

## Hometown hero rolls toward history

### Scouting trip to Africa considered a success

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For some, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. For others, it takes wheels of steel.

Chris Waddell took another step in his journey of 15,100 feet up the face of Mount Kilimanjaro on a scouting trip in June, and he did so without the use of his legs.

Waddell, a five-time Paralympic gold medalist in mono-skiing, plans to summit the tallest mountain in Africa using an 83-pound hand cycle.

Waddell conceived of the unprecedented ascent in the summer of 2007 and has recruited a group of local filmmakers, athletes, friends and benefactors to help him document the climb. He plans to scale the mountain in February.

Waddell's weeks long trip to Tanzania was his first time in Africa and included two-and-a-half days on the mountain. He ascended 10,500 feet without assistance. The mission was meant to give climbers an idea of what adjustments they will need to make in the next several months so Waddell can reach the top of the mountain.

The bulk of the trip was spent with patients at rehabilitation centers where Waddell met with health-care providers and discussed how to design and distribute a more robust wheelchair for disabled children and adults living in the developing world.

What surprised Waddell most about the trip wasn't just the technical difficulty of the mountain, but also the difficult conditions in Tanzanian hospitals where patients often must heal without sheets on their beds.

Another challenge for handicapped people in the country, Waddell explained, is a prevalent lack of understanding about what causes disabilities and how they can be treated in a country where many still attribute impairment to witchcraft.

"Chris didn't want to go to Africa and just climb a mountain," cameraman Mike Stoner said. "He's influencing a lot of people and not just those who are disabled. He's influencing everybody. Chris is a world-class athlete. He's probably more able-bodied than most people. It's hard to call someone disabled when they're as able-bodied as he is."

Defying stereotypes is part of the broader social program Waddell champions. He travels to elementary, junior high and high schools in Utah talking to kids about how to beat the odds. "The goal of being a disabled athlete is to shock people, show them the impossible," Waddell said. "The intention is to summit, and the summit is really personal to me. But it's the project in total that matters. I don't want to close my eyes to those other things."

One Revolution, the working title of Waddell's documentary and humanitarian project, plans to donate 20 custom wheelchairs to people in Tanzania. The cost of a wheelchair, about \$300, is too much for many families there and vehicles often break down on the country's unpaved pathways.

Waddell's climbing chair, which is his on loan, costs \$30,000 and has 56 gears. Park City residents are not strangers to the sight of Waddell whizzing along Spiro and Round Valley trails. He even goes off-road to train, rolling himself up the Pay Day ski run at Park City Mountain Resort.

Still, despite all his training, Waddell says he was surprised at how hard it was to climb sections of Kilimanjaro. "When you're skiing, you're only training for a minute or a minute-and-a-half race. When you're climbing, you've got to prepare for eight-hour days," he said.

Waddell's four-wheel vehicle is designed to roll over rocky terrain. He crosses ravines or ruts in the road with plywood boards and winches. "Physically, it was really demanding, but mentally it was even more demanding," he said. "You have to think in five-foot increments."

Stoner, who has filmed several sports-related documentaries, says what makes Waddell's journey compelling is his charisma and ease with people. "Ski movies can be so frivolous," he said. "A lot of the films about skiing are about ego. It's, 'Look what I did.' As a filmmaker what makes this project interesting is that it's such a broad canvas Chris is creating. And after seeing how he tackled the mountain, I think he can do this." Stoner said the climb had been strenuous carrying a 35-pound pack containing gear and camera equipment.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE STONER

Chris Waddell drives a custom-made hand cycle on Mount Kilimanjaro in June. The vehicle weighs 83 pounds and costs \$30,000. Waddell is trying to become the first paraplegic in history to summit the tallest mountain in Africa.



Education, awareness and equipment donations are key components of Chris Waddell's mission to climb Mount Kilimanjaro unassisted in February. He plans to donate more than 300 wheelchairs to the people of Tanzania.

# Waddell makes film about climb

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Add about 50 pounds and you begin to understand the load Waddell had to carry.

The trek attracted plenty of attention from locals, Stoner said. People would often stop and stare at Waddell and his team. "They just didn't think it was possible for a man in a wheelchair to climb a mountain," he said. "They really were excited about what Chris was doing. You could see people saying, 'Gosh, my brother is disabled. Do you think he could do something like this?'"

For Waddell, the answer is yes. "The film is about meeting one of the greatest challenges you can conceive, of meeting a challenge that is ridiculously hard," he said. "It's my journey but it's also the journey of a lot of disabled athletes."

Dave Robinson, one of the "One Revolution" executive producers, says that Waddell's good works and his program Nametags, a workshop that teaches kids to respect their unique attributes and abilities, has gained him notoriety at home. "Chris doesn't like the term, but we call him the hometown hero," he said. "Going out with him is like going out with a rock star."

Robinson added that the heart of the film is Waddell's connection to Africa. "The challenges people



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE STONER

**Giving hope abroad: Chris Waddell reaches out to a young boy in Tanzania as part of a tour of the country's hospitals.**

in Tanzania face are almost unbelievable," he said. "Part of the film is that we have a responsibility as global citizens and we can make a very significant global impact. We can give someone the gift of mobility."

Make a donation or watch an eight-minute trailer of the film at [one-revolution.org](http://one-revolution.org). Waddell will be speaking Sept. 20 at Ogden's "Utah's High Adventure Mountain



**Chris Waddell sits outside camp during his scouting mission in June,**