

Survivors of Antarctic mission land in NZ

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A glacier is seen close to Antarctica. Two Norwegian adventurers have said they held slim hopes of finding the three other members of their party alive, after their yacht went missing in a fierce storm in the region.

Two Norwegian adventurers Monday said they held slim hopes of finding the three other members of their party alive, after their yacht went missing in a fierce Antarctic storm.

Jarle Andhoy and Samuel Massie had been journeying by quad bike across Antarctica on their way to the South Pole when the tempest struck the 48-foot (14-metre) sailboat, but abandoned the quest on hearing the boat was missing.

Andhoy said his concern now was to contact the families of the three missing men -- Norwegians Tom Gisle Bellika, 36, and Robert Skaanes, 34, and 32-year-old Leonard Banks, a dual South African and British citizen.

"There's nothing to prove the boat is lost but I am going to be very honest with the family and realistic," he told reporters after being airlifted to the quake-hit [New Zealand](#) city of Christchurch on a US flight.

Massie, 18, said he hoped the steel-hulled Berserk was "sailing somewhere in South America without an engine" but acknowledged this was "the darkest time".

"It's been really traumatic. I'm here and not my crew," he said.

"I've been living with them now for the last seven months. When you live with somebody for that length of time in a ship a few metres big you really get to know them. They get like family, you know. I just lost three family members."

New Zealand officials hold out little hope of finding any survivors from the Berserk, which has not been heard from since it was hit by a ferocious storm in the Ross Sea off Antarctica on February 22. Sea and air searches have only found the boat's damaged and ice-encrusted liferaft.

Antarctica New Zealand chief executive Lou Sanson said the storm had been described as the biggest to hit the area in 20 years, packing winds of up to 180 kilometres (110 miles) an hour.

"Obviously they sustained damage," he told Radio New Zealand. "I just don't think there is any hope."

The Berserk had arrived on its reportedly unauthorised mission in [Antarctica](#) on February 11, and had left the two Norwegian explorers near the New Zealand and US bases to begin a quad bike journey to the South Pole.

Sanson said the issue of the safety of the expedition had been raised.



Massive icebergs clog the seas off the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica. A Norwegian expedition to the South Pole had likely been hit by tragedy, with hopes of finding the party's yacht with three sailors onboard slim, a New Zealand official said Monday.

"A number of both US (officials) and ourselves had said... at this time of year we close the bases for a very good reason -- because the temperatures are plummeting," he said.

"It's minus 20 (C, minus four F) there today, on the polar plateau it's minus 34 and (with a) wind chill of up to minus 60. And these guys had a 1,600 kilometre quad bike trip to the South Pole at one of the coldest times of the year and when we do get these big storms."

Andhoy, 34, defended the mission, which was to mark the centenary of fellow Norwegian Roald Amundsen becoming the first explorer to reach the [South Pole](#) on December 14, 1911.

"I think we did everything as good as we could. We prepared 110 percent," he said. "The place where this incident happened was a very

easy going place to sail, it's near a sound, near land, safe anchorage...

"This ending is very, very surprising. There's no logic to it."

Andhoy praised the multinational search which New Zealand authorities had led even as they grappled with the impact of the devastating 6.3-magnitude quake that flattened Christchurch last Tuesday.

"This help is really beyond anything we expected because we put ourselves in that situation. We knew the risk of it," he said.

New Zealand maritime authorities said Monday the search for the Berserk was continuing but that the anti-whaling ship the Steve Irwin, which had found the life raft, had been released from the operation.

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