

Polar Shifts: The Changing Face of Exploration

by Moki Kokoris

Humankind has explored the north and south extremes of our planet since the days of Pytheas, who in 325 BC is believed to have made the first attempts to penetrate the Arctic Circle in his search to find a source of tin. As was the case in his day, dangerous oceans and life-threatening weather conditions still fetter explorers in their efforts to reach polar regions by sledge, ski, boat, and foot. It is only the explorers themselves who know what drives them, but the unanswered question remains: Is it the journey that changes man, or is it man who changes the journey?

Not one person who has witnessed firsthand the majesty of these white environs, or who has experienced the perils and hardships whilst getting there, remains untouched and



Global Warming-101 Ellesmere Island Expedition Team

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American Polar Society

The American Polar Society was founded Nov. 29, 1934, to band together all persons interested in polar exploration. Membership dues are \$15 a year (\$17, foreign) and entitle members to receive *The Polar Times* twice a year. The American Polar Society is classified as a tax exempt organization under Sec 501(C)3 of the IRS Code. For more information about the American Polar Society, contact Kevin L. Bjella, *APS Secretary*, at 1.802.295.6881 or send email to kevin.bjella@erdc.usace.army.mil.

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unmoved. A shift in consciousness occurs as a result of these highly personal endeavors. Everything changes. Orientation changes. As new directions are sought, others are found. One compass bearing often leads to another which is even more profound and life-altering. This is the case in both literal and figurative terms.

Exploration inspired by fascination and individual challenge has yielded many firsts, as the long list of accomplishments in the annals of the Explorers Club will reveal. It is in the physical discovery of new places, new heights, depths, civilizations ancient or thus far unknown, where explorers find exhilaration that provides the rest of us with another window through which to view the richness of our world. These days, however, there is little left to explore as a complete unknown in the conventional sense. We now delve deeper into the subjects that have already been uncovered. This is exciting in its own ways, but what may be even more significant is the matter of what to do with the knowledge explorers gain, its economic benefits aside.

There is a noticeable trend occurring, the potential of which will hopefully grow exponentially, touching even those who cannot imagine themselves enduring the conditions and tribulations of polar exploration proper. Today, with the aid of modern technology, any man, woman or child can participate in these expeditions vicariously. There is so much to learn from these experiences, leaving the bone-chilling winds, cracking sea ice, white-outs, polar bear threats and the accompanying discomforts out of the equation. This leaves only the message being conveyed, its lessons to be learned, as the ultimate metaphorical summit to be attained. All we as observers need do is listen and watch as today's explorers try to show us new courses we should follow.

Will Steger is one such explorer whose exploration objectives have shifted from new discovery to education. Today he is leading an entirely new type of expedition, one into the realm of environmental stewardship. His past exploits are known to many, as his feats speak for themselves. The list of his most significant dogsled expeditions includes: the first dogsled journey to the North Pole without resupply (1986); the 1,600-mile south-to-north traverse of Greenland, known to be the longest unsupported dogsled expedition in history (1988); the historic 3,471-mile International Trans-Antarctic Expedition, the first

About Our Front Cover

The Will Steger Global Warming-101
Ellesmere Island Expedition, 2008.

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Will Steger

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dogsled traverse of Antarctica (1989-1990); and the International Arctic Project, the first and only dogsled traverse of the Arctic Ocean from Russia to Ellesmere Island in Canada (1995). His 45-plus years of polar travels earned him many awards, among them the 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award from National Geographic Adventure Magazine; the National Geographic Society's prestigious John Oliver La Gorce Medal for accomplishments in geographic exploration, in the sciences and for public service to advance international understanding; and both the Lindbergh Award and Explorers Club Lowell Thomas Award for his numerous polar expeditions, deep understanding of the environment, and efforts to raise awareness of current environmental threats, especially climate change.

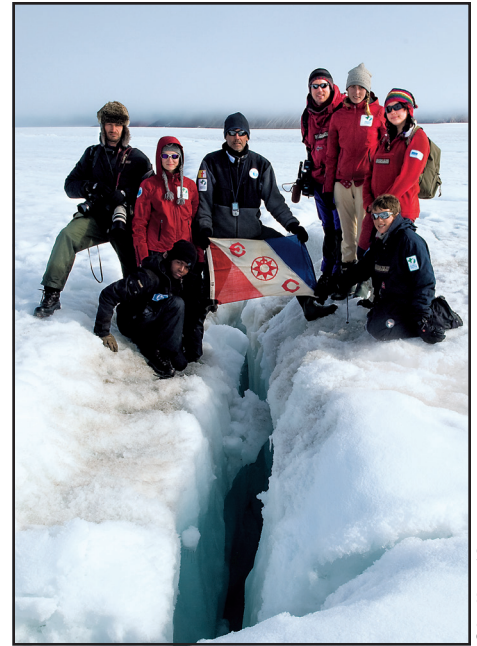
As a recognized authority on polar environmental issues and a ceaseless advocate for the Earth's well-being, Steger has been invited to testify before the United States Congress, as well as act as advisor to many world leaders on issues of environmental protection. His pioneering work in adventure-based environmental education was pivotal as he founded the Global Center of Environmental Education at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the World School for Adventure Learning at the University of St. Thomas in 1993. In 2006, he formed the Will Steger Foundation (WSF), with the mission of fostering leadership and cooperation in environmental education and policy. The WSF uses polar expeditions to generate interest and awareness of the effects of global warming on the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

The two most recent global-warming-focused expeditions were the one to Baffin Island in 2007 and the second to Ellesmere Island in 2008, both launched under the appropriately named "Global Warming 101" initiative. These two endeavors, with their dynamic web-based component, vivid accounts in archived video dispatches and supportive educational resource content, provided authentic eyewitness accounts of climate change in polar regions that will dramatically affect each of us and our environment. The goal was to nurture grassroots efforts that lead to massive institutional reform and technological innovation. So, it is directly from the front lines of global warming that Will Steger is able to inspire, educate and empower people around the world to take action in finding global warming solutions.

What is perhaps most interesting is that the majority of Steger's international team members—young accomplished explorers themselves—are in their twenties, thereby setting a peer-to-peer example for their online and iPod-carrying audience. This new expedition methodology has proven to be very effective in mobilizing youth to get involved.

Another similar direction has been taken by Luc Hardy, a French-American venture capitalist, entrepreneur, and adventurer who

The spot where they had eaten their lunch only hours earlier had simply drifted away right before their eyes....



© Luc Hardy / Sagax

The Pax Arctica expedition, recognized as an official flag expedition, holding the Explorers Club flag over a crack in the Ward Hunt Island Shelf

describes himself and his latest goal thusly: "I am a nomad by nature. My attitude is—if you don't go, you don't know—which at times can be risky but more often rewarding. Travel nourishes me. My life is privileged, and with this blessing comes responsibility. The Pax Arctica Initiative was launched as a vehicle for sharing these experiences with a large public." A member of the Explorers Club who has led several scientific expeditions in the polar regions, Luc is now also shifting his attention toward educational endeavors.



© 2008 Will Steger Foundation, Ben Horton

Crossing meltwater with dog team

© 2008 Will Steger Foundation, Sarah McNamee-Lander



Campsite in the shadow of an iceberg

In the summer of 2008, he led a 16-person expedition to the Canadian Arctic composed of a diverse group of adults and Young Ambassadors, ages 9 to 17, to eyewitness and report on the changes occurring in the Arctic as is

beautifully described and documented in Hardy's new book

Arctic Transitions—Witness to Change—Young Ambassadors in Nunavut. This book brings these ostensibly inaccessible regions to life through stunning photographs and stories from the young expedition participants themselves, who describe their impressions in their own words. We, in turn, witness the changes through their eyes.

As described in its own press release: "The Pax Arctica Initiative is a series of expeditions undertaken by environmental advocates in collaboration with Green Cross France and Global Green USA, designed to alert public opinion of critical environmental issues that endanger the Arctic region. Spanning a period of three years from July 2008 to 2010, Pax Arctica will emphasize focused research by ecological scientists and environmental advocates to explore and assess the ecological conditions and the geopolitical climate of the Arctic. The ultimate goal is to determine the steps needed to preserve the Arctic ecosystem for generations to come and to encourage the ratification of international policies to ensure the preservation of the Arctic habitat."

"I am a nomad My attitude is—if you don't go, you don't know"—Luc Hardy

However, there was a singular event that coincidentally defined the team's mission. A major goal of the Pax Arctica expedition

was to explore the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, but no one anticipated that Luc's team would unknowingly become eyewitnesses to its breakup. Although young minds might not have understood the gravity of this milestone, the group's opportune presence was serendipitous because actual on-the-ground footage was



Pax Arctica team walking northwest from Ward Hunt Island over slushy snow -

© Luc Hardy / Sagax



Luc Hardy

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captured just as the breakup was occurring. The spot where they had eaten their lunch only hours earlier had simply drifted away right before their eyes....

It is clear and heartening to see that through expeditions such as the ones led by both Will Steger and Luc Hardy, we are offered a unique view of the people and places at the tipping point of climate change. Programs like these provide an international platform for furthering education, discussion, and civic engagement, as well as opportunities for public interaction with prominent policy makers, scientists, journalists and business leaders which are critical in this process. These efforts connect people to people, across the boundaries of nationality and culture.

On the changing face of exploration,

these are today's explorers whose objectives are even more honorable than those who got "there" first or reached a summit "because it's there." These are the individuals whom we should endeavor to not only admire and support, but also emulate. And these explorers are our personal guides whose example and leadership it behooves us to trust and follow.

For more information, dispatches and photos, please visit <www.globalwarming101.com> and <www.sagaxexpeditions.com>

We wish to thank both the Will Steger Foundation and Pax Arctica for generously granting us permission to publish their photographs. □