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# Wife's cancer battle sparks fundraising ocean row

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**By Andrew Ffrench**

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WHEN Ellen Rees endured 11 hours of surgery for breast cancer, her husband vowed to do something to help others avoid such pain.

Now Nick Rees has set himself a huge challenge – rowing the Atlantic Ocean to raise money for research into life-saving treatments.

The 36-year-old former Abingdon School pupil has run the London Marathon and climbed Grand Teton, the highest mountain in Wyoming, to raise funds.

But they pale in comparison to his next fundraiser – rowing 2,600 nautical miles across the Atlantic to raise £250,000 for Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

Mr Rees left Abingdon School in 1994, but returned to use the school's rowing machines on Wednesday in training for the marathon.

He and friend Ed Curtis, 37, will take part in the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, starting in December 2013, joining other teams rowing from La Gomera in the Canary Islands to Antigua.

The row takes about 50 days.

Mr Rees said: "Three years ago Ellen, who grew up in Abingdon and went to St Helen and St Katharine School, was diagnosed with breast cancer aged 33.

"It was devastating and she showed incredible strength.

"She had to endure 11 hours of surgery including a mastectomy, and her physical recovery took three months – almost the same time as it will take me to row the Atlantic.

"Ellen had to go through treatment while taking care of our two children who were just one and three at the time.

"She is our inspiration."

The hedge fund manager who now lives in Farnham, Surrey, is seeking corporate sponsorship, donations and backing from schools.

He said: "We'll eat 8,000 calories a day from ration packs containing high-energy bars and boil-in-the-bag meals.

"It will be two hours on, two hours off for the rowing, so we will not be getting much sleep.

"We expect to lose 20 per cent of our body weight with 40ft waves. Only about 350 people who have rowed the Atlantic.

"This is something we can tell our grandchildren."

They have already bought the winning boat in last year's race, whose crew completed the journey in 40 days.

The boat, a 24ft Woodvale Pair Class, cost £33,000 and Mr Rees and Mr Curtis used their own money to buy it.

Mrs Rees said: "I am immensely proud of Nick and Ed and very grateful."

To donate to the rowers, visit [breakthroughatlantic.com](http://breakthroughatlantic.com)

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