

Ice Warrior Postpones Quest to Reach the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility *Sea Ice Conditions Are Considered Too Perilous*



This satellite infra red image shows the number of open leads or thin ice present on Sunday 7th February 2010. They stretch from the planned start point of our journey along our route (black line). Looking at a series of these images over a number of days indicates the degree of motion of the ice. The latest image can be viewed here http://weatheroffice.gc.ca/data/satellite/hrpt_dfo_ir_100.jpg Images courtesy of NOAA/NASA.

Explorer Jim McNeill has announced the postponement of his team's quest to be the first to reach the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility. Jim has decided that the daring attempt to cross from the northern shores of Canada to the very centre of the Arctic Ocean (a distance of 800 miles) is now considered to be too risky.

Jim says "The risks of early failure, of cold injury and of needing to be rescued are too high to justify setting out. I believe to venture out in the current conditions would be foolhardy and not achieve any of the scientific and adventurous aims we have and could possibly endanger lives unnecessarily."

Why?

Having studied the satellite images of the sea ice from the top of Isachsen to the Arctic Pole over the entire season, this winter continues the recent trend of slower Arctic ice growth according to our scientific partners the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) analysis.

In January, the Arctic Oscillation has been predominately in negative phase during this winter and therefore stronger westerly winds than normal, (We have seen this in southward shift of the polar front with more snow both in Europe and North America). The lower than normal pressure in the Arctic (negative AO Index) shifts the ice drift motion more towards opening (associated slowing down of the Beaufort Sea Gyre clockwise ice motion).

This means that the sea ice is still in motion and has not experienced the normal winter freeze.

Ice Warrior's lead scientist Bjorn Erlingsson concludes, "While this situation persists the ice has many leads of open water or with thin ice, making them very difficult and sometimes dangerous to cross. Likewise, the warming of the atmosphere associated with the opening of the ice is sustaining this large scale disruption and circulation pattern."

Having made his decision Jim asked for a comment from Wayne Davidson, Resolute Bay's chief meteorologist working for Environment Canada and this was his reply:

"One word, horrible. These are the worst conditions since I have been in the Arctic, (going on 30 years, now).

The entire thing is falling apart; sea ice extent at present is less than 2007 (the worst year ever for the ice).

As you can see from the satellite image, the leads are everywhere over the Arctic Ocean; at all locations. There is probably loose pack ice all throughout the NW passage which is highly unusual at this time of year! Especially when it's windy. Temperatures are way off the charts; warmish. + 10 to +15 C above normal. At times seasonal, but reverting always to crazy warm."

What now?

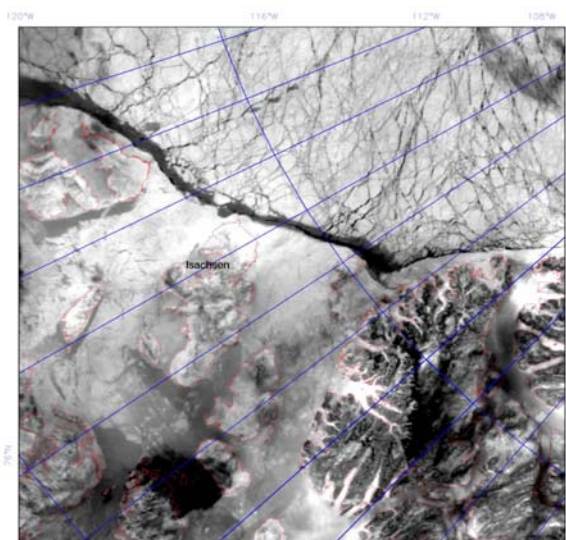
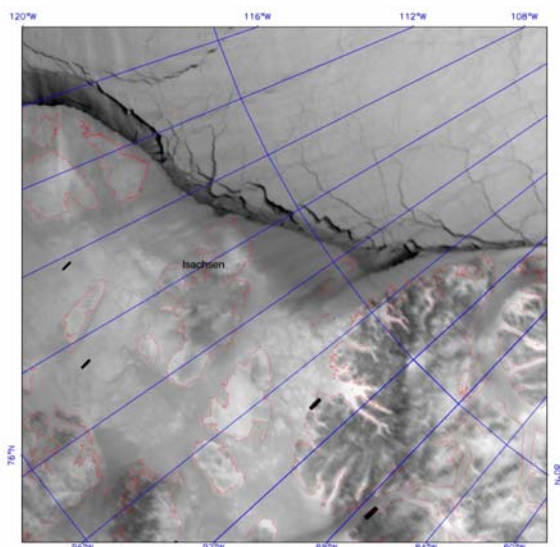
Obviously for a highly motivated team such a decision has been a bitter blow to expectations; especially having just concluded four weeks of intensive preparations in Svalbard.

"This change of plan is intensely frustrating and can be deeply depressing but when pitching yourselves against Mother Nature we must realise when she has the upper hand and react accordingly. We are not out there to unnecessarily endanger our lives and that's just what we would be doing. We will re-group, re-plan and become even more determined to deliver the reality of global climate change in the best way we possibly can." Explains Jim.

When will they try again?

It will not be possible to wait and see if conditions improve as there is only a small time frame in which to start the expedition so that we can finish the journey before the summer break up. Once this occurs it is impossible for aircraft to land on the ice and pick them up. So their next attempt will be the same time next year.

The Arctic Ocean occupies the region of both images to the top of the large black line (an open lead of water) which runs across the page. The darker areas are those of thin ice or open water and our advanced base camp is situated at Isachsen – indicated. The left hand satellite image shows a more stable ice condition on 2nd February 2006; though it is just beginning to break up. By the 5th March the ice was heavily broken and in motion, eventually leading to Jim falling through the ice on day 17. Images courtesy of NOAA/NASA.



BACKGROUND HISTORY:

Jim McNeill has attempted to reach the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility on two previous occasions. In 2003, he contracted a life-threatening flesh-eating disease (Necrotising Fasciitis) in his left ankle and was unable to leave base camp in Resolute Bay, Canada. His second attempt in 2006 was thwarted by disintegrating sea ice, some 130 miles into the journey on Day 17.

INTERVIEWS:

Jim McNeill is available for interview. Please contact Lori McNeill on: +44 (0)1344 883861, or email: lori.mcneill@ice-warrior.com . For further details: www.ice-warrior.com.

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Previous Press Release

Announcing the Ice Warrior Arctic Pole Expedition to benchmark the state of the Arctic Ocean and reach the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility for the first time.

Veteran polar explorer Jim McNeill begins his extreme High Arctic boot camp in Svalbard, Norway, a mere 600 miles from the Geographic North Pole.

He will be training 7 female and 7 male novice environmental explorers to become competent, safe polar travellers and to undertake one of the most important bits of citizen science - ever.

The aim

The aim of the 80-day expedition is for trained novices - ordinary people from all walks of life - to travel from the northern coast (79° 20' N, 105° 27' W) of Canada to the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility (85° 47' N, 176° 9' E).

They will be gathering raw, unbiased scientific data about the true condition of the Arctic Ocean.

Why are they doing it?

The premise for their expedition is: if we're not looking very carefully at what is happening to our Polar Regions, how do we know that what we're doing - with respect to tackling global climate change - is actually making any difference?

Being a benchmarking process the data gathered will mark the start of an ongoing initiative to "Ground Truth".

What are they doing

The journey itself is expected to be around 800 miles taking into account the ice shift (the movement of ice floating on the Arctic Ocean). The expedition is divided into three legs, each of around 26 days duration, with different teams with on each, all led by Jim.

An extra goal

On route - around Day 50 - the team will reach the Magnetic North Pole in its then current position (85° 11' N, 133° 7' W).

Latest news

The 4-week intensive High Arctic training kicked off January 13th – February 8th. They will learn how to live and travel in one of the most inhospitable places on earth, coping with wind chills down to -80°C .

Their extreme training includes developing systems to deal with emergencies such as: injury, hypothermia and frostbite; tent blow-downs and kit failure, as well as learning how to deal with potential crises including practise cold-water immersions at -30°C and re-warming techniques, along with the threat of polar bear attacks.

Jim McNeill says: “These are really exciting and critical times. I have a highly motivated group of high-performing individuals, now we have to gel them into the most effective teams possible, set their expectations and focus their energies. Each needs to be able to push the bounds of human physical and mental endurance: the better our training, the better our chances of success.”

“But this Boot Camp is going to be hard. Ambient temperatures may drop to -30°C and without the sun coming over the horizon (Svalbard is in a constant state of darkness) the team will not have the opportunity to warm up. They will have to cope with the practicalities of surviving in such a harsh environment.”

The science behind the expedition

Ice Warrior was formed in 2001 to emulate the “Golden Era” of exploration creating worthwhile and purposeful expeditions available to anyone with the right attitude and characteristics. Since then our aim has been to deliver the reality and truth of global climate change.

In 2005 Jim McNeill set up an agreement with the NASA-supported National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) to provide “Ground Truth” data.

Jim says: “From a scientific perspective we are setting out to gather unique sea-ice data from an area that has seldom, if ever, been measured. Importantly, the measurements we will be gathering will also validate the satellite data.”

The rationale behind the science

Far from confusing the general public with more data, Ice Warrior’s aim is to report clearly - and precisely – the actual on-ice conditions.

Jim McNeill explains: “One of the major problems I see is that the general public (and I include myself in this) are baffled, bemused and confused over the differing conclusions drawn by scientists through modelling the data in different ways. We will be repeating this data-gathering process annually to produce comparative data year-on-year and in a way anyone can understand as well as providing the data sets to the scientific community.”

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