**Veteran Explorer To Attempt The Coldest Journey On Earth**

**Veteran polar explorer, Sir Ranulph Fiennes**, will take on one of the last remaining polar challenges by attempting to cross Antarctica in winter – the coldest journey on Earth – with five colleagues and with the support of the Commonwealth and a number of sponsors.

On 6 December 2012, on board the expedition’s South African ice-strengthened research ship, ‘SA Agulhas’, the expedition team – led by Sir Ranulph – will leave London , bound for Antarctica. Their aim is to complete *‘The Coldest Journey’* – the first-ever trans-Antarctic winter expedition. *The Coldest Journey* will also attempt to raise USD10 million for Seeing is Believing, a global charitable initiative to fight avoidable blindness. During their sea voyage, the team will undertake a number of scientific tasks to provide unique data on marine life, oceanography and meteorology. Using the very latest technological innovations, this epoch-making journey will pave the way for a new dawn in Antarctic, year-round exploration.

On 21 March 2013, the equinox, the six expedition members will begin a six month journey to reach the Ross Sea. Their route from the Russian base of Novolazareskaya (‘Novo’) to Captain Scott’s base at McMurdo Sound – via the South Pole – will test the limits of human endurance. During this six month period the expedition team will travel nearly 4,000 kilometres, mostly in complete darkness in temperatures as low as -90°C. The expedition team will have to be entirely self-sufficient and there will be no search and rescue facility available, as aircraft cannot penetrate inland during winter, due to darkness and risk of fuel freezing.

Previously, the furthest any expedition has ever ventured into Antarctica during the winter is 60 miles. On this forthcoming journey, Sir Ranulph and his team will aim to cover 2,000 miles in six months, crossing the polar plateau at an average height of 10,000ft above sea level.

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 one of the last remaining polar challenges.

Of the Antarctic traverse, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, Expedition Leader of *The Coldest Journey*, said: “This will be my greatest challenge to date. We will stretch the limits of human endurance. Britain and the Commonwealth has a strong heritage of exploration, from Captain Cook 300 years ago to the present day. As such, it is fitting that a Commonwealth team should be the first to fulfil this last great polar expedition.

“It 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.”

As well as conquering this final frontier of polar exploration, the expedition also aims to make a decisive 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.

In addition, scientists on board its ice-strengthened Antarctic supply and training vessel, *SA Agulhas –* a ship generously provided 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.

Anton Bowring, Co-leader of *The Coldest Journey*, with responsibility for the marine activities of the Coldest Journey said: “As well as conquering this final frontier of polar exploration, the expedition also aims to make a decisive contribution to our understanding of global climate change and its impact on the polar ice caps. In addition we will use this great opportunity to increase our knowledge of the marine and polar environments and the impact on them by natural and man-made factors.”

While the ultimate objective is to complete *The Coldest Journey*, the exploration team intend to raise USD10 million for Seeing is Believing (SiB) – a global initiative led by Standard Chartered and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) to tackle avoidable blindness in developing countries. Since its launch in 2003, the programme has reached over 28 million people.

Eighty per cent of the world’s blindness is avoidable – meaning it can be prevented or treated. For as little as USD30 a person’s sight can be restored, allowing them to get back to work or school. Yet 39 million people are currently blind and without effective intervention, which is expected to rise to 76 million by 2020.

A further 246 million people are either moderately or severely visually impaired, simply for the lack of a basic pair of eyeglasses. Every dollar raised for SiB is matched by Standard Chartered, doubling the impact the organisation can make on the ground.

Sir Ranulph’s charitable endeavours on past expeditions have raised a total of £15m to date.

Sir Ranulph added: “I have been on some amazing expeditions and seen many of the beautiful and unique sights the world has to offer. When I discovered Seeing is Believing, what it stood for, and understood how easily avoidable blindness could be prevented, it inspired me and my colleagues to undertake this challenge. It is a fantastic cause and I would urge everyone who follows our progress to donate to it via www.thecoldestjourney.org.”

The expedition also offers a unique opportunity to generate diverse, engaging, real-time educational content for schools. The expedition will have far-reaching educational value and study opportunities encompassing maths, history, geography, biology and physics, there to inspire young people in the possibilities of high achievement.

Microsoft has developed a bespoke password-protected platform for this purpose that will be continually updated using cloud technology, for a modest donation this will be accessible to more than 43,000 schools in the UK and hundreds of thousands of schools throughout the Commonwealth which accounts for approximately one third of the world’s population.

Students will be able to follow the expedition’s progress, take part in competitions, and study fully integrated curriculum modules. These courses are currently being developed by Durham’s Education Development Service – one of the UK’s leading education resource providers – in partnership with Sir Ranulph and the expedition scientists, engineers, mechanics and ship’s crew and training officers.

Sir Ranulph’s attempt to complete *The Coldest Journey* is the latest in the long line of record-breaking achievements that have seen him become the first man to reach both Poles by surface travel. It also follows his hike to the summit of Everest, where he became the oldest Briton ever to do so. *The Coldest Journey* represents what may be Sir Ranulph’s final expedition, and one which despite being aged 68, he could not have undertaken any earlier in life.

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office has not previously granted permits for winter expeditions in Antarctica as they are deemed too dangerous; a testament to the sophistication of the technology required for this traverse. Sir Ranulph and the expedition team will be equipped with high-tech equipment, including battery-powered heated clothing and specially designed breathing apparatus to enable them to survive at -70°C and possibly at -90°C.

Finning, one of the world’s largest distributors of Caterpillar® equipment and powers systems, are providing customisation solutions and modifying two D6N track-type tractors to tow two specially engineered cabooses (sledges mounted living quarters) for scientific work, accommodation and storage, and sledges designed to carry 155,000 litres of special fuel designed not to freeze. The D6Ns have also been designed to cope with the extreme temperatures and harsh Antarctic environment. The 20 tonne vehicles will be equipped with radars to identify the lethal perils of crevasse fields. Bespoke cloud and satellite technologies provided by Microsoft and Iridium will enable real-time updates on the expedition’s progress.

The expedition departs from London in the centenary year of Captain Scott’s death in the Antarctic in 1912.

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to Editors:**

**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).

**About The Coldest Journey**

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

Follow the team on Twitter: @coldestjourney

Find the project on Facebook: www.facebook.com/thecoldestjourney

The Coldest Journey is attempting to raise USD 10 million for Seeing is Believing, the global initiative to prevent and treat avoidable blindness. The Coldest Journey’s lead sponsor, Standard Chartered, will match, dollar for dollar, all donations made to Seeing is Believing – a charitable initiative to tackle avoidable blindness around the world. 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, but due to the difficulty of reaching the coast in winter the team will not be able to begin the journey back to Britain until January 2014, arriving there in March 2012.

**About Seeing is Believing**

<http://seeingisbelieving.org.uk/home>

* Seeing is Believing is a charity which raises money to prevent 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. Launched in 2003, the initiative has grown into a multi-million dollar global programme reaching over 28 million people to date. Standard Chartered matches, dollar for dollar, all donations made to Seeing is Believing.

**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**

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

**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 CO-LEADER AND ICE LEADER:** Sir Ranulph Fiennes **EXPEDITION CO-LEADER AND 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