

A Bristol-based polar explorer is preparing to cross Greenland next month, on a 400-mile trek that has education at its heart. DOMINIC HARRIS spoke to Alan Chambers as he prepared for the trip.

# THE COLDEST CLASSROOM ON EARTH



Honour: Bristol adventurer Alan Chambers was awarded the MBE after leading the first British team to walk unsupported to the Geographic North Pole from Canada

**W**HEN you are in a wind-lashed tent at -50°C in the middle of the Arctic Circle, the idea of teaching a load of school children about environmental issues and the benefits of good nutrition might not be the first thing that springs to mind.

But from their icy 'classroom' in Greenland, explorers Alan Chambers and Peter Herbert will be helping thousands of youngsters across the UK with their school work, teaching them about everything from waste management to how to gather scientific data.

Alan, who lives in Whitechurch, and Peter, from Somerset, will set out on their educational trek at the end of April - a 400-mile, 40-day crossing of the world's largest island - and bring their experiences back to classrooms in schools all around the country.

The pair are taking their inspiration from the German explorer Alfred Wegener, who made several expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s to Greenland to study polar air circulation. Ridiculed by the established scientific community in his day, Wegener has since been recognised as the founding father of plate tectonics, which now features on the National Curriculum.

He also gave his life in a courageous rescue attempt to support his team in Greenland.

Alan and Peter are setting out from Uummannaq on Greenland's west coast, and will head across a latitude of 71°N for Wegener's mid ice station - a journey that rises from sea level up to an altitude of about 12,000ft (3,600m).

During their expedition, the pair will be entirely self-sufficient, skiing and walking across Greenland's ice cap while dragging sledges that weigh more than 200lbs (91kg).

But the explorers are well-experienced in such journeys. Alan, a former Royal Marine, was awarded the MBE after leading the first British team to walk unsupported to the Geographic North Pole from Canada in 2000.

And among Peter's polar achievements is the founding of Expedition Technical Support, a design and development facility dedicated to supporting Arctic and Antarctic exploration.

But this is their first major expedition that has an educational aim at its heart.



Green for go: Peter Herbert, left, and Alan Chambers at the expedition launch

### Greenland expedition 2008

- Alan and Peter's two-man, unsupported expedition will see them ski and hike from the west coast of Greenland to Wegener's Mid Ice Station, across 400 miles (640 kilometres) of icy terrain as high as 12,000ft.
- They are leaving at the end of April when it is very cold - down to -50°C with the wind chill. This means snow ledges will be more solid and there will be less snow melt.
- In his numerous trips to the North Pole since 2000, Alan has noticed increasing amounts of ice melt. He says that distances between ice floes are now up to 40 miles (64km), testament to the impact of climate change.
- Alan and Peter's trip has been sponsored by the Bristol-based company Great British Mobility Group.

Children will be able to follow the pair across the ice on the explorers' website, through blogs, where they will answer questions throughout their journey, and via live video links and competitions.

They will learn about climate change and its impact on wildlife, the principles of sustainability, especially heat and waste management, the use of technology and the benefits of good leadership and training.

### What they're taking on their adventure

- Alan and Peter will be pulling 200lb (91kg) sleds, which will carry all their equipment.
- Their expedition gear includes a specially-designed tent, eiderdown sleeping bags capable of withstanding temperatures as low as -60°C, and special cold-weather ski boots.
- They will also take safety transmitters, a satellite communications system, ice screws and anchors, windproof clothing, GPS systems, satellite phones, heat exchanger fuel systems and an EPIRB - an emergency positioning radio beacon.
- The satellite communications systems will be powered by batteries charged through a solar panel.
- Alan and Peter will have to eat 6,000 calories a day in order to stay healthy on their 40-day trip. They will carry: 140 large chocolate bars, 140 bowls of porridge, 70 freeze-dried pasta and rice dishes, 100 bars of fudge, 32pints (15 litres) of cooking fuel. They will be melting 66lbs (30kg) of ice each day in order to get water for drinking and cooking.

On Monday, at the expedition's official launch at Queen Square Dining Room, the explorers and their team met more than 70 people from local businesses and schools who are interested in getting involved with the expedition.

Richard Hale, Feet of Green's business and education director, is keen to link the expedition with as many schools as possible, from both the independent and state sectors.

He said: "What we are doing links



The big chill: The trek from Uummannaq to Wegener's ice station will take 40 days and cover 400 miles

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**Richard Hale, of Feet of Green**

in with the National Curriculum, from primary school right up to secondary level.

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The expedition is also being run in partnership with the GoIt! Schools Initiative and the HTI, which campaigns for schools to encourage children to be more adventurous and take risks.

GoIt! schools can become members of Feet of Green and enter competitions for the explorers. From how to design an efficient sled to the design of an effective diet for them.

Partnering with GoIt! has given them access to 400 schools, and information about their trip has gone out to almost 30,000 schools nationally - meaning they could help up to 15 million children.

Work with schools in Bristol is in its early days, but Clifton College, Colston's Girls, the Brunel Academy, Slirehampton Primary school and Keynham Rugby Club are all on board, and Feet of Green is involving more schools through the Extended Schools Partnerships in Bristol.

Alan, who is 40 this year, said: "We want to get children involved with this trip as much as possible, on a practical educational level and an inspirational level."

**LISTEN ONLINE**

To listen to how Alan Chambers will cross Greenland, and hear about the training involved in expeditions, visit our website [www.thisisbristol.co.uk/greenland](http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/greenland)