



South Pole 2019 - 2020 Blog No 3:

Let's get started!

It's minus 16 degrees in the wind, which is actually not too bad. It's close to nine o'clock, Saturday the 23rd of November and I am back at Union Glacier. I'm lying in my tent enjoying the moment. The last 24 hours have been very strange and exciting at the same time:

Friday evening, I was sitting with Paula and Ryan in our hotel, and almost out of the blue we received a message from ALE "there is possibly a flight on Saturday morning, please be ready at 8". Despite the sudden excitement, I had a good night, after a call with Daan in the evening and with the kids in the early morning. Suddenly I am sitting in the plane ready to take off to Antarctica! The 4 ½ hour flight went well and although it's the second time, landing on Antarctica is pretty awesome. I am aware when I take the first steps on this pristine continent that I am very fortunate to be here, but at the same time I wish I had Daan around me to experience this together. After taking several pictures of the landscape and the Illusion (the plane that flew us to Antarctica) we drive with a van to the Union Glacier camp where we will probably stay 3 nights. After an hour relaxing and sitting outside in the sun it's time to put up our tents. We all know how to do this of course but I have learned over the years that every guide has his or her own routine, so Ryan takes the lead and we follow which is going very smoothly. I almost forgot to say that my GARMIN InReach device [red. GPS and messaging device that works via satellites] is working very well and from my lazy chair I can send my location plus a text to Daan and 30 seconds later I have a response, which I think is mind-blowing if you take into account that London is close to 20.000 km away from here. My first day in Union Glacier I finish with a great dinner and after that I listen for the first time to the playlist that Daan has put on my iPhone. It will probably take a few days again to get used to the fact we're having daylight 24 hours a day. The tent is making it even more bright than it is outside. I experienced this 24-hour daylight already several times throughout my climbing career, but I still wake up at 3am, my body telling me it must be morning but my watch telling me it is the middle of the night.

After one night, I have to say that I am really happy with the combination of a 1,5cm ThermaRest foam mattress and an inflatable mattress. Together, I think it is close to 6 cm. For sure not the same as the Auping boxspring at home, but for the coming months this will do the job. After a heavy breakfast I start putting the new cover over my sled. The cover has my Beyond Summits logo stitched on it, as well as the Make-A-Wish logo and the logo of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which I have to say looks very cool. These last two logos are to be honest really important to me because besides raising awareness for the SDGs I am really happy with the Make-A-Wish partnership and I really hope that exposure related to my expedition will result in some decent fundraising so that many wishes of young, sick children can be fulfilled. The rest of the day is all about repacking our food, checking our gear and we have a very detailed communication meeting with ALE so that they know where we will be. They also show us all the potential hazards along the route, which is useful.

The interesting thing is that when I look back on a day like this, it feels like we have done a lot but during the day I have the feeling of not doing anything at all and just hanging around. This is probably also due to the fact that I only need to look after myself. Once a year Daan and I go away for four days together, just the two of us, often to places where you wouldn't easily go with kids. We are already doing this for 10 years now and we went to places like Uluru, the Ice Hotel, the Maldives, Lord Howe Island and a few more cool places. During trips like these, we have the luxury of my parents taking care of the kids whilst we are having some quality time together. Like now, we always have that feeling

that we have all the time in the world to do things, and then the funny thing is that during these trips we usually miss the kids already on day one!

Anyways, in the evening we sew our facemasks to our goggles. This is a 2 layered cloth that after sewing hangs in front of your mouth and makes it easier to breath than using a face mask. The idea is that the mask protects your face from the cold winds. I remember from the North Pole expedition that after a few hours the mask will be frozen and that at the end of the day the mask even has ice spikes at the bottom. Later in bed I listen to my first audio book "The Ascent" by Chris Bonington. I never met this remarkable British climber but in Sydney his son Joe was my trainer, together with Matt, for my Everest expedition. Halfway chapter one I am falling asleep...

The following day, in Union Glacier, we make our first meters on the ice with almost all our gear. I have to say that it feels less heavy than expected. Yes, in the end it will be 110 kilo and now, it is probably 'only' 85 kilo and this feels hopeful or misleading, because around Union Glacier the surface is very flat. It's good to practice so that I can make some adjustment and at the same time I am frustrated because my goggles already get foggy on the way back. How can it be, it's only 40 minutes and already this ... challenge? The rest of the day we use as well for some final details like taping our heels to avoid blisters during the first days. Ryan is very clear and warns us for all sorts of pain that we will feel in each part of our bodies. They will be gone in a few days only to then discover a new sort of pain. If all goes well, we will fly tomorrow and then the real adventure will start. Yes, I want to go because I still have these 55 days in front of me, which feels weird if you think that I am already 2 weeks away.

Private messages (it proves he can't fully let go of his to-do list 😊):

- *Perhaps this afternoon drop-off 😊. Later: No, it will be tomorrow. We'll start on the 80th degree on the Hercules inlet (on the ALE website you can find a detailed map). Every degree is 60 nautical miles, x 1.845km, so every degree is approx. 110km. from 80.59 it jumps to 81.00 etc. So, in total 600 nautical miles, which is 1130km. Now a bit of rest and then for an hour on the skis. The sled cover looks cool so I'm really happy. The sled is heavy but doable (the last part went uphill). Tent is up and it's time for dinner. It was very hot, so we were sweating a lot.*
- *Hi love, we're on our way 🤔. 12:45 we were airborne and at 13:15 we were dropped. After that we walked 4 nautical miles in 4 pitches. A pitch is a period and then a break, etc. How are you all? Did Sinterkaas [red. Saint Nicolas, Dutch tradition] already put something in the kids' shoes? The challenge is that despite the relatively high temperature (that make you want to take off layers of clothing) the winds are strong, which makes you want to wear more layers of clothing. Question: did Iris' teacher already respond to the update and the first set of Q&A?*
- *Hi love, today we skied for 6 hours. Storm, sun, 300m up with 111 kilo (1 kilo water bottle 😊) and we're at 80.08. It's heavy but it's going all right, and now we can recover. Please see the question re Iris' teacher. Please share some updates from your end every now and then – this gives energy to your husband xx PS did the furniture arrive already?*

"Welcome on board of the Twin Otter. This flight will take max 25 minutes and then we will drop you at the edge of the continent." It's almost 1 pm, Tuesday the 26th, and our sledges are fully packed in front of me and next to me. Together with two other explorers we are on our way to the Hercules Inlett. What a crazy flight. The view is mind-blowing, but the plane is going up and down, and so is my stomach. We have a happy landing and after saying goodbye, the plane flies out and then it's just us, snow and mountains. Ryan informs us that we will do 4 pitches (1x30 min and 3x40min) and 12-minute breaks, so off we go. The weather could not be better. There's almost no wind, it is sunny, and we have a flat surface. This last point is not for too long because soon we start the climb from 200m

altitude to 700m, of which part will happen tomorrow, I think. The 2 ½ hours on skies are going well and yes, the last pitch is very steep which made me realise that indeed yesterday was a bit too easy, compared to this. Are we still at 80 degrees? The joyful moment is short because Ryan tells me that due to crevasses, we needed to traverse instead of skiing in a straight line. It is clear, but I am not happy.

Putting up the camp goes well and soon we are drinking and relaxing on our mattress before I check our location. Yes, we did 4 NM (7,4km) in this short time but I think the mental game has started. Day one is done so 'only' xx days left. Yes, we don't know for sure, I hope max 49 days, but let's see. After dinner I get into my sleeping bag and see that most of my clothes are almost dry after I hung them to dry in our tent for a few hours.

The sleeping bag still feels nice. The wind has been blowing around our tent the whole night and for sure it's cold outside but I need to go to the 'toilet' so this forces me to put on my clothes. And yes, there it goes, my toilet paper after using it, shit. After a nice sprint I manage to get it back. So, I didn't only complete my daily routine, I had my warming up as well. The day starts where we ended, meaning steep uphill, now for 3 hours, followed by a storm during the second part of the day. We complete 6 pitches of each 50 minutes and at 4pm we set up camp again. During the day I have been thinking about many things but for sure I also discovered muscles I didn't know I had. The evening is a very nice reward. First, we have salami and crackers, followed by macaroni with melted snow. Oh, we also made great progress 80.08 NM.

Private messages:

- *It was a long day, I'm now in my tent, tired. During the day the weather was fine, but during the night, it is storming almost all the time. Locations are new every time. I haven't switched on tracking location to preserve the battery. We're still making a turn around the crevasses but tomorrow we should be able to walk a straight line for almost 500km 😊. Now I am going to sleep.*
- *Important. Today we did 10 NM, read 18.5km!!! This is really a lot with 110kg. Day 1 79.59s – 79.58w Day 2 80.05s – 80.20w Day 3 80.15s – 80.28w*

What do you do when the wind blows close to 100km an hour? The last two days we made strong progress with each day 10NM and up to 765m altitude which is great, but we need to work hard for it. The weather has been bloody hot, but 30 minutes later you are almost blown away. As we speak, I am in my tent and not 100% happy. I miss Daan and the kids, and I am also worried that something will happen with the tent. We are in the middle of nowhere and for sure there will be no rescue option with this weather. Ryan tells me that it will be OK but that it will stay like this the whole night. Every day we did 7 pitches of 50 minutes and each pitch is really different. Some of them I am singing (not really loud) and during other pitches I think about the year 2020, related to Beyond Summits, but for sure mostly about us as a family. I really miss all of them and I am coming to the conclusion that the coming years will be very special because before we know 'little' Lente will fly out. A few nights back I have been looking at 6 months of pictures and videos on my phone and I am so fortunate with my family and with all the special occasions. All of this made me think that now we are settled in the UK, it is about quality time again and exploring many parts of our new country. At the same time my challenge will be not to come home with a huge to-do list this time but with a more relaxed approach which is something to think about tomorrow. Now, it's my first movie night like Friday evening's at home, only here on my iPhone and with earplugs in, otherwise the wind will cause too much distraction...

Private message:

- *After 23 hours in the tent due to the storm, we finally packed up in the afternoon and skied for a few hours, in the spirit of 'standing still is no progress'. I'll share a tent with Ryan for 5 days, and then I'll have a tent on my own for 5 days. I feel slightly better but I hope we'll have better weather tomorrow so we can cover some distance. Have fun in India. Big kiss for all of you.*