

K A R I P O P P I S S U O M E L A

SOUTH POLE

W I N D S W E P T D R E A M

poppicok

SOUTH POLE – WINDSWEPT DREAM
KARI POPPIS SUOMELA

Photographs: Kari Poppis Suomela
Design: Kari Poppis Suomela
Translation: Bellcrest Translations Ltd, Hilikka Pekkanen, Tomi Snellman, Erik Miller
Proofreaders: Patricia McCormack, Graham Whitfield
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TO THE READER

South Pole - Windswept Dream will take you to the white expanses of the Antarctic, where snow and frost rule. It conveys the experiences of two polar explorers travelling in a frozen desert and a sea of sastrugi. You'll be a part of the first entirely Finnish South Pole expedition on an unsupported and unassisted trek from the Antarctic coast to one of the Earth's extremes.

A century ago, the polar explorers, Amundsen and Scott, raced to the South Pole. A lot has changed since then. The nature and the circumstances are still the same, however, and the challenges they pose are just as real. The same windswept dream still drives us forward. To reach our goal we must face the challenges posed by nature, rely on our companions and ourselves, have faith in the power of teamwork and commit to common goals. Our faith in success must never falter.

The purpose of this book is to convey the thoughts and experiences I had at the extremes of the earth. I hope the emotions and inspiration it evokes will carry you closer to your goals.

On the South Pole expedition, we applied many of the things we learned on our North Pole expedition. Those experiences were truly invaluable. Hence, the present book is largely based on the same elements as was the book *North Pole - Arctic Challenge*, published three years ago. It conveys the stories and experiences of our journey. The excerpts from the journal we wrote at camp in the evening records the 44 days of skiing. The photographs let you share and enjoy what we saw. This time, however, I've included onle a few articles that give factual details. They would unnecessarily repeat what was said in *North Pole*. I hope *South Pole* will find a place next to your *North Pole* book. Together, they form a unique presentation of the challenges of polar expeditions.

The preparations for a polar expedition require countless hours and immeasurable effort. The biggest challenges are financial. After the expedition, the return to normal life takes its time, too. While physical recovery was quick following the South Pole expedition, carrying out daily duties and chores and starting new projects so soon after returning home was extremely difficult. They warrant a book of their own so I've concentrated on the experiences of the expedition itself.

I am very deeply grateful to my entire family, my wife Kirsi and our children Rasmus, Reetta and Laura. They have often had to adapt their lives to my polar expeditions. Preparations and the expeditions themselves have truly tested their patience, not to mention the book projects that have extended the polar journeys even after my return. My sincerest thanks are also due to Pasi Ikonen for his solidarity and cooperation, which took us to our goal. It was a true pleasure to share our experiences every day. I am also grateful to the support team. They did an excellent job, arranging things. In fact, they often did a better job than we could have done.

A special thank you goes to all the friends of polar exploration, who nourished our days on the expedition through our blog and journals. The e-mails and comments received while in the Antarctic gave us so much strength to continue our windy endeavour.

Nurmijärvi, September 2009

Kari Poppis Suomela



2 EACH ONE LIKE THE OTHER

UNASSISTED



EXPLORATION 2008

44 DAYS – EACH ONE LIKE THE OTHER

Sleep is quickly shaken off when I open the sleeping bag. The sun warms the walls of our red tent pleasantly, but my sleepy face is touched by a fresh, frosty breeze. The first night is behind us and the second day of skiing lies ahead. In spite of the hundreds of such mornings experienced during previous expeditions, getting used to this kind of life always takes time. A new day lies ahead, and we're hoping to make good progress towards the south, where our final destination, the South Pole, is waiting for us. More than forty mornings to go.

Bright sunlight explodes on your face. The Antarctic morning greets the polar explorer with a biting gale that blows the sand right out of your eyes. Every cell in your body is alert and ready to start a new day of skiing and give it everything they got.

Another day at work, a steady rhythm on the white snow as the uneven surface squeaks under the skis and pulks. Every moment is real. Over hear, nature offers plenty of challenges. South Pole is somewhere ahead in the far distance.

Our two-person expedition has barely started. That the members have the same birthday, shoe size and second name doesn't guarantee anything; what does matter is that we know each other from years back, we know what the other guy' like when tired and how he reacts to the unexpected. That can make the expedition a success. All of this came into play when Pasi Ikonen and I decided to after our windy endeavour. In fact, it had been 15 years earlier when we first planned a long expedition together.





From the Hercules Inlet to the South Pole

When a polar expedition begins, you break away from the normal routines of everyday life, little by little. Skiing, rest breaks and living in a tent in the middle of winter become your everyday life, and these routines help you in moulding a life for yourself in the midst of ice and snow. For the next six weeks, this environment will be our home. We'll be living on our own, unsupported, with no help from the outside world.

The wind picks up and at times it feels like we are stopping completely or even sliding backwards. I squeeze the poles harder and flex every muscle in my body. You really have to work to get somewhere.

Daily routines help in organizing our lives in this new environment. Many things are done out of habit, both on skis and inside the tent. When you start on a new expedition, however, it takes time before a routine is formed and the members of the expedition agree on a set of common rules. There is no list according to which things should always be done – you just apply procedures previously found useful in certain situations. We agree to use many of the routines that had been found to work well during the North Pole expedition, even though some of those are new to Pasi. Still, we do so understanding that it is a good idea to reassess practices often and to adapt them, as needed, to the new environment.

Strict adherence to a daily routine is essential to making progress. We're not going to take any unnecessary rest days, and will try to go on whenever possible. I know that the idea of staying in the tent in the morning and waiting for the wind to die down is tempting, but no progress can be made by lounging inside. When you're in the tent, the weather usually sounds and feels worse than it actually is. Once you stick your head out, you're surprised to find that the wind isn't all that bad after all. A strict schedule also means sticking to the daily legs agreed on in advance, although allowances must naturally be made, depending on the circumstances and how people feel. At first we'll follow a six-hour skiing plan, but will extend the daily skiing time to eight hours after the first week at the latest, and then even to eleven or twelve hours a day towards the end of the journey.

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Day 1, 11 November 2008 Now skiing southbound

80°00,880S 080°10,636W, -20 degrees Celsius, 2 m/s, 10,69 km

The first Finnish South Pole expedition set off today. The Twin Otter landed at Hercules Inlet in the afternoon and we got on our skis at 3:30 pm. We started by skiing two kilometres in the wrong direction to make sure we started at the correct point. Under international ethical rules, an Antarctic expedition must start at the edge of the icecap and at a point North of the 80 ° latitude. Our official point of departure is 79° 59.966S 079° 37.838W.

Over a period of six hours we skied for more than five, covering just over ten kilometres - a perfect start and just enough to get sore, too. With the sun shining from a clear sky, the Antarctic felt hot. The thermometer said 10 degrees Celsius below and down to 20 below by the evening. There was no wind and we stripped down to our undershirts and took off our gloves for a while. A thin buff was enough to protect our heads.



It's important to adopt a strict and honest attitude. It's easy to deceive yourself in these conditions – and it's also dangerous. We never cease to underline the importance of keeping a promise made to a companion, but during polar expeditions the promises you make to yourself are just as important. This I've learned on our many previous expeditions. We've agreed that we'll ski every day and will not complain idly, the easiest way is to stick to this agreement. If you give in once, it's easier to give in a second and a third time.

I'm already worried about how far we'll ski today and trying to remember what the total distance was. Dry grains of snow rise from the ground and reach my face. Nature puts on its best show to test our motivation. We truly are on a windy endeavour.

According to the principles of good business management, goals should be divided into smaller sub-goals. This applies to life on the polar glaciers, too. An overall goal of kilometres can be conveniently divided into shorter legs, and this helps in understanding the process as a whole. The first resting day is a good intermediate goal even if its exact time has not been decided. It will be at least two weeks before we get to that point. The halfway point is also a good sub-goal, and the last 110 kilometres, the final stretch, is another important step forward.

A single day's progress is a concrete sub-goal. If you cannot reach this goal as planned, it's no use imagining the next day will be easier. The shortest sub-goal is a single leg: the skiing distance between two breaks. At this early stage of our trek, we know there are close on 400 such legs ahead. The sooner we want to reach the South Pole, the more legs we need to do each day. It's much more difficult to increase the speed of travelling.

The proximity of Christmas are a pleasant thing to keep in mind. The advent calendar we have in the pulk also helps us to reach our daily goals. It's fun to count the days to the first door on the calendar. From the first door onwards, it'll be nice going towards Christmas. Advent calendars shouldn't only be for children!

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Day 2, 12 November 2008 Routines in place

80°08,708S 080°19,101W, -10 degrees Celsius, 5 m/s, 14,77 km

We will climb a total of 3000 metres on our way from the ocean to the South Pole. For the most part, it'll be a steady climb of a few metres per kilometre, which means the uphill will barely be noticeable. That's not the case at the moment, however: on the first day we ascended 270 metres and another 190 metres today. Pulling more than a hundred kilos in the pulka, a climb like that really slows you down. We were on the move for eight hours today, including six hours actually skiing. Once we hit more level ground, we started to advance at three kilometres per hour: we're getting there, once we get up to speed.

The conditions were rather easy, although we were reminded of what can be expected: we spent half of the day with our hoods tight around our heads and our faces deep under the coyote fur.

The routines give our days a rhythm in an environment that's new to us. Whether on skis or in the tent, much of what we do is almost automatic. It does take its time to get used to routines and agree on common rules in the expedition.

We don't have a checklist which to follow. Instead, we deal with things as they emerge and apply practices to which we are accustomed. Often we apply routines that were proven on the North Pole, which I naturally know well. Pasi Ikonen was not on that expedition, however, so many of them are new to him. On the other hand, this is a different landscape and often it pays to rethink old approaches.

BEATING THE CLOCK

We're way behind schedule. In other words, it's five past six p.m. Chilean time. With four hours behind us, we've reached the halfway house for the day. After lunch, we'll still need to do the remaining four hours of skiing, stopping for two shorter breaks only.

I've been looking forward to this moment. Hunger churns my stomach when I turn the pulk sideways against the wind to sit on it with my back to the wind. During lunchtime we have time to rest and sit down for a while. Our muscles can relax and our stomachs get filled. Our minds relax, too, when we can just rest and do nothing for a while. There's no need to think about skiing or anything else for that matter.

Without looking, I grab a bunch of lunch bags from the pulk. "What would you like?" I ask Pasi. "Today's menu: chilli con carne, chicken curry, beef stew." I sit down on the pulk and put the thermos down next to my feet. The wind circles the pulk and whips up snow around the thermos, threatening to blow the whole bottle away. Luckily it's still full and heavy enough to stay almost in one place. After lunch, when it's empty, I must remember to pack it straight into the pulk. I try to turn my back



to the wind. The down parka is nice and warm in the harsh wind.

The ready-made food bags turn into tasty lunches just by adding hot water from the thermos. The food cools fast, which is why I must put the package in my pocket for the ten minutes that it takes for the food to stew according to instructions. It's nice to lie down on the pulk while waiting. We're lucky that the sun shines from the north and that the wind is in the south. The contrast between the two is truly distinctive. The sun warms my face which is deep under the cover of my hood and its fur trim. The bright light and exhaustion make me shut my eyes, and sleep is not far away. The wind keeps howling in my ears and beating the pulk's cover. Our skis are quickly covered with the loose powder flying along the hard surface of the packed snow.

I wake up. A ten-minute nap has done me a world of good. A real beauty sleep, only there's no mirror to check the result – which may be a good thing. I fish the food bag from my pocket. Once more part of the food has come out of the bag. Clues to our menu, visible on the breast of my parka and around my pockets, keep getting larger. I spoon out the tasty food. Soon I've got food all over my mittens, too, as I try to eat without taking them off – taking them off would mean just increase the risk of frostbite. It takes time to finish the lunch, since there's plenty to eat in a single bag, but at -20° Celsius we must eat quickly unless we want to eat frozen food. While we're eating, I keep shouting this and that to Pasi. I must settle for a monologue, however, even though the distance between our pulks is no more than three metres. It's difficult to talk, since the thick hood of the down parka and the fur trim of the ski jacket muffle all sound, and the rest is blown away by the wind. Well, we'll go over the most important things in the tent in the evening.

I glance at my watch: it's time to continue.

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Day 3, 13 November 2008 More crevasses
80°14,789S 080°17,016W, -18 degrees Celsius, 7 m/s, 11,3 km

In the morning, wind shook the tent violently. Luckily, the tent held its position, although we had pitched it on almost clear ice. Two ice screws and ice axes in the end of the tent and the snow over the snow skirts were quite enough.

At the start we took storm goggles and masks (Darth Vader type) to use. Today we caught only a glimpse of the sun, as the sky was covered by thick clouds most of the day. We encountered crevasses again, but this time they were remarkably larger than the earlier ones, being maximum width of over ten metres and a number of kilometres in length. Luckily, at this time of the spring, they are still covered by snow bridges so by searching for suitable detours we were still able to cross them. Some of the holes opened views of huge caves which descended as far as one could see.

I don't think I'm the fastest starter in the morning, but it seems that neither is Pasi. To my surprise, I find myself reminding him of the passage of time and of sticking to the morning schedule. It's normal practice to aim to get going two hours from waking. Towards the end of the expedition, when our routines have become honed, we'll be able to reduce this time by as much as thirty minutes, but now it seems that three hours have passed and many tasks are still unattended. Our goods are lying here and there, the pulk hasn't been packed, the tent is still standing and we need to relieve ourselves before we go.

Time flies, but we must watch the clock. If we don't keep an eye on the time spent, everything will take double the time. From previous experience I know that the importance of knowing the time increases as we travel on and become increasingly exhausted. We'd better watch it from the beginning, or our starts will be delayed more and more each day and, before we know it, our whole daily schedule will be in shambles.

Our original plan was to ski from ten onwards, Chilean time, but now the routine seems to have settled at starting after noon, before one o'clock. This way our day will end around midnight.

Keeping an eye on the time is necessary for getting the skiing rhythm right, too. We don't follow the traditional procedure of doing sixty-minute legs. Sixty minutes is all right for the first leg of the day, but from then on, once our bodies have warmed up, we'll be able to do longer, ninety-minute legs. The daily skiing time is thus set at eight hours: in addition to the first sixty-minute leg in the morning, we have time for two ninety-minute legs before lunch break. After a slightly longer lunch break in the afternoon, we do the same number of legs in reverse order.

By following this, as opposed to the standard sixty-minute system, we can skip two breaks each day. We should manage with a total daily resting time of less than two hours. At the moment it seems, however, that our resting time has extended into two and a half hours, although all we do during breaks is pee, have a hot drink from the thermos and take a quick bite of something nourishing from the pulk. Thus the planned twenty-minute breaks and the 45-minute lunch break are not

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Day 4, 14 November 2008 Today's ECO work

80°24,907S 080°21,326W, -15 degrees Celsius, 6,5 m/s, 18,88 km

Today our role was to be the cleaning patrol of Antarctica. We saw already from a long distance a yellow thing on the snow. At first, we thought it was a tent belonging to some expedition. To define distances in the middle of nowhere is almost impossible, so we made a total miss. The yellow pile was the size of a small carton, so would it be someone's food cache? While we checked it closer, it turned out to be a yellow kite bag which, according to markings, was from 10 years ago. This piece of textile had been lying on the ice cap for 10 years. OK; it is not lying there any more, because our eco-patrol cleared the trash away.

Because of the sensitive environment of Antarctica, waste regulations are extremely strict. No arranged garbage removal exists on the continent, so everybody should take their own trash with them. According to the permit, we can make one hole per camp for our physical waste. All other garbage we have to carry with us. Even burning of trash is not allowed.





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Day 5, 15 November 2008
You get what you ask for
80°31,777S 080°06,383W,
-12 degrees Celsius, 12 m/s,
13,55 km

Today we faced the conditions that we sought, ie, wind, driving snow and sunshine. We woke in the morning to the sound of the tent's flapping which gave us the idea of brisk wind. Measured from the opening of the tent, wind speed was 16 m/s. However, it did slow down conveniently to under ten when we started, so not more than a suitable tilt to the right and keep going'. We had to increase the angle during the day, as the wind gained force. Already, 10-12 m/s wind seems to slow down travelling; per hour the effect is about half a kilometre. Although we were not yet 'gone with the wind', still the wind hindered us a bit. At times like this the stick does not hold and often the skis slide backwards. Also, while skiing in cross wind, the sledge goes its own way and is stunningly always under the wind's command. Against sastrugi the sledge always finds the most difficult way.

Most of the day the horizon disappeared into scrappy fog, in spite of clear skies. The wind lifts fine snow powder from the snow that will from time to time take the visibility to zero. Despite the tough conditions, we enjoyed every moment.

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wo men put their determination and stamina to the test during 44 days of icy temperatures, freezing winds and physical exhaustion. As the first Finnish expedition to the South Pole, they skied more than 1000 kilometres to the South Pole, their courage challenged every day. They had to believe in success.

A century ago, the Amundsen and Scott expeditions fought their way through the white desert. Now, a century later, the same stormy goal still draws explorers.

Reaching the South Pole, Kari Poppis Suomela joined the elite of polar explorers.

Before him, only eleven others have skied to both the North and the South Pole without outside support.

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