

# R. Fiennes' Coldest Journey

05-14 February 2013

[Blue Ice and Mountains / Thursday, February 14, 2013](#)

By Brian Newham.

Yesterday was a long day and today isn't to be any shorter but we really want to make the most of the good weather. Despite a fresh breeze it is sunny with great visibility so we need to push southwards.

By late morning we arrived at an area of 'Blue Ice'. It's a term used to describe a surface that is just that - it's like an ice rink but with a few surface imperfections. They are widespread in the Antarctic and are generally found in areas of high wind, often amongst the mountains where the topography causes the winds to accelerate. These high winds stop the drifting snow from accumulating and the wind itself polishes the surface.

Our route today took us across one of these areas. It was only about 3km across but it was also on a gradual incline. We soon knew that the Cat D6Ns weren't going to have enough traction to pull our heavy loads. We had two options: fit some ice spikes to our tracks or split the loads and do the journey twice. In the interest of time we chose the latter. Even so, it's not a quick operation and we lost a couple of hours. On the far side of the Blue Ice area we reassembled the Ice Train and as I write we are pushing onwards towards the mountains which are now looming large. We have passed out first nunatak - an isolated peak which is sticking out of the surrounding snowy landscape. It's dramatic scenery and the scale is just enormous. The nunatak looks as if it's a short ski away but the reality is its over 10km.

We have been climbing pretty much continually for the last few days. It's almost imperceptible at times but slowly and surely we are making our way up to the plateau which will lead us to the Pole. We are now at nearly 900m above sea level. 2000m to go!

Tomorrow we expect several steeper climbs so it's likely we will be ferrying loads again. Meanwhile, if you want to see where we are, and you missed the link a few days ago, have a look at ;

<http://yb.tl/thecoldestjourney>

(tip ; when you have loaded the page zoom right out so the map appears, then you can zoom back in. Click the box top left next to 2648 and our track will appear)

The link to this map is available on this website.

[RGS Event Not Going Ahead / Thursday, February 14, 2013](#)

I am sorry to announce that the provisional event at the Royal Geographical Society on 20th March is not going to happen after all. Having put out the feelers to gauge interest it was decided by our Trustees that there was not a sufficient level to ensure that the full capacity of the RGS hall was filled.

On behalf of everyone at Operations HQ and beyond who were looking forward to marking the start of the traverse in the UK, I would like to apologise for any inconvenience and disappointment caused.

There will certainly be further opportunities to attend events in the future, most likely once the Ice Team have returned home and have their stories to tell. We will be sure to keep you posted.  
Best wishes, Hugh Bowring - Operations HQ

### Terra Firma / Thursday, February 14, 2013

By Anton Bowring, Cape Town.

Yesterday the expedition support team stepped ashore properly for the first time since we left Cape Town on 7th January. Although we got off the ship in Antarctica, the ice on which we stood was afloat. Even though we were surrounded by a landscape of undulating whiteness, we were no more on terra firma than the ship itself.

Inevitably we are all feeling unsettled. Our home for the past months is now changing in character. The ship looks pretty much the same but the crew are different and new faces are greeting us, strangers, unaware of our adventure - nothing to share, no jokes or grins exchanged as we pass each other in pursuit of our individual duties. Our cabins are clear. None of our personal trappings adorn the shelves and other surfaces. Is this my cabin? It looks like it but it has no personality, no sense of home. We are nomads now. It is time to go.

We are breaking up as a group. Eric, Glynn and Adrian are the first to go. Their flights are booked and they will be gone by evening - Adrian to Australia, the others to London. The rest of us are a helpless looking group standing on the dock. With our bundles of luggage and paraphernalia we stuff ourselves into a couple of hire cars and take a final backwards glance at the SA Agulhas. Cranes are loading containers and complex scientific constructions of stainless steel and clustered sensors. She'll be back at sea in a couple of days with a group of oceanographers. Aliens moving into our spaces. Our own container and Snowflake are packed and ready to be collected by our friends from Transglobal Express for shipment back to Britain. That's it. Job done. Next chapter.

The Dolphin Beach Hotel lies north of Cape Town in aptly named Table View. We have cabins in this stunning setting. We can look out from our rooms and terraces across Table Bay to the mountain which, today has its tablecloth of cloud. We are on the beach. The familiar sound of breaking waves is a reassurance. We are ashore, but only just. It is a perfect transition from our seafaring past to our rather more mundane future. For the moment we are cosseted and protected in our comfortable rooms and elegant surroundings.

This evening we dined in the well-known 'Blowfish' restaurant which is justifiably the pride of the hotel. We all had seafood - beautifully prepared to order, such a selection. It will be a while before we adapt to terra firma! A good night beckons. No more rolling or pitching on a moderate westerly swell.

We think and wonder about our six friends in their purposeful, elemental existence. What a contrast now exists between us. They are digging their way out of the ice. We are digging into the softest duvets. It's not a bad life here on terra firma. That's for sure.

Thank you Singer Group and all of the staff at the Dolphin Beach Hotel for your very great generosity.

### Human Urge / Wednesday, February 13, 2013

A rare blog from expedition co-leader, Sir Ranulph Fiennes:

"Sometimes I am asked what attracts me to Antarctica, this expedition being the third time (hopefully) that I will have crossed it. The Norwegians have a word 'polarhullar' meaning 'polar hunger', suggesting the Poles and travel to or near them is addictive. For me, I call it normal human urge. The first time I crossed the Antarctic was on skidoos as part of the first vertical circumnavigation of Earth without flying, the second was the first unsupported crossing of the continent. Those were both in summer, and this time I want to put our past experience to go one step further and make this crossing in winter. When once Man reached the moon, he now wants to tick Mars off the list. It's the same thing,

This expedition will present challenges neither I nor any other human being has experienced or been able to prepare for. We were only able to test our vehicles and clothing at trial temperatures below -58C in cold chambers. And, trials a year ago in North Sweden only produced temperatures down to -42C. So -70C (or maybe -80C or colder) plus darkness and high altitude will be a new experience and challenge for all of us.

We will not be able to rely on our equipment. Technology has changed exploration hugely in different places, but at -70C you cannot expect modern gizmos to necessarily work. If you do you may end up in lethal trouble by reliance on them.

Perhaps the greatest lesson I have learned about breaking difficult records is that the key ingredient is luck. We are going to need our fair share of it if we are going to complete this crossing."

### The Dig / Tuesday, February 12, 2013

The Ice Team had their work cut out for them when they woke up this morning to find their fuel sleds imbedded in two days and nights of snowdrift. Perseverance paid off and they finished the day 39km further south than when they started. Good work guys.

### On the Move / Tuesday, February 12, 2013

A sunny but breezy morning. 25kts and low drift. Took us about three hrs to get dug out and the Ice Train reassembled.

Now we are trucking at around 5km/hr. Need to make some mileage today so likely to be a long one.

Update by Brian Newham, Traverse Manager

### Hope / Tuesday, February 12, 2013 By Anton Bowring, on board SA Agulhas.

It's ten pm and it's hot. The air temperature is way up in the mid 20s. We have slowed to seven knots and we are about to alter course. Cape Point lighthouse is just seven miles ahead. Looking at the chart, I can tell you that it flashes blink, blink, pause, blink every thirty seconds. The light itself stands eighty-seven meters above sea level and in good conditions, like this evening, it can be seen thirty-two miles away. Over to our starboard (right) is Kaap Hangklip lighthouse. It flashes just once every ten seconds and has a range of twenty-five miles. While ahead and off the port bow (i.e. slightly to the left) is Slangkoppunt lighthouse which flashes four times in thirty seconds and has a range of thirty miles. From these simple indicators, it can be seen that, if we were to proceed along this heading, we would hit land in about an hour. So we must alter course to port in order to pass Slangkoppunt lighthouse on our starboard side. It sounds a bit technical but it is as natural a manoeuvre as you could wish for and, importantly it keeps us in the correct shipping lane. We are almost home.

Cape Point, which is also known as The Cape of Good Hope, is one of the world's greatest landmarks. Few vessels pass it without altering course to some degree. Heading from west to east or east to west between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. It lies at the bottom of the African continent yet it is not the southernmost point. That honour belongs to Cape Agulhas which is a way off, out of site, to our east. Cape Agulhas is the shy one to Good Hope's rather more celebrated reputation. The SA Agulhas is honourably named and I'm proud to be a small part of this ship's distinguished history. In the last few months we have taken the old lady to central London for the first time. Indeed, we took her north of the equator for the first time since she was built in 1977 in Japan. Of course she has been to Antarctica many times and served South Africa well. But we took

her, in her twilight years, a veritable pensioner, to participate in the first ever attempt to cross Antarctica in winter - one of the last great polar challenges. Some of us on board are, ourselves, of a pensionable age or near it. Even Ran is no spring chicken. In fact he is a senior citizen in more ways than one, even if he is one of the pluckiest for his age. And that, too, is something to celebrate; surrounding us ageing strivers who are, no doubt, living in a dream world, there are young Africans setting out on their lives of adventure at sea with whom we have rubbed shoulders and shared that dream. For them, there is the hope, the good hope, that the future will bring a life of opportunity. Inspiration works both ways and, while it would be pleasing to think that our expedition has given inspiration to the cadets on board this ship, I can say, for sure, that they have inspired me and I shall miss this ship, the crew and the cadets.

We'll be docking in the early hours. For now, I'm enjoying the last of the voyage, alone on the dark deck, soaking up the salt air and the experiences that uniquely belong to ships and the sea. We are gently rolling on an agitated surface, under a starry sky. The constant rumble of the engines, as inoffensive as the beat of your heart, accompanies the splashing as we slice our way through the waves. The lights from portholes on the deck below illuminate the white foam in diffused circles which glide past as we roll onwards. Where on earth could you experience such simple, fundamental sensations? It is a 'water' thing and I love it.

While the Ice Group are over two-thousand miles away in their blizzard, we are wilting in the humid night. I think about them often and wonder how they are faring. I couldn't do what they are doing. It's not my element - ice. It is wonderful to visit, to see, feel and absorb. But that's enough. Give me the sea any day.

The voyage with all its adventures, from the dance-off at Christmas and the fusion of food to the African singing, the big crane swinging, Snowflake, Mary the mouse (God knows how she's coping in the blizzard!), the 'snotter' and the exploding lavatories, has all been a huge privilege to experience. But above all it has been my new and many South African friends that I shall remember with the greatest affection. Thanks Cap'n Dave and all of you - for everything. See you again soon, I hope.

Blink, pause, blink, pause blink, pause blink. Slangkoppunt is on our beam. We're almost there.

#### [Update from the Ice Train / Monday, February 11, 2013](#)

Just to let you know that the Ice Train was unable to proceed today. The wind rose again during the night and this morning was 40+ kts with zero visibility. However, things have calmed down and tomorrow is looking more hopeful.

On a separate note, the SA Agulhas is due to arrive back in Cape Town tomorrow night, or early Wednesday evening. We'll keep you posted.

#### [Live Map / Monday, February 11, 2013](#)

It is a mix of pleasure and frustration that we welcome you to the Live Map service on The Coldest Journey website, courtesy of Yellow Brick Tracking.

A pleasure because it is a really cool addition to the site through which you will be able to chart the Ice Team's progress in Antarctica; a frustration because it is not currently working on our site and you have to be redirected to another site for now. But we're working on it, so please be patient.

The map is available to view on the website following this path Home > Expedition > Live Map, [Or you can just click here.](#)

### Stuck in the Snow / Monday, February 11, 2013

Another short video from Ian Prickett. This time he gives us an update on what has been happening today. As you will see, not much! Still, it's a good insight into conditions down there right now.

### Short Video by Ian Prickett / Monday, February 11, 2013

Check out this BRILLIANT short film compiled by none other than Ice Team handyman Ian Prickett. Are there no ends to this young man's talents. This is the best thing I have seen come out of the Antarctic yet. Well, on this expedition anyway. Enjoy!  
Hugh Bowring, Operations HQ

### Daily Report / Sunday, February 10, 2013

Every day the Operations Team in the UK gets sent a report on the day's activities compiled by Brian Newham, including weather conditions, distance travelled and current position.

In the spirit of sharing, here's today's:

Best wishes, Hugh - Operations HQ

### Daily Report / Sunday 10th Feb 2013

Current position	S70 33' 36.7"	E023 28' 05.1" (same as yesterday)
Distance travelled today	zero km	
Weather at 1700 GMT		
	Wind - SE 25 kts	
	Temp - minus 3C	
	Cloud - obscured	
	Current weather - drifting snow	
	Visibility - 200m	
	Contrast - Nil	

#### Today's action

It was blowing 40kts this morning and that has gradually eased to 25kts. Poor visibility and whiteout conditions. No movement for the Ice Train.

#### Intentions for tomorrow

There is moderate drift accumulation around camp which will require dozing before we can link units back together and getting moving again. The current improving trend in the weather suggests that we may be able to move tomorrow.

Long term intentions , If all is well we will continue south.

### Short Video of D6N Shifting a Scoots / Sunday, February 10, 2013

Here's a quick snapshot from arriving at our overnight camp tonight [Saturday - ed]. We are moving all the fuel scoots into a compressed bundle to limit the amount of blown snow in-between. Our Living and Science Cabooses have been detached as well to stop the wind tails that a 25 knot blowing snow storm can create.

By Ian Prickett

### [Blowing Snow / Sunday, February 10, 2013](#)

[By Brian Newham \(written on Saturday evening\)](#)

A grey and breezy start to the day which gradually deteriorated into blowing snow and visibility of only about 100m. Anyone who knows the term "whiteout" will know what we have been experiencing - the sky merges with the ground, there is no contrast at all and its quite disorientating. Despite the conditions we were able to push slowly southwards and clocked up 36km before we called it a day.

Outside now it is verging on a mild blizzard and we are expecting considerable drifts to form overnight. We have separated the components of the Ice Train and tried to park them so that the drift from one doesn't bury another. It's what you do down here and it can save a lot of digging. We will have to see in the morning how well we have fared in our first spell of poor weather and we will keep pushing south as soon as we can.

### [We're On Our Way - At Last! / Saturday, February 09, 2013](#)

[Spencer Smirl's latest blog.](#)

The first successful day of travel finally happened. Well, not completely successful, but just about.

Yesterday was Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. It was our 18<sup>th</sup> day on the Antarctic continent. Long days spent unloading and assembling our massive amount of kit. The sun never stopped shining and the temperature didn't spend much time below zero. The struggles of coping with missing kit, equipment growing pains and a difficult fit and finish would have been a lot more difficult to bare, had we had to do it at -20C with a 50-knot wind. Thank the ice gods that wasn't the case.

Last night we finished our final checks of the Cat D6N tractors, cleaned up all our rubbish and stowed the cabooses for travel. It must have been near 8 or 9 at night when Ian reminded us all of the frozen cheese, bacon and fillet steaks we had buried 6-feet under snow in an attempt to keep it frozen. It was too late to dig it up, we were all exhausted from what we hoped was our last hard day of labour for a few days. We added it to our list of pre-departure chores, which already included loading our two snow mobiles, and the knocking loose and connection of our magnificent Ice Trains.

The snowmobiles, which had to be lifted with a Finning Crevasse Boom, a devise bespoke to these two Antarctic tractors, needed to be hoisted nearly three meters high to where they would perch on top of 40 drums of jet fuel sitting atop a Lehmann sledge. This would be their home for the majority of our 300-mile depot run to the plateau. As for the connecting of the train, I can honestly say that backing up a 20-tonne sledge unit, sitting on top of four articulating ice skies, at over five meters wide, is definitely the hardest reverse into a hitch I have ever done. The worst of it is that the skies pack a path in the snow so if you have misjudged your line backwards it is near impossible to create a new one.

At last, we had finally got to a point of readiness for departure, vibrating with excitement, exhausted from anticipation of our epic trek to finally commence. "Lunch time" I looked at my Cat watch donated to me by Cat Merchandise; "Rats" I said when it turned out to be 10 minutes to twelve. I scoffed down my soup and canned fish as fast as possible and impatiently twitched in my seat as I waited for the rest of the guys to finish. Back outside, I climbed into the cockpit of the D6 for what seemed like the first time. We all gave the okay on the radio and I began to pull away. The mega Ice Train lurched to life behind me. The tracks would slip in the snow beneath me, twitching like a nervous feline with every increase to the load as the slack in the undercarriage was taken up. We were finally moving.

The last year of my life had been building up to this moment: racing 80 tonnes of metal, machine and medicine at 5km/h across the barren white that is Antarctica. I looked down at my Cat watch again: 1.30pm. I had a permanent grin stretched across my face. My I-pod struggled to make more

noise than the rattle of the tracks as we tugged along. I didn't mind. I was just happy to have some tunes.

I watched the speed listed on my Garmin GPS unit slowly start to decline from 6km/h all the way to 2km/h. I heard the turbo spin up to speed. I knew what was next. The slope ahead of us was barely noticeable to the eye, but to 80 tonnes it was ginormous. I had spun out. All the excitement washed out of me as a wave of despair crept in. It was 1.50pm. We had only made it just over a kilometre in 20 minutes and we were stuck. If we had to start relaying the load now, we would never complete our expedition: we would run out of time and fuel. We had a team huddle and agreed to leave three fuel scoots alongside this slope in hope that the 25 tonnes we were deducting would make the difference needed to have us on our way. After an hour and a half of moving spare parts around in the holds of the fuel scoots and re-rigging our tow assemblies for the reduced configuration, we were once again on our way. We pawed our way south across the ice at an average of 5.5km/h for three and a half hours. We managed to travel 18kms and drank 300liters of fuel between the Cats. It wasn't a complete success right away because we had to leave some scoots, but it was a huge success in the end because we were within our fuel limits and the machines had a problem-free day. I hope there are many more to come.

[Moving South" - by Brian Newham / Friday, February 08, 2013](#)  
[The Ice Train is on the move for the very first time.](#)

This morning we made final preparations and stowed the last of our equipment before setting out on our journey to lay a fuel depot further south. The strategy behind the fuel depot is twofold. Firstly, we need to reduce the weights that we are towing so we need to position fuel between our starting point at the coast and the Pole - we will then be able to pick up this fuel as we pass on our winter journey. Secondly, there is a mountain chain between the coast and the inland plateau and it makes things a lot easier for us to navigate through this area whilst conditions are easier and we have good daylight. Having laid our depot we will return to the coast and await the start of winter. Then we will set out on our winter journey with the benefit of knowing that we have fuel further south and also knowing the route through the difficult mountain section. It's a good plan.

We are hoping to get the depot down to 75S, that is our optimum position; but we will have to see how the journey unfolds and in particular what our fuel burn is. On the steeper sections through the mountains we are certain to have to ferry lighter loads backwards and forwards so it's really difficult to be certain of our estimates. We are starting to enter the unknown and will have many lessons to learn along the way. This depot journey is certainly not to be underestimated and the round trip will be over 600 miles.

So, just four hours ago, we hitched up the Ice Train and headed south for the very first time. Test pulls over the last few days suggested that we might be able to pull a bit more weight than we had originally planned, so we gave it a go. Things were okay until we came to the first incline and we soon realised that we should have stuck to Plan A. A quick reconfiguration and we were off on our journey. The pace is slow but very steady and as I write from the caboose we are gently nosing south. Through the window in front of me a flat, white, featureless world is slipping past. It's overcast and without shadow, but to the south the sky looks brighter. It's the way we must go and although it is not yet winter the journey has begun.

[Turbulence / Friday, February 08, 2013](#)  
[by Anton Bowring, on-board the SA Agulhas.](#)

The lavatory in my cabin exploded this evening. At the time I was minding my own business and, having minded it, I pulled the lever - not hard, mind you. Well, I was terrified, the thing erupted with a belching noise, half gurgle and half woosh! Great clumps of water leapt into the air and crashed on the floor increasing in size until I was pressed to the wall and wondering whether or not to run for it. I didn't. It carried on and I became mesmerised. The water slowly turned dark and big,

menacing bubbles filled the bowl. More eruptions and I started to wonder what I was looking at. It bore little resemblance to anything that I fully understood and the colour was indicative of something rather sinister. The trouble was that this unpleasantness was about to engulf me and it was supper time. I resolved to remain motionless against the wall in the hope that, whatever it was, it might not notice me and move on to another cabin. In time, I think it did. And I went to supper less hungry than I had been and shaking slightly.

Today the sea has picked up from yesterday's calm. The wind is following us but there is a swell coming at us from the west. The effect is to make us roll and twist in a corkscrew motion which is guaranteed to make the sensitive ones among us queasy. It doesn't really bother me and I've been impressed that this ship is reasonably comfortable even in a heavy sea. However, for a second day, there is little evidence of life on board. We are all taking it easy reflecting on the effort we put into our work at Crown Bay, and commending ourselves with another rest day by way of a treat. Having said that, Duncan and I went down into number two and number three 'tweendeck holds to inspect our cargo and measure the items we need to put into the container. Also, 'Snowflake' will need to be shipped home. In addition to our antique Tucker Snow Cat we have two four meter ramps, the spreader beams, drum lifting frame, plywood, rope, sledge sides, and various small items including the 'Oil Spill Kit' (which we didn't use). The good news is that it should all fit, with my two, wooden packing crates into a 20ft container. With the dimensions and an estimate of the weight, I emailed the agents in Cape Town and our generous sponsors Transglobal Express in Bromborough (UK) with the manifest. I also notified Paul at Revells Removals that he could expect the container and Snowflake to arrive in a few weeks time.

I heard from a friend in New Zealand today. She had read an earlier blog and sent greetings. I also heard from Virginia, USA, and the Black Forest. It is strange how, in this very remote place, folk from around the world are able to follow our expedition. On Facebook today I see that we have attracted over 7,100 'likes'. As I understand it this is probably a very modest proportion of the number of people who actually follow the expedition story. I am pleased that in the main we have attracted no derogatory comments or messages. Indeed, our supporters are wonderfully generous with their words and I'm sure that I am not alone in feeling deep gratitude and encouragement from them. This is not to say that we haven't got critics - of course we have but, fortunately, they have kept their distance.

As I type, the sea is continuing to build up. So are reports from around the ship about the plumbing. I am concerned that, if everyone flushes at once (and there are 55 lavatories on board - I counted them), the ship will go down in seconds with all hands. I reported my misgivings to Cap'n Dave at supper. We were all given fish nuggets, spare ribs and macaroni cheese. Cap'n Dave had a nice big piece of fish and fluffy mashed potatoes. We had chocolate ice cream - he had vanilla. Anyway, I mentioned the eruption and its distinctive colour just as he was popping a morsel of fish into his mouth. Like a car carefully backing out of a garage, the fish was withdrawn on the fork untouched and he turned to me with a look that was only half inquisitive. We agreed to discuss the matter later owing to the movement of the ship on the increasingly turbulent sea. I noticed that quite a few of my colleagues were forking their nuggets et al to the side of the plate. I'm not convinced either way. It could be the movement of the ship but, just as easily, it could be the combination of fish, ribs and macaroni - not necessarily the best assemblage in this weather I fear.

After supper, Cap'n Dave and I stood solemnly around my lavatory bowl. Cap'n Dave took the plunge and flushed. With a mighty roar and a belch the entire installation took off like a rocket and water as previously described threatened to engulf us. "That's not right" said Cap'n Dave as the monster finally settled down. "Best tell Chippy". He went off shaking his head looking forlorn and dejected.

It is now an hour later. My colleagues are watching a film in the Officers' Lounge. I am at my desk. Cap'n Dave just phoned. He seemed relieved. "Everything is OK now" he told me. "A junior engineer was a bit enthusiastic with his spanner earlier and the water pressure built up". I thanked him and tried a flush at arm's length by leaning through the doorway - just in case. Everything was fine - a perfectly normal flush. Clear water.



I'm now looking out of the porthole in my cabin. It is getting dark and there's a large iceberg about quarter of a mile on our starboard beam. But I'm intrigued. Is it my imagination or is the sea quietening down too?

### Ice Train" - by Richmond Dykes / Thursday, February 07, 2013

I have put it to the group as what to call the configuration of all the pieces of equipment once hooked together ready to pull out on our fuel laying journey. Their answer: Ice Train. This actually takes its name from the Land Trains that roll across the Australian Outback; we are not much different from them other than them having blue skies, red dirt, plenty of heat and kangaroos where we will have dark skies, ice, snow and currently no heat at all.

Today started off the same as any other day in the camp. After breakfast and getting suited up to go outside, we checked the Cats D6N's over for oil and water along with our daily walk around. We proceeded to start them up and allow them to come up to operating temperature.

In the meantime, the final tidy up was taking place around the camp with all sorts of things being stowed here and there by Brian and Ran. Rob and Spencer were putting the final touches to the caboose wiring, while Ian and I were doing a bit of heavy lifting of large items onto the top of a container to be lashed down.

After all of the above we had to free up the fuel scoots with the D6N. This entails giving each of the corners a nudge with the ski on the end of the crevasse arm to free them from their overnight grip of the ice. I would never have believed it until I saw it myself, but as any ski goes across snow it brakes the corners off the snowflakes which turn to water and leave a smooth lubricated trail as you pass over the ice. You could not walk on the surface afterwards as it is like an ice rink. This water is a benefit while you are on the move as it acts as a lubricant; however the problem occurs when you stop for a prolonged period of time and it refreezes, sticking you to the ice.

The configuration we trialled today was a Cat D6N followed by the science caboose, then the storage sledge and finally the fuel scoots in a formation of 3 and 3. We decided to drop the seventh fuel scoot on each load to shorten our ferrying trips up through the mountains and cut our travel time down. After making the fuel drop we will return to this base with two scoots, leaving us with an even number of four going back up onto the plateau. Traveling light the second time will give us a faster travel time on the ice while we still have daylight.

The full hook up took us just under an hour to perform; I can assure you that reversing sledges with double articulating skies is no easy task with a bulldozer. You have to turn long before you need to turn and it becomes a bit of a guessing game, but after a few cuts at her we managed to get everything hooked up and ready to roll thanks to Ian on the radio backing me in.

The order of the day from that point on was to take up the slack on the Ice train steadily and keep a straight line till we could ascertain what the computer was telling us in the Cats with regards to engine loads and torque converter readings. All came well within tolerance, with the engine pulling a 96% load factor at full throttle 2150 rpm in 1.5 gear and 1975 rpm in 2.5 gear. The torque converter ratio was a steady 0.92 to 0.94 in gear 1.5 and 0.86 to 0.88 in gear 2.5. We were very impressed with the pulling capabilities with no spinning out on the snow while turning.

Tomorrow will be onward and upward as we head for the mountains to make our fuel drop. The only question that remains to be answered is what will happen on blue ice and when do we put the ice spikes in?

For all you kids out there, Mary Mouse has been entrusted to me by the lovely Jill Bowring. She has been safe and well tucked up in her box in my bed as she had been tired from her journey from the boat to the top staging site. Mary has told me that she will be ready and willing to go for her first

drive in a Cat D6N tomorrow. Hooray for Mary! We will need to see if we can get Ran to sew her a boiler suit to keep her warm.

#### Hours of Daylight / Thursday, February 07, 2013

As you will see from the chart, it is changing quite rapidly at this time of year and it won't be long before we start getting proper darkness at night. As we move further south whilst we are laying the depot the nights will obviously get longer.

#### Mountains Of The Mind / Wednesday, February 06, 2013

*When in surroundings such as many of us involved with this expedition have experienced over the last few weeks, it's easy to let one's mind wander with abstract thoughts, promoted by the immensity of this landscape. Here's some thoughts and visions that prompted me to producing a piece writing. Hopefully penned in the same vein as one of my favourite books about the North - Arctic Dreams by Barry Lopez, He titles it 'Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape. I hope I have done it justice with this piece focused on Antarctic ice.*

#### Mountains Of The Mind

By Duncan Cameron, logistics and cargo coordinator

The evening colours last night made it very difficult for me to drag myself off to bed in the early hours of the next morning, staying awake for the deepening reds & crimsons of the coldest part of the day. Frustrated I can't show my soul mate first hand, so having to describe as vividly as my vocabulary allows.

It is so easy to want to keep taking photographs, but it never paints the whole picture. It won't capture the coldness in the air as the heat goes out of the orange orb for just a few hours of the 24. But the sun at this low declination allows the sheer craggy faces of the ice bastions floating alongside us, to be lit like blocks of gold bars. I spent some time alone up on the very bow of our metal life support machine - this is the furthest I can get away from the constant drone of the massive engines, the heartbeat of our island. The bridge being the brain, the galley the digestive system, cranes the large muscle groups, the officers, deckies, cadets & expedition staff the blood cells. The blood filling the arteries & veins of the holds, corridors & walkway of this amazing structure. The cells carrying and delivering, each job as important as the other.

When in Canada, I discovered "Forest Bathing", I think it was called, being immersed deep among the lifeblood of the grand timbers. Up on the bow last night, this constant slow rolling swell, dampened by so many tonnes of younger, flat floes, alongside contorted multi-year ice, many with 3-4 years of pressure formed in them; some white, some dirty with moraine spoil & scars, one or two like jewels in a crown, intense ice blue, deep fissures but rounded where once the underside of a diminishing, one time larger berg, now rolled - no, capsized. Revealing its underside as it slowly dissolves, giving up its icy heart to the relentless movement of wind & swell as it, along with others traversing around this behemoth of a continent, moves on its centrifugal journey north.

Returning to my un-tethered imagination of this seascape; well, it was like the ocean was breathing; big, sighing, rhythmical breaths, laboured by the cumulative weight of the ice on its massive chest. Akin to a climber at altitude where breathing is so much more calculated than in everyday life.

We could now see into our bay where many tonnes of ice shelf had stood only hours earlier, indeed this had been where we unloaded stores, several hundred drums of fuel, 25t bulldozers. The flat ground where the ship's derrick had craned our cargo, now disappeared 50- 70 metres back from the edge, fractured at a crevasse system weakness we had discovered and evaluated before starting discharge. The power of this unforgiving swell erupting with life, generated maybe a thousand miles

out to sea, the first obstacle it meets is the ice foot of our discharge ramp. After constant gnawing from previous swells, assisted by the sun and its solar radiation & gradual ablation, weakening and growing the delicate cornices and snow-loaded overhangs from above, it takes one final swell to start a gunfire of ice cliff collapse. Like the last jenga block removal, as one part of the ice cliff surrenders to the black-blue waters fathoms below. So this sets off a domino type reaction of further ice cliff explosions, left precariously unstable by the disappearance of the first, toppling to create a new landscape. This pristinely clean, virgin ice edge, looking out of place in the shelf body, in time, will suffer the same consequences. But only for the huge volumes and velocities of ice sloughing off the continent from the high Antarctic plateau does this conveyor continue. Indeed some ice shelves are growing rather than shrinking

Subsequent swells we can see rolling along the bottom of the ice cliffs, reaching a cave in the ice, a zawn, gully or rift. Black and booming in its darker reaches but erupting with noise, exploding spray and power of the reverb & chaotic forces of water meeting a solid object send plumes of spray, like dust skywards; captivating and dramatic in its audacious display.

How could a mortal sleep after witnessing such creation in the making.

### One journey ends and another starts / Wednesday, February 06, 2013

By Geoff Long, on board SA Agulhas.

We've been steaming steadily north at 11 knots for over a day now, the pack was kind to us and we've left behind the gentle rolling carpet of sea ice, escaping its grasp easily, reaching open water after only 30 miles. Now sailing through calm grey seas, the magical world of colourful ice, crevasses and penguins whilst still relatively near, seems so far away. At 64 degrees South, 360 nautical miles north of Crown Bay, only the occasional piece of floating shelf ice remind us that we are still in a remarkable area; in fact in a few months' time during mid-winter this part of the ocean will be frozen solid and totally inaccessible. In fact, John Parsloe the Ice-Pilot on board has just informed me that 57degrees South is the average extent of the sea ice in August - incredible to think that 780 nautical miles of the sea north of the shelf where we were just off-loading will be solid ice.

Whilst wrestling with the emotions of the last few weeks and leaving the team, it dawned on me that leaving Antarctica reminds me of the melancholic feeling I get when the snow melts at home in the UK and the brilliant white world disappears to reveal the dirty streets littered with muddy snowmen. On-board seasoned Antarctic veterans are already talking longingly of their next trip south; of how this place really gets its hooks into you and you always want more. And I can see exactly what they mean. Being a bit of a 'sunset-junky', the temptation to stay up all night photographing the ever-changing colours in the sky did not mix well with the need to be fed, watered and on the ice by 7.30AM ever morning!

On-board now our thoughts and talk inevitably return often to the Ice Team, their mood, activities and progress since we left; of how they will deal with the rigours of the journey ahead and the inevitable strains of living together in a confined environment. With little chance of 'personal space' once winter really starts to take a grip, they will primarily be restricted to the relative safety of the caboose and 'just going out for walk' won't be an option. There is no doubt that theirs will be an arduous journey both physically and mentally and one that I'm not sure if I could endure myself.

Time constraints, personal, financial and physical in terms of weather and ice, meant that our time on the ice-shelf was hectic and did not offer much space for reflection. We focussed on getting the job done, working long hours alongside the guys to make sure they were as ready as we could prior to our departure. Aided by the lack of darkness, days rolled into one another - when not ashore we were eating or sleeping on Agulhas, interspersed by wrestling with the internet to get photos and blogs back home to keep people in touch with progress. The morning commute from deck to the ice via the metal 'man-basket', was a daily wake-up call that never failed to remind me of the amazing situation we found ourselves in and how privileged we were to be there. As the days passed, the landscape became more familiar, if no less spectacular. Particular bergs became old friends, as did

other distinct landmarks such as ice caves and crevasses, these things which less than a fortnight ago were almost beyond comprehension for us who hadn't experienced this cold world before.

In some ways it seems like we were in Crown Bay for a considerable time, certainly thinking in terms of the magnitude of the effect it had on us and yet it was over so quickly. The Coldest Journey team is morphing once again, the Ice Team ashore have been delivered and are preparing for their first real challenge of setting up a fuel depot and the support crew on SA Agulhas are getting further away by the hour, heading back to a more normal existence at home. But at the same time we are all still aiming for the same thing; albeit that the vast majority of us will be watching those six brave men from afar - we're all looking forward to the journey.

The team may only consist of six men, but it's backed by thousands - by us on board, the UK operations team, the hundreds of sponsors who helped supply and develop kit along the way. Most importantly it's backed by all of you, following and supporting us from around the world and offering constant encouragement. In return we will endeavour to continue providing an insight into the magic of Antarctica, to share its beauty and physical challenges. The education programme aims to bring kids closer to this remote and unique environment and the scientific research to produce invaluable physical, psychological and physiological data. At the same time we will be raising money for the worthy cause of Seeing Is Believing and on a more individual level hoping to inspire others to challenge their normal boundaries and maybe start a journey of their own.

### Camp 2 - by Rob Lambert Tuesday, February 05, 2013

Since we arrived at the ice edge a couple of weeks ago, our work here has concentrated on getting all of our kit out from the various ship's holds and hidey holes and onto the ice. As equipment was craned ashore it was whisked away by our myriad of helpers, scurrying busily like so many oompah loompahs (though considerably more attractive), and deposited at one of three main work sites. Firstly, there was the unloading point at the foot of the ice shelf immediately next to the ship. Secondly, we had a site a few hundred yards up the ice ramp: here we plonked the cabooses where we could live and work on them away from the hustle, bustle, and potential instability of the very edge of the ice. And thirdly, we had a large work area a couple of kilometres away, beyond the top of the ramp and on the huge expanse of the ice shelf itself. This provided the flat ground and necessary space for all the fuel scoots and other heavy equipment to be stored, laid out in lines perpendicular to the prevailing winds to lessen the effects of drifting snow. It's been interesting trying to work across all three sites and easy to lose track of what was where, but today we moved house: we brought the cabooses and all the rest of our mobile workshop - as Ian said, "the most stunning workshop in the world" - up the ramp to join all the rest of the equipment at one single encampment. Camp 2.

The move itself went very well. Spencer reversed the Cat and science cooos up to the storage sledge, hitched up, and pulled smoothly up the ramp. The rest of us followed on skidoos as light snow fell, while Ran broke out the skis and glided along behind. En route, towards the top of the ramp we encountered a new crack in the ice, scything its way across our path as the ice below continues its inexorable journey to the ocean. The crack was deep, but safe enough to cross, and further evidence of the living, breathing geography surrounding us. As if another reminder were needed, from the comparative safety of our new camp a short while later we listened in awe while an immense rumbling, booming sound floated across the ice to us for a full minute; not thunder, but the unmistakable sound of the ice cliffs below disintegrating into the sea.

"As Hannibal had his elephants, we have our Cats"

Now, at camp 2, for the first time since the expedition was conceived we've been confronted with the stark sight of all our equipment - and nothing more - in a single place. Seeing really is believing. There's quite a bit of it and, just as it is too late for any of us six to turn around and go home, so we can't send any unwanted kit back now. It must all move with us over the next four thousand

kilometres, to the far edge of the continent. There's no doubt that Ran faces an epic personal challenge in attempting to cross those many miles on foot. But for the rest of us, and for the team on SA Agulhas and back home, this journey also poses an engineering and logistical challenge of formidable proportions. As Hannibal had his elephants, we have our Cats, and they must be fed and watered. You should see Spence and Richmond's toolbox.

We'll spend a couple of days here at camp 2, trying to work out where to put it all (Brian's head is becoming ever more well-scratched), putting the final touches to the cabooses, and preparing the vehicles for their first big test. In a few days we'll set off, heading south through the mountains and up to the Antarctic plateau 3,000 metres higher. There we'll leave a depot of food, fuel and supplies, before coming back to the coast to begin the traverse proper as winter begins in late March.

Meanwhile, we'll spend tonight in unfamiliar surroundings. No longer is our view of the comforting sea - our last link with home - behind us, or of the yawning chasm of an icy crevasse - our neighbour for the last two weeks - to our side, or of the ice ramp - our first campsite here - ahead of us. Instead, this evening we have nothing but a flat, white horizon in every direction. It's a view we'll have to get used to...