

THE GREAT RACE

Pole push powered by truffles and pemmican

KEVIN VALLELY

NOVEMBER 22, 2008

PUNTA ARENAS, CHILE -- *This is the first of Vancouver writer Kevin Vallely's weekly progress reports as he and his companions try to reach the South Pole in record time.*

Punta Arenas proclaims itself to be the southernmost city on Earth. Located at the tip of South America, it's a picturesque community of mansions and elegant shops that speak of a time when the city was a critical port of call for ships rounding the turbulent Cape Horn.

It still draws travellers to enjoy Chile's mountainous beauty (or simply to visit "the end of the world"), but for Canada's South Pole Quest team, it's a last taste of civilization before we reach Antarctica to run and ski 1,130 kilometres to where the world really ends.

Extreme athlete Ray Zahab of Ottawa, Arctic adventurer Richard Weber and I left from Toronto on Monday with eight duffel bags and seven barrels stuffed with food and equipment. The mountain of gear raised many eyebrows at the airport (none more than ours when we learned the extra baggage cost), but our expedition is "unsupported." What we start with is all we'll have.

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committed to letting them take part in the adventure.

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