

The Seeing is Believing  
**Trans-Antarctic Winter Expedition**  
Supported by the Commonwealth

**TheColdestJourney.org**

**PATRON:** HRH The Prince of Wales

**EXPEDITION LEADER:** Sir Ranulph Fiennes Bt OBE



**Press Release under Embargo until 0600hrs BST Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013**  
**POLAR CROSSING HALTED, SCIENCE PROGRAMME TO TAKE PRECEDENCE**

The first ever attempt to cross Antarctica in winter, dubbed “The Coldest Journey”, has covered over 300 kilometers and climbed from sea level to almost 3,000 meters up to the polar plateau, since the five man team set out on 21st March this year. This is the furthest distance and longest period that any expedition has travelled in the polar winter months. Using two specially adapted Cat D6N track-type tractors to haul their living quarters, essential supplies and science equipment, the present day team led by Antarctic veteran, Brian Newham, have encountered temperature to -50°C and near permanent darkness as they have navigated their way up through mountains and extensive crevasse fields towards the South Pole.

In addition to attempting the first crossing of Antarctica in winter, the expedition team are undertaking an important programme of scientific and medical studies which have never previously been undertaken due to the inhospitable conditions which they will encounter as winter progresses.

The expedition, planned and originally led by explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, has tackled many obstacles since the team arrived in Antarctica in early February on board the South African training ship SA Agulhas. The sheer weight of the stores and fuel required to sustain the five men for a year in the remotest part of the vast icy continent was in excess of 150 tonnes. For the next five months, no matter what problems they encounter, no known search and rescue facilities exist in Antarctica during the winter.

Throughout their journey, the team have faced and overcome dangers and obstacles which have been catalogued on the expedition’s website ([www.thecoldestjourney.org](http://www.thecoldestjourney.org)). Indeed, Sir Ranulph himself was forced to abandon his attempt to ski the 2,400 mile winter journey from Crown Bay to McMurdo Sound via the South Pole due to developing frostbite in his left hand. Subsequent medical examination found that this was caused, in part, by the onset of diabetes. Sir Ranulph was fortunate to be evacuated on the last aircraft to leave Antarctica before the onset of winter. Despite this, the remaining five expedition members have continued to make slow progress across extensive crevasse fields and blue ice where traction for the 25 tonne tractors is limited. Fuel and time have been expended beyond expectations in ferrying the expedition’s precious supplies towards their goal. As temperatures have dropped, so the incidence of differing technical problems has increased to the point where a fundamental decision has had to be made.

“None of us wants to contemplate the thought of not completing the challenge of crossing Antarctica in winter,” said leader, Brian Newham from Antarctica. “However, we have reached an unexpected crevasse field which, from satellite images and our own local survey using ground penetrating radar (GPR), we believe could extend up to 100 km to our South. The crevasses are certainly bigger and deeper than any we have previously encountered. They could easily swallow our vehicles and are deceptively hard to spot in the darkness and snow cover: dark and difficult conditions. In my judgement there is no real choice, I believe it would be reckless and irresponsible

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to press on and risk the obvious dangers while incurring excessive fuel consumption. The greatest success can now be achieved by completing the scientific studies with which we have been tasked.”

Under the circumstances, and against their instincts, it has been agreed by the expedition team and their supporters that they should desist from their attempt to cross Antarctica and concentrate upon their scientific work.

“We all feel very supportive of the unbelievably difficult decision that Brian and his colleagues have made,” said Sir Ranulph. “We have commitments not only to research organisations but also to schools across Britain. The communications from the team to schools will help children understand how different the Antarctic is to what they see around them and how observations of extremes help scientists to understand how the global system works. The time it has taken to both ascend to the plateau and negotiate horrendous crevasse terrain now renders it virtually impossible to complete a continental winter traverse. Moreover, if they continue South, they will have to commit their time exclusively to safe travel through continuing crevasse territory and this will have a very detrimental effect on their ability to collect data. The science will provide a lasting legacy. The first winter crossing, while very much our original aim, will not.”

Dr Michael Stroud, who is pioneering a study of the effects of isolation and the physiological impact of the hostile conditions on the team members as part of a Mars Analogue Research Study called ‘White Mars’, is hopeful that the change in objective will provide valuable information. “In particular the psychological studies will be of great interest,” he said. “No one has remained at high altitude in a mobile camp in Antarctica throughout the winter before. They could experience temperatures as low as -70°C and coupled with the permanent darkness and claustrophobic conditions, the stresses will be all too apparent. Future space travel will require similar endurance. This is the perfect terrestrial testing ground.”

Dr Dougal Goodman, Chief Executive of the Foundation for Science and Technology, a member of the expedition’s science committee, commented: “I am optimistic that the team will be able to make the most of the decision to stay where they are now. They will be able to devote their energies to the medical, glaciological and snow sampling research programmes. This is a rare opportunity to gather data during the winter at high altitude and distant from the coast.”

In addition to removing all of their equipment from this virgin landscape, the team will take with them important new knowledge for the scientific community and leave behind a pristine environment.

Over 300 sponsors have supported The Coldest Journey. Finning UK and Ireland supplied the specially modified Cat D6N track-type tractors. “The continued safety of our engineers is paramount. The lessons learned from Spencer Smirl and Richmond Dyke’s Antarctica experience will be especially important. They provide Finning and Caterpillar an opportunity to explore in depth how our engineers, the machines and the unique modifications continue to perform in such harsh conditions, and this invaluable knowledge will make an important contribution to the development of future equipment and engineering solutions. We are extremely proud of both Spencer and Richmond and of how the customised Cat D6Ns have performed so far on this extraordinary journey.” said Jason Howlett, Finning, Director of Equipment Solutions.

Jeanette McKenna of Seeing Is Believing said: “The Coldest Journey is an intrepid and daring expedition aiming to be the first to cross Antarctica during winter. In supporting The Coldest Journey, Seeing is Believing always knew the enormity of the challenge involved and the years of planning and commitment required – these are the reasons we became involved with the

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expedition in the first place. We share the team's disappointment that they have had to alter their plans but are delighted they remain safe and well. We will continue to support them in Antarctica as they focus on delivering ground-breaking scientific research, all the while continuing to raise awareness and donations for Seeing is Believing. We wish the team well for the rest of their stay on Antarctica.”

Help us support the team and continue to raise funds to eliminate avoidable blindness by visiting [www.seeingisbelieving.org](http://www.seeingisbelieving.org).

For further information, please contact:

Tris Kaye: UK Ops Manager  
M: 07811 446250

Hugh Bowring: Press Liaison  
M: 07768 275731