

Australians make Antarctic history

January 27 2012



A handout photo taken and released by You Can on December 31, shows Australians Justin Jones (L), 28, and James Castrission, 29, displaying the Australian flag at the South Pole sphere which marked the half-way point of their 2,270 km unaided expedition from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole and back.

Two Australian adventurers have made Antarctic history by becoming the first team to travel unaided to the South Pole and back, surviving three months of "extreme hardship", they said on Friday.

James Castrission, a 29-year-old accountant, and Justin Jones, 28 and a scientist, skied 2,270 kilometres (1,400 miles) to complete the arduous trek, overcoming fatigue, injuries and hallucinations from [lack of sleep](#) and food.

"It's an absolutely fantastic feeling, I can't describe the elation I am feeling right now," said Castrission after reaching home base late Thursday.

"It has been nearly three months of extreme hardship and at times simply surviving this adventure has been our goal.

"It's great to finish this trek on Australia Day (January 26) too and we can't wait to step onto the tarmac at Sydney Airport next week."

The pair reached the Pole on December 31 and en route passed the previous longest polar skiing trip without airdrops or sails. That record was set in 2009 when Norwegian Cecilie Skog and American Ryan Waters covered 1,800 kilometres.

Both men beefed up by about 20 kilograms (45 pounds) each in preparation for the gruelling trip, during which they towed 160 kilograms of gear.

They were eating the calorie equivalent of 15 beef burgers a day until [bad weather](#) caused delays in reaching the [South Pole](#), forcing them to ration their [food supplies](#).

They ended up losing 55 kilograms in weight between them.

"Despite the blisters, ulcers, soreness and fatigue I feel fantastic," said Jones.

"This trek has been the most mentally and physically demanding thing I have ever done but it feels worth it.

"I know the enormity of what we have achieved probably won't sink in until we are back home, however I'm now just looking forward to a nice hot meal and sleeping in a comfortable bed."

Over the past 89 days they endured heavy snowfall and winds of up to 70 kilometres per hour while the [average temperature](#) has been minus 25

Celsius (minus 13 Fahrenheit).

The men are now awaiting a flight out of Antarctica, which will take them to Chile to undergo medical examinations before returning to Australia next week.

They are familiar with extremes, have previously battled giant seas, sickness, sharks and food shortages during a 62-day world record crossing of the Tasman Sea in a kayak in 2007-2008 -- a 3,300-kilometre journey.

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