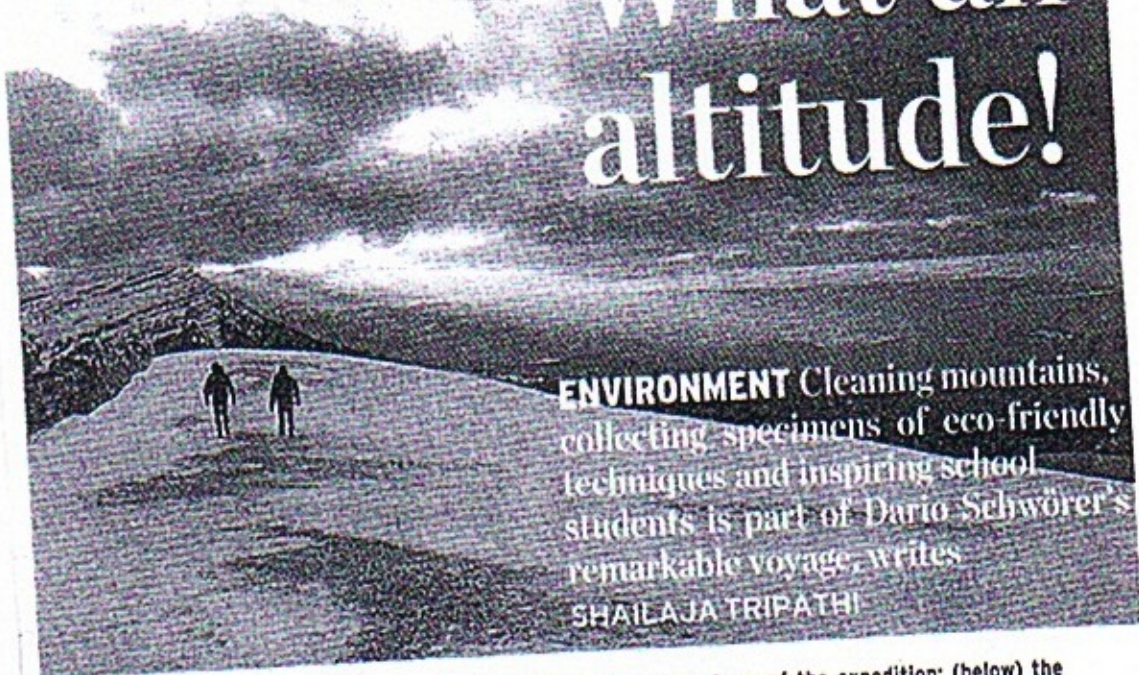


# What an altitude!



**ENVIRONMENT** Cleaning mountains, collecting specimens of eco-friendly techniques and inspiring school students is part of Dario Schwörer's remarkable voyage, writes SHAILAJA TRIPATHI

**VIEW FROM THE TOP** The couple Dario and Sabine forms the core team of the expedition; (below) the mountain guide Dario

The Hindu  
Sep 30, 2010

**W**hat sets Dario Schwörer's journey apart from many others who undertake a world record expedition? Not that he has climbed five summits and plans to cover two more. That he roams around the world carrying a message, though a very pertinent one, is also no news. Turning it into an extraordinary experience is the fact that Dario travels with his family, his wife Sabine and his three children — Salina (5), Andri (3) and the youngest child Noé (1). And lest one forgets to mention, all the three kids were born during the expedition what is known as "TOptotop Global Climate Expedition".

Their mode of transportation is equally intriguing. The family of five travels by walking, biking and sailing. While they sail with a Swiss-made boat powered by solar and wind energies, they cycle across continents and walk. "When our youngest son Noé developed a kidney infection, my wife had to rush back to Switzerland for his operation and at that time, she had to fly," says Dario on his way to Bangalore where he will spend about a month conducting workshops and interacting with school students.

Perturbed by the adverse effects of climate change on his 'office' (the Alps), he along with his wife Sabine decided to do something that would highlight the issue of global warming, the world over. Thus came about TOptotop Global Climate Expedition, an NGO under the patronage of United Nations. Dario and Sabine began by walking in their home country, Switzerland following which they climbed the Alps. "Our initiative is to set a record in world expedition during which we collect good examples of eco-friendly innovations and simple solutions that can be used in our daily lives," says Dario.

The youngsters, especially school students play a significant role in his programme. Dario visits schools in every city he goes to, interacts with children, conducts workshops and encourages them to participate in TOptotop Global Climate Solution Award. The students are asked to write four pages on 'what can you do in your country to save the climate' and also make a poster. Dario gladly shares with us that the winner of this year's edition of TOptotop Global Climate Solution Award is an Indian, Mohit Agarwal, a third year student of electrical engineering at IIT Delhi, who was chosen out of the participants from the 47 nations, Dario has been to.

## Sustainability matters

To date, they have sailed over 70,000 kilometres in their expedition vessel, climbed 400,000 vertical meters, cycled over 18,000 kilometres and visited over 47,000 students. Dario and his team also zero in on the sustainability projects and eco-friendly alternatives which are being used by people in their day-to-day lives like the ancient technique of preserving food without refrigeration in the Pacific island state of Vanuatu. Practising what they preach, the family expedition uses a sailboat, a boat which operates on renewable technology. "Sailing in the Southern Ocean, the boat hit a container and de-

veloped cracks. It took us one-and-a-half years to repair the boat which gave us time to make babies. We asked companies to develop a vessel that can operate on wind and solar energies with maximum safety in the toughest marine environments," recalls Dario. The first child Celina was born during this time. "We used a Swiss army knife to cut the umbilical chord and when the company read that information, they became our first sponsor," he adds.

It will be another six years before the bunch winds up their thrilling adventure. The expedition has been to the highest top in Europe, Mont Blanc, the highest top in South America, Aconcagua, highest mountain in Australia, Mount Kosciuszko and Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world and hopes to climb Antarctica's Mount Vinson and South Africa's Kilimanjaro in the remaining six years. "Mount Everest and Aconcagua were the most polluted mountains. We found aluminium, tin, plastic bottles, oxygen bottles there. We brought a lot of garbage down. We even brought down a dead body. Mount Kosciuszko was the cleanest mountain," he adds.

However, sustainability, Dario states is not a concept which is easy to explain to the Australians as compared to the Swiss. "For instance, people in Ladakh will understand the idea of sustainability better than those who live in Bangalore where people live on day-to-day basis. Ladakhis know they have to save for the harsh winter. So, the approach to sustainability will depend on the culture of that place. Also, I realised that the people who responded the most to our effort was the one who are suffering the impact of global warming like the flood victims of Ladakh or the cyclone sufferers in Kolkata," he observes.

(For more details visit their website [www.toptotop.org](http://www.toptotop.org))

