



News



Peter Turkstra sets up his tent on the Arctic ice



At Longyearbyen City Center with statue of Longyear



Checking out their tents and gear



Walking into town (Longyearbyen)

## Dressed not to chill

### North Pole trekkers making slow, steady progress

By Paul Legall  
The Hamilton Spectator  
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From the inside out, Peter Turkstra is well dressed to ward off the arctic chills.

In their light-weight Gortex parkas and matching wind pants, a group of local adventurers could be the best dressed folk to ever reach the North Pole.

Their grizzled predecessors, whose footsteps they're following to the top of the world, were positively shabby by comparison, in their tattered skin garments and seal skin boots.

But the five local men aren't out to make a fashion statement. They're simply using advances in modern technology to make their excursion as safe and comfortable as possible, in one of the most inhospitable places in the world.

Although they've all participated in high-risk outdoor activities, such as mountain skiing, deep sea



Photos by John Rennison, the Hamilton Spectator parks



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Links

>> [What's Happening](#)

>> [Story Index](#)

**Multimedia Studio**

>> [Pole Track Video](#)

>> [April 9 audio](#)

>> [April 10 audio](#)

>> [April 11 audio](#)

>> [April 12 audio \(1\)](#)

>> [April 12 audio \(2\)](#)

>> [April 13 audio](#)

>> [April 14 audio](#)

>> [April 15 audio](#)

>> [April 16 audio](#)

>> [April 17 audio](#)

diving and mountain biking, they'd never dealt with arctic weather conditions until this week.

But they feel their high-tech equipment and the able leadership of veteran adventurer, Doug Stoup, 42, will make up for their lack of experience.

"There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing," 45-year-old Paul Hubner said during a photo-op with three of his teammates last week.



jacket

As the owner of Baffin Inc., which makes high-arctic footwear in Stoney Creek, Hubner provided the team with his Baffin Boots for the trip. They're supposed to keep your feet warm at minus 100 C and have been worn to the coldest regions of the world by adventurer's like Stoup.

Hubner and Stoup met during an outdoor trade show in Salt Lake City, Utah, seven years ago and their friendship evolved into the current adventure.

The other local men are: Fred Losani, 41, and Peter Turkstra, 42, of Hamilton, and Steve Stipsits, 43, and Scott Shawyer, 35, of Burlington. An American adventurer is also along.

They're using the expedition to highlight the plight of child poverty in Hamilton and have raised half a million dollars in pledges to help alleviate the problem.

The team had just finished their third day on the pack ice when Stoup called the Hamilton Spectator via satellite phone Thursday to report their progress.

While the high-tech gear has been living up to expectations, the polar ice has been less than co-operative, by drifting in the wrong direction and creating an "arctic treadmill."

Since setting out from ice station Borneo on April 11, the men had slogged about 40 kilometres. But for every two steps they took, they lost one step to the southward drift of the ice. They'd only made 20 kilometres of forward movement and were still 70 kilometres from the top of the world.

Ever the optimist, Stoup was confident the forces of nature would change and the ice would take a "positive drift."

He said team members were still in "good spirits" as they drift off to sleep for their third night on the trail.

Each man has been lugging a sledge with about 45 kilograms of supplies and gear over the pack ice for about eight hours a day. Made of carbon fibre material with Kevlar tops, the sledges each weigh about three kilograms. They look like small canoes and can be floated across open water.

The trekkers also reduce their loads by eating freeze-dried food, which is rehydrated with melted snow.

They sleep in three small tents. And while curled up in their sleeping bags, they wear vapor barrier lining to prevent condensation from forming inside the tent.

While slogging over the pack ice, they wear layers of clothing that can be easily opened or removed to reduce sweating and prevent moisture from building up. They also wear undergarments that wick the sweat away from the body.

"Trying to stay dry is a top priority," said Hugh Dale-Harris, 35, who was part of a five-man British team that reached the North Pole with two dog sleds last year.

The group was trying to replicate American explorer Robert Peary's historic voyage in April 1909. He's commonly recognized as the first person to set foot on the geographic North Pole, although another explorer, Frederick Cook, claimed he got there first. He's generally dismissed as a fraud.

In his trek, Dale-Harris used a heavy wooden sledge similar to Peary's, which created challenges that the Stoup expedition probably won't face.

When he encountered wide expanses of open water, known as leads, he couldn't simply drag the sledge across as he would have with a carbon fibre model.

Instead, he travelled along the edge of the ice floe until he found a narrower gap where it was safe to cross. Sometimes he would build a small ice bridge by throwing chunks of snow and ice into the water and waiting for it to freeze over. The zigzag route added several kilometres to his journey.

Like many great explorers, Peary was influenced by the Inuit and emulated their ways. He wore heavy skin parkas and slept in igloos rather than tents.

Dale-Harris, who also tries to adhere to the native ways, says modern equipment alone might add to the comfort, but doesn't necessarily guarantee the success of a polar trek. You still have to be aware of the environment and make smart decisions along the way.

In that regard, the local trekkers are putting their faith in Stoup, who has proven his mettle by skiing to the South Pole and climbing one of the highest mountains in the world.

Unlike Peary's expedition, however, there will be no doubt about whether Stoup and his crew make it to the top of the world. Among their collection of gadgets, they have a Global Positioning System, which will accurately pinpoint the geographic North Pole as the ice shelf moves and shifts around them. They're also filing regular progress reports via satellite phone and e-mail.

When they reach the top in a few days, they'll be reaching into their supplies for a piece of cake to celebrate the occasion.

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