

Skydiving over Everest to champion girls' cause

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Kate Craig-Wood has swum with sharks in the Red Sea and ridden a snowboard at 100mph in Canada. But this week she is setting off to do something that is really making her nervous.

She is joining a group to take part in a first skydiving programme over Mount Everest. It will mean freefalling for a terrifying 60 seconds on a jump of 29,500ft. Ms Craig-Wood has made two jumps before – but from a relatively lowly 12,000 feet.

Ms Craig-Wood, managing director of Memset, a provider of hosted IT solutions based in Guildford, Surrey, also represents Intellect's campaign to help more girls retain an interest in technology. The purpose of the Everest expedition is to raise money for Computer Clubs for Girls, a UK schools programme that encourages girls aged between 10 and 14 to consider the IT industry as a career.

She said: "This is a cause I passionately believe in as there is a crisis in IT when it comes to women. The industry trade body, Intellect, says the under-representation of women in IT 'remains a significant and worsening issue'. In fact, in 2007 only 18 per cent of IT and telecoms professionals were female.

"Research just released by Intellect in their most recent Perceptions of Equal Pay Survey shows that less than a third of women in IT believe their pay reflects their experience and skills respectfully. This is hardly surprising as the gender pay gap in IT is 23 per cent – 6 per cent more than the average in all other sectors.

"Another finding shows that nearly 60 per cent of those women surveyed believed that their company did not have a transparent pay structure.

"So, as well as campaigning for equal pay for women in IT, I am also campaigning to get pre-teens and teenage girls to consider the opportunities, as I am convinced we will win the battle for equal pay in time."

To get that message across, she is prepared to leap from an aircraft above the Himalayas: "What makes this whole adventure even more frightening is the extreme cold. We're wearing special suits and oxygen masks, and we'll also be using specially designed parachutes, which are extra large to cope with the thinner atmosphere."

The jump, being organised by www.highandwild.co.uk, involves leaving the aircraft at 29,500ft, slightly higher than the summit of Everest, falling beside the mountain and landing at 12,350ft.

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