

Trekking the Planet

by Diane Nielen © 2011

Prepare to be impressed . . . ready, set, go.

Meet Darren and Sandy Van Soye, a most personable couple whom I got to know at a recent Sierra Club meeting. They had come to share their plans for the near future. Their incredibly ambitious plans. They are leaving in January on a 14-month odyssey. And they are taking, as of this date, 15,000 school kids from 11 countries with them! That's via cyberspace. The next best thing to being there.

How did this all develop? Well, we have to go back to the year 2003. That was when Sandy and Darren opted to show their own children, daughters who were then 10 and 12 years old, the world. And it was to be a learning experience. They conferred with the school personnel and worked up a lesson plan to assure that their girls would get the maximum benefit from the opportunity. As they visited 13 countries in four months there was much communication back to the girls' school. But it wasn't until they returned home that they learned that their reports were being shared with all 300 students in the school. Their journey had been followed and benefited from by all of them. That must have been when the seeds were planted that have now grown into the trip-to-come. The girls are currently away from home in college so the parents will be taking this marathon journey by themselves.

The Van Soyes have a committed belief that it is very important for young people to understand geography. They shared the results of a simple four question test that had been given to a group of 18 to 24 year olds. The first question was super-simple. Locate the Pacific Ocean on a map. But 29% of the group couldn't do it! Next question: what continent is the Sudan in? 20% incorrectly choose Asia rather than Africa. Question three: what is the most populous country? There was a higher rate of correct answers here. China, of course. But a third of the respondents thought the United States had over a billion people. Way off. And last query: What is the first language of the most people in the world? Nope, not English. Mandarin Chinese, spoken by 845 million. Only around 400 million claim our language as their first.

The Van Soyes' message is we citizens of the world need to know more about it, and geography is far more than maps. It is the people and how they live. The couple will travel by boat, by bus, by train, and only by airplanes when there is no other option because they want to minimize their carbon footprint. They hope to visit 50 countries and make 11 or 12 backpacking treks totaling over 500 miles. And every week they will report on their website as well as Facebook and Twitter what

they have experienced. There will be text and videos and a wealth of pictures. Wanna come along? Sandy and Darren will be directing their postings to educators at many schools who will in turn incorporate the information in their teaching plans. But you are welcome to become a Friend simply by signing up on their website. There is absolutely no cost, either for the Educators or the Friends. The couple shared that they both had careers in Information Technology for twenty-five years and now this is their "giving back." And you can correctly surmise that because of what their jobs were they know how to make their reportage worthy and classy. A visit to their website, www.trekkingtheplanet.net, will confirm my statement.

Let me entice you with their proposed treks on foot: They will cover 52 miles of the Overland Track in Tasmania. It is one of Australia's most famous bush walks. They plan three or four excursions in Asia. When they hike the 28 miles in Laos with a guide they will spend their nights with villagers of the Northern Hill tribes. In Nepal they plan to hike 94 miles in Mustang in the Kingdom of Lo. The habitat of Buddhist monks, this area has only recently been opened to foreigners. It is a rich untouched culture. Their Central Asian trek of 30 miles in the

Tian Shan Mountains of Kyrgyzstan will take them to an area of "celestial" peaks and alpine lakes bordering summer pasturing lands. Petra will be the destination of a 40-mile trek in Jordan. It is a world famous historical 6th century BC city literally carved out of the mountain sides.

They have two excursions planned in Europe. They will trek 53 miles in northern Sweden on Kungleden (The King's Trail). This will take them to over 100 miles inside the Arctic Circle in the Lapland region. And another 30 miles will be traversed through the Julian Alps which are in the Triglav National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Slovenia. Then in Africa they plan to walk 66 miles exploring Dogon Villages in Mali. The people there still live in unique dwellings carved into the rock faces. In Ethiopia their guided route will traverse 40 miles in the Simien Mountains National Park. This is also a world heritage site and they hope to see the wild ibex which was once hunted nearly to extinction.

They will conclude their travels in South America where three hikes are planned. They will explore 40 miles of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil and be engulfed in the rich flora and fauna. How many of the 15,000 animals will they be lucky enough to see? In Chile they will cover 35 miles of the Atacama Desert. It is the world's driest desert. Some areas have never recorded rainfall.

Finally, their exploration of Torres Del Paine National Park will take them on foot between 46.5 and 93 miles. They will see "giant granite spikes, bright blue wind-whipped lakes, iceberg-loaded rivers and the Southern Patagonian Ice Field, a vast junction of glaciers." Wow.

One of the headings entitled "Trip Overview" within the website will expand on the information I have shared plus delight you with a photograph of each of their proposed trek destinations.

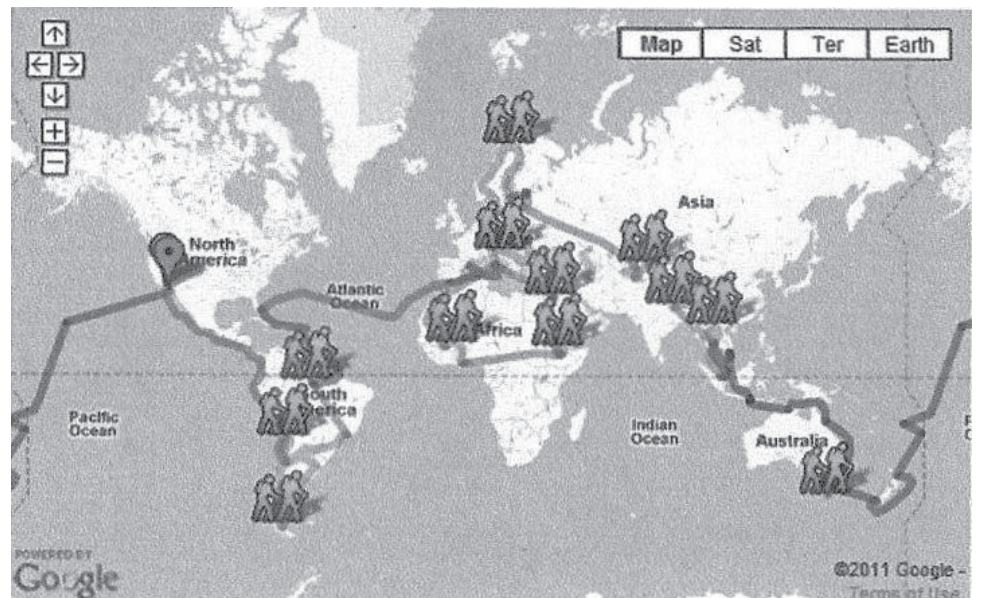
Their estimated time for all of these on-foot adventures is a total of approximately 65 days. That is merely 15% of all of their travels. Another 30 to 45 days will be spent touring with local guides and in home-stay situations, rich with discoveries and interactions with the resident peoples. Visiting approximately 50 countries will take them to six continents. And there will be 96 days at sea when they are on board ships between the continents.

By following this journey, kids can increase their understanding of geography and develop an appreciation for the cultural and natural significance of places in the world."



Follow Sandy and Darren Van Soye on their trek around the world by visiting www.trekkingtheplanet.net

PHOTO BY WWW.TAYLOREDPHOTOMEMORIES.COM



Although there is still nearly two and a half months until their departure date of January 28th already their website is a worthy destination for exploration. For instance, there's a geography directional quiz (which places are more north, west, south, or east?) as well as other game quizzes to involve kids. And until they leave the newsletter postings will be monthly. Once their travels commence there will be 60 four-page weekly overviews posted plus supplemental emails sharing their impressions as well as images and videos from "the road."

Sandy and Darren clearly have a worthy defined goal. Allow me to quote from their web home page:

"Our mission is to bring geography to life and instill a greater curiosity about the world – its people, culture and our fragile planet – in as many young people as possible.

By following this journey, kids can increase their understanding of geography and develop an appreciation for the cultural and natural significance of places in the world."

And, happily, you don't have to be a child to sign on. Just think: no airline tickets, no passports, no visas, no immunizations, no luggage searches. Just vicarious discoveries and adventures. Join me on board.

The Beer and Wine Garden is back!

Check it out at the *Winter Market*

Saturday, December 3, 2011 * 12:00-5:30pm
Downtown Plaza * Free Admission
Tree Lighting Ceremony at 5:00pm

- * Live holiday entertainment
- * Free pictures with Santa from 12-4pm
- * Bounce house * Carnival games
- * Caricature art * Balloon art * Face painting
- * Holiday shopping at vendor and food booths

Fullerton Museum Center
(714) 738-6545



www.cityoffullerton.com

Shopping Soiree

Friday, December 2 from 6:00-10:00pm

Stop by the Museum gift shop during the Shopping Soiree and receive **20% off** everything in the store. Museum members will receive **30% off!**