**Sir Ranulph Fiennes: Coping with extreme weather**

Sir Ranulph Fiennes, who recently returned to the UK after his latest Antarctic expedition, explains the impact of extremely cold weather - and how to cope with it.

I recently returned to the UK after developing a case of frostbite on my latest expedition in Antarctica, which we nicknamed "The Coldest Journey". The epic journey, which aimed to complete the first ever trans-Antarctic crossing during the polar winter, has continued without me, with a highly experienced team of four Britons and one Canadian.

Each foray I've made into the Arctic and Antarctic has confirmed that low temperatures without the wind are relatively bearable, providing that your clothing is sufficient. In Antarctica in particular you have high altitude to deal with which lends itself to being very windy. In the polar regions, even the smallest of holes in your warm clothing can have major implications on your core temperature and survival. If you are sweating and cold air manages to get inside your layers then you are in trouble.

In extreme cold, you can't think that your natural attributes will work as well as they usually do. In my case, I'd proved in various situations that my circulation was fine, even better than colleagues on previous expeditions, yet suddenly two weeks ago, during a whiteout at -33°C, and after only 15 minutes of exposure, one hand had a problem but the other one was fine.

The cold can affect you in strange ways, mentally and physically. To be mentally prepared for such extreme and demanding environments is incredibly difficult. Carrying out detailed planning so that you are confident in the expedition and its success is key, as is developing a mental toughness when faced with difficult situations. It is imperative to stay focused and not to panic if something bad or unexpected happens.

As an expedition member, you must believe in yourself and your abilities, and know your role within the expedition inside out. Preparation is key. In a group situation, when one person is having a down day, it is important for the others to pull him back up and motivate him and keep him focused. Everyone will have a down day, but in a team environment they will help each other and work together to reach the end goal.

To be physically prepared for extreme temperatures, training to get fit is critical, and you can try to put on weight to give you a bit of a cushion. Obviously, it also helps to research the best cold weather gear for whatever particular activity you are undertaking as well, so you are as well-equipped and warm as possible on the expedition.

What makes the Coldest Journey so unique is that it is the first attempt to traverse Antarctica during polar winter, so not only will it be cold, it will be completely dark for much of the expedition, which is also likely to affect the team's mindset.

When the weather sets in you cope with it like any other person. We play cards, draughts, backgammon, write blogs, write to the nearest and dearest, watch DVDs, listen to music …

And the team has seven or eight furry little mascots. I had a pink elephant from my daughter, Rob Lambert the doctor has two penguins, someone else has a power gorilla. There is also a busy little mouse called Mary, who seems to be the most notable. These mascots keep the team going.