

180 Degrees

Pole to Pole

Home at last, Rob and James talk about their experience



Above: *Adventurers return.*

On the 28th May 2008, a few days after arriving back from Sydney Rob Gauntlett and James Hooper held a reception at The Royal Geological Society (this had been facilitated by, among others, George Band, Old Blue, member of RGS and a member of Edmund Hillary's Everest expedition - which Rob and James emulated in 2006). Within the grand auditorium we gathered to hear them recall stories from their journey and answer questions. Christ's Hospital Head Master, Clerk and CHA Manager attended this event to represent the School's support of the boys.

At 4.14am on Thursday 24th April 2008, James Hooper and Rob Gauntlett sailed through the Magnetic South Pole, completing a pole to pole expedition after 1 year, 1 month and 1 day of travelling using only human and natural power.

The 22,000 mile journey had never been achieved before and the adventure has seen them cover three continents taking them through a range of climates from +50 to -50. The boys have skied, sailed and cycled to achieve three core goals; to break an exploring record, to raise money for charity, and most importantly to highlight the hugely topical negative effect of carbon emissions on our environment.

Rob and James first met at Christ's Hospital, over the seven years they were at School together their friendship developed based on a shared sense of adventure and a desire to make difference. Although they recalled not even liking each other when they first met!

In May 2006, Rob & James became the youngest ever Westerners to scale Mount Everest having just turned 19, having trained for their task with the CH climbing club. At 7.30am on 17th May 2006 they reached the summit of Mount Everest and just 9 short months later they had planned their second challenge 'Pole to Pole'.

Reflecting on the Pole to Pole journey they recounted the highs and lows of the trip. The lows included the near death experience when Rob fell straight through the ice into freezing water, whacking his head on the way down, lying unconscious and face down in the water for over four minutes until James pulled him out. A helicopter came to their rescue and Rob was treated for severe hypothermia before even getting to their starting point! Other lows included the 'disgusting sachets of high fat food', Rob's sea sickness and an 80ft wave taking out their boat (thankfully the boat was weighted to right itself again).

The highlights of the trip were during the 3,865 trek and cycle through South America to Punta Arenas in Southern

Right: *Coming into Sydney Harbour.*



Chile, where they recalled fond memories of meeting lots of different people along the way and also managed to borrow a yacht and crew from a sailing club in South America when funds got very low!

Rob, 20, and James, who turned 21 during the trip, and the crew of the yacht on which they sailed the final leg arrived at the Geomagnetic South Pole on Thursday 24th April (the crew on this final leg also included Charlie Berenger, also an Old Blue). This was the official end point of their journey, however they had another 1,000-mile voyage ahead of them onto Sydney Australia where their journey officially ended.

After hearing the boys recall their journey, I could understand why the next few months would be busy with them touring the corporate circuit and schools giving motivational and

Below: *Mobbed by the press on their arrival in Sydney.*



education talks on their trip and the reasons behind it.

At this point Rob and James took questions ranging from the serious:

What did you hope to achieve with the trip?

“We wanted to move climate change as an issue in the UK from a ‘concept’ which cannot be seen readily to something which is tangible in terms of filming our trip and reporting on the real life effects on people and their environment of climate change via our journal on our website. We will be using all these examples in our visits to schools now that we are back”

To the not so serious:

Why did you not use a tandem for the cycling challenge? Rob replied:

“Because I didn’t want to stare at James backside for thousands of miles!”

The CHA Manager asked the boys:

You say your journey started at 16 at School, in what ways did Christ’s Hospital help equip you mentally for your endeavours?

“Christ’s Hospital is a unique school which gave us both a massive opportunity in life. School life there enabled us to meet a wide range of different people from different backgrounds which has helped us during our trip, also being in a boarding school environment makes you very tolerable of being in each others company for long periods of time! When we were planning our Everest trip we were able to use the school’s climbing and cycling clubs to help us train. Christ’s Hospital influence played a big part in our successes, without the opportunities CH gave us we really wouldn’t have done all this – we fully intend on repaying this to them!”

And what next for the boys? Well according to Rob & James they want to get their fitness back after ‘sitting around on a boat for weeks on end!’ and then it’s the Isle of Man mountaineering competition for Rob and some rest time. James parting comment was ‘We don’t have another feat definitely lined up yet, but there’ll be something’. ...so watch this space!

Speaking of their achievements, Head Master of Christ’s Hospital, John Franklin said:

“Christ’s Hospital has been very proud of Rob and James’s achievements and their initiative to draw attention to such an important issue as climate change. We wish to congratulate them on successfully completing their journey which is yet another phenomenal achievement”.

More details of Rob and James’s trip may be found on www.180degrees.co.uk.

A Final note from the Adventurers

Dear Friends and Supporters of 180 Degree...

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind of excitement, and it seems as though our feet have barely touched the ground. Having left the South Magnetic Pole it took us 8 days of northward sailing to reach land. Almost two days before we sighted the coast of Tasmania, the air was filled with a smoky eucalyptus aroma, it was an addictive scent, something to tantalise us now that we were so close. When we first spotted Australia's Southern-most lighthouse late at night it enhanced the already electric atmosphere of anticipation on board *Blizzard* and even though we were exhausted it was difficult to sleep.

for us. Sailing past the Opera House and beneath the Bridge, the very moment that we had relived in our minds on so many occasions, was finally a reality and beneath a sapphire blue sky we came to rest alongside the National Maritime Museum.

We were overwhelmed by the crowd that had gathered to greet us. A hustling pack of reporters waited on the dock, the skyscrapers towered around us, and the sun was already beating down. Before we really knew what was happening and still in a state of bewilderment, we were thrust onto a podium and showered with generosity from all corners of Sydney. It was the most joyful moment of the last 14 months and yet all we could do was struggle to take it in and yearn for a quiet corner to hide in! A week later, having enjoyed the Australian jaunt immensely we were returning to the UK and we arrived at home early on Sunday morning to a small gathering of friends and family.

It is difficult to surmise in such a short way everything that we have learned and

experienced on this expedition, it has been a year spent almost entirely out of our depth, and struggling to seek our way through a labyrinth of challenges. However, that is exactly what we have valued most and we could never have anticipated how bizarrely the project would unfold. We have witnessed beyond doubt that climate change is affecting our world. We have shocked ourselves by how far you can get with just the will never to give up. But mostly we have been shocked by the ceaseless, immense support that we have received from so many.

It has never been more apparent that this expedition would not have been completed, and this project ever begun without the input, inspiration, work and support of a team that has surrounded us.

Thank you for creating the spark. Thank you for believing in the vision. Thank you for pushing us onwards. The work has only just begun, we want to share our experiences and must create a book and produce a documentary, but most importantly attempt to implant the same spark which has inspired us into other young people. Life is full of challenges.

With countless gratitude (and a little relief!), Best Wishes, James and Rob.



Above: *Sailing in past the Opera House.*

At sunrise, we were surrounded by greenery, trees and hills. We could see the street lights switching off and feel the buzz of civilization. It was a moment of intense relief. We were entering Hobart for a secretive stop to clear customs before Sydney, so the sailing was not entirely over but we knew that for the first time in over two months we would be in a position where we could relax entirely. Five armed officers searched the boat and deposited the very last items of food into quarantine bags, our passports were stamped and we were set free. Buildings, colours, roads, fresh fruit and for everything, the appreciation was immense.

Begrudgingly we prepared to set sail again, but we at least knew it would not be so cold again. Now we faced the problem of sweating in our sleeping bags, a luxurious predicament to have and the food was a fusion of flavours, not just rice and ketchup!

Finally, at 7:30 am on the 9th May – 1 year, 1 month and 1 day after beginning the expedition we passed through the Heads and into Port Jackson; the famous Sydney harbour. We were escorted in by a whole ferry of friends and supporters and *The Tribal Warrior*, a sail training boat for aboriginals, which performed the ritual smoking ceremony