



**South Pole 2019 - 2020** Blog No 1:  
55 days in an escape room...

It's close to eleven o'clock Monday evening, one day before my departure and suddenly it hits me. After putting Tom, who is half asleep, on the toilet, I carry him back to his bed whilst giving him a big hug. And the same as every evening I hope that he will respond on my one liner "I love you" which he does "love you". Normally this gives me a big smile but now I cannot control my emotions, so I give him another big hug and stay with him a bit longer and the first thought "why am I doing this expedition" comes to my mind.

As I am writing my first blog at the airport in Santiago where I have a 10-hour stopover I am not sure where to start. My training started on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, we moved countries during the summer, the kids started a new school, Daan a new role, I had many new opportunities with Beyond Summits and in the meantime, we keep on exploring the world. So I am sure that I will write and share with you about each topic more the coming weeks if the technology keeps on working on Antarctica but to start it might be more relevant to give you some guidance on what am I doing exactly this time.

The official description is *a South Pole Ski Expedition from November 2019 up to January 2020 (55 days), guided but unsupported, with the aim to reach the South Pole (90° point) by walking the Hercules Inlet route (1130km) after being dropped at the edge of the continent with in total 3 expedition members.*

Ok that's quite some information to take in so let me give a bit more detail.

I met Ryan Waters (our guide) during my expedition to Carstensz Pyramid. Ryan is besides a great guy from Colorado also a very strong expedition leader with several times Everest and North and South Pole expeditions behind his name. The reason I have chosen Ryan for this expedition is very simple. An expedition like this is in many ways different from a climbing expedition. You spend 24 hours a day with each other, there is almost no privacy, you live in a tent together for almost 2 months and all topics, frustrations, thoughts, emotions will be shared with each other. So, for me it was very clear I only want to do this long and crazy expedition if Ryan is able to guide me. The third team member is Paula Strengell from Finland who is a real adventurer and a very strong lady with a great diverse expedition experience.

As I already mentioned, the journey started for me in our new home in Kingston, London, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November. After saying goodbye to Daan in the morning (who left for a meeting in NY) and lots of kisses and hugs later in the day with Lente, Iris, Tom and my mother, my father and I drove to the airport together. Since we live overseas, I have for sure longer and deeper conversations with my father, but the moment I stepped out of the car will stay with me for a while. He for sure noticed that I was in doubt about what to do and asked me "will this be your last adventure?". My answer was "I'm not even sure if I should go now".

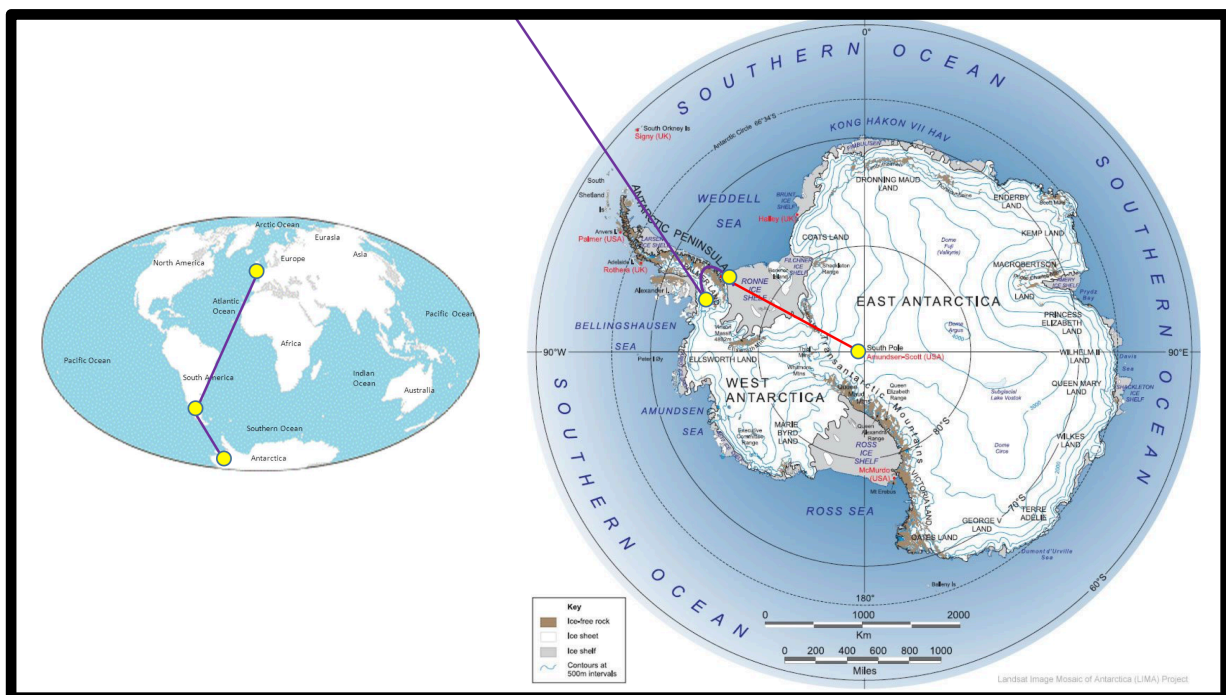
I think it's the people around me that give me the strength to do what I do and as I keep on saying "my legs went to the summit of Everest but that was only possible because of a huge support from many people around me". At the moment I think my challenge is that I sometimes don't appreciate the support from people close to me and probably because the last few months have been very challenging with the move. To be open with you it took me a long time to settle in Poland but the last year I really had the feeling that I was on track again. Moving to the UK with all its up and downs in combination with my upcoming expedition was very challenging and intense, so for sure I have been

far from relaxed and as a result of that not really open to or aware of all different kinds of support, which I regret.

After my check-in I make my way towards my plane. It's a 14-hour journey to Santiago and from there another 4 hours to Punta Arenas. In Punta I will see Ryan and Paula and we will use 4 days to pack all our food and sledges. The unsupported part means that we will be dropped and from that moment we are on our own. So, all the food, petrol (for melting ice and cooking our meals) and gear we need, we will have with us from day one. To bring that in perspective, this means 60 packs of food per person (1 pack per day) and 20 litres of gas, so a total of 110kg on each sledge. During these 4 days we will also discuss our ways of working, safety elements and our plan for the first week. But like with every expedition, we need to be flexible and adaptive to circumstances because one thing is certain – the plan on paper will not be the reality and even a plan in the morning can change a few times during the day for example due to weather change.

This is also the reason that I cannot say that we will for sure fly to Antarctica (Union Glacier) on Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November. The big plane called 'Illusion' needs to be able to land on an 8km long ice strip and after unloading and reloading to be able to fly out again. Having been there before for my Mt Vinson Expedition I know that this can easily be postponed or moved forward within a very short period. Depending on how all of this will go we might fly in one go with a Cessna plane to the edge of the continent or the day after and from there it's walking walking walking for roughly 55 days and aiming to reach the 90° point around the 13<sup>th</sup> of January and from there we will fly back to Union Glacier followed by our flight to Punta and back home.

Below an illustration of the expedition:



So, what about the comment '55' and the title 'escape room'?

The picture above shows you Antarctica but not really the size. But if you imagine 1,5 times Australia it might help. Antarctica is different from the (Arctic) North Pole. The Arctic is floating ice on water and Antarctica is rock covered with ice so not moving anywhere. On the North Pole we had the risk of

encountering a Polar bear but on Antarctica there is besides penguins and a few other animals that live only in one part of the coastline nothing to be found. No trees, insects, birds, nothing. As a result, many colours are not present so if I don't have green in my clothes, I will not see this colour for 55 days. What I for sure will see is daylight because in summer it is present for 24 hours a day which makes sleeping very challenging. Mentally the challenge is big – all you have with you, is what you brought with you – there's no opportunity of forgetting something and go back to get it or buy it somewhere. If something is not working, it will not work and stay like that. No chance of having anything repaired. If you compare this with your day to day life, then please consider now for a moment that you are packing your suitcase with literally everything you need until mid-January. Of course, we are in contact with some people in Union Glacier and we will have a satellite phone with us but knowing that a rescue operation is \$300.000 for sure you won't be calling them when you have a blister or some other "small" injury.

Knowing all of this I took the approach this time to have a bigger focus on the mental preparation. I'm not saying that physical training is not important. On the contrary, we'll burn 7000 calories per day, so close to half a million during the expedition. Combining a mental and a physical challenge was the goal of this expedition and for that reason I have been training 5x55 days this year with only one rest / special day in between. Yes, out of these 275 days I also missed one but now I know that I can handle a rhythm of training every day with no excuse and the expedition will 'just be' round 6 of 55 days. The approach might sound strange to others, but I learned from my previous expeditions that the way you prepare yourself can be done in many ways, but you need to figure out something that works for you and keeps you going. Like during the Everest preparation I made 500 selfies (each training one) which I shared with Daan and she challenged me along the way. In the end it's the same as with a marathon or an important event for your job, the preparations make the difference; on the day itself there is less influence on the result.

To close this first blog let me share a couple of 'why' reasons. It's for sure a privilege to be able to go again to Antarctica and to challenge myself physically and mentally. Next to that I always have been fascinated by ice and like with the North Pole the South Pole is changing fast. Another reason is that I want to discover how it will be to have a rhythm of 55 days doing the same thing over and over again: waking up around 6:30, preparing food for the day, putting down the tent, starting to walk around 9 followed by 5 minute breaks each hour up to 6pm and then setting up camp again, listening to music and trying to sleep in an environment where the temperature will be between -15 and - 50°C. Yes, believe it or not, this makes me curious because like in our normal life we all are facing challenges or we have things to do which up front might not give us a lot of energy but turning these kind of situations around is most of the time giving us joy and creates a learning experience for challenges ahead of us. Lastly, I hope that my stories will motivate or inspire others which is in line with my Beyond Summits mission of inspiring 1 million people to fulfil their dream.

Final call Latem flight LA0095 towards Punta Arenas....

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