



North Pole 2018 - Blog No 6: Body and mind reunited

Tuesday 10th April

Svalbard – Longyearbyen – Norway

YES, I am on my way! The last one and a half week have been very strange and many days it really felt like I was already on the Pole or at least in Longyearbyen (Svalbard or for the Dutch friends 'Spitsbergen'). I have been thinking about similar examples like a runner who has been training for his 100m race and by the time you walk into the stadium, somebody will tell you "your race is not going to take place". I know it's part of extreme expeditions to often remote places and the less funny thing, I am still not sure if it will all go ahead, but it has been really a struggle. This last comment probably also applied to my family members at home. I am aware now looking back at these days, that having me at home for 11 more days was a challenge for them as well. As most people know I am a perfectionist so everything was ready to go and organized days before, including envelopes with money for piano lessons and the cleaner. So my handover really took place and mentally I was already gone. Even waking up some mornings felt like I had been sleeping in a tent, so I should have said this earlier to Daan, the kids and my parents but my apologies for not being at my best these days.



I am now in my hotel room where I will probably stay for 4 nights. The first 36 hours relaxing and being on my own before we start 2 days of packing. I always prefer to arrive a bit earlier so that I can adjust to the time zone and climate, but most importantly to bring myself really in the expedition mode, but what is that? I can imagine that this will be different for each participant and saying this I might going to ask the others the coming weeks. For me it's important that I can "unwind", let things go, being here instead of there (read 'at home'), so mostly mental preparation. I don't have the mind space during an expedition to worry about things that need to happen or take place at home, there is no space to be concerned about Beyond Summits, I need to focus. This might sound selfish but I have seen too many people who underestimated the mental part and most of the time had a huge battle or needed to turn around. To be honest,

mentioning the words ‘turn around’ have a different dimension during this expedition as well, because this is not an option. We don’t have a base camp, we are like a campervan but without the wheels, we are on the move every day, because every day we rest will be a waste of gas that we need for melting ice, a waste of food and probably most relevant it can be that we drift away from the Pole instead of getting closer. Based on that it’s no option to turn around and to bring somebody who is not mentally ready back to our starting point. By saying that it’s actually selfish to not switch off from home and all the things that might matter. For this reason I am also happy that we have a small group and that we have the opportunity to become a strong solid team who will be able to help each other out when needed on tough days.

I have to say that saying goodbye yesterday felt good, especially because I was able to explain to Tom where I was heading to and he even mentioned to me the last weeks several times “Daddy is going to the North Pole”. Last time with my Everest trip he was only 15 months old, so what do you say after being with him so close for all these months and then suddenly you are away for 11 weeks? This time it will be not that long but for me it’s really important that the children know what I am about to do and that they can chat with Daan about it when needed. The flight to Oslo was 30 minutes delayed, which I hope will not be the overall phrase for this expedition but around 10pm I was able to put all my luggage on my trolley and headed towards the Radisson hotel at the airport for a few hours of sleep. Luckily no alarm issues in the morning followed by a nice breakfast at the airport and a smooth flight to my second destination, the Radisson Polar hotel in Longyearbyen.

The last half hour I was looking out of the window after a nice 2 hour sleep across three chairs. The view was amazing also because the weather today was perfect. Svalbard is a huge collection of islands and I guess most of the time covered with snow and ice. After taking some pictures we are already there and I realize that it has been a while ago that my expedition will start in the same time zone as my home town. This makes the traveling and the acclimatization much easier. After collecting luggage, which is always a relief, I take the airport bus to my hotel and before I know I am unpacking my stuff. The afternoon I am enjoying the cold sunshine, I see the first wild-life (a Karibu or like they say over here a Svalbard Reindeer) and I explore this nice small town. In the supermarket I am able to buy some groceries and it speaks for itself that everything is far from cheap which I think make sense if you think about the fact that Norway is already expensive and then everything needs to be shipped or flown into this place. Anyway, I am happy with my snacks and decide that it’s time for a burger for lunch. I almost forgot to mention, but in the first hours it’s clear to me that people don’t want snow and guns inside.



Every store you enter has the gun sign and every museum, hotel etcetera they ask you to take off your shoes. The last one makes it very cozy inside because everybody is walking on their socks. The first one tells me that there are more polar bears (3500) on this huge island than inhabitants (2700).

In the afternoon I am enjoying a powernap, I eat again and then Eric drops me a text that he is back in town so we catch up in a café called Kroa. It's good to see him again and we chat for a few hours mostly about the expedition. Around 11pm I close my curtains because it's time for a good sleep but also because it will stay light outside the whole night.

Friday 13th April

It must be related to the date, but we received some great news! We are scheduled to fly out as the first group to Barneo on Saturday evening and after that straight away in the helicopter to our dropping point! The result of that will be that it will be probably a 24 hour day event, but that's the least of my concerns.

But what happened the last 2 days? Wednesday was a cultural morning with a visit to the North Pole Expedition Museum and the Svalbard Museum. Both nice to visit especially on a cloudy day like today. Halfway my visit I received a text from Eric "what about salami cutting around 1pm?" The rest of the day we were busy with making things ready for our adventure, meaning cutting butter, cheese, chocolate and yes salami into daily portions. But also oiling all stoves, checking and repairing the tent poles etcetera. Halfway this activity the three other members arrive (David – Florida, Neil – Alaska and Vivian – China) so we are now complete. That evening we have our first team dinner and make the first selfie. In the hotel I have a quick WhatsApp call with Daan which is always good and I share my first experiences before I go to bed.



Yesterday was all about getting ready, counting and measuring food portions into day bags, making the last adjustments to our material and whatsoever. A daily bag of food by the way consists of roughly 6000 calories and weighs 1.5kg. I know from the Canada training that it's not always easy to consume this amount in a day but I am also aware that I need this take-in to have enough energy the next morning. I have to admit that I have been eating a lot the last four weeks so I am a bit above my average weight which feels strange and some days uncomfortable but I know that I will come home far below this number. In the evening Eric had his meeting with VIAAR (Victory In Arctic & Antarctic Research) International Projects and Expeditions.

During this meeting he received all the details like mentioned above, so our go-ahead. The rest of the team went out for a quick dinner.

Back to today. It's a bit strange that for almost 2 weeks we have not received any news and I was only able to find a post from the Barneo Facebook page that they were transporting all gear like mass tents, bulldozers and all kind of heavy stuff to the border of Russia to be flown out at some point. So being here now a few days again with radio silence and just my fingers crossed now finally paid off. I am still aware that things can be delayed because literally they are building the Barneo camp today around the 89.3 degree but the 900 meter runway is in place on a big piece of ice which is supposed to be 1.8m thick. Regarding the camp I am not too concerned and the reason is that when we arrive there we will probably fly out straight away with the helicopter to our starting position (ideally 170 East longitude and 89 North latitude) and from there just walk...

We use the morning for packing the sledge, which looks easy but every small detail is relevant. Like dividing the weight so it's easy to pull the sledge over pressured ice or maneuver it. Next to that it's important that I literally know where I have put everything, from snacks to socks or spare clothes in case I fall through the ice, to down jacket for my breaks or toilet paper. With conditions which we are going to face the coming days there is no room and time to sort things out or to waste your 5 minute break to discover where that piece of paper is. To be honest the one thing at this moment that makes me a bit nervous is the fact that this expedition will start from the first second. With other expeditions you make your way to basecamp, you can relax a bit and then you continue. In this case we leave the (although very basic) civilized world and by the time you step out of the helicopter it is full on. Just the five of us on the ice with our sledge including food for a while and a temperature which can be minus 30 or even 40.



After having packed the sledge it's time to relax and to write this update which I always like doing, but at the same time whilst doing it I am always thinking of home, so inbetween I look at some nice pictures of Daan and the kids and think about the upcoming holiday.

Dare to Dream

PS: From this day onwards we will send short text messages via the satellite phone to Eric's assistant about our progress and Daan will do her best to keep you updated: stay tuned.