

South Pole 2019 - 2020 Blog No 2:
Final preparation including Christmas dinner..

The 30-hour journey is behind me and the good news is that all my luggage is in front of me. It's 23:30 Wednesday evening, the 13th of November and I am about to leave the airport. I'm searching for my hotel papers and just noticed one line on the reservation confirmation "please make sure you arrive before midnight, otherwise check-in can only take place the next morning". Luck is on my side as my female taxi driver is driving 140km an hour to town and 5 minutes before midnight I walk into the hotel.

The night was not too bad and after a nice breakfast it's time to catch up with Ryan. Over the last 4 years we only had Skype contact but seeing him was like meeting a close friend again. As mentioned in my first blog it's for that reason that I am very happy that we are going to do this adventure together. In the morning we chat a bit and we check my gear. I always take too many items with me so that I can still discuss what we both think will be best. In the afternoon I can relax a bit before Paula arrives at the hotel as well. It's maybe not the best town, Punta Arenas, but for me it feels really good to be back and to have some time to unwind.



After a bit of shopping I take a shower and try to eat as much as possible. The reason for that is that normally my ideal weight is 88kg but taking in mind that I am probably going to lose 12kg this expedition I am already trying for 3 weeks to gain more weight, which is going very slowly I have to say. I left home with 87.8kg so I hope that four days Punta with chocolate, cookies and other fat stuff will at least bring me to 90. When Paula arrives, we go straight to the restaurant for a welcome dinner and I have to say that from the first minute I really feel that we are a well-balanced team. We openly chat about several topics, experiences and what is about to happen a few days from now. It's not a long evening because Ryan has been very busy the last few days and Paula and I have a small jetlag, so around nine I am back in the hotel for a good night's sleep.

Friday and Saturday are all about packing food and getting ready. Ryan has done this already many times but for me it's the second time and to be honest preparing food for 10 days is a bit different than food for 55 days. It's still very strange to think that I am preparing a meal that I am going to eat next year and that we need to think about Christmas although it's not going to be 4 courses but just 4 to 5 thousand calories. The amount of food on the table for each occasion is pretty mind blowing. Cans full of dry food, 15kg chocolate and cheese, 20kg salami, peanuts, raisins, oatmeal, milk powder, soup, coffee and so on. Each meal we weigh, always taking in mind not too much but for sure not too little. During the first weeks of the expedition we will lose fat but during the second part it will be muscles, so for that reason we divide the expedition and all our food into two. The portions for the

first 25 days are big and the portions for the second 25 days are crazily big. Just looking at a portion of breakfast or dinner makes me think how the am I going to eat all of that? Paula is for that reason a bit more concerned because she will burn less calories than Ryan and myself, which is a fair challenge, but for now, we keep the portions as is.



In-between all the packing we have enough time to relax, walk around and for me to make a long phone call home. Daan is already back from NY which went well, and the kids finished another school week. Tom is very active on the other side of the line, probably because “Sinterklaas” arrived in the Netherlands. This is a typical Dutch tradition which starts mid-November and the big celebration is on the 5th of December when the kids will get many presents, so it’s not a surprise that he is excited. I also chat for a while with Lente and Iris and after that with Daan. In a way, it’s strange to see them all enjoying the bonfire in the garden, but it also makes me proud that we can do this as a family. Me going for a new adventure and at the same time seeing my parents, Daan and the kids enjoying what we have as well. It’s these kinds of moments I treasure, especially after having left Unilever. I was fortunate with a company that provided me with all kinds of training opportunities, both skill development and even more importantly personal development. This in combination with many great people around me made me who I am today. Over the last few years I had to reinvent myself in many ways and like in a job this has been a journey on its own. Until this day I am very proud however about the decision we took as a family back in 2014.

Sunday 17th November

Yes, I am getting nervous so not the best night. Today we need to hand in our luggage and food so in the morning I do a last check, have some breakfast (again a lot) and I make my way to the lobby. ALE is the logistical partner for all kind of expeditions to Antarctica and they have become more and more professional. With an almost Swiss approach they structure the whole process from the day you sign up until the day you’re back home. At 10am sharp they are in front of the hotel and we start loading the truck. We drive with them to the office where all items need to go on the scale and we also receive our boarding pass already. During this whole process I am chatting with a few other explorers and when we are all done it’s again time to relax. Where I was nervous in the morning, it has now changed to excitement and impatience, so let’s hope that our flight, scheduled for Monday, will go ahead.



It's Monday 9am and I am not sure...

Is it feeling comfortable with being uncomfortable or is it that experience that I feel comfortable with not being in control? Most of you know I am a control freak. Especially during the last couple of years, since my career break and the increased frequency of expeditions, this controlled way of looking at life has not always resulted in the best outcomes. Having said that, I am convinced that it is not only luck that I managed to complete each of the 7 summits and the North Pole, all in the first time, knowing that the overall percentage of success is below 50%. For sure my way of preparation and determination is a huge part of the success, and on top of that of course great support and a bit of luck. Now, the good thing is that since I am back from the North Pole, I started to recognise that there is for sure a difference between going on an expedition or walking with the family and Luna (our dog) in Richmond park. The challenge is that on the day that I sign up for an expedition, which is often a year in advance, I have my excel sheet in front of me and I switch to an expedition mode, which means trying to control everything ahead of you. So, my expectation or even more, my way of living, does not give a lot of space for things to go wrong and is mostly focused on efficiency.

So, yesterday afternoon we had our briefing at the ALE office with some welcome drinks. I caught up with Nick Lewis, one of the owners who still remembered me, and I shook hands with many other people. This year, including us, around 10 people will do a similar polar expedition like we will do. This number of people is the same as other years, but still very low from my point of view, if you consider how many people travel and explore. The briefing is good, they talk about the rules on the continent and the treaty between many countries with the main focus to keep it pristine. But I have to say that I was distracted after the intro, or maybe already since the chat with Nick. So here I am sitting, in front of the ocean, looking at the horizon, enjoying the sunshine and having a strange feeling. We now already have a two-day delay. I am ready to go and want to go, but it is now out of my control, so I am ok with that. Am I? Yes, I am. And that's a great feeling. This is being tested straight away when we hear that due to bad weather on Antarctica, we won't be able to fly today....

It's Tuesday and one week of my expedition has already passed. Although the word "expedition" feels a bit strange after 6 comfortable nights in Hotel Diego de Almagro. Today is all about waiting and hoping to receive positive news about our departure to the Antarctic continent. During the day we already start making plans and ideas what to do if we can't fly, because we all have that feeling of being impatient. I also feel this in my body, like an upcoming fever, which it is not, but after training many months I have taken it easy during the last 10 days and it is like my body is now telling me "wake up and get active"!

It's already Wednesday, Thursday and Friday will follow soon. There's still bad weather on Antarctica and therefore no flying to the continent until further notice. Daan dropped me a voice message saying "you said this expedition will be a mental challenge, so here it is from day one". The good news is that I can now do a radio interview with a Dutch radio station, called "Radio Rijnmond" which I hope will

give some additional exposure to my Make-A-Wish fundraising. After some technical challenges I can use their reporter's app which allows me to answer all the questions and for them to record it straight away. That same afternoon it is already aired:

<https://www.rijnmond.nl/nieuws/188775/Rotterdammer-maakt-zich-op-voor-barre-tocht-door-Zuidpool>

In the meantime, I changed hotels (I moved into a cheaper one now we need to stay longer in Punta Arenas), we went to see the movie "Joker" and I organised an excursion (finally) to see the penguins. Other than that ... I take it easy and go for a run on Friday morning along the beach. Most importantly, the three of us chat openly about many things, which I like, because I think it will make us stronger as a team.

It's close to nine o'clock on Friday evening – I have Daan on the phone and I share with her the news that we just received. There might potentially be a weather window on Saturday morning, so we will need to be ready. As excited as I am, it also feels too good to be true and Ryan and Paula have a similar feeling. Maybe because we have been waiting so long and have been receiving bad weather forecasts during the last days, even this afternoon... Or maybe because we are suddenly all getting nervous. I spend time talking to Daan on the phone and I am happy that she shares things with me that are going on at her work, and at home, and again I realise how fortunate I am with her. I forgot to tell her that but I hope she knows. After our chat it's time to get ready, meaning sorting out my stuff that will stay in Punta, prepare my bag I'll take with me in the plane and the warm clothes I need to wear during the trip. I am in doubt if I shall take my last shower of this year now or tomorrow morning, but I know I will be awake early, so I go for the morning option and try to go to bed early.

A last comment before I close my laptop – from this blog onwards I will share short messages with Daan from my Garmin Inreach device. Daan will then pull together these messages and will share it with you once in a while.

Dare to Dream!

Link to Make-A-Wish donation page:

<https://makeawishnederland.org/actie/1343/expeditie-naar-de-zuidpool>

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