

Architecture Student, Who Broke Her Back in Accident, Prepares to Climb Kilimanjaro

In high school, Katie Taylor broke her back in a skiing accident and was told she would likely never walk again. Now, as part of her road to recovery, the UC architecture student is preparing to scale Mt. Kilimanjaro in August.

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By: [M.B. Reilly](#)

A skiing accident had left her with a broken back, and that's when, as a sophomore at Oakwood High School in Oakwood, Ohio, she was told she would likely never walk again.

But then, Taylor recounts, "After about a month, I could move a toe. After another month, I actually stood up and shuffled. I still relied on a wheelchair for about three to four more months."

And, slowly, Taylor, who is today a 20-year-old sophomore majoring in architecture here at the University of Cincinnati, began her recovery, first getting around in a wheelchair, then on crutches and then with the help of a cane.

"Right after my accident, I made a promise to myself to get better and to run a marathon," she recalls, adding that she was inspired by an article about Patrick Rummerfield, the first spinal cord injury quadriplegic in history to recover full physical mobility. Rummerfield was paralyzed from the neck down in his 20s, and 18 years later, he completed an Ironman triathlon.



UC's Katie Taylor trains for her climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

And Taylor figures that climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest summit in Africa, comes close enough to her promised goal.

Taylor will hike the trail (no rock climbing is involved) to Uru Summit, taking about a week to reach that peak in early August, where she promises to have her picture taken with a UC pennant.

And, in some ways, she hopes her accident and subsequent slow recovery will be a plus in her endeavor: "I've been working on my cardio fitness and my leg strength with day-long hikes in Mt. Airy Forest or up the steps of Immaculata Church in Mt. Adams. I still have a slower pace because my recovery has been a slow one; however, in the thin mountain air of Kilimanjaro, it's actually advised that the hikers take it slow, take small steps. Speed is not the way to complete this challenge, endurance is. It's actually advisable to walk slowly in order to gradually acclimatize to the altitude as you go."

Others with physical disabilities have completed this route (Machame Route) to climb Kilimanjaro. In Taylor's case, she figures the hike will take a week, hiking eight hours a day.

She states, "I've been told by people that the temperature will be frigid and that the night before reaching Uru Summit is miserable but then you reach the peak as the sun is coming up, and everything is then worth it."



Taylor jokes that that kind of experience isn't unlike the challenges of being in UC's top-ranked programs within the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning. She says, "Well, DAAP is stressful, but there are also great opportunities like co-opping with a great firm. (She's already had one such [co-op](#) in Pittsburgh, and is looking forward to her second [co-op](#) semester this fall in Baltimore.) Or, you ace a project or crit. Then, it's all worth it."

Taylor, who will start her climb on Aug. 6 and return to Ohio on Aug. 14, hopes to raise awareness and funds by means of her climb. She explains, "It's important not to put limits on what we think people with disabilities can or cannot do."

She is also raising funds for an organization called [May We Help](#), and you can see a video of Taylor on the organization's home page. The organization, headquartered here in Cincinnati, specializes in linking individuals with specific needs to skilled volunteers who can invent, modify or adapt devices that improve the quality of life for those with physical disabilities.

Accompanying Taylor on her hike are friends Eric Oberwise, an engineering student at the University of Dayton, and Chris Kubik, project director at May We Help.

