



LONG WALK: Nathan Gray, left, Polly Greeks and Michael Gresham, a friend of Gray.

THE WALL BETWEEN US

The Great Wall of China, the smitten woman, the driven man ... and two books. **VANESSA WALKER** talks to Polly Greeks and Nathan Gray about their joint experience on an epic walk

THE FIRST TIME Polly Greeks held her finished book in her hands it wasn't pride that overwhelmed her but the cold sweep of anxiety. It was early one morning in 2004 and a TVNZ makeup woman was slathering thick foundation on Greeks' face when someone stuck a copy of *Embracing the Dragon* in front of her.

It was only then, just before her first on-air interview, that she truly accepted her story, a brutally honest account of the months she joined boyfriend Nathan Gray on his quest to become the first westerner to walk the length of the Great Wall of China, was about to be made public. It is a riveting travel memoir — Greeks is an exceptional writer — but as she knew, the real narrative was the fiery disintegration of her relationship with Gray and her excoriating record of both of their — but mainly his — behaviour.

Consider this excerpt, which tells what happens when the two are stuck on an almost vertical mountainside, too scared to inch forward on the crumbling stone steps and too frightened to turn around in case they fall: