



South Pole 2019 - 2020 Blog No 4: Celebrating all kind of successes

23 hours of storm - it is driving me crazy... But without movement no progress, so it's 15.30 in the afternoon and we put down our tent to start walking. If I leave any item unsupervised, it's gone forever, taken by the wind and disappearing towards the horizon, that's how strong the storm is. We only walk two pitches of 60 minutes each, and satisfied we put up the tents again and start preparing our dinner. The coming five nights I will be sharing a tent with Ryan and Paula will have her own tent, and the prospect of having a tent on my own for five nights is another thing to look forward to. We're all trying to break this expedition into parts, not for the reason that we want it to be finished after we have just started, but more to be able to celebrate small achievements or occasions as fuel to keep us going.

Sunday and Monday are two big days and we walk 22 nautical miles in total, which is great. The weather is now more in our favour, but often, after a break, I have the challenge of getting my hands warm. Whilst we're moving, I sweat a lot and my clothes become wet. During a break, I'm obviously not moving, so there is no rotation of warm air in my clothes and everything freezes straight away. After the 12-minute breaks I then need 15 minutes to warm up again and my hands are sometimes so cold that I cannot feel them at all. It's like when I was young, playing outside during the winter and when coming back home, sitting in front of the heater for 30 minutes with shivering hands. The good news is that by the time we put up our camp, we know that we will hit the 81st degree point sometime tomorrow, which is again something to celebrate – we're getting comfortable with being uncomfortable.

What a great moment – the moment we hit that 81st degree on Tuesday. It feels like so much more than just our first degree. 10 months of training, having said goodbye to Daan, my parents and the kids already 3 weeks ago, packing our food, being delayed by 5 days, climbing more than 650 meter of altitude with 110 kilo in our sleds, finding our rhythm as a team on the ice and aligning our ways of working ... I'm sure you will agree this is more than just the first degree! Now we're already looking ahead again, and I am calculating everything, which I am sure will drive Ryan crazy at some point, but it keeps my mind busy during the day. I keep converting nautical miles into kilometres, into hours and days and concluded we moved into 3 digits, which means we 'only' have 974 kilometres left. For me, this sounds cool because it reminds me of the many car journeys from Warsaw to the Netherlands. This trip was also 1130 kilometres and usually we had huge traffic jams at the start. Often, after 2 hours being underway, Waze was still showing a 4-digit number, but as soon as we crossed 999 kilometres to go, the journey became smoother.

I have to say that the last two days have been very good for me. I found my routine, I know where I have packed all my stuff (which is really convenient) and I'm getting used to the (still) heavy sled. In the meantime, I brainstormed some great ideas about a potential TED talk and maybe even writing a book. I use the evenings to write down my ideas on paper, to listen to music and to chat with Ryan, tonight for the last time before I will have the tent 5 days to myself.

It's 5 December – a festive day, but also an emotional day. The reason is that it's Sinterklaas in the Netherlands. The tradition goes as follows: mid November Saint Nicholas (Sint) travels from Spain to The Netherlands with his steamboat and his helpers and after having spent a couple of weeks in the Netherlands, he celebrates his birthday on the 5th of December. That evening he (or his helpers) knock on the doors and leave many presents for the children. Tom (who still 'believes') has now the perfect age for this tradition so I really regret that I am not around this year. The good thing is that I bought

all the presents, so I know what they will get from De Sint. The other nice thing is that I opened my first letter today, a Sinterklaas poem (written by my mother) and a present is waiting for me back home. I surprised the team here as well with a typical chocolate letter, in this case the S, which didn't take long to be eaten, as you can imagine! This was all after a nice day on the ice and we achieved a new record of 11.6 nautical miles, so we're all happy. Now I am relaxing on my own in the tent, listening to Coldplay and exchanging messages with Daan to coordinate the last details, because they will celebrate Sinterklaas shortly.

It's already Saturday evening and I'm looking back at perhaps not my best two days. We covered enough distance and we're already close to the 82nd degree, but yesterday my mind was the whole time back home, thinking about the Sinterklaas celebrations. In the evening I made my first satellite call (or should I say 20 calls). It was great to hear Daan, Lente, Iris and my mum, but what a shitty connection. Every 30 seconds it broke up and although I was happy to hear that they had great fun, it also made my evening and my day empty. This is also driven by the fact that we have 20 days ahead of us with a similar view. Yes, it's beautiful but at the same time, just imagine 360 degrees around you, everything looking the same. A blue sky and a flat, white pancake of 500 kilometre around you. It gives me too much time to think! I mentioned to Daan yesterday that it is a real strange experience that you are in such a 'zone' the whole day that all kind of memories surface. Friends from when I was 5, school moments, work situations, everything you can think of, and then, at night, I dream about it. In a way, I am ok with this because it gives me the opportunity to almost take a helicopter view and to work out what the important things are in life, so I am sure I will come home with a few insights