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photos submitted

LAST month, Kevin Vallely, Ray Zahab and Richard Weber broke the world record for the fastest self-supported expedition to the South Pole. Vallely will talk about his adventure tonight at Centennial Theatre.

KEVIN VALLELY SPEAKS AT VIMFF TONIGHT

Polar Express

■ **Kevin Vallely:** Polar Express, Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival, Friday, Feb. 20, 7:30 p.m., Centennial Theatre.

Manisha Krishnan

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NORTH Vancouver adventurer Kevin Vallely has been asked to speak at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival in the past, but he hasn't really had much to say — until now.

Last month, Vallely and his teammates Richard Weber and Ray Zahab made a 33-day journey across Antarctica on their own, breaking the world record for fastest unassisted trip to the South Pole.

Needless to say, Vallely's got his share of stories to tell. "Certainly the South Pole trip, it ended up being quite

successful and gaining quite a lot of notoriety locally and internationally, so I know there's a lot of people that are keen on hearing about it and I'm kind of keen on speaking about it," he says, noting the story made front page news for 330 newspapers around the world and was picked up by CNN International.

The previous world record of 39 days was set in December and although the recognition that's come with beating it has been surreal, it has very little to do with Vallely's motivation to make the 1,094-kilometre trip.

Around 15 years ago, Vallely became inspired when he read up on a great arctic explorer from Canada who was among the first two men to complete a round trip on foot to the North Pole — Richard Weber.

"That started me on my adventuring career, I did a number of major trips because of it," says Vallely, who has skied 2,000

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THE trio started the expedition at Hercules Inlet on the Ronne Ice Shelf and made their way to the bottom of the world with Vallely and Weber on skis and Zahab on snowshoes.



MAJKA BURHARDT

Finding adventure in vertical Ethiopia

■ **Majka Burhardt:** Vertical Ethiopia — Possibility, Environment and Adventure in the Horn of Africa, Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival, Saturday, Feb. 21, 7:30 p.m., Centennial Theatre.

John Goodman

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As part of the VIMFF's Women and/in Climbing event at Centennial Theatre tomorrow night Majka Burhardt will talk about scaling the Gheralta Massif in northern Ethiopia. The adventure is chronicled in her new book Vertical Ethiopia: Climbing Toward Possibility in the Horn of Africa.

North Shore News:

As a climber you're focused on landscapes but you also have a degree in anthropology — your landscapes are filled with people — that's different from most climbers I would imagine.

Majka Burhardt:

I think a lot of people initially get into climbing to get away from everyday life but if you've been in climbing for a long time you start understanding how it reacts and relates to everyday life. It has to be relevant. It does for me. That's how I tend to travel and to see the world using climbing as a portal to get closer to other things that are important.

North Shore News:

You put the climbing experience in context.

Majka Burhardt:

I try really hard to do that. It's something that I'm constantly flipping around in my head. You get a lot of downtime when you are actually climbing. You have these great stretches of complete focus and then great stretches of utter nothingness and your brain starts working. Mine sits out there and says "How does this all relate?" I think as a writer it's an opportunity to share those thoughts and learn about them more.

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Government excited about future projects

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North Shore News:

Your first trip to Ethiopia was to learn more about the Geisha coffee bean.

Majka Burhardt:

I'm actually starting work on another book about coffee in Ethiopia and it's sort of bringing me back full circle. We didn't find (the bean) in Ethiopia but we're pretty sure it's there. The government was not really excited about the trip that I was on looking for it. They were afraid that the bean was going to be taken away from Ethiopia but that was the opposite of what we were trying to do. We were actually trying to find it and help them cultivate it there. You have a coffee bean that is \$150 a pound and suddenly the economics of Ethiopia can change quite a bit. Ironically having written the book, Vertical Ethiopia, the government is now really excited about the work I've done with Ethiopia and eager for me to come back and help facilitate my looking for coffee.

North Shore News:

Why is it difficult to find? It sounds like it was an Indiana Jones type expedition.

Majka Burhardt:

It was. It's a bummer that we didn't quite pull it off but it is something that I think I will be part of down the road. It's difficult



photo Gabe Rogel

TO learn more about the trip and Burhardt's book Vertical Ethiopia visit www.majkaburhardt.com

to find because it's not being cultivated in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's the birthplace of coffee. It's the only place where coffee grows wild but no one's ever found Geisha in Ethiopia. It's cultivated in Panama.

North Shore News:

To most North Americans Ethiopia is a very remote, exotic place.

Majka Burhardt:

I think it is a remote and exotic place. One of the things that surprised me most when I first arrived in Ethiopia was just how green it was and how much topography there was. Even when you fly into Addis Ababa at around 8,000 feet you see these mountains and rolling hills. Every circuit in my brain told me that I wasn't supposed to be seeing that in Ethiopia because it was supposed to be flat and dry. My take on the country is that it's a really unique place in Africa because it has this complex history — it's the only country in Africa that was never colonized. You have all these different associations with Ethiopia and I think it really holds people's imagination that way. It just keeps going and going and going. Ethiopia hasn't had a chance to claim all of that history because they've really struggled with natural disasters and the political situation.

North Shore News:

Are there Christian, Muslim and tribal forces in play there?

Majka Burhardt:

Very much so. You have 60 per cent Christian, 40 per cent Muslim. And then there's tribal forces which really don't break down separate from that. They usually tend to fall into one of those religious camps. Ethiopia has always been this model of the two faiths intermingling really well with mosques next to churches.

North Shore News:

How difficult is it to get around? Did you feel safe when you were there?

Majka Burhardt:

I felt exceptionally safe. It's really easy for a woman to travel in Ethiopia. It's a relatively low-crime area. I walked around Addis Ababa by myself all the time. I would take public transportation. That being said you would make choices as you would in any big city but it's exceptionally safe. Travelling up in the area where we were climbing was very safe also. We were climbing up there and people were really quite receptive to us. There's no sense of, "OK you need to be covering yourself," in this way or the other. We were in one of the more progressive areas, northern Ethiopia. If you're going to go out to eastern Ethiopia you're going to be getting into the Odegen where you have a lot more of a Muslim influence and women aren't going to be as welcome to go around climbing but where we were it was perfectly acceptable. We were a novelty to people around us.

North Shore News:

What were the logistics of the trip?

Majka Burhardt:

Climbing isn't a normal way of operating in Ethiopia — you



photo Gabe Rogel

MAJKA Burhardt first visited Ethiopia in October 2006.

don't get a climbing permit there the way you do if you go to India or Pakistan or Nepal. We actually had a permit because of my Ethiopian publisher — they wanted to give it to us just in case someone tried to shoot us down or some militia decided to show up. All things considered it was pretty fast. We got a vehicle, we had a local to help us with driving and translating, we hired a cook. We went up there and everything flowed really easy.

North Shore News:

What did the Ethiopians think of you as climbers?

Majka Burhardt:

I was trying to figure out why as a climber we think we have a right to go into these other places and climb — is it a legitimate way to come to know another country? When you're hiking up you're living in the same environment that the locals live in so you're getting wickedly dirty, you have burrs in your clothes and your hair and you're putting your hands into cracks as you climb. And I think that by being that intimate with the landscape people understand that you're there and you want a different experience. I thought that people were really respectful of what we were doing and were intrigued by it. They thought it was a little bit absurd because we have tons of climbing equipment — they would pick up all the heavy clamps and ropes and laugh at us.

North Shore News:

Had Gheralta ever been climbed before?

Majka Burhardt:

The Gheralta Massif had never been climbed on before. We did three routes on it. None of them went all the way to the top as the rock quality was not super ideal. After you got about 300 feet up there was this really rotten red band and a bunch of horizontal stripes that changed the composition of the sandstone. The thing that was really special technically was trying to keep your head together on really soft sandstone. You don't want soft rock to climb on and you don't want soft sandstone to climb on because it tends to crumble and break. It was a daily exercise in, "How much can you trust the gear? How good is this rock? If one hold crumbles then another one might. How much risk do you want to take?" The thing about that area is that there is a lot of rock and Gheralta is by far the most prominent and beautiful area up there. There's tons of nooks and crannies and if you spend enough time you could probably find things that were of better quality.

North Shore News:

Where are you planning to climb next?

Majka Burhardt:

I'm going to Namibia in early May for a month long-project that's going to probably result in a documentary or possibly two different film projects. It's continuing this idea of how do adventure and culture go together and how does adventure give you access to a deeper understanding of culture in starting global conversations?

Capilano Performing Arts Theatre
2009 Season

CURTIS FULLER WITH "A" BAND AND NITECAP
February 22 @ 8pm | Tickets: \$34/\$31
Trombonist and NEA jazz master Curtis Fuller's sense of time and ambitious solos has made him a mainstay of the hard-bop scene. His career has included performing with Clifford Jordan, John Coltrane, Hank Mobley, Art Blakey, Wayne Shorter, and many other jazz greats.

EXIT 22: THE THREEPENNY OPERA
Mar. 12-14, 18-21 @ 8pm; Mar. 18 @ 12pm
Mar. 15 & 21 @ 2pm | Tickets: \$20/\$14/\$8
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JILL TOWNSEND BIG BAND
W/ SPECIAL GUEST JIGGS WHIGHAM
March 27 @ 8pm | Tickets: \$30/\$27
Townsend's big band features some of Vancouver's finest jazz artists including Campbell Ryga and Brad Turner.

Box Office: 604.990.7810 Online: capilanou.ca/theatre

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Capilano University
Capilano University - 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver

Vancouver Welsh Men's Choir presents

St. David's Day CONCERT

Sunday, March 1 • 8:00pm

St. David's United Church
1525 Taylor Way, West Vancouver

Tickets: \$22/\$18

VWMC.CA or 604.878.1190 or ticketmaster.ca