



East north east

Steven East walked to the North Pole carrying the Elmbridge Lifestyle Magazine. Richard Nye trails him to Walton

Let me run this by you. You're a regular guy with a wife and kids, working in financial assurance. You like a good game of squash and a bit of dragon boat paddling, but in general, the nearest you get to a walk on the wild side is the Painshill interchange in the rush hour. Then one fine day the manager of your boat club suggests that you might like to walk to the North Pole - unguided - with only a diabetes expert in tow. Do you twist or stick?

Steven East from Walton decided to twist. Furthermore, in recognition of our pre-event coverage, he took the *Elmbridge Lifestyle Magazine* along with him.

"Jock was always going off on these adventures and coming back suntanned," jokes Steven. "I said that he should tell me about them in advance. This time he decided to call my bluff."

'Jock' turns out to be Jock Wishart, one of Britain's foremost modern day adventurers. In 1996 he and fellow trailblazer David Hempleman-Adams organized an "expedition with a difference", successfully shepherding ten intrepid novices on the first ever televised trek to the Magnetic North Pole. In April of this year the two men teamed up again to recreate the trek - but this time as a race. From Resolute Bay in Canada, it took the five teams a shade over three weeks to cover the 350 frostbitten, snowblinding miles to the Pole. And although they were only third overall - the race was in four timed stages - it was 39-year-old Steven and his team mate Mike Krimholtz who won the last leg, beating everyone to the top of the world.

"It was an amazing moment, the pinnacle of everything for which we'd trained since October. We couldn't understand why the two top teams weren't already there. Apart from the jockey Richard Dunwoody, they were all ex-military, Arctic warfare types. Also they were skiing; we were walking.

"We knew that they had started the last leg a day ahead of us, but for some reason they decided to camp for the night just short of the finish. We just kept on going."

What happened when the others showed up?

"Well, Richard Dunwoody was pretty cool, but the first team were really peeved. They'd won every other leg. How were they going to tell their £80,000

unbroken daylight, sunset and sunrise just a few minutes apart; polar bears lurking; the ever present threat of frostbite, leading almost inevitably to gangrene; and, worst of all, blizzards.

"As you approach the Pole it gets windier. Visibility can be down to five feet. On one occasion we were in a blizzard, and since we were crossing a frozen ocean there was nowhere to hide. We couldn't pitch our tent because the wind would have ripped it to shreds. It was even too cold to take our gloves off for food. There was no alternative but to keep going - 30 hours without a break. That was our most frightening experience, but it was also the most satisfying. When the same thing happened again, we knew that we could endure it."

And they did. On the first day of May, at around 1pm, the team's Global Position System - a device which records one's precise location to the nearest 20ft on the planet - gave Steve and Mike the good news: mission accomplished; Pole attained; *Amundsen woz 'ere*. Less than 250 people had ever been to a Pole. Other than 18 solo-handers, none had ever done it without a guide.

And did our heroes go wild? Did they rip off their gear and make some rousing speech about Elmbridge and the destiny of Man?

"No, we were just confused because the others weren't there," admits Steven. "So, being English, we just pitched our tent and had a nice cup of tea."

And curled up with a good magazine.

Steven's journey was partly to raise money for *Born Too Soon* and *In Safe Hands*, a neonatal charity based at Kingston Hospital NHS Trust.

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sponsors that they hadn't got there first? There were a few gunshots fired, I can tell you."

What - at you guys?

"No, into the air."

Ah well: the course of polar adventure ne'er did run smooth. Even before setting off on April 9, Steve and Mike lost their third team member, Norman - and he was the navigator!

"I think he had 'Arctic shock,'" explains Steven charitably. "It is so, so cold up there. Sometimes it gets down to -49 degrees. Before leaving England we all spent the day in a fridge, but that was only -17. Norman just had to bail out, so on the night before the race Mike and I were up till 3.30am studying pamphlets about ten inches thick."

After that it was all quite routine: 19 hour days; constant falling through the ice;