

EXPEDITION NEWS



July 2008 - Volume Fifteen, Number Seven

EXPEDITION NEWS, now in its 14th year, is the monthly review of significant expeditions, research projects and newsworthy adventures. It is distributed online and to media representatives, corporate sponsors, educators, research librarians, explorers, environmentalists, and outdoor enthusiasts. This forum on exploration covers projects that stimulate, motivate and educate.

THE 2008 STEVE FOSSETT SEARCH & RECOVERY EXPEDITION

In late summer, a highly trained and experienced team will lead a two-week search and recovery mission into northern Nevada to locate missing adventurer/explorer Steve Fossett.

The team consists of individuals from various backgrounds, including an Alaskan bush pilot and a retired commercial pilot serving as aviation consultants, two wilderness first responders experienced in wilderness survival, three professional mountain guides who have worldwide climbing experience, search and rescue professionals, a communications specialist, and an expert in the use of balloons with camera search technology.

The balloon technology is a new and innovative method to attempt to locate any possible Fossett crash site via a bird's eye view of the search areas. The mobile helium balloons are tethered to a person walking or to a mobile vehicular platform such as a 4x4 or ATV. The balloons will carry cameras that may detect anomalies in the surrounding terrain.

Expedition leader Robert Hyman, 49, of Washington, D.C., a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (FRGS) and Life Fellow of The Explorers Club, is coordinator for all on site activities. Robert Atwater, 60, of Stafford, Va., also a Fellow of the RGS and Life Fellow of The Explorers Club, is the team operations director and mission contact for media and public relations. Lew Toulmin, Ph.D., 57, of Silver Spring, Md., also a Fellow of the RGS and member of The Explorers Club, is the research director.

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EXPEDITION UPDATE

Sunny Outlook for Solar Plane

Plans continue for Solar Impulse, a planned circumnavigation of the earth by a solar-powered airplane (See *EN*, September 2006). Construction of a 4,409 lbs. (2,000 kg) aircraft with 262-ft. (80 meter) wingspan is scheduled for 2009-2010. The five-stage round-the-world flight is expected to depart in 2011, on a flight over land close to the equator, but essentially in the northern hemisphere. During five stopovers, pilots will be replaced, media interviews will be scheduled, and presentations will be held with political and scientific authorities. Each flight segment will last from three to four days, which is considered to be the maximum a single pilot can endure.

The Solar Impulse will gain altitude during the day and descend during the night to conserve its batteries.

Lead pilot is Bertrand Piccard, 50, who originated Solar Impulse as well as the Breitling Orbiter balloon circumnavigation. His success as inboard commander of the first non-stop round-the-world balloon flight in 1999 established him as a well-known "savanturier" (scholar-adventurer).

Co-pilot and project co-founder is André Borschberg, 55, graduate of the EPFL (Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) in mechanical engineering and of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in management sciences. He has trained as a pilot at the Swiss Air Force School.

Last May near Zurich, both pilots took turns at the controls of the HB-SIA prototype during virtual flights lasting 25 hours. The computer simulation was possible thanks to two separate systems: (1) a flight simulator developed by the

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In preparation for the expedition, team leaders have conducted over 20 interviews with participants of last year's search effort. Consultation has taken place with several search and rescue professionals and the team conducted extensive review of maps and possible travel paths that Fossett may have taken. "The odds of finding Steve may not be great, but I know they are zero if we do not try," Hyman tells *EN*.

An advanced mountain base camp will be established in an undisclosed location in Nevada's Wassuk Mountains to deploy search teams using a "sweep method" to cover remote and hard to reach areas that have been identified as "high probability" locations of the Fossett aircraft.

Steve Fossett, Fellow of both The Explorers Club and Royal Geographical Society and an Explorers Club Medalist, was a personal friend of Atwater's. In honor of Fossett's activities in Scouting, the flag of the World Organization of the Scout Movement will be carried during the expedition. (For more information: Robert E. Hyman, robertehyman@gmail.com).

In a related story, Alfred Garwood, a freelance writer for the *Mountain Gazette*, offered some poignant comments about Fossett in a recent issue. He writes, "Like (Amelia) Earhart, they still haven't found Steve Fossett's plane (at least as of press time). (And who knows, maybe like [Dr.] Livingstone, he'll come out of it still). But unlike Ms. Earhart, his story has quickly faded. Yet it is important here to see a man who, in our own time, had the character and vision to challenge himself." ▲

Quote of the Month

"I don't want to write about climbing; I don't want talk about it; I don't want to photograph it; I don't want to think about it; all I want to do is do it."

— Chuck Pratt, legendary rock climber (1939-2000). (Source: Bradford Washburn American Mountaineering Museum, Golden, Colo.).

In September 1960, Pratt, along with Royal Robbins, Joe Fitschen and Tom Frost climbed the second ascent of the Nose of El Capitan in an impressive six and a half days (see related story). In September 1961, Robbins, Pratt and Tom Frost climbed for three days to summit 900 feet on a new El Cap route, the Salathe Wall, the hardest and baddest big wall route in the world at that time.

Solar Impulse engineers and assembled by EPFL, giving the pilot a panoramic view on five screens arranged in a 210 degree arc around the cockpit; and (2) a mission management system combining meteorological conditions, air traffic control restrictions and energy control for route optimization. Developed by Altran engineers, this system takes as its input 10,000 typical parameters of the airplane, keeping it in the most appropriate flying conditions. Test flights are scheduled for spring 2009.

Once the efficiency of the batteries will allow the reduction of weight, it is believed the airplane could seat two pilots for very long flights, include a non-stop round-the-world flight.

"Solar Impulse is both a solar airplane with the ambition of flying night and day without using fuel, and a symbol of what our society must be capable of achieving in terms of energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies," said Piccard. The project cost is approximately \$95.8 million to pay for 55 people working for more than four years. Main sponsors are Deutsche Bank, Omega, and Solvay. (For more information: www.solar-impulse.com).

Big Expedition Ends Just Shy of Alaska Summit

On June 21, the team of four mountaineers on the Big Expedition for Cancer Research (See *EN*, March 2008) determined that they had reached the safe limits of their attempt to climb one of Alaska's unclimbed peaks. For nine hours, they battled unstable snow, ice and rock to move within 500 vertical feet of the summit of Peak 8290 in Glacier Bay's Fairweather Range. The two rope teams huddled at the high point and called an end to their attempt of the unclimbed mountain in the inaugural Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center's Big Expedition. The project was designed to create awareness of the search for a cancer cure.

"Extremely hazardous" were the first two words out of 32-year-old Matt Farmer's mouth when he made the sat phone call back from base camp to the Big Expedition's Seattle Communications Center. "We gave this mountain everything we had within the boundaries of safe, rational mountaineering standards. Sometimes the mountain sets the limits and we have to accept them," Farmer said. Farmer from Seattle and Dawn Glanc, 32, from Bellingham, Wash., were on one team. Kevin Mahoney, 39, and Bayard Russell, 30, both from Madison, N.H., were on the other.

Thousands of people followed the climb for cancer research in the media and on-line. As the team returned, they vowed to attempt more unclimbed mountains in the future. (For more information: www.fhrc.org).

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Have Gear, Will Travel

Midwest Mountaineering, Minneapolis, has become the official Gear & Equipment sponsor of the 1909 – 2009 Peary Centennial Expedition (See *EN*, August 2007). On February 17, 2009 explorer Lonnie Dupre of Grand Marais, Minn., and a team of Arctic explorers and Inuit companions will begin a 1,600-mile dog sled journey through the polar reaches of the high Arctic in the footsteps of Robert E. Peary and other explorers of his time. The expedition team, accompanied by food, gear and equipment, will depart Minnesota on January 7, 2009, bound for the polar Inuit village of Qaanaaq in northwest Greenland. Qaanaaq is located 1,500 miles north of Minnesota and the expedition will travel there by chartered aircraft via Ottawa and Iqaluit, Canada. Once in Greenland, the team will train through the polar night for approximately 1-1/2 months with their dog teams. When the sun and light finally return on February 17, the team will begin its 1,600-mile journey north.

The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, has teamed up with the Peary Centennial Expedition as Science Partner of the expedition. The team will bring to Greenland old black and white photographs from the Academy's archives, taken in 1909 during Peary's trip. Since these images contain no descriptions, their purpose is to locate the geological formations that match the ones on the pictures and determine whether Inuit elders can recall the identity of people captured on film. (For more information: www.pearycentennial.com).

Mawson's Hut Slowly Being Restored

As freezing gales howled outside, Douglas Mawson sat in his tiny den, recording the details of his Antarctic adventure. Nearly 100 years later, and despite the ravages of one of the planet's most inhospitable climates, his little space still stands inside the expedition's main living quarters (See *EN*, September 2006).

So, too, does the workshop, the transit hut, where movements of stars and planets were observed, and the magnetograph house, set up to monitor the South Magnetic Pole. Thanks to work by the Mawson's Huts Foundation, the buildings erected by members of the 1912-13 expedition are slowly being restored, according to a story in the July 2 *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The back-breaking work, which can only be undertaken in the two-month window the weather allows each summer, are documented in a new book, *Mawson's Huts*, published to raise funds for additional renovations. The book showcases Frank Hurley's original images as well as photographs taken in recent years.

Inside the living shed it's almost as though the men had only just stepped outside – there are stacks of magazines on a shelf, a burnt-down candle in a tin, unopened tins of food and old clothes.

Sponsors will be pleased to have made products that last: there's a case of Colman's flour, half a jar of Heinz Indian relish, a rusty tin of CSR's Golden Syrup and another of Horlick's Malted Milk. Bottles of medicines and the chemicals Hurley used in his darkroom appear perfectly preserved (see images at www.mawsons-huts.org.au).

There have been eight major expeditions since the foundation was formed in 1997, says its chairman, David Jensen, and while great progress has been made, there is still much work to do. "It'll go on for years," he says. ▲

EXPEDITION NOTES

Toilet Training on Everest – A young mountaineer from Nepal has claimed a major breakthrough in his bid to promote eco-friendly climbing on Mount Everest – with his team he reached extraordinary heights of cleanliness. Expedition leader Dawa Steven Sherpa has made it his mission to clean up the world's highest peak, and at the same time revolutionize big mountain climbing by conducting some badly needed toilet training. "Nobody set out to destroy the mountain, it's just a problem that slowly crept up," said Sherpa, just back in Kathmandu after his Eco Everest team took what could be the ultimate personal hygiene challenge. The idea of the expedition, he said, was to leave nothing behind – not even a yellowed pee-hole in the snow.

Decades of heavyweight expeditions have badly soiled Everest. "When mountaineering started, there was only one expedition per year, so they didn't bother about their waste as they thought the impact was minimal. But as mountaineering got more popular, that same attitude continued," he said.

"People just threw their trash and human waste into crevasses."

The result, he lamented, is that the sacred mountain is now dotted with unpleasant surprises. "There are some examples of climbers who chopped off some ice to melt for water, only to find there was human excrement in it," said the 24-year-old. "At one of the camps where I set up my tent, when the ice started to melt after a couple of weeks, we found we had pitched on a toilet tip. It does not really decompose because it's so cold and dry," Sherpa told the AFP news service.

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But last May, Sherpa's team, made up of local support staff and 11 clients, tested Clean Mountain Cans – essentially sturdy, small plastic barrels developed in the U.S.

“When I told the expedition members, they were all for it. I was scared the Sherpas would not like it as nobody likes handling human waste, but everyone was great and very proud to be part of the solution,” said Sherpa. And instead of the kerosene or cooking gas normally used at base camp, the expedition tested parabolic solar heaters that proved more than equal to the job.

Support staff were also given bonuses for hauling down rubbish accumulated over the years – including parts of a crashed helicopter, old ropes, tents, climbing gear and even the body of a climber who went missing in the 1970s.

Why Penguins March – An attempt will be made during the coming Antarctic summer to understand those factors that affect the survival of fledgling Emperors on their maiden excursion from the rookery, and factors that affect the survival of adult Emperor Penguins during the pre-molt and post-molt fattening phases of the annual cycle when the ecology of Emperor Penguins is poorly understood.

The study is being conducted at the Snow Hill rookery, the northern-most Emperor Penguin rookery in Antarctica, under the supervision of Sandra Birnhak, director of the Foundation for Antarctic Research, Inc. and Out of Antarctica, Inc., New York. Since her retirement from the film industry, Birnhak has been channeling her energy into raising funds for scientific research projects in Antarctica. The rookery is adjacent to an expanding krill fishery and is in a region of the world that is fast becoming affected by global warming.

During the first of the two crucial adult fattening phases, adult Emperors must double their body weight in order to endure the three-week molt (when the birds are unable to feed) and grow a full coat of new plumage. During the second phase, adults must double their body weight a second time, peaking at about 90 lbs., to survive the upcoming four-month winter fast. Any human-induced changes to the pack-ice environment affecting the birds' capacity to fatten normally could affect the survival of the Emperors at Snow Hill.

This study will be conducted jointly by the Instituto Antartico, Argentina, the Universidad de la Plata, Argentina, and the Australian Antarctic Division. Study leader is Graham Robertson of the Australian Antarctic Division. The project is seeking financial support from people and organizations concerned about the protection of Emperor Penguins and their breeding sites. (For more information: www.quarkexpeditions.com).

Peak Named for Elizabeth Hawley – The well-known French ice climber François Damilano has named a newly climbed peak in Nepal after Elizabeth Hawley, the American Alpine Club honorary member and longtime chronicler of mountaineering in the Himalaya. Damilano made a solo first ascent of Peak Hawley (20,282-ft./6182 m) in the Dhaulagiri Group in early May, after climbing 23,760-ft./7242 m Putha Hiunchuli.

Hawley has been documenting expeditions in Nepal since the American Everest expedition in 1963 and has been a crucial figure in the success of Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust. Her archives were compiled into the AAC-published Himalayan Database. PlanetMountain.com has published a story with more details and photos of Peak Hawley, and a picture of Damilano and Hawley in Kathmandu.

Elizabeth Hawley defied the conventions of her era: an American woman who traveled the world on her own before settling in Nepal for good in 1960, she is recognized as the one source the mountaineering world depends on to document, authenticate, and evaluate the significance of expeditions in the Himalaya. According to her biography, *I'll Call You in Kathmandu*, by Bernadette McDonald (2005, The Mountaineers Books), she is an enigmatic woman who – though she's never climbed a mountain – is so well respected for her rigorous interview style that some of the world's elite mountaineers confess to fear her sharp tongue and relentless probing.

Biking the World's Belly Buttons – Long distance cyclist, avid traveler, botanist and novelist Jim Malusa, 51, writes of his anti-summit expeditions to the lowest points of each continent in his new book, *Into Thick Air*. Why did he go down instead of up during his six-year series of “anti-expeditions”?

“Two things appealed to me: I wouldn't have to wear thermal underwear and I could ride my bicycle,” replied the Tucson native. The highpoint of his low-point trip was his journey through Djibouti, Africa. There Malusa partook in the daily custom of chewing khat, the coffee-like stimulant that “makes all your worries go away,” and endured periodic stoning by local children.

Despite the ferocious reputation of the people of Djibouti, Malusa told an audience at the New Canaan (Conn.) Library on May 27 that during his ride through Djibouti, he was treated with kindness by the locals, and as thanks, distributed postcards of a symbol of the American West – Tucson-area cacti.

“The pleasure of going down rather than up is no one really cares. You don't have a sponsor like The North Face worried if you reached the top or not,” he said. ▲▲



MEDIA MATTERS

Pair Regain El Capitan Speed Record – Hans Florine and Yuji Hirayama set a speed record on the Nose, the most famous route on the most famous wall in the world’s rock-climbing Mecca of Yosemite National Park. Their July 2 ascent shaved 2 minutes 12 seconds off the previous record set in October by the German brothers Thomas and Alexander Huber.

And so ended the latest chapter in one of the most singular competitions in the world of sports, one not sanctioned by any official body, with no judges, and whose official time was kept on a stopwatch clipped to Florine’s climbing harness. Nonetheless, their attempt to set a record has set abuzz the world of climbing, and the feat astonishes even seasoned rock climbers, who typically take three days or more to climb the granite monolith, according to a July 3 story in the *New York Times* by Miguel Helft.

Speed competitions remain a fringe activity in the clubby world of rock climbing, and they are not welcome by everyone. Some traditionalists say climbing is an opportunity to be one with nature, more lifestyle than sport, and see competitions as little more than a sideshow.

Florine and Hirayama climbed simultaneously for most of the route, tied to one end of the same rope. The rope was always clipped through carabiners into equipment stuck in the wall, so a mistake would not necessarily mean a fatal plunge to the bottom of the cliff. But a misstep by one climber could pull the other climber off his stance and send both on long, bone-crushing falls.

The Ski Channel to Cover Rock Climbing – The Ski Channel is a video-on-demand (VOD) cable television network founded by Steve Bellamy who also founded The Tennis Channel television network. It features mountain oriented sports, activity and lifestyle content. Thus far distribution deals with Time Warner Cable, Brighthouse Networks and Cox Communications have been announced, but Bellamy has stated that numerous other distribution deals will be announced shortly. The network is to launch sometime later this year.

The Ski Channel expects to broadcast events, movies, destination travel, news, equipment, instructional, real estate and all the different sports and activities that take place in the mountains in both the summer and winter. The channel carries ski, snowboard, mountain bike, rock climbing, base jumping, luge, hiking and a number of other mountain sports. Currently its rock climbing coverage consists mainly of media coverage about climbing that have appeared in print media. (For more information: www.theskichannel.com)

Oral Histories Provide Clues to Franklin Expedition

Mystery – More than 150 years after the disappearance of the *Erebus* and *Terror* – the famously ill-fated ships of the lost Franklin Expedition – fresh clues have emerged that could help solve Canadian history’s most enduring mystery, according to a June 25 story in Canada’s *National Post* by Randy Boswell.

A Montreal writer set to publish a book on Inuit oral chronicles from the era of Arctic exploration says she’s gathered a “hitherto unreported” account of a British ship wintering in 1850 in the Royal Geographical Society Islands – a significant distance west of the search targets of several 19th- and 20th-century expeditions that have probed the southern Arctic Ocean for Canada’s most sought-after shipwrecks.

Dorothy Harley Eber, author of the forthcoming *Encounters on the Passage: Inuit Meet the Explorers*, says the new details about Sir John Franklin’s disastrous Arctic voyage in the late 1840s emerged from interviews she conducted with several Inuit elders at Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.

The Inuit account – passed down from 19th-century ancestors who witnessed the British expedition’s failed attempt to find the Northwest Passage – describes “an exploring vessel” that anchored off the Royal Geographical Society Islands during the winter of 1850 because “they were iced-in and had no choice.”

Evidence of the expedition’s presence on the islands, according to Inuit oral history captured by Eber, can still be seen during the summer months in greasy deposits along the shore where “the ground is soiled by rendered seal oil blubber” used by stranded crewmen to fuel fires for cooking and warmth.

The Royal Geographical Society Islands lie between Victoria Island and King William Island where the Victoria Strait reaches the Queen Maud Gulf north of mainland Nunavut.

The location of the iced-in ship described by the Inuit is nearly 62 miles (100 km) to the northwest of a stretch of water between O’Reilly and Kirkwall islands – close to King William Island and the mainland Adelaide Peninsula – that has emerged as the prime search area for Franklin shipwreck hunters.

University of Toronto Press, which is publishing Eber’s book this fall, is billing the book as a must-read for Franklin aficionados, in which “new information opens up another fascinating chapter” on the tragic Arctic voyage.

Franklin himself died in June 1847, with the two ships at his command frozen in sea ice somewhere west of King William Island. The 105 surviving crew members battled

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bitter cold and ice-choked seas before succumbing to hunger and disease over the following few years.

Various artifacts from the Franklin Expedition and the remains of several crewmen have been discovered over years, but the ships have eluded searchers – including those on a major Canadian government-sponsored expedition in the 1990s.

The Holy Grail of Firsts – The travel industry keeps offering rarer and more meaningful ways to connect to the world, according to the Spring 2008 *New York Times* Travel magazine. “Like modern-day Edmund Hillarys, the uber-elite are going to the ends of the earth – and beyond – and they want to get there first,” writes Evan McGlenn. White Desert (www.white-desert.com), the only outfit ever to gain permission to pitch safari-style tents on Antarctica, now offers the chance to explore the continent instead of only seeing it from a boat. Last season every berth – about \$39,000 each – sold out.

McGlenn continues, “And in the race for the holy grail of firsts, Virgin Galactic (www.virgingalactic.com) will begin test flights into space this year. The company has already sold 200 spots at \$200,000 a pop, and not just to billionaires.” One of 80 accredited space agents worldwide reports, “We have some clients that have taken a second mortgage out on their house to pay for the flight.” ▲

BUZZ WORD

Buildering – The art of climbing buildings; a pun on “bouldering,” a genre of rock climbing performed on large boulders. Buildering was in the news in June when Frenchman Alain Robert walked up to the 52-story New York Times building in New York and proceeded to climb the tower’s decorative metal latticework to the top, 750 feet above the ground. A professional daredevil, Robert has scaled more than 80 buildings around the world. Often he’s arrested; other times he’s been invited to climb buildings for publicity or charity. (Source: *Wall Street Journal*, June 10). ▲

ON THE HORIZON

Craggin’ Classic – The American Alpine Club’s first annual Craggin’ Classic is scheduled for October 10-12 in Golden, Colo. The festival is open to AAC members and non-members alike, and provides the opportunity to climb with a variety of sponsored and international

athletes at classic areas like Eldorado Canyon. The event will be packed with parties, BBQs, bands, slide shows, AAC award announcements, even sumo wrestling, and is made possible with support from key industry sponsors, including Patagonia, Black Diamond, Mammut, Asolo, Lowe Alpine, The North Face, Climbing Magazine, and Urban Climber. (For more information: www.CragginClassic.com). ▲

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Himalaya Climbs and Treks – Five percent discount for Explorers Club members. Climbs and Treks with Dan Mazur and SummitClimb.com - Africa, Himalaya, Aconcagua, Everest Basecamp Treks, Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya Treks and Climbs. Ascents and walks around Africa, Tibet, China, Nepal and around the world with our experienced friendly team. Established for 18 years. Novices, and experts are welcome. 360 570 0715, info@SummitClimb.com, www.summitclimb.com.

New LEKI Antishock System – LEKI, the leading international manufacturer of trekking poles, has introduced a Soft Antishock-Lite (SAS-L) System that provides much more comfort along the trail. The impact energy is absorbed directly into the lower shaft. The perfect combination of steel spring and elastomer provides precise synchronization between spring strength and compression – making trekking with a pole more comfortable than ever, reducing stress on the joints, muscles and ligaments. (www.leki.com)

Tights, Tops and Sport Support Bras for Athletes – CW-X Conditioning Web is specifically tuned to provide total support to the key muscle groups and joints of the lower limbs and upper body. Tights and Tops, and the company’s new Sports Support Bras, are made for a wide variety of high-energy activities, including running, fitness walking, hiking, cycling, skiing, snowboarding, track and field, and other fitness activities. It has been worn to the summit of Everest on at least two occasions. (www.cw-x.com). ▲