

Average wintertime temperatures in areas of the Arctic Circle are 6°C warmer now than in the '60s

TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE **#5**
CONQUER THE POLE

Pole position

Adventurer Tom Avery embarked on his most grueling expedition so far, to a land of ice drifts, polar bears and Portuguese tourists...

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

WHAT? TAG Heuer ambassador Tom Avery leads the Barclays Capital Ultimate North Expedition to negotiate the ice ridges, open water and -55°C winds in order to take 16 dogs for a very long walk – to the North Pole. Oh, and break a record in the process.

WHERE? From a base camp at Cape Colombia, Ellesmere Island, Northern Canada to the top of the world!

WHY? To discover if Commander Robert Peary's 1909 expedition to the North Pole – reportedly taking just 37 days – could really have been achieved using the equipment of the time.

At first I thought it was a storm or maybe a blizzard like the one that had held us up for a whole day earlier in the expedition. But as we opened the tent and looked out, we saw the most gorgeous, blonde woman jump from the helicopter that was creating the gust. She proceeded to hand out champagne. Each of the dozen or so Portuguese tourists surrounding her took a break from their photo opportunity and raised a glass of very chilled bubbly to toast their trip. Three Russian guys who'd just completed a 37-mile trek and were waiting for the helicopter looked on, bemused

too. It was no dream. Just another day at the North Pole.

Shortly before the tourists landed my four teammates and I checked our GPS system to confirm our position as 90 degrees latitude, all lines longitude – we'd reached the Pole. Not by helicopter either. We'd beaten our target time by just under four hours and reached the top of the globe from our Canadian base camp in 36 days, 22 hours and 11 minutes. The feeling was one of immense relief. For those final few days the polar ice drift often meant we were floating in the opposite direction to our goal. One night we went to bed 25

miles away from the Pole, but woke up 30 miles away, and spent the first few hours of that day catching up lost ground, dragging and pushing the spruce wood sleds we'd constructed across the ice. Each of the two 1909 replica sleds weighed 650lbs when fully laden with our supplies.

Thankfully we had 16 Canadian Inuit dogs – much bigger and more resilient than regular huskies – helping us. And hindering us. Some days their squabbling could be infuriating. Just before we left base camp, Denali, a bitch, came on heat and drove the rest of the pack to distraction. ▶





The ice king cometh – Tom Avery conquers the Pole

◀ Eventually we set up “married quarters” for her and a dog called Ootah that resulted in us possibly being the only expedition to return with more dogs than we left with. Denali didn’t give birth on the trek but she was certainly carrying her pup when she led a raiding party into our bags in the final few days of the trip. We were already down to half rations when she and the pack scoffed two days worth of food.

When the going was flat all was fine. We’d built up our endurance levels ski touring in the Alps with the TAG Heuer team before setting off for the Pole. But hitting pressure ridges – 30ft-high piles of ice formed as the drift buckles – still meant the trek became the most arduous, physically exhausting adventure I’ve ever been

We’d lift the sleds to the top of a ridge, only for them to capsize and so make the task of covering 20 yards take over an hour

involved with. Within the first 200 miles we encountered hundreds of these ridges. Each time we’d lift the sleds to the top only for them to capsize or jam in a snow drift and so make the task of covering 20 yards of terrain take anything up to an hour to do. All this was done over treacherous

Tom and his team make it over another ridge



Robert Peary’s (right) 1909 achievement was the inspiration for the expedition



ground and in a brittle environment with a high risk of muscle pulls or ankle twists that could have jeopardised the whole expedition.

As we cleared the main cluster of ridges we then faced the equally treacherous obstacles of “leads”. These are streams of open water stretching for miles.

Some are just six inches wide – others are two miles across. We’d have to wait for hours for the huge ones to refreeze. Crossing them was terrifying because beneath that few feet of newly formed ice were two deep miles of dark Arctic water.

The closer we got to the pole the more leads we encountered

as the rising temperature of the approaching summer melted the ice. Then, as one of the dogs went into the water for the umpteenth time and I tried to haul his sodden 95lb bulk out, I slid in too. For a moment the water felt warm – just -1.8°C compared to the air temperature of -30°C . But within about 15 seconds I started to feel very, very cold. I hauled myself out and did what the dogs would do – roll around in the snow, as it absorbs the water before it turns to ice.

I then ran around in circles to warm the water in my boots to my body temperature. The worst thing you can do is keep still. No, actually, the worst thing you can do is *get wet* and keep still. In the meantime my mates rummaged through the kit bag for my spare clothing then stripped off as many layers from ▶

ESSENTIAL POLE GEAR



Good timing

TAG Heuer Aquagraph, £2000, 0800 037 9658, www.tagheuer.com
The watch with which Avery reached his goal is water-resistant to 500m and has luminescent hands and hour-markers; the classic adventurer’s timepiece.



Get fleeced

Mountain Hardwear Monkey Man fleece, £100, 01572 724 499
Made from Polartec Thermal Pro Monkey Fur with long, air-trapping fibres and powerstretch cuffs to keep the snow out, it’s the ideal mid layer.



Vision of the future

Oakley A Frame goggles, £99, 01462 475 400

For pole or piste, these feature face foam to wick away moisture and 100% eye protection against UVA, UVB, UVC and harmful blue light.

