

# PARALYMPIAN WANTS A A REVOLUTION

Decorated athlete plans Mt. Kilimanjaro climb to change how disabled are seen

By ANNA BLOOM  
 Of the Record staff

Mount Kilimanjaro is known as one of the world's highest walkable mountains, but Park City resident Chris Waddell plans to climb it without the use of his legs.

While others will walk on the 60-mile path, Waddell will pedal a handcycle, his heart rate beating twice as fast, pushing the pedal four times around for one revolution of his cycle's wheel. Where others will sidestep a rock or a log, Waddell will need to exert extra arm strength to lift and roll the vehicle's four wheels over the obstacle, sometimes 12 inches off the ground. When others climb on, he expects the back wheels to lose their traction in the mud once in a while.

In June 2008, Waddell plans to be the first paraplegic to summit the 19,340-foot peak, documenting the experience on film. As he trains for the 10-day journey, he repeats his mantra, "One Revolution." "One revolution means so many things to me," he says, "one revolution of the handcycle, one revolution to change the way people see the disabled community, and one revolution of the globe, which symbolizes steady, fundamental change."

When people see the documentary of his trip, Waddell hopes they will not see the differences, but the similarities. He says he wants to change the way people perceive the disabled.

"What this film is going to be about is the belief that people have to move forward, and that's not specific to someone with a

disability," he says. "All people are going to experience trauma in their lives. No one is exempt."

Part of Waddell's mission is to undo the idea that disabled equals charity. He wants to prove his ability and worth beyond "the good cause." He insists the film be for-profit, he says, to prove that people with disabilities can provide an economic value.

"The point is that, after an accident, many people are dependent of handouts, but handouts keep them from getting ahead," he writes in his blog, [chriswaddell.wordpress.com](http://chriswaddell.wordpress.com). "If the general public just continues to see the charity, we've missed an opportunity to be seen as individuals."

The idea for the climb came this summer in Tibet, a place where many people not only see the difference between a paraplegic and an able-bodied person — they also believe that disabled bodies are punishment for bad karma in a past life. Waddell, a decorated Paralympic skier and track racer, traveled as the featured guest of Park City's National Ability Center to serve as a counter example to those prevailing beliefs. During his 15-year career, he won 13 medals as a Paralympian, one for track and 12 for skiing — more medals than any other Paralympic athlete in history.

"I was coming over to Tibet as an example with the National

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PHOTO COURTESY OF KATIE ELDRIDGE

To climb Kilimanjaro next June, Chris Waddell plans to use a one-of-a-kind four-wheeled handcycle.

## HIS STORY

In 1988, Chris Waddell broke his back in a skiing accident during a winter break his freshman year at Middlebury College. Months later he returned to school and began to ski in a mono-ski, becoming captain of the ski team. Later he graduated cum laude in international politics and economics and is currently pursuing his master's in business administration at Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah. He has since won 13 medals in the Paralympics — one in track and 12 in skiing and nine medals at the World Championships — six for skiing and three for track. In 1994, Waddell swept all four alpine skiing events at the Paralympics in Lillehammer, Norway. Credited with revolutionizing the sport of mono-skiing, Waddell has conducted camps for disabled skiers throughout the country.

## Climbing Kilimanjaro for one revolution: What it takes

Chris Waddell, one of the most decorated male skiers in Paralympic history, won 13 medals over four Games competing in wheelchairs and mono-skis. He plans to arrive in Tanzania in June of 2008 to climb Mount Kilimanjaro using a one-of-a-kind four-wheel hand cycle in 10 days. Here's what he's up against:

### 19,340 feet

Mount Kilimanjaro is the tallest mountain in Africa and the tallest freestanding mountain in the world.

### Rocky roads

No paraplegic has made it to the summit, though three others have made an attempt. Though the mountain is considered "walkable," rocks and logs that able-bodied people can step over can become "massive obstacles" on a hand cycle, according to Waddell.

### Off-road vs. road hand-cycles

On the road, Waddell says he's used to moving at 20 miles an hour. On a four-wheeled hand cycle, he will be moving at one to two miles per hour.

### Climate

As Waddell climbs Kilimanjaro, he will encounter conditions from equatorial to arctic, from a belt of dense forests on the lower slopes to a wet tropical climate to desert to snow at the summit. The changes in ground temperature and moisture will have affect the traction of his wheels, which may get stuck in the wetter regions.

### Perception

Waddell hopes to challenge people's preconceptions about the disabled. "If you really take the time to look at us, you might be surprised," he says.



# Paralympian plans Kilimanjaro film

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Ability Center to show them that being disabled doesn't mean you've done something wrong," Waddell explains. "In fact, the Dali Llama doesn't believe that's the case."

Though Waddell has spent nearly two decades competing and has been featured in newspapers and magazines, he realized that he was not as visible as other athletes on television. "In some ways, it feels like it all didn't happen," he says of his career.

While watching a travel show on television, Waddell wondered if he could climb Kilimanjaro — and if it was documented, he thought, then his athleticism and ambition could be exposed to a larger audience.

"Maybe if people get a chance to see it, they will be surprised to see themselves in it and see what's great about all of us — our ability to recover from adversity," he says.

In the documentary, Waddell plans to incorporate friends and family members and the histories of some of his heroes, including his mentor, Jim Martinson, who lost both his legs in Vietnam and built the first mono-ski, and skier Diana Golden.

Waddell remembers watching Golden race in an able-bodied race with one leg a year before his ski accident in 1988 that left him paralyzed. "In a sport so riddled with excuses, she seemed so excuse-free," he recalls. "I gained a hero that day."

Golden died at the age of 38 of

the same cancer that cost her a leg. For the film, Waddell will interview her husband and coach.

"I look at these people and say to myself, 'These are the people I want to be like,'" he says. "My transition was so seamless — in the hospital for two months, road racing in the summer, ski racing in the winter. I didn't have to create any of this stuff."

Since the summer, Waddell has trained on a \$5,000 One-Off Titanium off-road three-wheel hand cycle and a \$30,000 one-of-a-kind off-road four-wheel hand cycle. Before the snow fell, he trained on Round Valley trails, Guardsman's Pass and Snowbird with Dean Cardinale who will be his guide in Tanzania. In the near future, he plans to train in Mexico to test the technical challenges in a different climate.

With both handcycles, passengers lean forward with their knees bent, moving pedals with their hands, and thanks to multiple gears, can also articulate up and down to help riders conquer obstacles.

The two hand cycles were developed and built by Mike Augspurger, founder of One-Off Titanium in Massachusetts, a company that designs vehicles for racing and more recently, war veterans.

Augspurger says that his four-

wheel off-road handcycle is 50 pounds heavier and moves more slowly than his three-wheel model, but it adds more traction. Others have been successful with the four-wheel model on Mount Fuji and on more burly mountains in the United States.

Augspurger shares a wish for change with Waddell, seeking to bring a greater equality to the disabled community. His original handcycle was called the "Afghanistan Model," because he had heard 50,000 people in Afghanistan needed wheelchairs, he says. The idea was to give the citizens a practical vehicle that could travel over unpaved paths typical of their country.

Augspurger remembers contacting Waddell in 1997 after seeing him featured in Outside Magazine beneath the title, "Could This Be the World's Greatest Athlete?" and inviting him to try out one of his early model handcycles. He remembers Waddell, who lived nearby, jumped at the chance.

"He wouldn't have had such a long, successful career as an athlete without being really focused and dedicated," says Augspurger from his shop outside of Boston. "If he says he is going to climb Kilimanjaro, I believe him."

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