



North Pole 2018 - Blog No 3: One-week training Lake Winnipeg – Canada.

Friday 12th January

It's 3:55am and my alarm clock is making noise, but not really...

Yesterday when we went to bed around 11pm and I was pretty sure that I had set the alarm. Daan even made the comment, "make sure you put it at AM and not PM". Now it appeared at 4:15am that I forgot to change the day to Friday. So a coincidence or not, but fortunately I wake up only 20 minutes too late and it feels like a deja vu to my Everest summit day, but that was Friday the 13th. I quickly wake up Daan who is so nice to drop me at the airport, I jump in my clothes and 10 minutes later we are on our way with all the luggage in the back of the car. Daan can actually bring me to the airport because Nel and Willem will be around these two weeks which is great because that allows me to go on this adventure and Daan to stay focused on her job. As soon as we arrive at the airport I jump out of the car so that I can check in all my gear but challenge number two is on the horizon. Not my oversized luggage (read ski's) for which I have been in contact with KLM over the last three weeks but my ETSA documents for Canada and the US. I proudly tell the guy behind the desk that I completed all the paperwork for the US yesterday based on KLM's advice. The man gives me a nice compliment but is making me clear that without the Canada forms he cannot release the boarding pass to me. Of course I cannot blame KLM for not sharing this information with me but it feels frustrating to be informed about my stop-over location and not about my final destination. Luckily I have my lap-top with me and within 5 minutes I am connected via my personal hot-spot. Yesterday when I was completing the US papers the comment on page one was "be aware, approval can take up to 72 hours" so with some nerves I start to fill in all the questions and after making a 7\$ transfer I receive an e-mail within 5 minutes with the comment "approved". Ready for attempt two to check-in, but I suddenly realize that my backpack is still in the car... What is happening today?? During the last 24 hours I received more than 30 comments on Facebook that I am so organised and well-prepared, and now this. Daan runs quickly back to the car and I complete my check-in including paying 85 euro's (single journey) for ski transport. Then it's time for coffee, a big kiss and many hugs...

Like with many things in life I don't realise enough what I have today. I am writing this first paragraph on my way to Paris (first stop-over). As an aside, the Air-France crew is really nice and just came to explain the "fastest" way at the airport to get my connecting flight because I only have one hour. But coming back to what I have, I realise again that Daan and I really have something special and that we both create opportunities to develop personal ambitions. Another ambition for this year is to be honest that we also create more "relaxing" moments so that we can more enjoy what we are doing as a family, for example creating quality time at home instead of going away every school holiday and weekend.

Meanwhile I am squeezed in plane number three and the wind is blowing with a temperate of minus -17 into the cabin before we take off. Paris was a bit of a challenge I have to say. With limited time and a huge crowd that all needed to go to the same terminal as me, it became really a battle for places in the bus. But I made it and after a nine-hour flight to Minneapolis and going through customs including all the paperwork, picking up luggage (even if it is a stopover) and checking it in again 50 meters later I am now ready for the last flight. After

landing in winter wonderland everything went smoothly. At the hotel I quickly take my dinner before I go to bed, pretty early but based on the seven-hour time difference you can also so very late.

Saturday 13th January

Time to meet the other group members.

Funnily enough I am again sitting in the plane - don't worry, everything went well but I just did not have the time to write is during the training so I am now flying back home one week later and my first stopover this time is Calgary.

Although I woke up early I have to say that I had a good night and after a nice breakfast I take my last shower knowing that on the ice I will not have the opportunity. Around 9:30 it's time to meet the others but equally important to do a gear check. For me this is almost the most important element to cover during this training. I want to be sure that my gear is 100% North-Pole-proof, that I know how to use it and that I feel comfortable with it. After a round of introductions it is clear to me that we have a very diverse group with different backgrounds, qualities and goals, which I think is great. Next to Eric (the leader of this course and guide for my upcoming expedition) we have Dean as an additional guide, Shan for the logistics and 11 participants including myself (Brad Paul, Janice Poehlman, James Mills, Rachael Sarette, David McCampbell (all USA), Liz Murrie (Ireland), Sarah Scriver (Canada), Dirk Groth (Australia), Lynda Prior (New Zealand), Masatatsu Abe (Japan). I am very pleased that Eric is happy with my gear and that we can have a good discussion on what to us and try out during the coming days. After checking out it's time to go and the typical big Chevrolet van is waiting for us outside for a one-and-a-half-hour journey to the lake. The cosy cabin offers us a nice place to start our training week but Eric is pretty clear that we need to put up tents in the garden straight away, so no luxury anymore and just snow, ice and a matress of 2 cm thick for the coming week. It gives me great joy that I feel straight away comfortable with the other members and most importantly with Eric. We only had several Skype conversations over the last few months and within 2 months we are about to embark on a huge adventure, so getting along with each other is really important. During the day we receive many tips about how to put up a camp in snow and ice conditions, to burn and use the stove and heater in the tent and many other topics. Of course none of them are new to me but as mentioned in previous expeditions, every leader has different ways of doing things so again it's great to start understanding how Eric is working. After some chats in the evening it's time to make my way to my sleeping bag for a night with a temperature of around minus 25 degrees Celsius.

Sunday 14th January and Monday 15th January

Getting ready.

Both days are all about knowledge enrichment and trying things out. It's cold outside, especially in combination with some strong winds. After 2 nights camping in the garden we move our tents to the lake, make our first miles on the water and start camping like we are already on our way. Overall everybody is in a good mood.

Tuesday 16th January

Time to go! But why?

I came to the conclusion that the question 'why' is almost irrelevant. We are all different and we all have different needs to keep our personal battery charged. For many of us this is enjoying a beach holiday at the same location every year or just taking time off to get things done in and around the house and for others it can be camping, visiting cities or whatever. For

me... apparently I choose locations that are always challenging for my body and mind and at the moment in combination with freezing my balls off.



Men, it's so cold! Before I lose connection I quickly make a screen shot of the current situation outside and the message is clear "feels like minus 38". Let's open my sleeping bag, have breakfast, pack my stuff and get ready. Knowing that I don't like waiting (read getting cold whilst not moving and losing energy) I take it easy because with a new big group it always takes a bit longer for some to get ready. Halfway the morning we make our way on the ice. The idea is that we cross the lake and that we build our camps somewhere on the water, but Eric and Dean are coming quickly to the conclusion that there is very limited snow on the lake which makes it difficult to build a decent camp for all of us and to melt snow which we need for our meals and drinks. So we follow the coastline and make our way to a big island. The first day is not that long but good enough for me to enjoy how it is to walk with a sled that is around 45kg. As mentioned before, I can try out different layers of clothes. The key thing is that you don't get cold but you also need to avoid sweating at the same time. This is to be honest not that simple because as soon as you stop moving you feel the crazy wind trying to find its way between your layers and when you pull your sledge you are hot before you know it. This challenge is even more related to my snow goggles. My face must be covered at all times because frost-bite is around the corner. Brad for example only exposed part of his face for a short time but in the morning he woke up with a bit of first degree frostbite. But by covering your face you know that your breath will fog your glasses and with these temperatures they will freeze within 5 seconds. So we all made a nice sort of face mask which we attach to our goggles and which I now use on days like today. If it is a bit less cold outside I can change to just my balaclava in combination with goggles and when it's really nice outside just my sunglasses. Around 4pm we set up camp, make our food, drink a lot and go to bed around 7pm. We sleep in 3 person tents and the first couple of nights I share the tent with Liz and Rachael. We all have our tasks and every day we rotate jobs.

Wednesday 17th January

Not a regular walk in the park.

During the night I wake up, what is that? The tents are shaking so the ice is moving. Pretty exciting but scary at the same time. The ice is on most places 1.5 meter thick and can easily carry a car but every day the ice makes its way due to pressure and temperature changes. When we are walking on the ice as well, many times during the day you hear the sound of cracking ice and especially when you walk over a big piece that is not covered with snow, it's exciting. As a team we start up the day even more smoothly than the day before which is great. After a few hours we are facing a new adventure, ice ridges or pressured ice. It's almost like titanic plates that are pushed together and built upon each other. Luckily we cannot walk around it so we need to work out a way through it. From step one I feel 100% in my element

and I really like the challenge we are facing. During a break I have the opportunity to make some awesome pictures but one hour later it's time to put up camp and to make ourselves ready for the night.



Thursday 18th January

Blue sky and wolf prints.

I still wake up every morning around 4am which I think is not really related to my jet-lag but more to the fact that we go to bed around 8pm. So after turning my body from left to right about 50 times it is time to open my sleeping bag and to make breakfast. I have to say that all the meals we prepared in the cabin so far are really good. Everything is measured so that you know how many calories you take in. Most items are unpacked to safe weight and for convenience, so that you don't need to open snacks with gloves whiles being outside or even worse, to take of your gloves. Before we left today I noticed the sound of a drone not knowing that Eric has this with him. Based on this we have a good chat about what to take with us to the North Pole. VR? Drone? Cameras? The most important thing is that we are both willing to put a lot of effort in capturing an amazing expedition two months from now. After we are all done we practice with a compass in pairs of two. This is not new to me but a long time back so great to practice. The day starts where it ended so pulling my sled through ice cubes up to my shoulders. It's a pity that it finishes so soon and that we move to more flat ice but I am convinced that I will have my portion in a couple of months. After the lunch break, which is really a treat, we continue our way around the island. To be honest it sounds strange to say 'treat'. Sitting in the cold on your sled, protection your body from the wind and trying to consume your half cold soup by lifting up your face mask with your gloves (as taking of the goggles can make them freeze), yes, that really sounds like a treat. I think it's the same as the cold temperature. The first days it was around minus 40 and now 15 so 25 degrees warmer.. So after being really uncomfortable, less comfortable becomes a luxury and maybe that is something to take with me at home and to presentations for sure. Now walking on the flat ice covered with snow I noticed that we are almost surrounded by footprints that are not from one of us or other people – they appear to be serious wolf prints. The island that we are walking around has no houses on it and is covered with a nice forest so if we camp here, which we do, then it will be close to them. We find a nice spot around 5pm and start to put up tents straight away because within half an hour it will be dark. Tonight I am sharing a tent with David. The reason is that Eric wants us to get "used to each other. On the North Pole we will rotate sleeping mates as well, so that you share tents 3 or 4 nights with different individuals, which stimulates the team building. David is 62 and has set himself the goal after he retired to climb the 7 Summits and the two poles within 2 years. Whilst doing that he is raising money for Haiti, so overall a great goal and a great person to meet and be with. During the evening we already have some good conversations about our backgrounds and I am able to share some of my

climbing experience as well so for the first time this week I go to sleep pretty late. 9pm but unfortunately 15 minutes too early.

Friday 18th January

Heading back to camp and making distance

In the morning several members share the news that the wolves probably got very close to our camp because the sound of hauling was very loud around a quarter past nine. Oh, men, why have I missed that ... chips! After some fun pictures with the go-pro stick and knowledge sharing from Dean about hypothermia (is a medical emergency that occurs when your body loses heat faster than it can produce heat, causing a dangerously low body temperature. Normal body temperature is around 98.6 F (37 C). Hypothermia occurs as your body temperature falls below 95 F (35 C). Dean is doing a great job in explaining this and I am really enjoying this session on the ice. Close to noon we start to make our way on the ice which is a bit late, taking in mind that we would like to come as close as possible to the cabin. So without talking a lot we start our journey at a decent speed. Halfway we are crossing some pressured ice but this time it has water on it so we try to go across it a bit further. At this moment I notice that Eric is very experienced with "reading" the ice. Although he is only 5 feet and a bit ☺ (below 1.7m) he observes the area from a distance, as well as close by, and probably by recognising the shapes of the ice he knows where we need to go. This is extremely valuable because by going in the right direction in one go you save an enormous amount of energy and time. Around 5:30 the surprise is that we are next to the cabin and that we crossed close to 15km of ice in just half a day, which is giving me good confidence for the next adventure. Although we are next to the cabin we will still put up the tents for the last time with the only difference that we will watch a movie about "chasing ice" inside. Not a surprise that I don't see the end of the movie because my watch is going beyond 9pm tonight.

Saturday 19th

Time to say goodbye

One more time we put on our ski's because Eric and Dean came up with the idea to make some additional drone shots. First I was thinking 'oh men again', but thinking about the previous drone movie from our camp which Eric showed us I am really happy that we are going to do this. After walking around for almost one hour we have enough material and is it time to sort out all our gear, that we close the cabin but more important that we say goodbye, to the ice, but not for long.

The van brings us back to the hotel and although I am really looking forward to a shower I first want to talk to the kids and Daan. Again it feels really special to share my experience with them knowing that they are part of my new adventure as well. Without them and their support I cannot participate in these kind of expeditions. A few hours later, some rest and that well-deserved shower we go out as a group to the city centre of Winnipeg. There are some beers and wines and some still water for me because I made again the commitment not to drink alcohol during the last 3 months before my upcoming expedition. It's really time to say farewell to all the others. It was again very special to meet so many different people from around the world and I am sure that I will catch up with a few of them at a later stage and with David already 2 months from now. It's close to midnight already so I go to bed knowing that I will have a long trip back home via Calgary and Amsterdam. The last thing I do is uploading some first pictures on Facebook which for me is a nice closure of this successful training week.

Dare to Dream!