



# WALKING THE TALK

## CLEANING UP SA'S COAST

By EMMA MCGARRITY

**A**ll environmentally savvy people are anti-litter but few would go to the extremes Michael Baretta and Camilla Howard are going to. Baretta and Howard have undertaken a seven-month trek that will see the duo walking the 3 000km South African coastline, from the Namibian to the Mozambican border, collecting and

recycling litter along the way while spreading their message of environmental responsibility.

The two, who have been friends since high school in Cape Town, have both given up their jobs and “normal” lives to go on their Trekking for Trash mission. For Baretta, the decision was clear-cut. After working in Jo’burg for three years, Egoli’s fast-paced life

became too much for him. “I felt like I was chasing the pot of gold at the bottom of an ever-moving rainbow. I just wanted to do something different and life-changing, and also do good while doing it,” he explains. Howard, on the other hand, has taken a break from the short-course cooking school she runs with her mother and plans to

people what to do; we wanted to actively do it at the same time. That's why we're now walking with a massive "bin backpack", literally collecting litter and encouraging people to do the same.

They could be informal waste collectors, craft people — as long as they are doing interesting things with used products. For example, there is a great initiative in Kommetjie where they make things from recycled waste, so we posted a little bit about that to show

## We wanted to do something crazy and bold to make people aware of the amount of litter,

**Trekking for Trash** started as a project about a year and a half ago. It began with some awareness drives, putting up relevant links and such on Facebook, leading up to the start of the trek. It's not registered as a not-for-profit, but we aren't making any profit from it.

**We chose the coastline** route because the rivers flow down from inland. So if people litter inland, it flows down to the sea and then round the coastline, which is something we really wanted to highlight.

**The response from** the public has been amazing. If we post a photo of a really bad beach, entire families volunteer to go down and clean it up. Even the Department of Environmental Affairs came on board. There was a beach north of Strandfontein, which was the dirtiest beach we had seen by far. There were fishermen all along the coastline who had driven their 4x4s on the sand dunes — which is obviously not on — and there were all these fish and chip packets and bottles lying everywhere. It was quite sad to see but everyone around was behaving as if this was entirely normal. So we sent a photo to the Minister for Environmental Affairs and the department then offered to clean up that beach.

**Part of our mission** is also to use our Facebook community to showcase people we meet along the way who we believe are doing cool things.

people what they do there. We then encourage our Facebook community to donate to these projects directly, or support them in some way.

**Communicating via our** social media accounts — Facebook and Twitter — is very important to us because we want people to see we are actually doing this ourselves and that it's not a big company which has huge money or someone who's being paid to do it. So we spend around two hours a day communicating with our online community; we answer every post ourselves.

**We're 1 000km into** the trek now, so any preparation we hadn't done before we left we've had to adjust to en route. The mental preparation was definitely the most important aspect of the pre-trip planning. For the physical preparation, we sort of walk ourselves fit.

**Getting used to** being tired all the time is a major adjustment. Walking in the sun for eight hours a day is quite draining, and then we catch up on all the media and communication stuff at night. We're not quite used to always being exhausted but we're getting better at it.

**The biggest difficulty is** being away from family and friends and constantly being on the road, constantly moving. Also, seeing and meeting new people continuously can be tiring.

**We would love for** more people to join our online community and get involved. Details of scheduled clean-ups at beaches along our route are online — come down and support us. People can also help by supporting the informal waste collectors and the waste initiatives we have identified along the way. **” TBI**

Find *TrekkingForTrash* on Facebook, follow them on Twitter @Trekking4trash, or visit their website [www.trekkingfortrash.co.za](http://www.trekkingfortrash.co.za)

return to her business, unless life takes her elsewhere.

For now, the duo are concentrating on their *groot trek*. *The Big Issue* met up with them in Muizenberg — while doing one of the many organised beach clean-ups they have planned for South Africa's coast — to find out about the journey so far.

**“ We both decided we** wanted to do something crazy and bold to make people aware of the amount of litter that goes unnoticed. We didn't want to just start a campaign telling

