mwc-info.net/en/services/Journal_PDFs/Issue1/FINAL_development_issue1)



Pachamama



The spare room for volunteers



Powered by wind turbines and solar panels



Sabine at the helm



Collected artwork



Top to Top on Mt Kosciusko



Andri and Dario meet baby Noé



130kph pushbike (prototype)