



Baby Seb in hospital

Ben with Ivan and Seb

# Coast to coast

TV personality Ben Shephard is gearing up for one of the toughest endurance challenges he has yet to face, all for charity. Tegan Chapman catches up with him before it all kicks off in Tynemouth...

For many people, the thought of running a marathon would be enough to bring them out in a cold sweat. But a group of friends – including TV star Ben Shephard – are aiming to complete a mammoth seven-day endurance event in aid of a charity.

Ben has been friends with Ivan Hollingsworth, from Monkseaton, Whitley Bay, since childhood.

When Ivan's son Seb was born in 2009 with a congenital heart defect called tetralogy of Fallot, he and his wife Nadine set about raising money for the Children's Heart Unit Fund (CHUF) at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle, to help other children like Seb.

Ivan was able to call on his famous friend to help him in his quest to raise £120,000 for a special heart machine, and last year the pair, along with friends and supporters, ran the Coast to Coast (C2C) route from Whitehaven to Tynemouth, raising funds.

The charity has now smashed the £71,000 mark, and the challenges have stepped up a gear, with Ben and Ivan preparing to cycle 145 miles in two days from Tynemouth to Whitehaven, before completing the equivalent of five marathons in five days to get back to their starting point.

"Seb has had to undergo all sorts of incredibly invasive, painful and scary tests and even open heart surgery," said Ben.

"The courage he showed and the resilience of his parents, coupled with the skills and care at the Children's Heart Unit at the Freeman, is exactly why I wanted to get involved in this brutal challenge.

"Seb has to go through unimaginable pain and confront some very real fears at a ridiculously young age, and what's more, he doesn't have a choice, and he never ever stops smiling.

"The least we can do is put ourselves through a tough challenge to show how proud we are of him and all the children like him."

While it wouldn't be everyone's idea of fun to take part in a seven-day marathon challenge, Ben, who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2009, wouldn't have it any other way.

"This event is one of those things that seemed like a great idea at the time.

"Ivan usually corners me after a few beers in a cosy pub when I'm feeling invincible, but the reality of it is that it's unbelievably tough. But I don't believe for a minute that what we put ourselves through compares to what the children are going through."

The end of the mammoth challenge will once again be Tynemouth beach, a sight the runners love.

"Last year it was very emotional as we had Seb with us as we ran into the water. It is a moment I will cherish for a very long time," said Ben.

The day after completing the run, there will be a fundraising ball at Close House Hotel, compered by Ben.

"I can't wait for the ball," he said. "If it's anything like last year, it will be a great and fitting conclusion to the C2C, but getting into a suit and smart shoes is not great after all those days on the road,

"I've asked Ivan if we can have a pyjama theme this year, with slippers, which would be much more comfortable!"

The C2C will kick off in Tynemouth on Thursday, July 28, and the boys will return on Wednesday, August 3.

■ The Handbags and Gladraggs Ball will be on Thursday August 4. Tickets, priced at £75 a head or £600 for a table of 10, are available along with information about the charity by visiting [www.seb4chuf.org.uk](http://www.seb4chuf.org.uk)

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