**Antarctic Adventure Ben Fogle tells David Harrison of a terrifying journey**

It was the moment when Ben Fogle thought he was going to die. The television presenter and his fellow adventurers, James Cracknell and Ed Coats, were deep into their gruelling expedition to the South Pole when they realised they had strayed on to a giant crevasse. This was a huge crack in the ice, hidden from view by a thin cover of snow and ice. “We were walking,” Fogle said, “when suddenly I heard a loud boom, then another one. I realised it was the sound of snow falling into a crevasse. We had been told that there were no crevasses on our route but I could feel the snow shifting beneath me. Crevasses can be a mile deep and I was terrified that I would be dragged down. I thought, ‘I could die here’. My mouth went dry and I started to panic.” Fortunately, Fogle, 35, and his colleagues managed to calm themselves enough to navigate out of danger.

The team was one of a number competing in a race to the South Pole. They eventually finished second behind two Norwegians. The British adventurers skied, and pulled their sledges, across 481 miles of snow and ice in 18 days, five hours and 30 minutes. Fogle said he was “not disappointed” at losing to the Norwegians.

“I’m just delighted to have finished,” he said. “I knew it would be tough but I had no idea it would take such a toll on our bodies.” He added: “It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done. It started with frostbite, then I burnt my lips, got blisters on my feet and had a bit of hypothermia. It all just starts to get on top of you. There were many days when I thought we were not going to finish the race.”

Fogle has frostbite on his nose. “I was worried I might lose my nose,” he said. “For the last 43 miles I put a hand-warmer on it and wrapped it in a bandage to try and keep it warm.” Doctors at the Antarctic base have told him the frostbite will clear up in a couple of months. The British team all suffered from blisters. Cracknell, 36, the former Olympic rowing champion, had frostbite on his fingers and pneumonia, and both he and Coats, 28, a Bristol doctor, suffered chest infections.

Bitterly cold winds pushed the temperature as lowas –50°C at times and whipped the snow up to create a “white-out”. Some days brought bright blue skies and lifted the temperatures to –15°C. Throughout their expedition across the vast, hostile landscape they saw no sign of wildlife. “Not even a single bird,” said Fogle. “That tells you how hostile the landscape was.” The trio skied for around 16 hours a day, slept for just four hours, and spent the rest of the day eating and preparing for the

next stage of the race. They burnt up to 9,000 calories a day but consumed only 3,500, causing them all to lose the weight they had deliberately put on before the trip. They enjoyed breakfast – porridge “with lots of sugar” – and they constantly snacked on salami, chocolate, cheese and jelly babies. Dinner was powdered food with added water. “If you ate it in England you would think it was disgusting,” said Fogle. “But to us it was food from heaven.” The fish pie was the favourite, but the team also liked the sweet and sour chicken, spaghetti bolognese, and spicy mince with rice. The adventurers drank melted snow, and boiled water on a small stove to make tea and coffee. Fogle took Earl Grey tea bags “as a treat”. They slept in a small three-man tent that was lightweight but able to withstand the bitter Antarctic storms.Fogle said the team got on well with each other, and “had a laugh” in the tent. “Amazingly, there were no rows.”

While Coats passed the 16-hour days listening to *Blackadder*, and Cracknell to Andrew Marr’s *History of* *Modern Britain*, Fogle dealt with the long, freezing days by mentally “going somewhere else, thinking about places I have been on holiday”. He was also cheered by a series of messages his wife Marina gave him in envelopes to be opened each day of the expedition. Fogle said he now wanted to stay at home for a long time. “But ask me again in six months’ time,” he added with a chuckle.