

# ^ BEN SAUNDERS v

28 December 2017

**Ben Saunders reaches South Pole on his solo, unassisted and unsupported crossing of Antarctica. After facing unrelenting sastrugi and continuous white outs, he halts expedition following fears he will run out of food.**

**28 December 2017, Antarctica** – 52 days and 1,086km into his Trans-Antarctic Solo expedition, Ben Saunders has reached the South Pole. He is the third person in history, and the first Briton, to have skied full length expeditions to both poles solo.

Throughout the expedition, Saunders has faced unrelenting sastrugi – hard packed wind-blown formations of snow and ice, which are usually ankle to knee height but on this expedition have reached shoulder level and higher – and has endured almost continuous white out conditions, meaning navigation is a constant challenge. Saunders commented ‘the physical exertion has felt more like a North Pole expedition, the conditions have left me depleted physically and mentally. I am 52 days into the expedition, and my Scott expedition in 2013 / 2014 saw us sled hauling for 105 days on the ice. I have never seen conditions like this in Antarctica’.

Having expected to reach the South Pole with 20 days of food remaining to see him through the final 576km of the journey, which he expected to take a minimum of 17 days, Saunders now has only 13 days of food left due to the ferocious conditions he has faced, which have drastically hampered progress.

Taking on more food at the Pole would render his unsupported record attempt a failure; continuing on with depleted rations would mean banking on near perfect conditions and unhampered skiing. There are also sections of the final glacier where air rescue is impossible due to the nature of the terrain, and this must also be factored into the decision faced by Saunders. There is no margin for error here and bad weather, not unusual in the most hostile desert on our planet, would further jeopardize Saunders reaching his goal.

‘I made a promise to Henry to get home in one piece. As much as I am determined to finish this trip for him, I need to make my decision based on safety and not let my own determination cloud my judgement. There is a very fine line between success and failure in extreme environments’.

‘I don't think Henry would be telling me to go for it given my concerns about the diminished safety margin. It feels like the most respectful thing I can do after Henry's

fate is to be prudent and safe. I've been in this position before on my Scott expedition, gambling on leaving the Pole with less food than I'd planned. It resulted in us getting into serious trouble - Tarka and I were forced to halve our rations for a few days to try to make our first depot, the weather turned bad, we both became exhausted and hypothermic, I therefore have very little inclination to gamble on setting off from the Pole again without sufficient food'.

'One of the emails I received as I was nearing the Pole, when friends knew that I was facing this excruciating decision and were bombarding me with messages of support, was from a friend who wrote: 'I defer here to Whympers well-known wise words: "Climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are nought without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste; look well to each step; and from the beginning think what may be the end.'"

This message helped Saunders make the final decision, which he said has troubled him over the last 4 weeks and has added to his physical and mental turmoil.

Having reached the South Pole at 1600 on 28 December, and with 13 days of food left, Saunders decided to halt his expedition at the South Pole. Saunders is now waiting to be picked up to return to Union Glacier, the ALE camp on the western edge of Antarctica. From there he will fly to Punta Arenas, Chile and then home to the UK.

Despite calling a halt to the expedition now, in reaching the South Pole Saunders becomes the third person in history to have completed full length solo ski expeditions to both the North and the South Poles.

This is Saunders's twelfth expedition in the Polar regions. In 2014 he completed the longest ever polar journey on foot, and the first completion of the expedition which defeated Captain Scott and Sir Ernest Shackleton – a 105 day round trip from the Ross Ice Shelf on the coast of Antarctica to the South Pole and back again. Ben has covered more than 7,000km in the polar regions since 2001 and was the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in history to ski solo to the North Pole. Ben also holds the record for the longest solo Arctic journey by a Briton.

## **Background**

**In November 2017, Ben Saunders set off to attempt the first ever solo, unassisted and unsupported crossing of Antarctica in memory of his friend Lt Col Henry Worsley.**

This west-to-east traverse from Berkner Island to the Ross Ice Shelf via the South Pole was planned by Ben's close friend Lt Col Henry Worsley, who nearly completed the expedition before falling ill and passing away in hospital in Chile in January 2016.

The expedition has been made possible with the support of Canada Goose. The leading outerwear brand, which has a 60-year history developing products for people working, living and exploring the harshest places on earth, has supplied Ben with customised kit for his expedition. The project has additional support from Land Rover and The Bremont Watch Company.

Ben is proud to be supporting The Endeavour Fund, part of The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, which supports wounded, injured and sick veterans through providing opportunities in sport and adventurous challenge. Ben is dedicated to continuing the efforts of Henry Worsley, who was raising funds for the Endeavour Fund when he died in Antarctica. Henry's legacy raised over £500,000 for the charity, and Ben is determined to continue this fundraising in memory of him. Ben takes with him to Antarctica an Endeavour Fund flag which was taken to Antarctica by Henry, and returned to the Endeavour Fund after his death by his widow, Joanna Worsley.

Ben's progress has been broadcast online in real time, at [bensaunders.com](http://bensaunders.com) and on social media (@polarben).

### **Expedition facts:**

**Distance:** 1,033 miles / 1,662 k

**Duration:** +/- 65 days alone in Antarctica, including Christmas and New Year

**Ambient temperature range:** zero to -50 degrees centigrade

**Sledge weight:** 125kg at start of expedition

**Altitude:** between sea level and 3,100 metres

**Calories consumed:** 6,250 per day

**Changes of underwear:** two

**# ENDS #**

**For all press enquiries related to Ben Saunders and his next expedition, please contact: Victoria Nicholson: [victoria@bensaunders.com](mailto:victoria@bensaunders.com) / 07801 418014**

## **Notes to Editors:**

### **Canada Goose Inc.**

Founded in a small warehouse in Toronto, Canada in 1957, Canada Goose has grown into one of the world's leading makers of performance luxury apparel. Every collection is informed by the rugged demands of the Arctic and inspired by relentless innovation and uncompromised craftsmanship. From Antarctic research facilities and the Canadian High Arctic, to the streets of New York, London, Milan, Paris, and Tokyo, people are proud to wear Canada Goose products. Employing more than 2,000 people worldwide, Canada Goose is a recognized leader for its Made in Canada commitment, and is a long-time partner of Polar Bears International. [canadagoose.com](http://canadagoose.com)

### **Land Rover**

Land Rover was one of the title partners of Ben's last expedition, and Ben has been a Global Brand Ambassador for Land Rover for nearly a decade. Since 1948 Land Rover has been manufacturing authentic 4x4s that represent true 'breadth of capability' across the model range. Defender, Discovery, Discovery Sport, Range Rover, Range Rover Sport, Range Rover Velar and Range Rover Evoque each defines the world's SUV sectors, with 80 per cent of this model range exported to over 100 countries. <https://www.landrover.com>

### **The Bremont Watch Company**

Bremont is an award-winning British luxury watch brand, manufacturing mechanical watches in Henley-on-Thames, England. Bremont is making considerable investment with its UK watch making and manufacturing and at the end of 2014 launched a new facility in Silverstone to manufacture case and movement components. Co-founded by brothers Nick & Giles English in 2002, Bremont has made a substantial impact on the watch industry. The brand remains true to its original principles of: aviation and military, British engineering and adventure. As well as manufacturing watches for some of the most exclusive military squadrons around the world, Bremont continues to play an influential role in revitalising the British watch industry, the birthplace of numerous timekeeping innovations still used today. Bremont was delighted to partner with Ben for his last expedition and designed a bespoke watch – The Terra Nova – to mark this achievement. Bremont will be working with Ben again to produce a new limited-edition watch for the Trans-Antarctic Solo Expedition. <https://www.bremont.com>

### **The Endeavour Fund**

The Endeavour Fund is a project managed as part of the Armed Forces Programmes at The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and

Prince Harry. It plays an important role in supporting Servicemen and women with the ambition to rediscover their self-belief and fighting spirit through sport and physical challenges. Engagement in physical challenge promotes recovery by targeting the physical, psychological and social impacts of injury.

[www.endeavourfund.co.uk](http://www.endeavourfund.co.uk).

For the latest information on the Endeavour Fund see: [@endeavourfund](https://twitter.com/EndeavourFund) / <https://twitter.com/EndeavourFund>

### **Henry Worsley**

Lieutenant Colonel Alastair Edward Henry Worsley, MBE (4 October 1960 – 24 January 2016) was a British explorer and British Army officer, having just completed a 36-year career serving with the Royal Green Jackets and later the Rifles Regiment, retiring in October 2015. Since childhood he had pursued a passionate interest in the lives of the Antarctic explorers of the Edwardian age – Shackleton, Scott and Amundsen. Attempting to be the first person to cross Antarctica on foot without external assistance, he crossed more than 900 miles and was forced, by exhaustion and ill health, to call for help 130 miles from his journey's intended end. Rescued and flown to a hospital in Punta Arenas, in the Patagonia region of southern Chile, he was diagnosed with peritonitis, and died on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Henry was 55 and left his wife Joanna and children Max and Alicia.

Henry's final expedition was raising money for The Endeavour Fund.

### **Solo expeditions to both North Pole and South Pole**

#### **Børge Ousland**

North Pole 1994 unsupported

South Pole 1995 unsupported (but assisted with kites)

#### **Fedor Konyukhov**

North Pole solo 1990 (but with resupplies)

South Pole solo 1995

#### **Ben Saunders**

North Pole solo 2004 from c70km north of Cape Arktichevsky as flew over open water to start (didn't leave from land due to melting sea ice in the Arctic).

South Pole solo 2017.

### **You can sponsor Ben and The Endeavour Fund directly at**

<http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/polarben>

N.B. no charitable funds are being used to pay for the expedition: all donations go directly to The Endeavour Fund and the expedition costs are wholly sponsored by the expedition sponsors.