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British Pair Take On Baikal Run

By Jemma Buckley

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Lucy Ward, 42, moved to Moscow from Essex, England, in 2010 with her partner Liam Halligan and their three children. On Saturday, the couple aims to run a half marathon across the frozen surface of Lake Baikal to raise money for The Promise, a British charity that supports Russian children with special needs.

Q: Why did you decide to take part in the Lake Baikal Ice Marathon?

A: My interest in the race was fired when I spoke to a friend's husband, who competed last year. I'd seen Baikal myself about 10 years ago when I traveled on the Trans-Mongolian Express. It skirts the edge of Baikal, and I remember looking out of the window and seeing this vast expanse of ice. It's an astonishing natural phenomenon, and it's got a mythical, magical history. Before the race, we have to sprinkle a glass of vodka on the ice to bless the lake. I doubt that ritual happens anywhere else in the world!

Q: How long will it take you to complete the race?

A: I have absolutely no idea. All I want to do is finish. It's not the place where you aim for a personal best. You are out in the elements and dealing with the strangeness of running on an unmarked surface. You can see the finish line from the start point, so it's psychologically tough.

Q: Have you run in charity races before?

A: Yes, but nothing of this length. This race isn't an extraordinary distance, but it is very unusual. Lots of people run marathons and half marathons, which is great, but this one is attention-grabbing.

Q: Why have you chosen to raise money for The Promise?

A: I love what this charity does. I especially like a program they have to help children with special needs that involves intense stimulation. The children have an awful lot of contact with people and are really encouraged to interact. It produces phenomenal results. The charity also helps to train Russian staff, rather than just parachuting in British people.

Q: Have you noticed that charity is perceived differently in Russia than in Britain?

A: Charity is much bigger in Britain. A big element of that is the ease with which a person can donate, using electronic methods such as Justgiving.com. There isn't the infrastructure to do that in Russia. When I've spoken to Russian friends about it, they've been really interested to know how it works. It's a shame that they don't have an equivalent here because I'm sure there are people who are willing to give.

You can find out more about The Promise at www.thepromise.org.uk and sponsor the couple at www.justgiving.com/LucyMirandaWard.

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