

For immediate release

## **ROUND THE ISLAND, HONG KONG: couple successfully climbs the full length of Hong Kong Island's coastline in a world first expedition**

**Esther Roling and Paul Niel have mapped 125 trash hotspots along the coastline and taken more than 50 water samples to create a first-of-its-kind pollution map of Hong Kong Island**

Esther Roling and Paul Niel emerged wet, exhausted, full of scratches blisters, cuts and bruises but elated at Siu Sai Wan Chai Wan on Sunday, May 28 evening after a groundbreaking, world first journey around the full length of the Hong Kong Island coastline. "It was a long, tough journey with a lot of challenges to face, from extreme weather and strong currents, to barnacled cliffs and also the mental exhaustion, but in the end we prevailed," says Dutch born Esther Roling. "The journey around the Island was so unique. It's amazing to be on the wild cliffs, hidden beaches and then minutes later, the busy urban city."

Together with her husband Austrian born Paul Niel, the couple successfully circumnavigated the whole of Hong Kong Island along its coastline perimeter – the first time this has been achieved. Both are long-term Hong Kong residents, local entrepreneurs and experienced in organising expeditions and adventures around the world.

They set off on Tuesday May 23 in Siu Sai Wan in a clockwise direction. Over the next six days the couple circumnavigated the full length of Hong Kong's 85km coastline by climbing, scrambling, jumping and swimming and staying as close as possible to the waterline – a multi-disciplinary sport known as 'coasteering'.

The goal of the expedition was to create a detailed map of Hong Kong Island's biodiversity, water quality and coastal pollution for which the couple successfully took 50 water samples. The team partnered with The Open University Hong Kong to survey biological and chemical water quality parameters through these water samples, which will give insight into Hong Kong's microbiobiodiversity. In addition they photographed 125 trash hotspots along the coastline which have been mapped and shared onto the Global Alert App which is an award-winning application created by the Ocean Recovery Alliance.

"It's sad to find so many rubbish sites. We saw heaps of styrofoam piles, even full caves of them. We counted more than twelve fridges, old TV sets, broken boats, fishing nets and more. Obviously some of the places are hard to get to, but we also found trash in places that could be rather easily cleaned," says Paul Niel.

The couple originally estimated to complete the expedition in 7 to 8 days, but despite very adverse weather conditions they pushed on and arrived ahead of schedule. "Our expedition was close to being aborted on the second day, when we got stuck in Black Rain conditions (extreme intense rain, which leads to forced closure of schools in Hong Kong). Heavy rain showers and intense lightning and thunderstorms very close to us made any continuation very dangerous," says Niel. "It was a frightening moment. Thankfully the weather situation improved and we could continue along the steep cliffs on the Islands exposed eastern coast." The weather also impacted their camping along the route, making it very difficult in the hot, humid weather. "We spent most of our nights fending off mosquitos or sweating in our tent" says Roling.

They got swept off in strong currents and had to cope with a sudden rope tear which led to a narrowly escaped serious accident. In addition, they braved masses of jellyfishes, stings by sea urchins and got attacked by kites. Worst of all, was the general wear and tear of continuous daily climbing and scrambling for 11 hours daily over slippery barnacled rock in Hong Kong's tropical heat, which resulted in heavy infected wounds.

Yet both adventurers agree the experience was more than worth it. "It was very painful, but it was definitely worth it and we are very happy to have finished this unique adventure. We met so many interesting people, saw so many unique places and the experience overall was fantastic," says Roling.

"This expedition has not only raised awareness about pollution along our beautiful coastline, but hopefully it has, and will encourage people to become engaged in either reporting where trash build-up is, or going out to clean some of it themselves," adds Doug Woodring, Founder of Ocean Recovery Alliance. "The 125 hotspots from the expedition are already loaded onto the Global Alert app, and will help the government and organisations across Hong Kong direct efforts to reduce and remove some of this rubbish."

"It was a huge team effort and would not have been possible with all the great support we received, especially from the Explorers Club Hong Kong chapter. We are proud to have been the first flag carriers for the local chapter," adds Niel. "Most of all, I am happy at how well we worked together as a team and couple. Its not always easy as husband and wife when you are that close! Now its time to spend time with our little daughter."

The team has released the trash sites on GlobalAlert ([www.globalalert.org](http://www.globalalert.org)) and plans to release the results of the scientific water samples within the next two months.

A documentary featuring the adventure is currently in production.

**Ocean Recovery Alliance:** ([www.oceanrecov.org](http://www.oceanrecov.org)) is a registered non-profit organization with the aim to use new technologies, innovations, creativity and collaborations to solve issues that face the health of the ocean today

**Explorers Club Hong Kong:** The Explorers Club ([explorers.org](http://explorers.org)) is an international multidisciplinary professional society dedicated to the advancement of field research and the ideal that it is vital to preserve the instinct to explore. Since its inception in 1904, the Club has served as a meeting point and unifying force for explorers and scientists worldwide. Famous firsts include: first to the North Pole, first to the South Pole, first to the summit of Mount Everest, first to the deepest point in the ocean, first to the surface of the moon—all accomplished by our members. The Hong Kong chapter ([facebook.com/explorersHK](https://facebook.com/explorersHK)) was founded in 2016 by Michael Barth.

Regular updates are under the Hashtag: **#RoundtheIslandHK**  
<https://www.facebook.com/RoundtheIslandHK/>

*The Round the Island Hong Kong Team would also like to thank the Royal Geographic Society, The Open University HK, Bremont Watches, American Century Investments, Infiniti Motors, Palintest, RC Outfitter, Patagonia HK, Lizard Adventures, Reviv HK, Mana - Fast Slow Food, Peroni, LifeProof, Palm Equipment and StormForce Marine for their support.*

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**Appendix:**

Photo 1: Paul Niel and Esther Roling on the Cliffs of Hong Kong (Photo Credit: Mark Delecate)

Photo 2: Taking a Water Measurement

Photo 3: Sample Trash Sites around Hong Kong photographed and mapped by the Expedition Team

Photo 4: Map of 125 mapped trash hotspots around Hong Kong Island (Source: [GlobalAlert.org](http://GlobalAlert.org))



