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TEN EDINBURGH PUPILS RETURN FROM LIFE CHANGING ARCTIC EXPEDITION

Exhausted and exalted, ten teenagers flew back into Glasgow Airport having completed a life changing 10 day, 100km arctic expedition with the charity, The Polar Academy (www.thepolaracademy.org).

All aged between 15 and 17 years old, the 6 girls and 4 boys are the second group to benefit from The Polar Academy, a charity set-up in 2013 by expedition leader Craig Mathieson and with the aim of inspiring Scotland's youth through exploration.

During the expedition, temperatures were as low as minus 25C. They've seen the Northern Lights and tasted a traditional Inuit dish of raw narwhal skin.

Selected from St Augustine's, Liberton, Gracemount, Forrester and Tynecastle High comprehensive schools, the Edinburgh pupils faced temperatures below -20C and hauled their own 45kg sledges as they played an active role in navigating across sea ice, setting up camp and tracking through remote mountain passes on x-country skis. During the expedition each pupil burned at least 3,000 calories per day.

Supported by three expert guides and a doctor, they also conducted scientific field research on ice samples.

47 year-old Mathieson, named in 2013 by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society as Scotland's first Explorer in Residence, is a veteran of several successful expeditions to both the North and South Poles.

The Bo'ness based explorer, commented: "I'm so proud of the whole group. Throughout the expedition, all ten pupils have shown tremendous grit and determination and worked really well as a team. Over these 10 days and during the months of hard physical training, they have all grown in confidence and I'm sure now know what can be achieved with determination and hard work.

"By taking that first step with the Polar Academy, each has broken the mould to realise that life really can get better. They are ordinary pupils who have achieved the extraordinary and the living breathing proof that dreams are attainable. Huge thanks to Chris Tiso, CEO of outdoor retailer Tiso, Bergans of Norway and all of the other organisations which have contributed to helping give these pupils a truly life changing experience."

During the expedition, through wild, challenging terrain, the pupils' camped and cooked under the stars, saw the Northern Lights, visited abandoned Inuit villages and passed under countless unnamed peaks within one of the remotest places on earth.

The pupils will now be tasked with relating their personal experiences to peer-groups in Edinburgh schools with the aim of inspiring thousands of other kids across Edinburgh and Scotland.

Julia Sanderson celebrated her 17th birthday on the expedition: “It was amazing, breathtaking, challenging and hugely rewarding. Everyday brought new experiences and challenges. We had a huge day skiing over a glacier, I saw the stunning Northern Lights and we even ate a traditional Inuit meal of raw narwhal skin! At night it was minus 25C but during the day we were putting on factor 50 sunscreen.”

The Polar Academy needs to raise £170,000 for each of its annual expeditions, made possible by the input of a number of individuals and organisations, including Chris Tiso, CEO of the outdoor retail specialist Tiso Group and a founding supporter of the charity. Bergans of Norway, City of Edinburgh Council, Cornhill Building Services and private donors also support the charity.

Chris Tiso, the CEO of Tiso Group, fellow adventurer and Hon President of Scouts Scotland, added: “The teenagers have shown tremendous commitment and grit to undertake the tough physical training required to journey in the arctic. Through The Polar Academy and with the support of their school and parents, these ordinary pupils have hugely gained in confidence and achieved the extraordinary.”

The expedition started at Tasiilaq and navigated to Tiniteqilaaq before returning back to Tasiilaq. The expedition included Mathieson’s hand-picked expert fellow guides; Nigel Williams, Head of Training at sportscotland Glenmore Lodge (by Aviemore), Dr Michael Wild as expedition doctor and Jess Ainslie, an instructor at Glenmore Lodge.

Edinburgh expedition team

Chloe Hogg (15 – Tynecastle HS), Natasha Hoffmann (15 - Liberton), Ryan Hume (15 - Liberton), Sara Michno (15 - Tynecastle), Iona Somerville (15 - Gracemount), Julia Sanderson (16 - Gracemount), Nathan Stewart (15 – St Augustines), Gregor Whitlie (16 – Forrester HS), Alanna Laing (15 - Forrester), Scott Coomber (16 – Forrester HS).

Leadership Team (back-up team)

Rebecca Alexander, Gregor McRae, Mackenzie Ritchie, Georgia McNally, Jason Cheung.

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