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**SEVEN SEAS AND SEVEN SUMMITS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

The TOPtoTOP Global Climate Expedition is familiar to many of us at SGS. The husband and wife team, Dario and Sabine Schwörer, are now 40 000 nautical miles into their amazing global expedition to sail the seven seas and summit the seven highest peaks on the seven continents, in a unique journey to promote environmental sustainability.

We managed to catch up with Dario on a well-earned rest stop and hear about TOPtoTOP’s highlights of 2011.

**SGS:** “Where have you travelled to in 2011?”

**Dario: “**In the last year, the team has travelled through ten countries: India, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia (Cocos (Keeling) Islands), Mauritius (including Rodríguez Island), La Reunion (France) and Tanzania. That makes us around the 6 000 nautical miles mark for the year, and now passed the 40 000 mile-mark for the trip as a whole.”

**SGS:** “Has it all been smooth sailing in the *Pachamama*?”

**Dario:** “Not all smooth. As we sailed through the Malacca Strait we collided with a tree trunk! Full use of the bilge pumps helped us successfully overcome the threat of taking on water luckily. And a big thanks to James Khoo, of the Marina in Lumut, for completing all the necessary repair work.”

**SGS:** “So the *Pachamama* is still in sea-worthy shape then?”

**Dario:** “Better than ever thanks to the efforts on our stop in Thailand. We overhauled the *Pachamama* and renewed the logos, and thanks to Sika, nine new Sunware panels were securely glued onto the deck. We have also been working with the NTU University in Singapore where Swissnex organised an event for TOPtoTOP, opened by Ambassador Jorg Reding, at the university. We are involved in a project there, headed by Professor Subodh Mhaisalkar, to improve the energy efficiency of our fuel cells, LED and lithium batteries. On a more sea-worthy note, Commander Jean-Michael Kergoat of the French Navy assisted in risk assessing our voyage across the Indian Ocean to avoid the Somali pirates in the region. We had the choice of sailing further south and battling storms and freak waves, or a shorter route through Somali pirate territory. We chose to fight the storms not the homicidal and unpredictable pirates.”

**SGS:** “Good choice of route. Any stand-out events for TOPtoTOP in 2011?”

**Dario:** “A great many! We participated in the ‘Clean Energy Expo Asia’ in Singapore. This was a great honour, as we had previously spoken at this event in 2009. Swissnex Singapore gave us a good platform at their booth. Other highlights would include our clean up in Malaysia. We organised an island clean up there with the help of the Navy. In pouring rain, over 150 volunteers in more than 20 yachts came together to remove waste and other items from the beaches of the five surrounding islands. And in Langkawi we appointed Zuraidah Abidin to further strengthen the ‘TOPtoTOP No Plastic’ campaign. This campaign has been distributing drinking water filters and reusable shopping bags free of charge to encourage the local community to reduce the number of plastic bottles and bags, and the subsequent waste they produce.”

**SGS:** “Is plastic waste still a big issue in Asia?”

**Dario:** “Definitely. Plastic-waste is a real and visible problem across Asia and the crew literally had to wade knee-deep through it while in Thailand on clean up duties. Even when we visited remote islands such as the Cocos Keeling in the Indian Ocean, we found plastic waste strewn across its windward coastal region. The effect of plastic-waste here also extends to the marine populations of fish and turtles, who become trapped in the waste and perish. Unfortunately their population numbers are already dramatically diminishing.”

**SGS:** “So there is still a long way to go in the education and clean up operations for Asia?”

**Dario:** “Yes, however we have left the region in a safe pair of hands. Chris Ngoi, the winner of the ‘TOPtoTOP Climate Solution Awards 2010’ has founded ‘TOPtoTOP Asia’ in Singapore with 30 members so far. So when we left the region from the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club, with Ambassador Jorg Reding thanking us for ‘getting the ball rolling’ with our initiatives, we know that Chris will keep working hard to continue the good work here.”

**SGS:** “And we hear there was a ‘new arrival’ for the Schwörer family before departing Singapore?”

**Dario:** “Indeed! Alegra Tea Elena joined our family, born at the KK hospital in Singapore. We planted a tree over the placenta in the grounds of the Swiss Club in Singapore, and as is tradition with our family, we baptised Alegra on the mountain “Gonzen” in Switzerland. Lucia also organised for families to attend a TOPtoTOP camp in Maloja for a third successful time, so we are going to make this an annual event in the first week in august from now on.”

**SGS:** “A long trip back to Switzerland for the baptism then?”

**Dario:** “As it happened the joy of Alegra’s birth was balanced by distressing news that Noe had been diagnosed with the rare Kawasaki Disease, and as a result had to be repatriated by the REGA. However, thanks to REGA, the Phuket International Hospital and the University Hospital in Zurich, Noe is now healthy and can continue on the voyage with us.”

**SGS:** “Good news that all is well. We hear Noe may have a rival for claims on Everest?”

**Dario:** “Noe can still hold claim to being the youngest person at Everest base camp, but Carl Elsener, who joined us for the ‘Clean Up Kilimanjaro Expedition’ made the climb and summit with us all. He is just eleven years old! So yes, maybe Carl will be looking at an Everest summit in the future, who knows? Mount Kilimanjaro was our fifth TOP after Everest, and leaves us with Denali and Vinson to climb.”

**SGS:** “There was also the first Maasai with you at the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro?”

**Dario:** “An amazing feat of strength, especially as he had come from sea level and travelled all the way from the coast. The Maasai country is struggling with ever more frequent droughts due to climate change. In the village of Loiborsoit we aim to raise awareness in the region and install guttering and tanks to capture village rainwater runoff. We also plan to replace a defective pump in the village well with one that operates on solar energy. We hope this will help show the way forward for sustainable water management, and Markus Heeb must receive thanks for agreeing to visit the project annually to ensure its upkeep.”

**SGS:** “Any other achievements in 2011 you’d like to mention?”

**Dario:** “Our member Hanna of the Rotary Club of Yankalilla in South Australia has let us know that the project ‘Coloured Pencils for Children in Nepal’ has come to fruition. The Rotary Club of Yankalilla collected 585 packets of coloured pencils, 333 sharpeners and 200 colouring-in books, which have been sent to Kathmandu this September. The Sherpa, Lhakpa Gyalzen, will distribute them for us to schools in the Himalayas.”

**SGS:** “It sounds as though 2011 has been a great success for TOPtoTOP?”

**Dario:** “2011 certainly has been a good year. Our visitor number for presentations has reached 56 000 and we have collected 27 tonnes of waste from our efforts. Thanks to SGS, and our other sponsors, we can continue on our journey.”

**SGS:** “Many thanks Dario and safe travels.”

**Dario:** “Merci.”