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MARTIN MURRAY
EXTREME ADVENTURES

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Extreme Adventures

Martin Murray: To the Top of the World

Over the years, I've interviewed a great many people. And of all the ones I have, I can honestly say that none have ever been on another line taking a call about polar bear sightings. But then, Martin Murray is unlike anyone I've ever met.

Martin Murray likes to swim and ski. That doesn't sound unusual until you realize that he swims ten km at a time across a lake, and plans to ski—quite possibly by himself—all the way to the North Pole.

"I've always been an outdoorsman, with a desire for adventure," says Murray, manager of the family-run Murray O.K. Tire in Kapuskasing, Ontario. "My motto is go for it, be active."

Born into the business

His involvement with the business started even before he graduated from college as a licensed mechanic. "I was born and raised in a garage," he says. "My mother and father started this business in 1971, and I was always going to go into it. Even when I was in college, I was working in the shop after school. I never got out of that circle, which is why I'm doing this now."

He put his heart and soul into the company, and while it was rewarding, the long hours took their toll. "In 2000, I was working too much," he says. "I was putting a lot of energy into the business, and I realized that I burned out. There was a lack of energy, and I felt depressed. That's when I decided to get active, and to combine an active life and a successful business. That's what brought me to the adventure world."

A rekindled passion

It was shortly after Murray's 30th birthday that he stopped smoking and rekindled a passion for the outdoors that he'd known

throughout his boyhood. He set himself to the task of improving his fitness and skills in search of an ultimate goal.

In March 2004, he went on an organized expedition to cross Lake Abitibi. "It's a five-day ski trip, covering 100 km," he says. "We do it on cross-country skis. I was a paying customer on the expedition, and there were forty of us on the lake.

"That was the last year the adventure company was doing it, so a friend and I decided to go [in March 2005]. We called some other guys in the area and we created our own mini-expedition with seven people."

A man and his dog

With three- and five-day solo expeditions for training, he crossed Lake Winnipeg in January 2006, taking twenty days to cross the ice in a solo, unassisted expedition. In March, he went across Abitibi again, accompanied by friends, and in July, he swam the 10 km across Remi Lake in five hours and 58 minutes.

In January 2007 he again tackled Lake Abitibi, but this time with a four-legged companion, his Malamute dog Charlotte.

"It was the first time with my dog on the ice," he says. "It was the first time she was strong enough for it. She pulls a pulka (sleigh) that's used for the equipment.

"On that expedition, it rained for two days, and there was water on top of the ice. The

nights were below zero, and my boots were damp and I had to leave them in the shape of my feet so they'd freeze like that. That way, I was able to put them on in the morning. I would ski for half an hour and the boots would warm up, and then I'd tie them up. If you get your feet wet, you've got to keep the boots in the proper shape of your foot. It's very uncomfortable when the temperature is -20°C."

Business and adventure

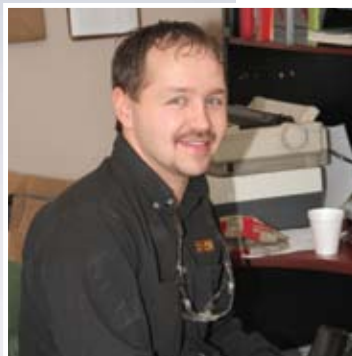
Business and adventure are two different worlds, Murray says. "When I'm on the ice, the only thing I worry about is survival, taking care of me, taking care of the next day. I clear my mind of the business. I'm better in my business now because I can go away from it, and when I return I have a fresh perspective."

He's planning an expedition in January 2008, when he and Charlotte will cross James Bay. This adventure isn't measured in distance, but in days. "It's not how far, but how long," he says. "I have 20 days of food, and I have to have a safety net of two days in my supplies. Where I go depends on where I am in 15 days. On the Quebec side of James Bay there's a village every 100 km or so, and the expedition is going to end at one of those villages. If I reach one and I've got six days of supplies left, I'll go for the next one.

"I have to bring 40 lbs of food for the dog, and 60 lbs of fuel and food for me, plus our equipment. It's more efficient to travel



Martin Murray, manager of Murray O.K. Tire, with his Malamute dog, Charlotte



Murray O.K. Tire employees (from top) Claude Michaud, Stéphane Desbiens, and Louise S. Isabelle

cross the top of the globe and be evacuated from the Russian side on schedule. There, 200 km from the Pole, is the Borneo Ice Station, a starting point for adventurers who prefer an “easier” guided trek. Returning to Canada from the Pole on skis requires even more polar experience—only ten people have achieved the feat—and Murray, who says he is not focusing on such a difficult venture, plans to fly home from Russia.

“The problem is that the Russians leave the ice on the April 30th,” he says. “If you’re too late and you’re still on the ice past April, the flight from Canada picks you up, and that’s \$100,000.”

Support is everything

Murray depends on the support of his children, his girlfriend Claire, and the staff of his store to keep him going, along with his mother and father, who help with the trip food preparation. He also receives a lot of encouragement from his company’s clients.

with a dog. It’s not really for the company, but because they can easily pull their weight and sometimes twice that.” Both man and dog will drag pulkas; Charlotte’s will always weigh the same, while Murray’s sleigh will lighten as they consume the food and fuel.

Difficulties of survival

The difficulties of survival on the ice aren’t just the cold conditions. The call about the polar bear was a report of a sighting near the point where Murray’s expedition will start. These are dangerous creatures, and Charlotte’s job will be to smell any that are around and warn Murray in time.

All of these adventures are preparation for his supreme goal: to reach the North Pole on cross-country skis in 2010.

“I’m training and focusing to do it alone,” he says. “I’d like to be with someone, but it’s hard to raise an expedition, and if the day comes and I don’t have someone ready to go with me, I will be there alone with my dog.” If he succeeds, he will be one of only some 225 people to achieve the feat since the beginning of the 20th century.

Part of the difficulty is the cost. While he’s hoping it will not exceed \$60,000, he must budget \$250,000, in case he doesn’t reach specific points in time.

A traditional North Pole expedition covers 775 km over 50 days, and it’s \$32,000 for the flight to the starting point. If he needs to replenish supplies at the 88th Parallel, it’s \$58,000. And then he has to

“People come into the shop and ask about my adventures. I really see it at the first snowfall, when I’m out walking and people are coming up and asking what’s next. There’s great interest in the community. I’m happy because this is what it takes; it’s a great sense of motivation to me.

“The adventures, the training and the preparation would be impossible to achieve without 100% support of my co-workers. We have a great teamwork that supports me. The staff is working very hard and is backing me, with all of them taking responsibility to ensure our client is always taken care of. They are a great, great team, and without their dedication to their workplace, the adventures would be impossible.” **TN**