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JOHN ALL SET FOR SOLO MISSION TO THE SOUTH POLE

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11:40 - 21 August 2006

Intrepid John Wilton- Davies is setting out to become only the eighth person in history to reach the South Pole alone and unsupported.

The self-employed Devon business consultant has already spent £70,000 on training and equipment for the gruelling expedition, which is due to start in November.

John, who lives with his wife and two young children in Clyst Honiton, will carry 140kg of supplies behind him on a sledge for the duration of the expedition, which could take up to three months.

"I'm 44 and married with two young children, so I guess it's mid-life crisis time," said John.

"I have been a fairly fit guy most of my life and I got to the point where I thought, if I don't do something like this now, things will start wearing out.

"I thought if I did something as big as this I would get it out of my system. I will not come home and think I want to do something else now."

Fewer than 200 people have ever reached the South Pole, and the majority have travelled in teams or relied on dogs, kites or powered vehicles to get them there.

John has trained this year in Spitzbergen and Greenland in an attempt to prepare himself for the conditions. But during training temperatures have only dropped to minus-one degree Celsius.

For the expedition itself he is expecting temperatures to average around minus-20 to minus-25 and at times even plunge to 40 below zero.

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But John said: "The thing that everyone says is that you can get used to the cold but you never really acclimatise to it, so perhaps I'll be at an advantage not knowing how cold it will be, as I won't be so terrified of it."

He hopes to cover the 700 miles at the rate of 10 to 15 miles per day, by the end spending up to 12 hours walking, pulling his sledge behind him.

His equipment will include all his food, shelter, state-of-the-art satellite communication equipment and enough fuel to spend four or five hours a day thawing out ice and snow to make water.

While he is away, his wife Michele, 34, who works for Christows Stockbrokers in Dix's Field, will look after the couple's children, Zak, three, and Sam, one.

She said: "I'm extremely understanding. I find it strange and put it down to a mid-life crisis. I realised he would be away for two or three months, but hadn't really taken into account the amount of training. There are stages where I am very supportive and times where I'm a bit fed up with the whole thing. I think he'll cope with it physically, but I think the biggest problem will be the mental difficulties of being on his own for that amount of time."

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