

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)

POLAR TRIUMPH

ADVENTURERS REACH TOP OF THE WORLD

**By Marissa Nelson
The Hamilton Spectator**
(Apr 19, 2006)

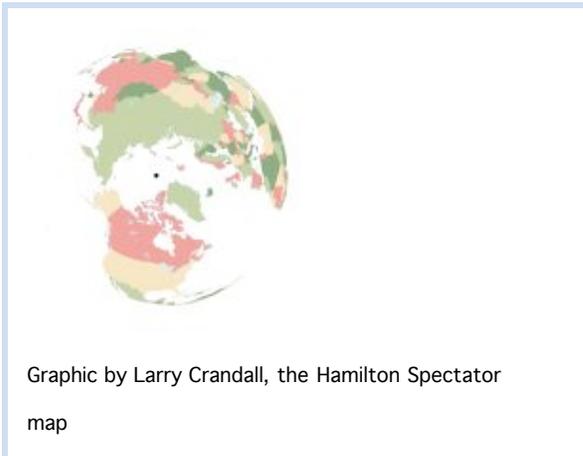
It was the ending they all wanted.

Around noon yesterday, a week after setting out across some of the world's least hospitable terrain, five local men reached their goal: the North Pole.

"We are on top of the world for sure," said an elated Doug Stoup, the team leader, on a scratchy satellite phone. "Everyone is in fantastic spirits."

The seven-member team only had a little more than an hour at the geographic North Pole before getting plucked from the sea ice by helicopters.

The team, which set out for the North Pole April 11, included Paul Hubner, of Stoney Creek-based Baffin Inc.; Turkstra Lumber president Peter Turkstra; Losani Homes CEO Fred Losani; Branthaven Homes owner Steve Stipsits, and Scott Shawyer,



Graphic by Larry Crandall, the Hamilton Spectator map



Four of the five local trekkers to reach the North Pole, Steve Stipsits



Fred Losani



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CEO of an engineering company.

Stoup said yesterday around 12:30 p.m. that he'd already called the helicopters and expected them at the Pole shortly. The team made it to the Pole after eight days skiing in treacherous conditions.

The team members were pulling their supplies in sledges behind them.

"We put our arms up in the air. We couldn't believe it was over," said Stoup, describing the moment. "It's truly a spectacular place. We're really enjoying it and taking it all in."

Their last night on the ice was spent about 11 kilometres from the North Pole. While it doesn't seem far, it was a challenge, Stoup said, because of the massive ice ridges they had to clamber over yesterday to reach their goal. The mounds of ice were sometimes as high as 20 feet.

The other major obstacle was open water called leads. The weather has been relatively mild. Yesterday was one of the coldest days at -22 C -- not very cold for that part of the world at this time of year.

"We've had a lot more (open water) than we've experienced on previous trips, so Mother Nature was throwing everything at us she could ... trying to keep us from getting to the North Pole," Stoup explained. "But we arrived and we're happy as can be."

The helicopters ferried them to Ice Station Borneo -- a Russian-French floating research station at 89 degrees in the Arctic Ocean. They were to fly to Norway today.

Stoup said the view from the Pole was incredible.

"You'd think it was just a white stark environment, but there are so many different colours, especially when the sun comes out," he said.

While the men camped on older ice for their final night -- between 15 and 20 years old, much of their last day was on ice just a few days old that is



Paul Hubner



John Rennison, the Hamilton Spectator

Peter Turkstra.



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only a few centimetres thick.

"You could almost see the ice move as you went across it. A lot of the guys were worried it wouldn't support us."

While the warmer weather makes travel more comfortable, it makes the ice conditions more dangerous.

"My biggest concern was us falling in," Stoup stressed.

He actually had a scare on Monday, when his hand and one foot went through the ice he was testing.

By the time Stoup got to the Pole, he was thinking of luxuries back home -- seeing his family, pizza and beer.

The team also reported seeing reindeer tracks at the North Pole and were planning to spend some time trying to see if they could find Santa.

"We'll update you as soon as we find something. We're looking around here," Stoup said.

The crew was hoping to raise \$500,000 on their trek to the top of the world. The last the team had heard, that figure stood at \$360,000. The money is to fight child poverty in Hamilton, with most of it going to nutrition and music programs in central Hamilton schools and the rest for food banks, shelters and other poverty-related programs.

The plan is to identify breakfast or nutrition programs in place in both public and Catholic schools and provide funding for supplies. In music, the group plans to fund appearances by musicians and the purchase of instruments for school programs.

The Spectator's Newspaper In Education developed a curriculum for elementary school children, with kids in 61 public and 40 Catholic school classrooms using regular coverage of the trek to supplement their learning of the Arctic. Students are in touch with Stoup and his team through thespec.com.

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