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**THE COLDEST JOURNEY SETS SAIL FROM LONDON WITH ROYAL SEND-OFF**

The Coldest Journey expedition, led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the world’s greatest living explorer, begins today in earnest when the expedition ship departs from London at 15.15, laden with equipment and supplies for the Antarctic challenge ahead.

Not only does the expedition aim to complete the first ever trans-Antarctic crossing during the polar winter, but importantly it is attempting to raise US$10 million for Seeing is Believing, a global charitable initiative to fight avoidable blindness. All donations will be matched by expedition sponsor, Standard Chartered.

HRH The Prince of Wales, who is Royal Patron of The Coldest Journey, today visited the expedition ship, the SA Agulhas at her River Thames mooring alongside the HMS Belfast, to wish the crew luck and give the expedition a Royal send-off.

On this significant milestone for The Coldest Journey, which has been five years in the planning, Sir Ranulph Fiennes said: “*Our expedition ship departing London with all of our vital equipment brings into sharp focus how close I now am to beginning what is my greatest challenge. The expedition team and I are extremely grateful for HRH The Prince of Wales’ support for what will be a most considerable test of human endurance.”*

Joanna Lumley, a trustee of The Coldest Journey, co-hosting the departure event aboard the SA Agulhas, said: “*The ship departing from London today is a thrilling episode in this amazing adventure. She looks sensational and to think that she is transporting all of the vital equipment for the expedition is incredibly exciting.*

*I know that this is a dream come true for Ran, and has been five long years in the planning. I am proud to be here today doing all that I can for the expedition and for Seeing is Believing which is a fantastically worthy charity*.”

The SA Agulhas was acquired by Expedition Co-Leader and Marine Advisor Anton Bowring after years of searching across the globe for a suitable vessel. She has been docked in London since 29 November 2012, taking on board technical equipment and supplies including two 20-tonne modified Cat® D6N track-type tractors, two cabooses – one which will act as living quarters and one which will be a hub for scientific research – scientific equipment, fuel sleds, specially heated clothing and Antarctic cold weather gear, and a variety of food supplies.

The ship will make her way from London to Cape Town, South Africa, where she will be met by Sir Ranulph Fiennes, and fellow Ice Team members, Brian Newham, Ian Prickett, Spencer Smirl, Richmond Dykes and Dr Robert Lambert, just before Christmas. After further preparations early next year, the expedition will begin on 21 March 2013 at the winter equinox, as the team start their six-month journey to cross Antarctica to reach the Ross Sea.

Their route from the Crown Bay, Dronning Maud Land, to Captain Scott’s base at McMurdo Sound – via the South Pole – is a significant challenge. During this six-month period the expedition team will travel nearly 2,000 miles, mostly in complete darkness and in temperatures potentially nearing minus 90°C. The expedition team will be entirely self-sufficient, as search and rescue capabilities will be significantly constrained as aircraft may not be able to operate in hostile winter conditions.

Sir Ranulph will complete the expedition entirely on skis and will be accompanied by alternate members of the Ice Team. Whilst traversing the continent the team will conduct a number of scientific experiments including helping to measure the effects of global climate change on the polar ice caps during Antarctic winter. The research will, among other things, measure the thickness of the ice, map features of the ice during winter, and sample for bacteria to see what can survive in the extremely cold temperatures.

Commenting further on the expedition’s aims Sir Ranulph said:

*“As well as raising awareness and vital funds for our chosen charity, Seeing is Believing, this is a unique opportunity to carry out a number of scientific tasks in the extreme polar environment, which will make a significant contribution to our understanding of the true effects of global warming on the Antarctic continent.*

*“Seeing is Believing is a cause very dear to me. Having experienced temporary snow blindness myself in the past, I’ve had a glimpse into what it would be like to lose my sight. It’s absolutely frightening. For as little as $30, someone’s sight can be restored through a cataract operation. I was moved by the challenge of eliminating avoidable blindness and I wanted to be a part of it. The Coldest Journey has the potential to make a real impact towards the goal of eliminating avoidable blindness around the world.”*

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to Editors**

**Expedition goals:**

The Coldest Journey expedition has five key objectives which will have significant implications on the worlds of exploration, charity, science, technology and education:

Exploration

The expedition aims to conquer the last great polar challenge; successfully crossing the Antarctic continent during winter. Previously, the furthest any expedition has ever ventured into Antarctica during the winter is 60 miles. With a winter crossing of the Arctic having recently been completed by a Norwegian expedition, this is the first ever attempt at an Antarctic winter crossing and is the last remaining polar challenge.

Charity

The expedition is aiming to raise US$10m for Seeing is Believing (SiB*)*, a global charitable initiative tackling avoidable blindness around the world:

* There are an estimated 39 million blind people in the world but 80% of blindness is preventable or treatable
* Seeing is Believing funds eye care projects in underprivileged communities within developing countries
* Standard Chartered, the expedition’s lead sponsor, will match all donations made to Seeing is Believing, dollar for dollar
* Seeing is Believing is a joint charitable initiative between Standard Chartered and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and since its launch in 2003, the programme has helped over 31 million people

Sir Ranulph’s charitable endeavours on past expeditions have raised a total of US$22 million (£14m) to date.

Scientific research

On the ice: Scientists on the expedition will be conducting a number of experiments, including helping to measure the effects of global climate change on the polar ice caps. The research will include measurement of the thickness of the ice, mapping features of the ice during winter and sampling for bacteria to see what can live in such extreme winter temperatures.

On the expedition ship: In addition, scientists on board its ice-strengthened Antarctic supply and training vessel, *SA Agulhas –* a ship generously chartered by the South African Maritime Safety Authority – will make detailed oceanographic, marine biological and meteorological observations on behalf of a number of research bodies around the world.

Technological innovation

Using the very latest technological innovations, this epic journey will help to pave the way for a new dawn in Antarctic, year-round exploration, testing the boundaries of equipment able to function and support the team at these extreme temperatures. Two customised cabooses will house the crew and science equipment for six months in temperatures potentially nearing –90°C, pulled by specially engineered and modified Cat® D6N track-type tractors. When traversing the ice, the team will wear specially developed heated clothing and use breathing apparatus to protect them from the ever present threats posed by such extreme temperatures.

Education

Over 143,000 schools throughout the Commonwealth will be able to access engaging, real-time content and students will be able to follow the Ice Team’s progress across the Antarctic. School curriculum modules spanning a host of subjects including maths, history, geography, biology and physics will be made available in exchange for a donation to the expedition. For more information visit: [www.thecoldestjourney.org/home/education/](http://www.thecoldestjourney.org/home/education/).

**About Sir Ranulph Fiennes:**

Sir Ranulph Fiennes OBE is, according to the Guinness Book of Records, ‘the world’s greatest living explorer’.

Sir Ranulph was the first to cross the Antarctic Continent unsupported (with Dr Mike Stroud); the first person to cross both polar ice caps and the oldest to climb Everest; and he remains the only living man to circumnavigate the world along the polar axis (accomplished with the late Charles Burton).

The Coldest Journey may be Sir Ranulph’s final expedition, and one which despite being aged 68, he could not have undertaken any earlier in life.

**About Seeing is Believing:**

 [www.seeingisbelieving.org](http://www.seeingisbelieving.org)

Seeing is Believing is a charity which raises money to tackle avoidable blindness across the world. It is a collaboration between the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness and Standard Chartered, the lead sponsor of the expedition, to fund sustainable eye-care services in areas of poverty and high need across the world. Launched in 2003, the initiative has grown into a multi-million dollar global programme reaching over 31 million people to date. Standard Chartered matches, dollar for dollar, all donations made to Seeing is Believing.

**About The Coldest Journey:**

[www.thecoldestjourney.com](http://www.thecoldestjourney.com)

The trans-Antarctic winter crossing is considered the last remaining polar challenge and its completion will mark a world first:

* *1958: 1st crossing of the Antarctic*
* *1969: 1st crossing of the Arctic*
* *1979-82: Transglobe Expedition led by Sir Ranulph Fiennes with Anton Bowring as Marine Coordinator – only expedition ever to circumnavigate the globe on its polar axis*
* *2010: 1st winter crossing of the Arctic completed by Norwegian expedition*
* *Winter crossing of the Antarctic* ***never yet attempted***
* The crossing will start on 21 March 2013 and finish by 21 September 2013

**Further information on scientific research:**

The expedition’s research will make a unique contribution to our understanding of the effect of climate change upon the poles. CryoSat-2 (an environmental research satellite launched by the European Space Agency in April 2010) is designed to track changes in the mass of the polar ice caps by measuring the distance to the surface of the ice to within half an inch. Year-round calibration on the ground is the only way to validate this data, so the readings taken by trained members of the Ice Team will form a vital part of this research. This work is one of five international scientific projects which have been selected by the Science Committee, including mapping the height of the landmass using new GPS techniques and taking core samples to establish the water flow from the ice sheet. The Ice Team will also be sampling for cryo-bacteria capable of withstanding the extreme cold conditions.

**Expedition members:**

Ice Team:

Sir Ranulph Fiennes Expedition Leader

Brian Newham Traverse Manager

Ian Prickett Traverse Support Technician

Spencer Smirl Lead Equipment Technician

Richmond Dykes Equipment Technician

Rob Lambert Ice Team Doctor

Ship Team:

Anton Bowring Leader

Jill Bowring Education Coordinator

John Parsloe Science Coordinator

**TAWT (Trans-Antarctic Winter Traverse):**

The expedition is managed by **The TAWT Trust Limited**, a UK registered charity under the Chairmanship of Tony Medniuk. The TAWT Trust Limited is a UK Registered Charity No. 1140147

**REGISTERED OFFICE:** Fairfax House, 15 Fulwood Place, London, WC1V 6AY. Company No. 07424188

**TRUSTEES:** Tony Medniuk (Chairman), Anton Bowring, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Richard Jackson, Gavin Laws, Michael Payton, Eric Reynolds, Alan Tasker, Joanna Lumley

**CHAIRMAN of SCIENCE COMMITTEE:** Sir Peter Williams CBE FRS FREng, Vice President The Royal Society

**DEPUTY CHAIRMAN of SCIENCE COMMITTEE:** Prof. Dougal Goodman FREng, Deputy Director British Antarctic Survey 1995 – 2000

**SCIENCE CO-ORDINATOR:** Dr Tim Cullingford

**MEDICAL RESEARCH LEADER:** Dr Michael Stroud OBE

**MARINE SCIENCE CO-ORDINATORS:** Dr Christopher McQuaid and Adrian McCallum

**EXPEDITION LEADER:** Sir Ranulph Fiennes

**MARINE LEADER:** Anton Bowring

**LONDON HQ OPERATIONS MANAGER:** Tristam Kaye

**EDUCATION LIAISON:** Phil Hodgson, Durham’s Education Development Service

**COMMONWEALTH LIAISON:** Derek Smail

**COLD WEATHER EQUIPMENT DEVELOPMENT:** Steve Holland & Team

**EXPEDITION POLAR CONSULTANTS:** Martin Bell, Liz Pasteur

**EXPEDITION MEMBERS:** Brian Newham, Ian Prickett, Spencer Smirl, Dr Robert Lambert, Richmond Dykes

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