

By Paula Murray

A FORMER reality TV star has joined the ranks of hardcore adventurers who have walked to the Magnetic North Pole.

Mike Laird has reinvented himself as a modern expeditionist since his year on the Hebridean island of Taransay in the BBC's *Castaway 2000* series.

The 43-year-old is now back in Scotland after making the gruelling five week trek in some of the most inhospitable conditions imaginable.

Mr Laird, from Edinburgh, said: "I didn't do it for charity. I did it to see how far I can push myself.

"It was tough. I think there are less than 200 people in the world who have trekked to the pole so it is a pretty exclusive group."

The financial services consultant paid for his place on the 12-man expedition, which began in northern Canada's remote Nunavut territory.

They hiked 372 miles through polar bear country, via Bathurst Island and Ellef Ringnes Island, before reaching their destination.

Mr Laird added: "During our training before heading off we were warned about the polar bears but also told we are in their territory and therefore the firearms we used for our protection should only be used as the last resort.

"In the end, we didn't see any bears.

## North Pole adventure for reality TV star



**COLD COMFORT: Mike Laird pushed himself to the limit on his Arctic trek**

But we did come across plenty of tracks. They were right outside our tent, they were everywhere.

"When you think about how quickly your own footprints can vanish in 60km per hour winds you knew just how close the animals were.

"We had plenty of horrible days

when the temperatures plunged right down to -35C and below but with the windshield it was obviously far colder.

"Those days were difficult. You were trekking for miles with nothing but your own thoughts as company because it is impossible to talk to anyone.

"There were some dark days, let me

tell you. But on the mornings when the sun was out and the temperatures climbed maybe up to -15C it was perfectly balmy and you could keep on going. We really lived for those days."

Sharing a small tent the size of a double bed for five weeks with two other men was also a challenge. It was

their bedroom, kitchen and bathroom rolled into one.

Mr Laird added: "We cooked in it, we slept in it, we peed in bottles in it and stripped and washed in front of one another.

"The thing a lot of people don't understand is that you only go out for toilet if you absolutely have to and that comes with serious danger. You can easily have serious frostbite – men have lost their manhood to that in the past."

He is still suffering from the exposure to Arctic temperatures and added: "It's what we'd call a frost nip. Basically it means my fingers and toes are numb and I struggle with buttons and mobile phones but it will all wear off in a few weeks' time.

"One of our group was not so lucky. He had severe frostbite to his fingers but instead of telling us and alerting a medivac he suffered in silence for four days until a flight was due in to deliver food for us. It was only then he said things were bad and he had to abandon us."

The adventurer has only been back home for two weeks but is already planning more expeditions. His next two trips will take him back to some of the coldest corners of the world while a third is planned to Malaysia.

He said: "It is in your blood. I have a taste for it now and each adventure is more challenging than the previous one."