



Expedition: The Women's Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition 2018

Field Study: Investigating Physical and Psychological Adaptations of Women in Extreme Environments

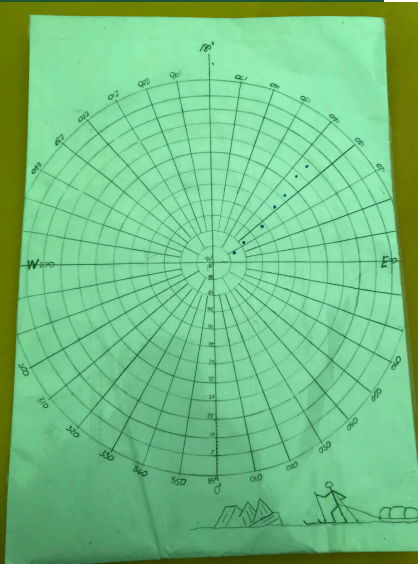
Summary: The Women's Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition 2018 is a team of women from across Europe and the Middle East who have come together to ski the last degree of latitude (89-90N) to the North Pole. Expedition Leader Felicity Aston selected the team members from over 900 applicants. The women are from Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Slovenia, Cyprus, France, Russia, Sweden and the UK, and range in age from 26 to 50 years old. They represent a wide variety of occupations and experience levels - from 34-year-old Ida, a Swedish Arctic Adventure Guide, to 50-year-old Misba, a soon to be grandmother from Manchester in the UK who works in Finance for the National Health Service and has no previous experience apart from hillwalking in the British Isles. The goal of the expedition was to provide insight into the apparent lack of understanding and/or preconceptions that exist between women in the Middle East and Europe.

THE EXPEDITION

The expedition involved skiing 80km in seven days across the shifting pack ice of the Arctic Ocean. The temperature fell as low as -38C while the team dragged all their equipment and supplies in sledges weighing 50 kg, slept in tents on the ice and faced both pressure ridges (barriers of



The Women's Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition 2018 Team



The team used a hand-drawn map because there are no permanent physical features on the ice.

ice rubble) and leads, cracks of open water between pans of ice, which they had to negotiate as a group.

Along the way, the team collected data for two related science studies – one focusing on the mind and the other on the physical. The POWER study involved the team wearing a range of monitors on their bodies before, during, and for a short while after the expedition. They also had to undergo several sessions of testing before and after the expedition in Longyearbyen Hospital and provide saliva samples at regular intervals during each day of the expedition. The study will look at the impact of extreme environments on the metabolism and energy consumption of women. The psychology study involved a daily questionnaire / log as well as longer surveys before, halfway through and after the expedition. The study seeks to pinpoint how an expedition like this changes the values of participants and whether this is affected by cultural background.

Both studies are addressing gaps in knowledge about how women, and especially women

WHO

Felicity Aston and the Women's Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition 2018

WHAT

A team of 11 women skied to the last degree of the North Pole

WHEN

April 15 - 21, 2018

WHERE

North Pole

WHY

To foster cultural understanding between women in Europe and the Middle East



Felicity Aston

from a range of cultural backgrounds, adapt to extreme environments and the pressures of expedition. These studies filter into a much wider pool of knowledge, all aimed at the future exploration of space by mankind. Any space mission will be made up of women, as well as men – and will likely be international. This makes the data from our expedition especially relevant.

The expedition reached the North Pole on the 21st April. The team members from Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Cyprus are now the first from their countries to ski to the North Pole. With these records, they return home with a strong and positive message about the role of women today and the power within us all to achieve our ambitions, no matter how seemingly unlikely.

The team was accompanied on the ice by a documentary film crew of two camera women who shadowed the expedition and were looked after on the ice by two female polar guides. They successfully captured footage of the expedition, which will be turned into a feature-length documentary by award-winning producer/director, Holly Morris, for release some time in 2019. It is hoped that the film will help the expedition in its aim to share the story of its team as widely as possible.

EXPEDITION GOALS

The goals of the expedition were to:

- Ski the last degree to the North Pole (many team members are the first from their country to ski to the North Pole)
- Foster greater understanding between women of European and Arabic cultures
- Inspire others to reach beyond the expectation of others and fulfill their own life ambitions
- Complete the POWER study, which looked at the physiological adaptation of women in extreme environments, particularly energy expenditure and metabolism
- Complete a psychological study looking at the impact of experiences in extreme environments on values

CHALLENGES FACED

- Timeframe: Our expedition was only seven days long, which brings challenges. We had to be ready to go with our best performance right from the moment we landed on the ice, and we were always against the clock.
- Terrain: Traveling through a landscape that is itself moving was a unique challenge. We were aware that we had to offset the drift of the ice in our navigation so that we didn't drift past the Pole and end up having to ski against

the movement. This added to the "against the clock" feeling of the expedition because we had to keep moving in order not to drift too far in the wrong direction. Challenges of the terrain itself were pressure ridges and leads. Only once did we come across open leads, but luckily we were able to find a route through. We were hesitant across our first frozen lead but we got a lot braver as we crossed more of them! Twice we came across pressure ridges large enough to cause problems. Each time, we ended up skiing a considerable distance in the wrong direction in order to find a route through. In all cases, the size of our team was a significant factor. It took us much longer to get everyone across obstacles, which increased the risk that something would move while we were negotiating them....but thankfully this didn't happen.



- Experience: One of the biggest challenges – and yet perhaps the most interesting part of the project – was the lack of experience within our team. On our first day, in temperatures of -38C, we had a team member with frostbite despite having trained hard on avoidance, having warned ourselves that the first day was when we were most at risk, and having repeatedly checked ourselves and each other throughout the day. We have since thought long and hard about what we could have done differently to prevent this case of frostbite. Our conclusion is that lack of experience of what it 'feels' like to not be able to feel your extremities must be a critical factor - perhaps more so than previously realised. We need to think of new tests we can do while on the move to check extremities.
- Polar Bears: Last year a polar bear was encountered within the last degree, so we were extra careful. We conducted watches, which were successful. In fact, most people enjoyed their turn.
- Communications: For such a short expedition, normal communication/social media plans weren't very effective. We needed more intense communications, more pre-prepared material, and a more detailed plan.

EXPEDITION RESULTS

The team reached the North Pole on the 21st April 2018. Team members from Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Cyprus are now the first from their country to have skied to the North Pole. A documentary film team successfully shadowed the expedition, and their footage will be edited into a feature-length documentary for release some time in 2019. Preliminary results of the POWER study will be presented at the DAVOS Summit in 2018, but a full analysis will not be completed until the following year.

Similarly, results from the psychology study are not expected until 2019 as part of a wider project.

EXPEDITION FUNDING

Principle sponsor: Kaspersky Lab, National Sponsors: Honda, Engie, OmanTel, Poseidon Expeditions, I Feel Slovenia (Slovenian Tourist Board), Sports Corner, Equipment Sponsors: Berghaus, Montane, Hilleberg, Summit To Eat, Grant: Winston Churchill Memorial Trust

ABOUT THE FLAG CARRIER

I am a British Polar Explorer and a WINGS Fellow (Courage Award 2014). After spending three continuous years on an Antarctic Research Station as a Meteorologist for the British Antarctic Survey monitoring climate and ozone, I began organising and leading my own expeditions including the First British Women's Crossing of Greenland and the Commonwealth Women's Antarctic Expedition (which took a team of novices from countries such as India, Jamaica, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore to the South Pole). In 2012, I became the first woman to ski alone across Antarctica, a 59-day journey of 1084 miles. In the UK I have been appointed MBE for services to polar exploration and awarded the Polar Medal. I am a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and of The Explorers Club.

EXPEDITION TEAM

Team Leader: Felicity Aston

Supporting Members:

Asma Al Thani (Qatar), Ida Olsson (Sweden), Lamees Nijem (Kuwait), Natasa Briski (Slovenia), Mariam Alabbas (Saudi Arabia), Stephanie Solomonides (Cyprus), Anisa Al Raisi (Oman), Susan Gallon (France), Olga Rummyantseva (Russia), Misba Khan (UK)



CONTACT INFORMATION

<http://www.euroarabianexpedition.com>



WINGS WORLDQUEST

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.wingsworldquest.org

info@wingsworldquest.org