

ITV/RAY BRADBURY

# I'm Edwina ... get me a home extension

**Sharon Feinstein**

SHE introduced herself to a new generation and survived everything the producers of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Herethrew* at her. But all Edwina Currie wanted out of her appearance was a home extension, says her husband.

As the 68-year-old former MP prepares to fly back to Britain after her ordeal in the Australian jungle, John Jones, her second husband, revealed that funding an extension to their 17th-century cottage in the Peak District was the reason she took part in ITV's reality show. The final is tonight.

"They had asked her before and she said no," said Jones, a former police officer in remission from cancer. He was startled when she said yes. "I said you will get bored and might meet some real nerds."

Instead Currie turned out to be the surprise hit of the show.

Her stoicism in the face of dietary deprivation and an endless array of bugs endeared her to an audience that has probably forgotten, or is too young to know, why she became famous.

The former Tory health minister openly admired a contestant more than 40 years younger, saying as *The X Factor*'s Jake Quickenden exercised: "Wonderful sight, isn't it?" To see him stretching,

she told viewers later, was "an old lady's dream".

Nothing in the show was as she had expected, according to her husband, who singled out BBC newsreader Michael Buerk as a disappointment.

"She was hoping for a bit more discourse with Michael Buerk," he said of the veteran presenter of Radio 4's *Moral Maze*. "He is a let-down.

"Edwina has worked with him before but I think he is out of his depth, looking around with his mouth slightly open thinking what is going on here, not knowing quite how to play his part."

For his part Buerk, who was voted out of the jungle on Wednesday evening, admitted that his "curry sank" when he saw that Currie was one of the contestants.

"She is quite didactic and inclined to lecture people, but at least we could have a conversation together," he said in an interview with the *Daily Mail*.

"The rest [apart from Currie] were just a blur," he said. "I had no idea who they were or what they did. And all they wanted to talk about was pop music or football."

He admitted to being shocked by their vulgarity and ignorance. "Two or three... didn't know what a pineapple was," he said.

According to Jones, Currie too will have found some of the other contestants hard work, especially Kendra Wilkinson,



John Jones, left, says his wife Edwina Currie, top, believes Michael Buerk, above with Melanie Sykes, has been a 'disappointment'

the 29-year-old former stripper who had become one of Hugh Hefner's girlfriends despite a 60-year age gap.

"Edwina has met most kinds of people [but] I don't think she has ever met anyone quite like this girl before. "I think [Edwina] is thinking, 'I wish that girl had stayed on at school a bit longer, worked a bit harder and doesn't have such a stupid existence and didn't put such a value on material possessions and money and stuff like that'."

Despite his wife's famous

affair with John Major, Jones was relaxed about her on-screen flirtation with Quickenden, the 26-year-old former lifeguard who was the hunk of the series.

"She treats him like a grandson. I think he is a very likeable young fellow, good looking.

"He is not the brain of Britain but he's thrown himself into it," he said.

People warmed to his wife, he suggested, because "she's a very interesting woman, very diverse with a huge amount of

different skills and different ways of looking at things".

For Buerk, who lost a considerable amount of weight during his time in the jungle, it has clearly been an ordeal. He likened it to being "yanked around like a laboratory rat".

He revealed that all the contestants were questioned by the show's psychologists about whether they were likely to self-harm and were warned that masturbation was forbidden. "I had to assure these officials I could get through three weeks... without self-

harming or masturbating in front of 12m viewers."

Throughout the 19 days he spent in the jungle, he found the "humiliation factor far worse than the fear factor". Having to dress in a cockatoo costume was his "jungle hell".

When he got kicked off the show Buerk and his wife celebrated with a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc at the five-star Palazzo Versace on Australia's Gold Coast. Jones, however, said he had no special plans for his wife's return as she "did not like a fuss".