



Photos these pages: *Spirit Of Sydney* in Antarctica before being crushed in the ice.

# Poles APART

Three tales from the South Pole: one tragic, one almost tragic, and another safely averted

**I**t's truly amazing how fast the deadlines for this column come around. I always leave it till the last few days in case something topical pops up. Sadly, I'm now rewriting it as media reports appear on another, quote, "Foolhardy Adventure!" Unfortunately on this occasion there maybe some substance to it.

All my life I have advocated the right of any individual to head over the horizon, push themselves to the extreme, in whatever way they see fit — as long as they don't expect others to put their lives at risk bailing them out if things go wrong.

In the days of William Bligh, 222-years ago, you were very much on your own and faced the consequences of everything you did. So too in 1968, when Robin Knox-Johnston was the first to sail solo and unassisted around the world in a leaking 32ft timber ketch, with a faulty radio and no EPIRB (the technology had yet to be developed). Robin knew he was responsible for his own destiny.

With all my adventures, I work to a rigorous risk minimisation

program, looking at every aspect of the activity, be it land, sea or air. I always carry an EPIRB and other safety gear, as no matter how well prepared you are, things can still go wrong.

By carrying an EPIRB, I have agreed to become part of an international rescue system and that comes with important responsibilities — to do everything in my power to make my rescuers' lives as easy and safe as possible, should they ever be called upon.

The effort you put into that aspect of voyage planning is governed by the risk you perceive for your activity. If you're just out for some offshore fishing in a tinnie, then the regulation safety gear is fine.

If you're planning to sail farther south than any yacht has been before, like deep into the Ross Sea, Antarctica, where you can/will face 100-knot winds, vicious seas and -20°C temperatures and where the salt spray instantly freezes to your boat, then you need to have the works! Sadly, it appears the 16m Norwegian yacht *Berserk* may not have and is now lost with three crew presumed dead.

The skipper, Jarle Andhoey (a self-proclaimed Viking), made contact with me before his expedition began. He was seeking my advice about the Ross Sea and if we could deliver him some fuel from the expedition ship *Orion* (I'm the expedition leader onboard) during a rendezvous off Ross Island.

I suggested he should be out of the Ross Sea completely by February 20, as things can get nasty after that date, and if he had all the required permits, we could help out with fuel.

Andhoey mentioned invitations to the South Pole from the "highest officials" and that the Russians were setting up fuel drops for him on the continent. He believed all was well and insisted the Ross Sea is easier than the Southern Ocean. He did not need permits for the fuel transfer, because we would be assisting a mariner in need and safety comes first.

I like these self-proclaimed Vikings for their adventurous spirit, but not their cavalier attitude. They have done some crazy expeditions in the past and made some fantastic documentaries, but they shun authority, evade the system wherever possible and appear to have broken the law on numerous occasions in the past.

That may again be the case on this expedition, as they had no

Antarctic voyage permits required under Norwegian law. This would have necessitated greater contingency planning.

On Feb 22, *Berserk's* EPIRB went off about 20nm north of Ross Island. Winds at the time were around 90kts with 8m seas. RCC (Rescue Co-ordination Centre) New Zealand struggled to get info on the boat and the expedition. Three ships joined the search and ultimately found the wrecked liferaft and nothing else. Their

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efforts were outstanding and they went into harm's way often.

Jarle Andhoey and one other crew were found onshore with quad bikes, apparently trying to get to the South Pole? They, too, had to be rescued later as they became trapped in crevasse fields.

No one yet really knows what they were up to, but it appears to me they hadn't done some of the critical risk minimisation required for such an expedition. This includes some of the most

basic precautions, like notifying all the relevant authorities before the event. We all have the right to die, but if you are that passionate about doing your own thing, in your own way, with no regard to any rules or regulations, *please* leave your EPIRB at home!

This expedition has made life more difficult for responsible risk-takers for sure.

## SPRIT CRUSHED IN ICE

I bought the 18m *Spirit of Sydney* in 1994, specifically to transport five-tonne of equipment to Antarctica and set up a 2.4m x 2.4m hut for my wife, Margie, and I to live in during 1995. The yacht then went on to do a total of nine sailing expeditions to the White Continent. It endured many dramas during that time, including a dismasting, but all the contingency planning and preparation meant that we were always self-sufficient.

*Spirit of Sydney's* last voyage to Antarctica in 2001 proved to be very dramatic. I was not onboard, I had bought the 36m ice-ship *Sir Hubert Wilkins* and was busy with it. *Spirit* headed south with a competent skipper, chief mate and eight other crew seeking adventures.

Conditions were too tough to land on Antarctica, so they headed home and straight into a pack-ice trap, which smashed the boat badly. Both rudders were snapped off,



With 86 Passengers safely back aboard *Orion*, Don McIntyre leads his expedition team, as they get some ‘Shackleton’ practice, dragging the trapped Zodiac 400m across the ice to open water. **Inset:** After a long day, Margie McIntyre, Joint Expedition leader on *Orion*, finally makes the ice edge with the last of the survival gear. The passengers were already into the hot chocolates!

to look after all the passengers in extreme blizzard conditions for up to 36 hours. It’s a huge amount of gear and a lot of work to move around, but it’s always possible that one day we may get separated from the ship for any number of reasons.

This year, at Shackleton’s Hut on Ross Island, it very nearly happened. With 86 passengers ashore, the wind suddenly shifted and a large field of pack-ice I was monitoring, headed into the bay, threatening to block our exit back to the ship. I called for an emergency evacuation and our highly-trained expedition team set to work.

We managed to get 40 people off before the leads all closed. I left one Zodiac trapped inside the ice, in case it was needed later. Over the next few hours, as the weather started to turn with snow drifts, we carefully managed to get all the remaining guests out onto the mobile ice using planks across cracks and as slippery dips down ice edges. Slowly but surely our contingency planning paid off and eventually all were back on *Orion* experiencing five-star luxury again (rather than a night under noisy canvas!) and talking about their grand adventure on the ice.

As I close this column, I read that the search for the *Berserk* has just been officially called off. Three crew are presumed dead. I hope they just got slammed and bruised, all their comms knocked out and the boys are now struggling north and trying to limp home on a damaged boat. The world thought Shackleton was dead once, too, but he and all his men ultimately survived! 🚩

five holes were punched into the hull, which was being substantially crushed. At the same time, two icebergs were moving toward the entombed boat, with the prospect of delivering the final blow.

I was in satellite communication with the skipper during this time. He was doing an amazing job, but decided it was time to turn the EPIRB on. RCC in Canberra swung into action and a conference call was organised with the Australian Antarctic Division to look at the implications of a rescue. I was brought in to advise on the boat, crew and equipment.

*Spirit* was very isolated but in the direct path of the French Antarctic base resupply vessel, which immediately increased speed and did not have to alter course. Consideration was then given to launching an aircraft and dropping whatever supplies may be needed.

I explained all the preparations and planning that we had made for just this occurrence. With all onboard specialist survival gear and training to manage in-the-water or on-the-ice available onboard, the authorities then decided that there was nothing more the crew needed. In the eyes of AMSA and the Antarctic Division, *Spirit* had it all, so no

aeroplane was launched. We also had three systems to accurately pinpoint the boat’s position.

The crew battled to stay afloat. Thirty-six hours later and about 12 hours before the ship was due on scene, *Spirit* broke free of the ice unassisted. Although a broken boat, she successfully embarked on an epic three-week 1650nm voyage back to Hobart, without help.

When the water police wanted to go out and pick them up 50nm offshore (with emergency steering, it was very hard to point in a specific direction), I said okay, as long as I pay for everything: “charter” the police boat and people, including fuel, overtime, meals, and so on. The police were happy to do it free-of-charge but I insisted and this time they said okay. I went out with them and it was a happy ending. The police had the best boat for the job.

### **86 TRAPPED ON THE ICE!**

Antarctica is like another planet, so after 18 years of intense, up close and personal involvement, I respect it more than the Southern Ocean. It is sitting there waiting to catch you out.

For the past six years, on every landing I lead ashore from *Orion*, I carry enough survival gear with me