



South Pole 2019 - 2020 Blog No 5: South Pole Moves

Day 13 just finished, but what a day... The wind had dropped in the morning, which was nice, but during the night my sled got covered by close to a meter of snow. So, after a warm-up activity in the morning of digging out my sled, eating breakfast and packing our stuff again, we made our way. Today, we have 7 hours and 20 minutes on the agenda and during the first pitch we did more than 2 nautical miles. I decided to play some music today, which might sound easy. Having said that, my earplugs need to be under my jacket, my goggles and balaclava, and by the time you switch on the music you hope that everything is still in place, which it was, fortunately. The playlist that Daan has put together is nice and during some songs I cannot help but making some dance moves. I am walking in the back and for sure there's nobody behind me who could see me :). The time is unfortunately not going faster and every second part of each pitch I feel pain in my shoulders and my chest, mostly on my left side, which is far from ideal I can tell you. I tell myself that this will go away in a few days' time and that probably some other kind of pain will take over. During the last pitch my stomach starts playing up. The issue is that the harness (to pull the sled) is pushing into your tummy with every step you take and with that some gas is produced... Not a big deal with so much free space around you, you would think, but in combination with a potential toilet moment it becomes a bit more challenging. Also, considering we're wearing many layers of clothes and my pants have these strips over your shoulders, the idea of rushing to the 'toilet' is utopia! When Ryan puts up his ski poles as a sign that we're going to stop for the night, you can imagine that this feels as a big relief. After a toilet moment however, I can feel that my stomach is not 100%, so I get into my sleeping bag early, after Ryan shared with us the great news that our new record is 12.4 nautical miles! The night was good, but during the morning pitches again I feel the pain in my left shoulder. Luckily the pain doesn't last so long this time and, in the end, we're having a great day – we passed the 82nd degree and we did 12.7 nautical miles, another new record!

Yesterday I started the topic 'personal hygiene' so let me continue that topic. I will not get into all the details, but if you think "not for me" then feel free to skip this paragraph. I already mentioned that my last shower was on the 23rd of Nov, which is already 17 days ago, but there are even more days to go before having another one! So, how it works is that first of all you need to accept that you and your teammates will smell. We have limited clothes with us, we work extremely hard so it is a fact that when you open your sleeping bag in the morning or when you change into your 'camp clothes' at the end of the day the area will be filled with many kinds of aromas which we normally describe as 'unpleasant'. I have a routine of using two baby wipes in the morning after my toilet break and I always use hand sanitiser. I also have a deo stick with me that is not killing the smell, but it gives a nice, fresh feeling. At the end of the day I use chalk powder for my feet and around my men-zone. Lastly, I have now twice given myself a baby shower: you put boiled water in an empty plastic dinner bag and with a small piece of soap and a mini towel I give myself a quick (it's cold at the South Pole) wash. Overall, it's not that bad, but I have to say that I am really looking forward to that hot shower half January! Oh, and I forgot to mention that today I had the luxury of treating myself on my second piece of clean underwear ;-).

They say, "no news is good news", which I think is true most of the times. It's strange to be so far away from all the things that are happening in the world. Here, it is just the 3 of us and no news about the UK elections, Trump, or any football updates from my team Feyenoord, until today. Daan dropped me a text "did you hear the news about the Chilean plane that flew from Punta Arenas to Antarctica that

went missing?”. No, we haven't heard this yet, but it sounds scary, knowing that we also flew from Punta Arenas to Antarctica, and this plane was probably also planning to land at Union Glacier. The rest of the day this is on my mind and as soon as we stop for the night, after a challenging day on the ice, we hear the latest status, which is not good. Although it is not 100% confirmed, the plane probably crashed with 38 people on board. The rest of the evening, we're all a bit down.

The definition of “rest” is very relative. Yes, today is the day that, after 12 consecutive days of walking on skies, we ‘only’ did 4 hours today. We still had to put down our camp in the morning and build it up again early afternoon. Anyway, I am not complaining because it's for sure nice to sort out some stuff, read a bit and to give my stomach some rest. I think we are now in the phase where slowly our bodies start to change and adjust in many ways. In so many places you feel pain throughout the day, small spots on the legs pop up because of the wind that is always blowing in our direction and when I gave myself a shoulder massage two days back I noticed that my bones are already less covered by fat. All of this is not a surprise but, in some way, unknown and a bit scary, because it's only day 17 today and we still have so many days to go. A rest day also means that from tomorrow onwards we will step up the pace and duration, which means we're adding 40 minutes of ski time per day. 6 out of the 7 pitches will last 70 minutes and the last one 60 minutes. Adding 40 minutes might not sound that much but small numbers during an expedition like this have a big impact. 40 minutes extra for the remaining 33 days means that we are adding 22 hours of skiing time.

The rest ‘afternoon’ is also nice to chat a bit more with each other. Yes, we are 24/7 with each other, but believe it or not but, on a regular day we don't talk that much. You ski behind each other, during the break you eat, drink and eat, and during the evening you chat during dinner which is great because that really helps to get to know each other better. I always find it fascinating that you share so many detailed stories about your life in such a short period of time. I think this is driven by the fact that you are with a small team, you share the same challenges, you have a similar passion and in many ways you also trust each other during the day with physical challenges. All of this creates the foundation I believe for all these open discussions. I really enjoy this part of expedition life – learning from different cultures, backgrounds, points of view etcetera. As I mentioned before, my motivation to go on these extreme adventures is not only the mountain or that 90-degree point – it's the whole journey including the people that make these kinds of adventures so rewarding.

I've had my ups and downs during the last two days, but probably it will stay like that until the end. Yesterday, it was Friday the 13th which always reminds me of my Everest summit Day on Friday the 13th of May 2016. Today our day started with 6 hours of storm into our face and a very challenging surface. I mentioned before that we are crossing a huge white pancake, but this pancake is far from flat. The wind pushes the snow in all directions and creates thousands of small bumps, so finding a rhythm on a day like this is impossible. Luckily, the wind died an hour before we stopped to put up camp and given it's Friday, it's movie-night for me, just like home. Today I have to say that the weather was good, but due to my stomach issues I have only been eating crackers and drinking tea, so my energy level is dropping rapidly. My stomach on the other hand is improving, so I hope that I can have my pieces of salami again soon as I need the fat. By the way, it's not only me who is having ups and downs. Both Paula and Ryan have some feet challenges, Ryan some serious pains in his feet which hopefully will be over again in a few days and Paula is struggling with blisters. One of them is healing nicely but the left foot is very painful. Paula is a tough lady and is for sure not complaining! The last great piece of news for the day was that we did a stunning 13.6 nautical miles and that we crossed 83 degrees, so chips as appetizers before dinner and after that I will dive into my sleeping bag for 9 hours.