

*Teacher Prasatt Arumugam becomes first S'porean to complete Pacific-Crest Trail*

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# S'porean conquers US 4,280km trail for charity

**SINGAPORE** – Two weeks after completing the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), Prasatt Arumugam is still suffering from the physical havoc it has wreaked on his body. He could trek 17 hours in the rain during his five-month hike, but now struggles to walk the length of his house.

However, the 26-year-old bachelor does not regret undertaking the 4,280km endeavour between Canada and Mexico, which made him one of the 4,862 people to finish one of the world's longest and toughest trails — and the first Singaporean to do so.

Prasatt embarked on his solo trek last July as part of TrekInvicta, a social initiative he founded to support the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF). He aimed to raise S\$10 for every mile (1.61km) — or about S\$26,660 in all — for the CCF.

The teacher, who lost his aunt to cancer, left his job to attempt the hike, which cost around S\$13,000. The National University of Singapore Society gave him S\$3,000 while the National Youth Council will reimburse up to S\$5,000. He is self-funding the remaining amount.

He trained for six months, but was initially overwhelmed by the journey that started in Washington, wound through Oregon and ended in California. "There was always this fear I had ... because less than 50 per cent



Prasatt at the Sequoia National Park in California. Initially overwhelmed by the journey, he was rewarded with breathtaking sights and met people who helped him in various ways. PHOTO: PRASATT ARUMUGAM

of people complete it due to injuries or just lack of willpower," he told TODAY.

"(But) I knew I had to finish it for the CCF ... I think because of how much it demanded from me, it showed me how much I can actually do and gave me

more faith in my own abilities."

Prasatt went from struggling to walk 15 miles daily to "easily" covering 75 miles in two or three days. But there was a price to pay. "Every day, some part would hurt," chuckled Pra-

satt, who lost about 6kg and is now underweight. "I walked alone most of the time, but pain was always with me."

Danger was a constant too. Slight missteps along narrow paths with steep drops on one side would have been fatal. "I tripped a lot. If I didn't have my trekking poles, I'd been in serious trouble," he said.

Prasatt feared for his life one stormy night. Strong 60kmh winds uprooted one side of his tent and he had to scramble to find more rocks to hold it down, while rain leaked in.

"I was on top of my sleeping pad, like a raft, and felt like a drowning rat trying to escape from a sinking ship!" he said. "It was cold and I worried about getting hypothermia."

The rewards for the risks Prasatt took came in the form of breathtaking sights like majestic mountain ranges and beautiful lakes. He also encountered more than 50 people who helped in various ways. Many were trail angels — people who provide help for trekkers, like accommodation and transport to and from trails.

A family he met in Washington offered him refuge when he got to Oregon, where they lived. The mother, Helen Wall, even drove him around to get supplies, took him out for Indian food and mended his ripped-up pants.

"They treated me like family," he said in awe. "I was really touched ... the amount of kindness I received was quite overwhelming."

Prasatt, who has an older sister, credited his loved ones for giving him strength. He kept in touch with family, girlfriend and close friends whenever he had mobile phone service.

His father, Arumugam Apparoo, said: "Initially, we were worried and discouraged him, but when he talked to us ... I thought somebody had to do something (for the kids)."

He even travelled to California to meet Prasatt, adding: "I am proud of his accomplishments."

CCF executive director Neo Lay Tin said: "We were heartened by Prasatt's determination to conquer the physically demanding terrain to promote awareness of childhood cancer ... His perseverance and tenacity will inspire and encourage children and youths with cancer to forge ahead with courage."

Prasatt aims to raise S\$50,000 through his campaign, which he will wrap up by this month before starting work as a secondary school English Literature teacher. He has raised S\$44,966 so far and is hopeful of more donations from the public to help the CCF.

"This is the hardest thing I've ever done but at the end of the day, it's just five months," he noted. "I couldn't go through my journey on my own; what more the CCF beneficiaries' longer and harder battles? We must give them as much support as we can and one way is to donate."

● Learn more about Prasatt's campaign at [TrekInvicta.com](http://TrekInvicta.com). To donate, visit [bit.ly/trekinvicta](http://bit.ly/trekinvicta). All proceeds will go to the Children's Cancer Foundation.

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