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Adventurer at his peak

Iron-man participant, marathon runner, keep-fit fanatic and adventurer, Vincent Tremaine also finds time to be chief executive of Flinders Ports. He talked to SHANE MAGUIRE about his life.

BATTLING a blizzard for three days while climbing in the Himalayas or cunningly talking your way past armed communist rebels are events normally associated with the likes of James Bond. In this case the name is Tremaine, Vincent Tremaine, and the deeds certainly don't fit with the usual image of a corporate heavyweight but that is exactly what he is.

Mr Tremaine, 46, is chief executive of Flinders Ports which controls seven shipping ports in South Australia.

As such, his job involves sitting in an office at Port Adelaide, running a business that sees billions of dollars worth of goods exported and imported to and from SA.

Ironically, this iron-man participant, marathon runner and dabbler in adventure has never stepped foot on board any of the massive ships that visit here because he gets seasick.

"I went across to Kangaroo Island with my family and was sick as a dog," he admits.

Born in London, he moved to Victoria in 1964. He took on the role of Flinders Ports' boss 2 1/2 years ago after the former Liberal Government sold the business to private enterprise in 2001.

He started in accountancy, moving to sales and marketing and later joining Toll Holdings in Victoria as a divisional general manager.

He was also involved in stevedoring operations and a trucking line in Melbourne and was at the head of a bid by Toll for the SA Ports Corporation.

Toll did not go ahead with the bid and so Mr Tremaine was poached by Adsteam and Egis to head Flinders Ports.

Running such a high-powered and demanding operation, Mr Tremaine believes fitness plays a crucial part in his ability to make quick and correct decisions every day.

So to that end, this self-confessed fitness fanatic runs, swims and rides his bike about 20 hours a week and not just for the exercise.

His passion is marathon running, having competed in nine so far. This year, he took part in his first iron-man event.

``I enjoy endurance events and I really believe to think clearly in business or in life you need to exercise, so I enjoy it," he says.

``This is brain work, the other is brawn but it keeps me fit, I have been running for 25 years and have done nine marathons and I want to do another iron man, although I hope the lead-up is smoother than the last."

Six weeks before the iron-man event, Mr Tremaine was out training on his bike and while travelling down Henley Beach Rd at 40 km/h he hit a car, snapped his bike, smashed the car's window and was sent flying. ``I got 11 stitches in my hip and damaged my heels but I recovered and took part in the event," he says.

He finished 693 overall but 35th in his age group, conceding it wasn't bad ``for an old bloke".

As if cycling up to 60 km before work, swimming a few kilometres in the pool each day and running morning and night wasn't enough to keep fit for work, climbing mountains also takes Mr Tremaine's fancy.

With a group of mates he recently headed off to the Himalayas to climb Mera Peak, a 6500 m mountain.

At the 5500 m mark a blizzard hit, pinning them down for three days and eventually they had to head down. ``The snow was waist deep and we learnt pretty quickly that it's the conditions that rule," he says.

During that same journey they ``accidentally walked into a Maoist stronghold" and were faced with the necessity of negotiating a safe passage.

``We very briefly thought about overpowering them. There were only two of them but they did have guns after all," he says in a joking tone.

``I thought `Well, one of us might get killed and maybe three injured, should we give it a go?' but reality hit home and we each paid \$20 for safe passage. I even got a receipt."

It is possible such adventures could make your daily nine-to-five job seem a little mundane, not so for Mr Tremaine.

His latest headache and probably a more demanding task than fast-talking rebels, is trying to convince the State Government to chip in \$30 million towards deepening the channel at Outer Harbour.

This amount, added to the \$20 million offered by Flinders Ports, would allow the channel to go from 12.2 m to 14.2 m deep, meaning larger ships could use the facilities.

If the deepening took place, which also involves the lengthening of the current channel from 9 km to 11.7 km and extending through the main passenger terminal and freight wharves, economic benefits to the state would be up to \$1.9 billion with increased container, car, wine and grain movements alone. If the work is not done 150,000 containers a year will be moved by road to Melbourne, \$2.8 billion a year in trade will be at risk and up to 2172 jobs in jeopardy.

`` It is true to say that unless our population grows or there is outstanding development, we as a state are always going to find it hard to match the eastern states," he says.

`` But this is a very competitive state, we move 17,000 containers of wine, car parts are imported and cars exported and grain ships come through here, all of which impacts on our society.

`` The deepening of the channel is a major issue we have to deal with. The government is saying all the right things at the moment but we just need a financial contribution from them.

`` We are hearing the right words from the government. It is just a matter of getting around Treasury. The larger ships exist now, we just can't fit them in.

`` The state has to do it. The benefits for all of us are overwhelming."

THE federal government has found an extra \$400 million in the month since the Budget to spend on roads.