



behind every pulk for the next man in line to use if the one in front falls in. If the first skier goes through the ice, we return. If the last one goes through, we'll pull him out and keep moving forward. If any of the skiers in the middle fall, we'll take action as required.

We don't get very far this time because the ice appears to be very thin. Jermi leads the team. His pole goes almost all the way through the ice with the first hit. We should circle around a little. A new attempt and better results. Jermi advances a bit farther. From the shore it looks like he's half way across already. In reality, we've only covered the first quarter.

One more blow with the pole. It goes straight through the ice. Jermi falls in at once. Oh no! Henkku rushes to help and also falls through the ice. All we need is more men in the fray and we'll all be swimming together. I get my cameras out; it looks like there might be something interesting to photograph. I glance at the thermometer tied to the pulk: -31 degrees Celsius despite the hefty wind. After a lot of splashing around the boys get out of the water. Getting out of the water with your skis on is not a simple matter even though we did practise it in Finland.

We assess the damage. One ski is swimming with the fishes because all the splashing and kicking accidentally released the binding. Henkku tried to grab it but in the end it sank out of his reach, heading for the bottom 3000 metres below. We took spare skis with us, but only one pair to save weight and in fact only one ski is left now. We need to take more care from now on.

The lead looks impressive and the ice is really thin. Yet we have to cross to the other side. Some of us are still prepared to try again right next to our first attempt. I don't think that would make any sense. We can't swim across because we have no clear sense of the distance. How far would we have to slog on the other side before the ice would carry us and could we get out of the water?

We continue skiing eastward, looking for a better place. Some of us are complaining of the cold, which is no surprise considering the time we wasted in the swimming episode. It's impossible to add clothes because we're wearing our dry suits, which means that everyone has compromised on clothing. Some are wearing their thick, fluffy fleece suits underneath. The suits are great when you're

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***Day 21, 25 March 2006, Spring is in the air***

*83°57'10"N, 74°56'46"W, -19 degrees Celsius/-33°C, 9.4 km, 0 m/s*

*After the rest day we resumed the journey to the North Pole. Spring was in the air and the conditions were good, with the wind dying down in the morning and the temperature rising above -20 degrees Celsius.*

*We were able to give up the double carry today, hauling all our gear in the pulkas one leg at a time. As a result, we skied the longest distance in the second shortest time to date. The mood was good today - we finally felt that we would make it to the pole!*

*In the evening the temperature dropped again and when we went to bed we could again enjoy a crisp temperature of -33 degrees Celsius.*