A historic hike along sections of the Great Wall of China has been planned for May 6-17 as a cooperative venture in fellowship, fitness, and goodwill between the Indiana University School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) and the Beijing University of Physical Education (BUPE).

Some 40 faculty, alumni, students, staff and friends of HPER will be joined by about 20 representatives from BUPE for the event. Event coordinator and leader David Gallahue, associate dean of HPER, said the participants will cover about 50 miles of Great Wall sections during five hiking days. “Living well through healthy lifestyles reflects the philosophy of both schools, and we plan to demonstrate this by hiking with our Chinese colleagues and friends,” he said.

“Most areas of the Great Wall where we will hike are closed to the public,” Gallahue explained, adding that this will be historic because it is the first official international hiking group given permission by the Great Wall Commission to walk along the Great Wall. “Our delegation of Chinese and Americans will hike the Great Wall together in the spirit of friendship, fitness, and international understanding,” said Gallahue, an accomplished hiker and backpacker. Many of the HPER participants in the event started a training program in January to prepare for the hike because parts of the route will be moderately strenuous and cover mountainous terrain.

Gallahue said the objectives of the hike include celebrating the 10 years of friendship and cooperation between HPER and BUPE that have produced several cultural exchanges; raising awareness throughout Indiana, the nation, and the world about living well through healthy lifestyles and enjoyment of physical activity, a cornerstone of the HPER philosophy; and securing donations for placing playground equipment at communities along the hike route to serve as a permanent reminder of the cooperation between BUPE and HPER.

Significant donations of equipment have been made from individuals as well as corporate sponsors. Acknowledged among these are American Play Systems and their suppliers for playground equipment, Federal Express for transporting the equipment to China at a greatly reduced cost, and the Children’s Better Health Institute for corporate funding to assist with transportation costs. “We believe this gesture of goodwill will help enhance relationships between our two nations at the grassroots level, with the playground donations leaving a tangible legacy of friendship and cooperation, reminding us of the importance of our children, whether in Beijing or Bloomington, as the upcoming leaders in the world community,” said Gallahue.

In addition to the hiking, usually from five to eight hours each day, there will be welcome and farewell banquets, cultural events, and daily activities focusing on health, fitness, sport, recreation, and leisure.

HPER developed a Web site for the event to “capture the spirit of the Great Wall walk and communicate this spirit to a worldwide audience,” including some special features for K-12 students.

—Office of Communications and Marketing, IUB