

Explorer Bering up after practice trip

In the last edition of *inhouse* we reported about Mike Laird, Solvency II Risk Analyst in the Risk and Compliance team, who is aiming to undertake a world record attempt next year - to be part of the first group of people in the world to cross the Bering Sea from Russia to the USA and back again, by walking and swimming.

Mike is preparing for the trip this year, and began with an expedition to the region in February to test equipment that has specifically been made for him to do the crossing. He recently got back and shared his experience.

"We didn't get across the Bering Sea for a variety of reasons but the trip itself was an immense success. We got out a short distance but in general the ice was too thin and slushy so we could neither ski, nor swim, nor kayak. We were progressing at a painfully slow 400 exhausting metres per hour. Very annoying but the local Eskimo population said it has been unusually warm this year. It never really got below -30C.

"It's typical of expeditions this remote and extreme that no matter how well planned they are, sometimes nature still wins. We earned immense respect from the islanders for getting ourselves back to relative safety rather than needing to call in emergency rescue services. We knew that the closest was out of action so if

we had needed help it would have been US Air Force from three to four hours away.

"My travel partner James got frost bite and that was also a factor in us coming back. I got frost bite too but my hands are huge (better blood supply) so I recover well. Five days later when in Anchorage I went to hospital to get a painful arm looked at and after four x-rays I am in a cast for a fracture in my wrist. I didn't realise at the time due to the cold but it's so remote you have to be able to cope no matter what happens.

"It is really brutal there, far harder than a month trekking to the North Pole that I did two years ago. But we made lots of useful contacts (whalers, seal trappers, eskimos, walrus hunters and gold prospectors) and met really lovely people. We will re-think some of our kit and strategies for the trip next year but that was always the reason for the recce. Not disappointed in any way. Just looking forward to getting back on it.

"In other news, I have secured full Royal Patronage. It was confirmed on Monday by Kensington Palace. It is amazing news and demonstrates the fact that HRH Prince Michael of Kent believes we have what it takes to complete the expedition in 2016. He has in fact said that he and one of his staff will probably come to Alaska to see us off!

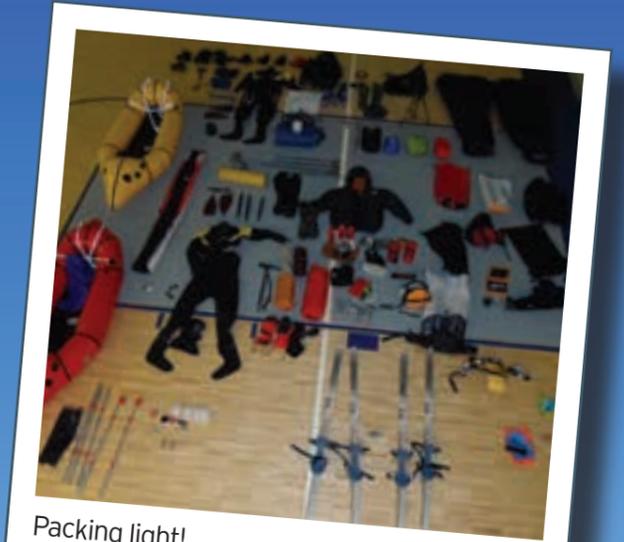
"I have also secured full support from the Russian government at both a Federal and a Regional level. This is rarely granted as the area we shall be in is sensitive and heavily restricted. It is in fact normally closed to Russians let alone foreigners. This means that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Kremlin has approved the expedition too. This came about through some meetings I have held with the Russian Embassy here in London.

"There is a lot still to do! I had a meeting at the Special Forces Club in London last night with the team and some of our counterparts in Moscow on Skype. We are considering changing the dynamics of the whole trip to do something utterly revolutionary in terms of Arctic expeditioning. I also have to meet with the US Ambassador in London and then probably the British Ambassador in Moscow. I am flying out there in May and will also have meetings with the Russian Geographical Society and some oligarches from whom I am hoping to attract sponsorship funds.

"We will do another full kit test before heading out but most likely this will be in Scandinavia. The most likely timing for this will be end of January 2016. Roll on next March for the expedition."



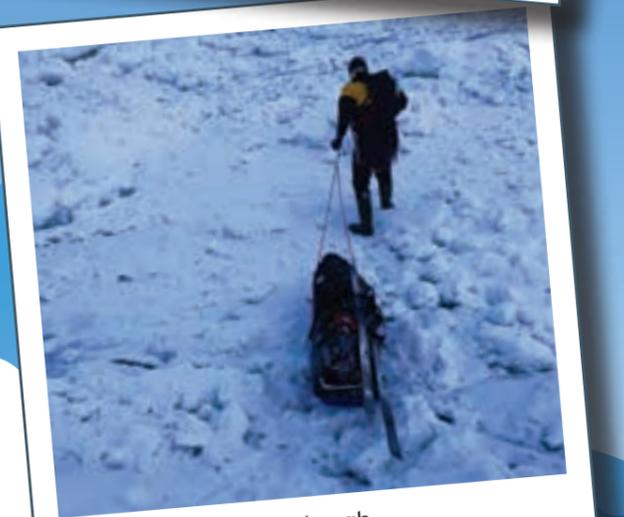
Home sweet home



Packing light!



Mike later found out he'd fractured his wrist!



When the going gets tough...



Scot Bering up well for deadliest trip

Mike's had coverage of his trip in the Express!



Beautiful but treacherous terrain



The local store stocked all the essentials