

amber

gets the green light

Preparing to embark on a gruelling cycle ride from John O'Groats to Land's End, Amber Bryan tells Louise Cummings what has inspired her epic 900-mile challenge...

Amber Bryan has earned herself a reputation as a bit of an action girl. No stranger to adrenaline-junkie sports, she's fearlessly abseiled down a 250ft waterfall in Costa Rica, swung through the jungle on a perilously high monkey swing and tackled Ben Nevis, hardly breaking into a sweat.

However, her latest challenge – cycling the length of blustery Britain in 12 days – promises to be the most gruelling yet. The adventurous 29-year-old will set off from John O'Groats with her friend Ian Richards on October 4th, and undertake a mammoth 900-mile journey, aiming to free-wheel into Land's End on October 16th. Along the way, she'll burn a staggering 50,000 calories, ascend a total of 37,000 ft – that's 8,000ft higher than Everest – and turn her pedals a quarter of a million times.

As a personal trainer in Waterbeach, fitness is obviously Amber's forte, so you might think the challenge would be a breeze. However, long-distance cycling is not one of her passions, so she is understandably anxious about the arduous journey ahead.

"It's so far out of my comfort zone," she admits. "I'm not a cyclist; even when I was a student in Cambridge I didn't have a bike. I've owned a mountain bike on and off throughout my life, but more for going on country cycles or popping to the bakery in the village. I'm certainly not used to riding on roads with lots of traffic so it is going to be hard."

One thing that will keep Amber pedalling

will be the fact that, with each mile, she is raising cash for Ataxia UK. Ataxia is a neurological condition that affects balance, co-ordination and speech. Amber's grandfather, 77-year-old Charles Debenham – a well-known artist in his home city of Colchester – was diagnosed with the condition several years ago, so it is a cause very close to her heart.



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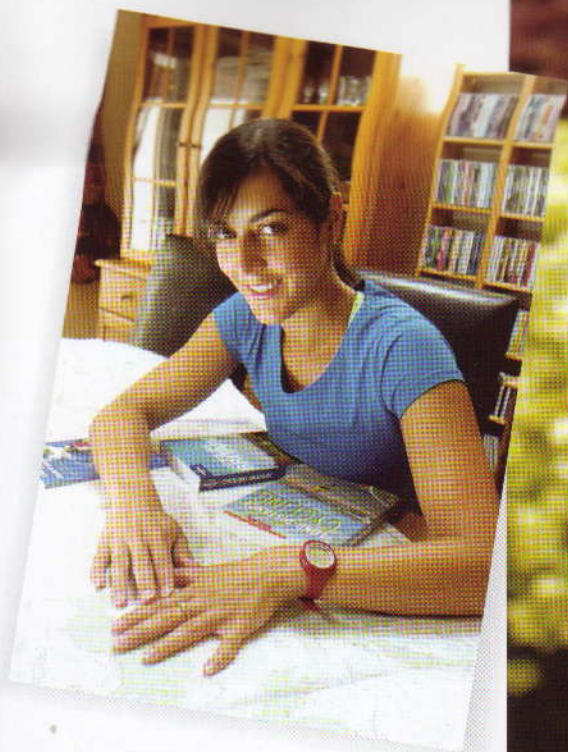
"I think my grandad is quite touched at what I am doing," Amber enthuses. "He is doing really well and has defied the doctors in terms of how he is at this stage.

He is such a character, so eccentric and I think the fact that he is an incredibly intelligent man with such a strong mind does help. But his balance has been affected and there will be a time when he won't be able to walk and will lose motor functions," she explains.

Amber's co-pilot on her cross-Blighty cycle ride is friend Ian Richards, who runs a B&B in Scotland. They met when Amber was walking the West Highland way and checked into his homestead. "Ian asked if I could do distance personal training over email as he couldn't get to a gym. I agreed and then asked what he was getting fit for. He explained that he had taken up the mantle to do the John O'Groats to Land's End challenge," she explains. "He had a guest stay who was going to be doing the cycle ride, then was diagnosed with cancer, and wouldn't be well enough to do it. Ian was really touched by the story, so he bought the bike off this guy and committed to do it."

Keen to try out the challenge herself, Amber asked Ian if he'd mind having some company on his journey down the country, and he readily agreed. "Training has been difficult as we live at other ends of the country, so everything has been done on the phone and email, apart from one planning session, when I was up in Scotland," Amber says.

The pair have plotted out their 900-mile route, and are aiming to cover roughly 80 miles a day, staying in pre-booked B&Bs along the way. "We are expecting the first few days and the last two days to be the most difficult because obviously the



Scottish highlands and then all through Cornwall is very hilly, so they will be the worst bits," Amber muses.

Whatever the challenges, Amber is no quitter and is determined to succeed. Indeed she has already planned her finishing celebrations. "I have practised my victory hand clench!" she laughs. "I think I will feel really proud. It's a mammoth challenge for anyone, even someone who is a superkeen cyclist and clocks up to 20 miles a day cycling to work. I do have moments of panic when I think 'am I completely mad?' so I think getting to the end I will have that sense of 'wow, I've actually travelled the entire length of Britain on a bike, through my own steam'. Whatever the weather or misfortune we have in terms of punctures, it will be very satisfying. Plus we've got a cream tea and a massage waiting for us at the end, so that's a great incentive!"

Amber aims to raise £1,000 for Ataxia UK. If you would like to sponsor her challenge you can donate on her Just Giving page www.justgiving.com/amberbryan

To find out more about Amber and her personal training business log onto www.lovefittraining.co.uk



Amber Bryan pictured in training for her most gruelling challenge yet; cycling the length of Britain in 12 days

ABOVE Her inspiration; grandfather, Charles Debenham

