



North Pole 2018 - Blog No 2: Less than 100 days, it's getting colder!

Yes, it has been a while since my last update about the North Pole and to be honest the number of days left is making me a bit nervous. In my mind I have had the thought that 2018 was still far away and my thinking for a while has been "it's next year". Of course this was true but I need to face it, 2018 has started and from counting months before my departure I moved now to weeks and soon it will be less than days. So am I ready? ... No not yet!

The first six months of 2017 I have been training a bit but I was more focused on settling in as a family in our new country Poland, which so far is a great adventure. But like with every move there is a lot to be done. During the summer I had several conversations with Ryan Waters and Eric Larson. Ryan was my guide during the expedition to Carstensz Pyramid in 2015. He is the owner of Mountain Professionals and besides a very qualified guide he is also a great person to climb and spend time with. After Carstensz we stayed in touch and when I was preparing for Everest he was the one that made it clear that I had to train 'beyond' the summit which had a huge impact on my training approach. Ryan and his company are also offering expeditions to the North and South Pole so for me it was a no brainer to ask him and his organisation again if they would take me with them. It's good to mention and maybe to clarify as well that a trip to the North Pole is not that common anymore. Ryan and Eric were the last two polar explorers that were able to do the full polar expedition, meaning starting in Greenland all the way to the magnetic (90 degree) point. It took them in 2014 more than 70 days and many times they had to cross the water in special suits because of the bad condition of the ice. Now in 2018 no organisation is willing to drop you, or more importantly, willing to pick you up in case something goes wrong whilst crossing the ice in that area, because it's almost impossible to land safely. So what am I going to do? During 2 months a year there is a Russian organisation that drops a few crazy explorers around the 88th / 89th degree with a small cargo plane. I agree this sounds a bit vague so let me explain it in a bit more detail. Around March and April, the ice is pretty stable and the weather conditions are not too bad so this organisation explores the area around the 89th degree point and will find a point where they can build a temporary air strip and a camp called "Barnino". Like I said it can be the 88th or the 89th degree and as a result of that it is possible that we receive the news that the expedition will be an additional walk (with a sledge) of around 150km. One thing is certain: our plan / schedule which we will have as an expedition team will not be the schedule in the end and adjustment is the key to success. This is also driven by the fact that the North Pole is only ice and not like the South Pole, land covered with ice. As a result of that it can be that you walk 9 hours during the day crossing 10km of ice with a temperature which was last year on average minus 42C and during the night you drift away 5km. The plan is that our expedition will last around 3 weeks in total. Flying from Warsaw – Poland on 29th March and saying goodbye to my biggest supporters Daan and the kids. Then my flight will bring me to Oslo and the next morning to Longyearbyen – Spitsbergen. Spitsbergen is the fifth largest island of Europe with a size similar as the Netherlands. The group of Islands are part of Norway and already on the 78th degree, compared to Warsaw 52nd). We all need to be there on the 1st of April but I like to get acclimatized a bit earlier, and let's be honest, how often will I visit this island and will I have

the opportunity to be inspired by its beauty? The first 3 days as a team we will be packing and repacking food for each team member and each meal, discussing the final details and waiting for "good" weather to head off to Barnino. Talking about the team I think it's relevant to mention that Eric will be our expedition leader. Eric has been working closely with Ryan over the last 10 years and normally he is taking people to the North Pole and Ryan is taking care of the South Pole which makes them both expert on two very different poles. The rest of the team consists of 4 adventurers including myself, so a small team that can move "fast" over ice. In the following updates, of course I will share more details with you about my new friends and the program.



But what about 'not ready yet'?

I think this is a combination of many things. First of all, and probably most importantly, I have a very high standard of being ready. My approach with every expedition has always been "influence all the elements that you can control". Meaning buying the right gear, finding the best organisation, have an intense training schedule and make sure everything is in place at home so that I will not get distracted during my expedition. If I look at each element I have to say that most of my concern is probably related to my condition and health. The last six months of 2017 I had several small injuries which had an effect on my training days but mostly the duration of them. Next to that I have a bit more personal challenge like giving priority to many other things like running the household, which makes sense but now with a young dog it's a bit more challenging. Next to that we had many guests during last year which is great but also has its effect on available time to train. But it's not making sense to look back so my focus is on the coming 100 days for which we (including Daan) made some important changes. This approach will be similar as my approach with Everest so I am convinced that I will be ready in relation to my standards.

As I mentioned earlier as well, having the best gear is crucial so that has been high on the agenda during the last 3 months. After going through my gear list with Eric and Ryan it was clear to me that I can use many items from my previous climbing expeditions but that the North Pole also requires many specific items which were for sure not available in Poland. For that reason, I decided to travel in October to Oslo, the Mecca for artic clothes and other gear. The trip was also a good reason to visit some climbing friends from my previous expedition. Benedict and Gaute are living in Oslo so besides shopping for gear I had some good quality time with them in combination with discovering Oslo. I have to say that one of the reasons for me to participate in expeditions is that it is for me an opportunity to relax. This sounds a bit strange when you take in mind that I burn around 6000 calories a day but for me walking / climbing are like meditation. I really have the time to let things go or to reflect on my life. On the other hand, I was already missing Daan in Oslo and this of course is even a bigger challenge during these long expeditions. Because what I probably enjoy the most is exploring the world together, the two of us, or with the kids. This is also one of the reasons that I try to involve them as much as possible in my journey. After Oslo I still had some challenges with buying gear online but I think I can now say that I am 99% sure done related to this part of my preparation.

So after being silent for a while I hope you are now up to date again. On the 12th of January I will depart to Canada (Winnipeg) where I will have a training week. During this week we will cross Lake Winnipeg in 4 days with temperatures measured last week between minus 30 and 40... next to that we will also discuss and align on many challenges that we can face on our expedition like how to deal with a polar bear if we would encounter one.

So my next update will for sure cover more about this adventure, my team and my training progress.

Dare to Dream in 2018!
Jaco