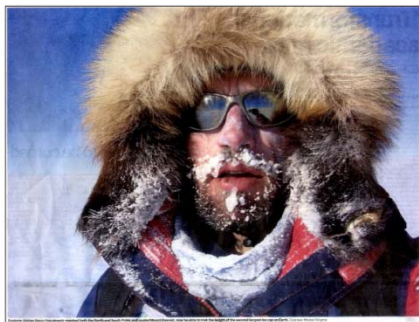


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Countdown to Greenland trek

The explorer Adrian Hayes and his teammates are in Greenland, gearing up for their frozen journey



# On the verge of an epic adventure

The Dubai-based explorer Adrian Hayes has arrived in Greenland to begin an Arctic trek using kite-ski and sleds. But first for him and his two teammates come several days of intense preparation, both mental and physical. Leah Oatway reports

For explorer Adrian Hayes and his two teammates, the toughest part isn't the trek itself, but the preparation. The Dubai-based British adventurer arrived in Greenland yesterday with his two teammates for three days of preparations before they set out to trek and hike the length of the second-largest ice cap on Earth.

When they leave on Monday, travelling first by boat to their jumping-off spot at the southernmost point of the country, Mr Hayes and Owen McDermid and Derek Cowe, both Canadians, will be tackling a route never before successfully navigated.

They face an epic journey of 3,300km from the Atlantic to the Arctic Ocean – and The National, the expedition's official media partner, will be following their progress every step of the way across some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world.

Throughout the voyage, Mr Hayes and his teammates will use a metal probe to measure the depth and density of snow at each stopping point, recording the co-ordinates and findings for Dr Sebastian Merrifield, a climate and polar scientist at the International Arctic Research Centre at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The data will be fed into the centre's climate-change modelling system.

For the next three days, the team are based in the small town of Narsarsuaq, an Greenland's southern coast, where they are double-checking equipment and carefully loading sleds.

The explorers are carrying everything they need for a journey that could last 40 to 50 days. They will have no outside support.

"We have got weighing scales and will be weighing absolutely everything," said Mr Hayes, a former officer in the British Army's 8th Airborne Division, who lives in Dubai with his wife and two children. His previous expeditions have taken him to the North and South Poles and to the summit of Mount Everest.

The focus until Monday will be on packing the 150kg loads on their sleds to be balanced and so supplies come easily to hand when they are needed.

"These three days are about unpacking the boxes and packing everything into five-day packs, dividing everything out, dividing the weights. For the South Pole we took a week to do this. It's pretty frantic work."

Only one team, from Norway, has traversed Greenland south to north before. In 1992 the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen and Terry Larsen parachuted on to the southern tip of the ice cap and paddled a kayak to within a day of Cape Farwell, the southern tip of Greenland.

Heavy ice prevented them from finishing the trip. They arrived at Cape Morris Jesup after 84 days and 2,200km, which was then the longest unsupported ski trek in history and the only unsupported full south-to-north traverse of Greenland in date.

None, however, has tackled the route taken by the Greenland Quest expedition – a journey equivalent to the distance from Dubai to Athens, or London to Cairo. In length, Greenland is about the same size as the Arabian Peninsula. If they are successful, the team will claim the record for the longest unsupported Arctic journey.

The men can expect to face hazy, hazy winds, which can reach hurricane force. But they will be relying on wind power to help drag the sleds. Depending on terrain, an expedition, man-hauling sleds will proceed at a slow walk. But with a good wind in their favor, parachute-like kites, Mr Hayes and his team expect to sit at speeds of up to 100 kph.

They have been practising the kite-skiing for the past six months in the UK and in Yukon, Canada. Other training has included dragging tyres through the desert, simulating sled-hauling, and long neutral-trek carrying backpacks filled with rocks.

When they hike at the end of each day, they will pitch a four-man tent,

in which they will melt snow for drinking and hot water on a stove to hydrate their freeze-dried rations.

"What they call a four-man tent is actually more like a two-man tent, so it's pretty tight," Mr Hayes said.

"It has a vestibule in the middle where we will do the cooking, and then two people sleep on one side. We will probably switch around to have turns as the single guy at the end of the tent, but again, for weight-saving purposes, there's no point having three separate tents."

Living in such proximity and in such challenging conditions – the temperature in Greenland is averaging minus 17°C – makes disagreements and tensions almost inevitable. In an attempt to tackle this before they set off, the three

men will recap a "team alliance" session they carried out while training in Yukon.

Teamwork is something both Mr Hayes and McDermid say is particularly important after their expedition to the South Pole in 2007, when tensions among the party of five created problems.

"We have a normal leader for this trip, but I did take it upon myself when we get up in Yukon to have a team alliance session with the guys," Mr Hayes said. "It is about discussing in all beforehand – what we expect from each other, to be open and honest with each other about these things."

The three friends discussed what they wanted to give to the expedition, how they wanted to behave when things got tough and how to resolve disagreements and conflicts.

"If you can create a culture of openness and honesty, then if someone is annoyed about something, they say something to that person rather than letting it fester," Mr Hayes said. "This is a great help."

As well as the psychological aspects of the journey, the men will face a range of physical challenges, such as crossing crevasses and glacier lakes and the risk of injury, particularly when using kites. Ploughing into an unseen ice ridge could easily mean the difference between success and failure.

When Mr Hayes, 45, reached the South Pole in December, he completed a sort of last-track, sharing five months off the record for reaching both poles and ascending Everest, which he achieved in a little over 13 months.

He confesses to falling in love

with the polar regions, and says this challenge is designed to highlight the need for a sustainable lifestyle and to increase awareness of climate change.

Greenland is widely regarded by scientists as one of the clearest indicators of the effect of climate change on the planet. Its ice sheet, which covers 2.71 million sq km and 88 per cent of the country's surface, is about 2,600km long and up to 3,000m wide, after the Antarctic. It is the second largest in the world. It averages 12m deep but is melting three times faster than it was 10 years ago, losing as much as 300 sq km of ice every year. It is thought to be the biggest single contributor to rising sea levels across the world.

With the help of scientists and environmental experts from around the world, Mr Hayes has called on schoolchildren to become "ambassadors" for his expedition, creating green wrist bands for them to show their support and, with the help of UK charity International Kids that show pupils how they can live a more sustainable lifestyle.

"The basic argument is that you cannot solve climate change, which is an environmental problem, without looking at the whole of society, without looking at the whole of the economy; they are all inextricably linked," he said.

"When you are an Ambassador, I'm sure, Greenland Ice cap, and you run a place totally untouched by litter, coffee, mobile equipment, pollution, the excess of consumerism or materialism, you get taken back to a place where you feel we could all do with more of."

**@ the greenland quest**

Follow the progress of the team with The National, the expedition's official media partner, which will carry exclusive weekly reports and interviews with Adrian Hayes and his teammates. Our online coverage includes an interactive map charting the team's progress. Hayes's daily blog, audio interviews recorded on the ice, video footage and photographs of the team that will be beamed to The National via satellite. The site also carries details of the team members.

Follow the trek at [www.thenational.ae/greenland](http://www.thenational.ae/greenland)

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