We are going to make it up there!

Expedition leader Lee Li Jen often repeated this catch-phrase to her team during the most gruelling parts of their cycling journey to the Himalayas. The phrase seemed simple but to Lee Jen’s other team-mates such as 23-year-old Alvin Lee, this simple phrase was often the one thing that kept them going.

While their peers were doing internships during the mid-year holidays, Singapore Management University (SMU) undergraduate Lee Jen chose to take the path less travelled. Calling themselves Zero Limits, fellow SMU undergraduates Chnng Deming, Ong Fang Kei, Danny Ng, Pek Aiwei, Mo Shuhui, Alvan Tan were also part of the team which embarked on the expedition.

The team’s name certainly seemed appropriate given the nature of their challenging expedition. Zero Limit’s cycling route literally spanned two countries. In total, 16 days were spent cycling up brutal paths to the top of the Tibetan plateau, past the famous Mount Everest base camp and down Nepal’s fertile rice fields. The team's non-stop 3.2km downhill ride was also said to be the longest downhill ride in the whole world.

Priceless experiences

“The expedition meant a lot to me. I had the chance to experience extreme sports through an expedition, challenge myself by taking on new roles and lastly, I had this valuable chance to meet people that I would not normally meet,” explained Alvin. As the team’s sponsorship executive, Alvin managed to secure subsidies from organisations such as the National Youth Council and Singapore Sports Council.

Li Jen heartily agreed. “Even though we had to pay about $4,000 each, I felt the experience was priceless! During the expedition, I pushed myself to my physical and mental limits. During the beginning, we would suffer body aches almost everyday and we will end each day with the full knowledge that the next day will bring yet another uphill ride. I guess I learnt perseverance when I thought I would give up instead.”

Perseverance and grit were certainly needed through Zero Limit’s experiences. Preparations began eight months prior to the expedition and team members were expected to give their full commitment to training immediately after the term exams.

To build up cycling stamina, three cycling trips to Malaysia were also included in the team’s training schedule — two to Desaru, one to Kuantan and the last was up Cameron Highlands. During the actual expedition, the team found themselves cycling an average of 50-80km daily.

On top of this challenge, some members experienced the brutal symptoms of altitude sickness. Breathing difficulties, having headaches and even coughing out blood were some of the symptoms experienced.

Both Alvin and Li Jen also speak warmly of their Tibetan and Nepalese guides, and of the various people they met.

Their Nepalese cycling guide, Akihaya, was one such example. Despite a meagre monthly salary, he inspired the team with his kindness in organising free biking expeditions for the local children and his determination in training for cycling competitions.

As for Alvin, the sheer innocence of the local children touched a chord in the undergraduate’s heart.

“I still remember the local children running to us whenever we arrived in a village. Although they were dressed in torn and threadbare clothes, they were never too weary to greet us with a smile and a laugh,” said Alvin.

Li Jen also recalled how the children loved taking photos with their digital cameras. “They were always very excited and would start jumping up and down in glee every time they saw their own photos on the screens of our digital cameras,” said Li Jen.

The stories seemed endless. The team spoke passionately about visiting the Mount Everest base camp, moving through desolate villages perched on sandy slopes and the general jaw-dropping sensation of being up in the lofty Himalayas.

As the interview drew to an end, Li Jen’s passion for adventure-cycling could clearly be seen in her concluding remark. “My friends and I are going to go for more expeditions and we will definitely continue cycling for the rest of our lives.”