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Training for Datuk

It's been an inspiring, and perspiring, path towards the *Star2* Adventure Challenge.

By **ANDREW SIA**

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DID you make any New Year resolutions to "exercise more" in 2015? And have you found that you still haven't got off your butt?

Those were the first questions we asked readers when we launched *Star2*'s Adventure Challenge in March, which is all about encouraging couch potatoes to climb a mountain!

Personal confession time: I, too, had been sitting on my posterior for too long since "conquering" Annapurna Base Camp, Nepal, in November. Sure, there has been some cycling and jogging here and there, but – what with gorging on goodies during Chinese New Year – by March, I could feel my fitness tapering down.

So when *Star2* decided to engage readers with different challenges, I decided to propose an option that could help me regain my hiking legs. Besides, my day job is to write, source for, and edit articles about adventurous pursuits.

My *Star2* colleagues – Terence Toh, Nasa Maria Entaban, Nadine Fernandez, and Jerome Kugan – also wanted to be fitter and quickly signed up for the challenge. Another colleague, Eric Ian Chan, who has experience training hikers and teaching wilderness camping, volunteered to help train the group.

The aim is to show that exercise can inspire us to greater heights, literally and figuratively. And to encourage an appreciation for Malaysia's great outdoors.

We asked readers for stories (and pictures) of how they had taken up jungle trekking and mountain climbing. And we were pleasantly surprised when so many people wrote in recalling how they had been hiking not just to improve their stamina but also to reclaim bodies wracked by cancer, to control high blood pressure, and to overhaul their lives from mundane workaholicism to eagerly-awaited-weekend-adventurism.

Some also hiked to train their young children to be resilient problem-solvers, improving their family ties in the process (see the stories at <http://www.star2.com/tag/star2-monthly-challenge/>).

For our own *Star2* couch potatoes, I had to select a peak to showcase our mission. Unlike Penang Hill or Maxwell Hill (in Taiping, Perak), there is no "signature" peak close to our office in Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

Sure, there are some hills, such as Bukit

Gasing or Bukit Kiara, but these are too easy. Tackling Gunung Kinabalu would have been great, but we felt it would be a tad too much to go from zero to hero in just a few weeks (we kinda stretched the "monthly" of the challenge a bit to give ourselves and readers more time to train).

Enter Gunung Datuk near Rembau, Negri Sembilan (about 30 minutes drive south of

Seremban). The peak is 884m high so it's neither too hard nor too easy. It's a steep, continuous climb all the way to the peak, which requires solid leg strength – something like ascending and descending the 272 steps at the Batu Caves staircase many, many times over. It's used as a training ground for many hikers from the Klang Valley (and also Malacca) because it can be done as a day trip.

Many other peaks, such as Gunung Nuang in Hulu Langat, Selangor, are surrounded by forests, thus obscuring the view. But Gunung Datuk is one of the few Malaysian mountaintops from which you can enjoy glorious views of the plains below, and even the sea. Perfect for a victorious challenge photo!

Seremban is my hometown and I first climbed Gunung Datuk as a student when our Mathematics teacher at King George V school, Mr Siaw Fook, kindly volunteered to take us up the mountain.

I remembered that my legs were stiff for days after that expedition. So how would I fare now with decades added to my age and bonus kilos to my weight?

Before my landmark Nepal trek, I had trained by ascending the never-ending steps of Bukit Saga (405m high) in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, and the rugged wilderness of Bukit Kutu (1,053m) in Kuala Kubu Baru, Selangor. But those mountain legs had faded away in the months since because cycling (being a non-load bearing exercise) strengthens certain muscles but doesn't work on many of those needed for hiking, such as the back muscles.

My new training ground was FRIM, the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kepong, KL. I chose this place because it's an oasis of towering, shady trees, a world so near, yet so far from the city's concrete jungle. And because it's close to where I live, I could sweat it out in solid three-hour sessions rather than

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spending a whole day tackling mountains further afield.

Most people like to go on walks here along the Rover Trail (from the mosque to the Nature Education Centre). It's a gently sloping path which takes about 45 minutes to cover. But I needed something more for my training.

Luckily, just off the main trail, there are several detours that are more demanding. My main route was to hike from the waterfall parking lot, following the river uphill till I hit the Rover Trail.

From there, I veered off onto the Canopy Walkway trail and up to Bukit FRIM – where there is a rusty old sign declaring that you have reached 1,000 feet (305m) in altitude – before descending to the Rover Trail again. I

usually did this route twice, going back and forth. At times, I pushed myself further by taking yet another detour, ascending an extra 150m or so along a steep trail to an isolated telecommunications tower.

This was another plus point about FRIM: I could train as much or as little as I wanted to. If I felt more energetic, I could do more (or harder) loops. If I had a touch of flu coming on, I could go a bit easier.

Usually, after all these exertions, I would return to the cooling waterfall for a well-earned swim and bath, with my appetite totally primed for the delicious food in Kepong.

Last week, a friend and I did a recce hike of Gunung Datuk, to double check the route and to look for any possible pitfalls the team would

have to avoid. Thanks to my FRIM workouts, the ascent was relatively easy.

There are several steep slopes which could prove tough for some of the team members. But, fortunately, unlike my visit last year, there weren't as many mosquitoes (and bees) buzzing about.

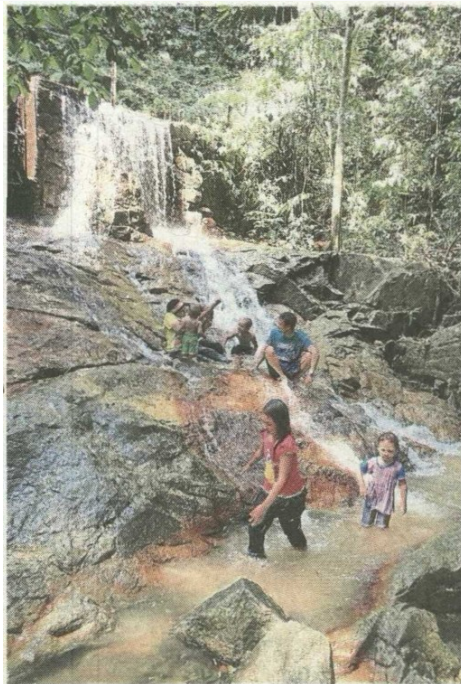
The team has trained quite well for this challenge, though I am worried that the trails will be really slippery if it rains. We will be making our ascent today, so please do wish us all the best!

■ Look out for a report on the Star2 Adventure Challenge team's climb next Saturday.



The writer trained for the Star2 challenge by trekking at FRIM.

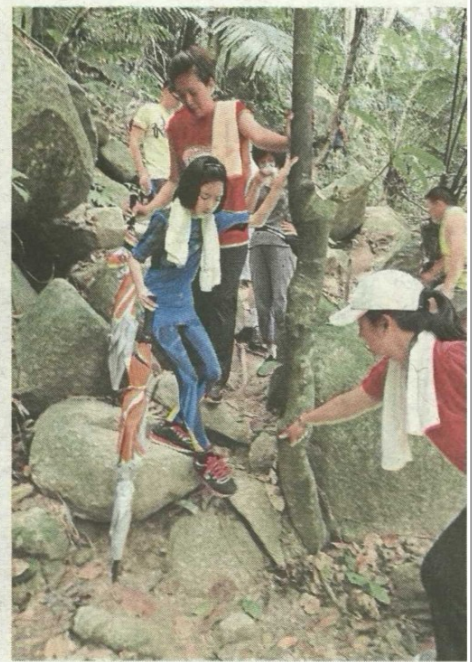
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Perfect for washing up after a sweaty hike. This is just one of many waterfalls inside FRIM.



The old sign indicating that you have reached 1000 feet in altitude at Bukit FRIM.



Even young children can tackle the Canopy Walkway trail.



The hiking trails in FRIM are popular with families on weekends. Photos: ANDREW SIA/The Star

VALUATOR

Company(Brand)	Mention	Tone	ROI
Consumer Behaviour News (Consumer Behaviour News)	2	0	RM 0
Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) (Forest Research	10	0	RM 0
Gamuda Bhd (Gamuda Bhd Industry News)	4	0	RM 0
Health & Wellness News (General Health)	1	0	RM 0

GIST(ENGLISH)

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