

South Pole team is down a man

Trek delayed three days as they wait for frostbite victim to be airlifted out

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It took only 10 minutes in the frigid Antarctic winds for Mark MacLennan's hands to become frostbitten.

MacLennan, one of the four Hamiltonians trekking to the South Pole to raise money for local charities, removed his gloves earlier this week to retie the harness of the sledge he was pulling behind him.

He knew something was wrong when his fingers started to go numb.

MacLennan was airlifted to the Patriot Hills base in Antarctica for medical attention yesterday. If he had continued the trip, he would have risked losing his fingers.

"It's life or death out here -- there are no games," MacLennan said from Antarctica via a satellite phone. "I found that out within hours."

The setback has been disappointing for the team, made up of Peter Turkstra, Steve Stipsits, Fred Losani, MacLennan and their guide, American Doug Stoup.

The group was forced to put their 160-kilometre journey on hold while they waited for a medevac team to airlift MacLennan to Patriot Hills. It was three days before the weather co-operated.

To stay warm in the -35 to -40 C degree weather, the men had to stay in their small tents for most of the day. Disappointment about their teammate's injury coupled with the anxiety of losing time was frustrating for the adventurers, Turkstra said.

"The mood has been down because we couldn't get a sense of when the plane was coming. Being caged in a tent for days and days and days is tough," Turkstra said. "But you have to be prepared to be patient. When you're in Antarctica, you can't really control much."

MacLennan's injury wasn't the first hurdle for the team of adventurers. Their flight from Punta Arenas, Chile, to Antarctica was delayed for four days because of bad weather. That meant the team had already lost the time they budgeted for bad weather before they set foot on the frozen continent.

Once they arrived, the adventurers found the altitude -- 10,000 feet above sea level -- to be their biggest challenge.

"You're towing a 120-pound sled behind you, and you're just gasping for air," Turkstra said.

This is the second time the group has taken on an adventure to raise money for charity. In 2006, they travelled to the North Pole and raised more than \$500,000 for local kids.

The biggest difference between the two poles is the humidity, Turkstra said. Antarctica is extremely dry, he said, which results in rough, granular snow.

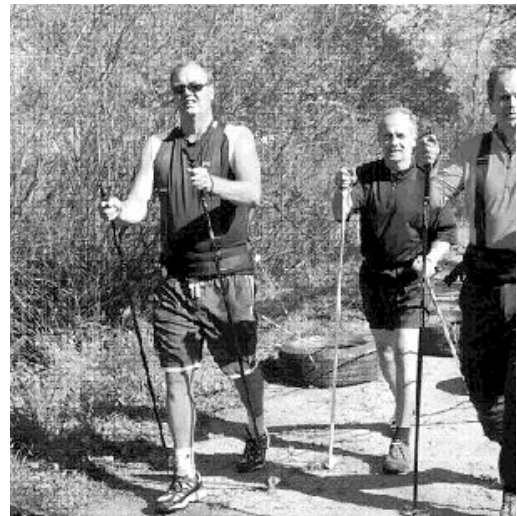
"In the North Pole, we tended to hit icy conditions," he said. "Here it's just very, very sticky, like sand."

The team is hoping that MacLennan will be able to meet them on the South Pole when they're picked up at the end of their journey.

"I'm disappointed because I can't go on," MacLennan said. "But Mother Nature just took a chunk out of me."

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