

Fiennes's evacuation from Antarctica under way

February 27 2013, by Justine Gerardy



Explorers Ranulph Fiennes (left) and Anton Bowring talk to journalists on January 6, 2013 in Cape Town. Fiennes's evacuation got under way after the veteran adventurer was forced to pull out of a marathon expedition because of frostbite.

The evacuation of injured British explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes from Antarctica got under way Wednesday after the veteran adventurer was forced to pull out of a marathon expedition because of frostbite.

Fiennes was picked up in the early morning and headed for a Belgian station about 70 kilometres (43 miles) away after injuring his left hand at the weekend, his team said.

The 68-year-old was part of a six-member team attempting the first winter crossing of the world's coldest continent.

"After what seems like an eternity waiting for the weather to improve, Ran was finally able to begin his long journey home in the early hours of this morning," said Hugh Bowring of the expedition's operations headquarters in London.

His withdrawal from the epic trek, which is set to start next month, was announced on Monday but a [snowstorm](#) had grounded the team and stalled his evacuation.

Fiennes was finally picked up Wednesday by a team of Belgians stationed at Princess Elisabeth Station.

The group reached the expedition team at 6:00 am local time (0800 GMT) in temperatures of around minus 18 Celsius (minus 0.4 Fahrenheit) and winds of around 20 knots (37 km/h, 23 mph).

If weather permits, he will next be flown from the Belgian base to the Russian-run station at Novo which has an airstrip and is a key route in and out of Antarctica.

"All being well, the group will fly from Novo to Cape Town late this evening," Bowring said in a statement.

"Although given the nature of the ever-changing [weather conditions](#) out in Antarctica, nothing is certain."

[Medical treatment](#) for the frostbite injury is the priority on arrival before the adventurer flies back to the United Kingdom.

In a video posted on the expedition website of his departure, Fiennes said he was "not happy at all".

"The good thing is that the dream is still continuing," he added.

The team's doctor said Tuesday that "Ran", as the multiple record holder is known, has suffered frostbite to four fingers of his left hand.

This was after he removed a glove to adjust a ski binding at the weekend, forcing him to withdraw from the marathon trek.

Fiennes had suffered severe [frostbite](#) to the same hand during a 2000 expedition, and sawed off the damaged parts of his fingers himself.

The five remaining members of the team will press on with the mission, dubbed The Coldest Journey, and are set to start the winter crossing on March 21.

The group hopes to be the first to make a more than 2,000-mile crossing in winter.

The furthest winter journey in Antarctica so far covered 60 miles in the early 20th century.

The team members will face six months of mostly darkness in an area where temperatures can plunge to minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 Fahrenheit).

The team is led by two skiers carrying radars and followed by two tractors pulling sledge-mounted, converted containers with the rest of the

team, equipment, fuel and food.

Despite Fiennes' absence, the remaining members said they carries "his determination and incredible spirit forward".

"It is now only a few hours since we said our difficult farewells but we are already moving south and are poised to gain the polar plateau. Onwards," said the team's Brian Newham.

The campaign aims to raise \$10 million (7.6 million euros) for the Seeing is Believing blindness charity and will carry out scientific research.

Fiennes was the oldest Briton to summit Mount Everest, has crossed both polar ice caps, and has also crossed the Antarctic unsupported.

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Citation: Fiennes's evacuation from Antarctica under way (2013, February 27) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-fiennes-evacuation-antarctica.html>

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