

'Conquérant de L'Impossible'



Ex-Matie Mike Horn is a man to whom some of the most extreme firsts in the world can be attributed. His new book, *"Conquérant de L'Impossible"*, encapsulates his life philosophy – striving to achieve the impossible, the implausible, the unobtainable; and succeeding. He disappears off the radar for years at a time, re-emerging with a conquest so vast and unimaginable under his belt that the world in its entirety registers the magnitude of his accomplishment.

CarolynFrost

We have followed his journeys for some time now; forays down Peruvian waterfalls and the Amazon River on a hydro-speed, or his paragliding expedition in the Andes Mountains. In 2000 Mike completed a 17-month circumnavigation of the Equator, a feat called Latitude Zero, where he covered 40 200 km on foot or with non-motorized vehicles, and earning alternative sport's top accolade, the Laureus award. (See article in Matieland 02:2001)

A man who is drawn incontrovertibly to extremes, he went from the languid heat of the tropics to the bone-penetrating cold of the northern-most climes, and completed what may well be the most arduous journey of his life. He named his expedition "Arktos", ancient Greek for bear, a creature whose tenacity and capacity for survival makes it an

appropriate metaphor. The goal: To be the first man ever to circumnavigate the world around the Arctic Circle.

The logistics were daunting, even to the most hardcore navigator and adventurer, comprising eleven stages initiating and concluding at North Cape. Mike sailed westbound over the Greenland Sea to the east coast of Greenland, taking one month to cover 5000km, and then traversed Greenland on skis - pulling his sledge with the help of a kite and prevailing winds. His logistics crew awaited him with his aluminum mono-hull boat at the west coast, enabling him to traverse the Davis Strait. In the North-Western territories of Canada, he passed through the Dease Strait to Coppermine, and continued on foot to Point Hope – on the west coast of Alaska.

Upon reaching the north point of the Brook Range, he

then paddled his sea kayak through the Bering Strait to Siberia. A torturous journey on foot followed, following rivers and traversing the Anadyrskiy Mountain Chain situated above 2000m altitude, all the while keeping on the 68th latitude. The isolated regions of Kular and Tiksi, on the eastern coast of Siberia, were thus covered on foot and sea kayak. Mike went from Norilsk through to Murmansk, home of the ancient prisons of Staline, and then headed under sail and on kayak back to his starting point at North Cape.

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Originally estimated at 18 months, the epic journey eventually took 27 months to complete, and Mike arrived at his destination on October 21st 2004. "As I cycled towards the Norwegian border that I had left two years and 20 000km ago, I could not help to nod my head in satisfaction. In my mind I told myself that I had done a good job. I am happy with what I have seen and experienced. Nothing was said out loud – the silence around me said it all. I returned to Norway a humble and happy man. I kept cycling, lowered my head and thanked God for keeping me safe and alive in the Arctic."

Risking hypothermia if he took longer than seven minutes to erect his tent each night, urinating in a bottle and using it to warm his feet, facing an average temperature of -62 sometimes causing his eyelids to freeze shut, fighting fatigue and sleep-deprivation and sometimes walking for days without stopping – truly this was a test of the greatest endurance. A daily consumption of 12 000 calories was required to fuel his body, six times the normal amount. Oats with olive oil and honey, NASA drinks and dried foods were his sustenance, and chocolate bars reduced to the texture of pebbles. A sled weighing 200kg was dragged with each step, and one day he walked for 16 hours and, according to his GPS, lost 3m of ground as he drifted imperceptibly backwards. One night he was interrupted by a predatory bear, who set off the trip wire rigged around his tent, but it left without trying to gain entry. Unwelcome company in a bleak and lonely tundra.

Mike considers himself one of the most privileged men on earth to have been able to experience life in the Arctic, and ascribes his success to the mindset of nothing being impossible. "To have all this freedom you must be able to make a lot of sacrifices" he states, which entails revising your comfort zone and learning to be happy with much less.

It is difficult to comprehend how the mind works in such circumstances, where survival is paramount and all energy is directed thereto. A man trudging alone, cold and wearied beyond belief, conceivably losing ground as the ice floes move irrespective of his attempt to move forward. Retaining the fortitude and tenacity to keep on going, when faced with adversity and exposure to the brutality of the elements. High-tech equipment represents only a fraction of the requirements for such a journey – the rest reside in body and spirit.

Mike has a credo called Elements of Adventure, which could be usefully extrapolated elsewhere. Developing leadership skills, improving communication skills, working on decision-making and problem-solving, developing group cohesion and morale, building self-confidence and testing perceived limits and last but not least, resolving conflict.

This intrepid explorer seems to represent what is noble about the human spirit; our capacity for courage, humility, passion, endurance, improvisation, fortitude and vision. He delights in the wonders of the natural world, putting his body and mind to the ultimate tests and rigors of survival, facing the unknown with composure and self-confidence, and enabling many others the enjoyment of vicariously experiencing what he does firsthand.

Mike incorporates adventure into his life in a way that defines him completely. He has circumnavigated the world along the equator, and around the Arctic Circle. He could not, however, circumnavigate pain, or despair, or loneliness, or fatigue. He could not succumb to sleep or stop when his body protested the trauma of its ordeal – the alternative was death. Strength of mind existed as integral partnership to

strength of body, and Mike's journey represents an achievement that is quintessentially heroic and worthy of the deepest admiration and respect. When I look at his face I see the man he is. Inner strength, calm resolve, tenacity, determination, control, motivation, excitement and serenity. Visualising, no doubt, the next journey into the unexplored regions of this vast world, for the joy of putting his resilience to the ultimate of tests.

Mike is now back in Switzerland with his wife and two daughters, having completed his book.



Mike Horn



Photos: www.mikehorn.com