

Polarventure Success

Our expedition out to Baffin Island this month was a great success although it didn't all go according to plan. A full expedition report is in the process of being completed but a summary is included below.

The expedition left the UK on the 5th March flying out to Ottawa and then up to Baffin Island. This year had seen some heavy snow storms in Eastern Canada but luckily the weather did not get in the way of our flights and we made it up to Iqualuit with no problems.

Unfortunately our connecting flight up to Qikiqtarjuaq was another story. The flight left without problems on a beautiful sunny day but when only twenty minutes from Qikiqtarjuaq the pilot announced technical problems and had to return to Iqualuit where we were forced to over night. The following morning one of our rucksacks was run over as it was being loaded on to the aircraft and was in such a bad state we couldn't take it out on the expedition. However we made it up to Qikiqtarjuaq that day and wanting to make the most of the good weather we were keen to get out to our drop off point as soon as possible.

The weather was good as we got dropped off on the 8th March at Okoa Bay. Our first big problem was finding an access route onto the glacier as it was heavily crevassed. We opted to haul our kit up and around the side of the valley so that we could get on the glacier further up the valley. Over the next four days we made good progress up the glacier and began to realise that we could cross the Penny in good time. Unfortunately on the evening of our fourth night it became apparent that we wouldn't be going any further. Vijay's feet had started to suffer from poor circulation living at -40/-45'c and to carry on would almost certainly mean frostbite. There was only one option and that was to return.

We made good time down the glacier and returned to Qikiqtarjuaq on the 13th. Vijay flew down to Iqualuit the following day to have a precautionary check up on his feet. All was well but according to the doctors to have carried would have meant frostbite. We had made the right decision.

Meanwhile Antony carried on with the science phase which was the core of the expedition which is an International Polar Year project. Antony spent four days in Qikiqtarjuaq giving talks in the local school and spending time learning about Inuit culture and their history. Questions were asked about any seasonal changes that have happened in recent history. Inuit elders and hunters proved to be a wealth of information on climate change and were very keen for their concerns to be heard.

On the 17th March Antony left for the next phase of the expedition. Antony was planning to attempt to ski solo to Pangnirtung, a distance of 150km through the Akshayuk Pass. Antony made good progress making on average 15 miles a day. Unbeknown to Antony a "severe weather warning" had been issued the day before with gale force winds and heavy snow predicted. The evening of the 21st saw the wind increase in force as the weather forecast had predicted. Antony decided to sit tight and wait out the storm. It lasted for three days with Antony sometimes not being able to leave his tent due to the severity of the raging winds. "People will ask what it was like and what did I do to keep busy," Antony says "but the simple truth is the storm couldn't be rushed you just had to tune yourself into nature's cycle. Time passed very quickly. I just slept and let my mind wander. It was often too cold

to hold a pencil so I couldn't even write." Temperatures got to around -60°C including wind chill and the winds reported to be about 50kph.

Once the storm passed Antony skied the remaining 30 miles to Pangnirtung in two days and enjoyed a hot shower at an Inuit family's home stay on the 26th. During the next couple of days Antony visited the local school speaking to seven different year groups on climate change and his time skiing to Pangnirtung. "The students were really keen to find out about England and why I wanted to ski solo in winter." He also visited a local craft centre which has been set up during the 70's to help promote Inuit art and generate much needed jobs within the community. He met and interviewed a number of the artists including Andrew Qappik who designed the Nunavut flag and coat of arms. "There are very few jobs here and the craft centre helps generate much needed jobs as well as promote traditional Inuit art."

Antony then returned via Ottawa where he met up with Vijay who had been conducting research and logistical support for the expedition. They returned as a team on the 31st March, both extremely happy that no injury had occurred and that they had made all the right decisions when needed.