



MEDIA UPDATE

Friday 12 March 2010

NORTH POLE EXPLORER DOWN TO LAST SET OF SKI POLES

Two broken ski poles have put Western Australian polar explorer Tom Smitheringale in a precarious position in his quest to become the third person in history to reach the North Pole solo and unsupported.

Just 12 days and 65km into his 800km expedition, Tom is now using his spare ski poles to continue towards the Pole. But the reality of the situation weighs on his mind. One more broken pole and he will be unable to continue.

Tom is also experiencing delamination of two or three fingers on each hand, with the surface skin peeling back due to the cold. But he explains that “delaminated fingers are nothing a tube of superglue and some steady hands can’t fix as it bonds skin amazingly well”. He has also patched up some minor frostbite on his knee, which he described as similar to a graze.

However, amid the adversity, Tom remains positive and has enjoyed some near perfect weather with clear blue skies, good visibility and little or no wind resulting in minimal drift. The conditions seem to be improving each day, with the ice becoming slightly more forgiving the further north Tom travels.

Tom’s spirits have been given a jolt by this second breakage, but he reminds us: "I choose to be here, I'm lucky to be here... Nothing to be negative about. Remember, this is my choice."

After 12 days, Tom has travelled 65km towards the North Pole.

THE MISSION

Tom is trekking 800km of frozen Arctic sea on foot, alone, and dragging a 160kg sled, to the North Pole. It will take 70 days in temperatures as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius.

To get there, Tom will have to ski, climb, guard against polar bear attack, risk falling through the increasingly thin Arctic ice and swim across leads (breaks in the ice). Five people have tried the same feat in the past five years. All failed and two have died

trying. In the history of Arctic exploration only two men have ever reached the North Pole solo and unsupported and Tom will be the first Australian ever to make it.

Tom set off from Ward Hunt Island at the northern tip of Ellesmere Island in the very north of Canada on Monday 1 March at 3am Australian WST time. The original plan to leave from McClintock Inlet had to be scrapped at the last minute due to a huge lead forming just off the coast.

BACKGROUND

Born in Perth, Western Australia, to English parents, Tom finished his secondary education in England. He spent five years in the British Army, including time in the Queen's company of the Grenadier Guards (guarding Princess Di among others) before returning home to Fremantle.

Tom is passionate about the great outdoors, travelling annually to New Zealand to climb in the South Island and regularly runs guided trips in WA's Stirling Ranges. He is an accomplished adventure racer competing in many extreme multi-day events often without sleep that involve a variety of outdoor sports such as mountain biking, running/trekking, abseiling, climbing, and kayaking. When he's not pulling a sled, Tom divides his time between working as a personal trainer and preparing for his next expedition applying the lessons he has learned in almost two decades of pushing his limits.

THE CAUSE

Tom's charity partner for the One Man Epic is Burnet Institute.

"During my military service in Africa, the suffering I witnessed had a profound effect on me," Tom said. "I saw people enduring unimaginable poverty, hunger and the devastating effects of diseases like HIV and AIDS. Seeing this first hand really put into context what I'd seen in the media. While I was in Africa, I vowed that one day I would find a way to help make a difference. Discovering that some of the leading research into these diseases is done right here in Australia at the Burnet Institute gave me added inspiration."

The Burnet Institute focuses on curing and preventing the spread of some of the world's worst infectious diseases of global significance. Burnet has offices in Australia, Fiji, China (Tibet), Indonesia, Lao PDR, Burma, PNG, Mozambique and Thailand.

A big part of Burnet's work focuses on the 'Big Three': HIV, Tuberculosis (TB), and malaria which cause the deaths of seven million people every year. In addition, an estimated 33 million people are living with HIV and one third of the world's population

is currently infected with TB. Burnet's work combines world-class laboratory research and practical, frontline public health programs in some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities around the world.

Tom hopes that through his expedition, he can motivate others to support the Burnet Institute's outstanding work and help improve the lives of people living with these terrible diseases.

CONTACT

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