



Power trippers: Ray Zahab, Richard Weber and Kevin Vallely hope to set a new speed record for the South Pole.

The Super Squad

Three of Canada's top adventurers join forces in a bid to conquer the South Pole

HOW DO YOU TOP running across the Sahara? Canadian ultra athlete extraordinaire Ray Zahab was stumped on what to do for his next big adventure after his epic 111-consecutive-day traverse of the world's most famous desert in the spring of 2007. Then it occurred to him—an all-Canadian, unsupported sprint to the South Pole using sustainable power whenever possible. And if he and his team happen to beat British adventurer Hannah McKeand's world record for the fastest unsupported trek to the South

Pole—39 days, nine hours and 33 minutes—well, so be it.

Richard Weber was a shoo-in as expedition leader. The native of Chelsea, Quebec, is best-known for being the first, along with Russian partner Mikhail Malakhov, to travel on foot unsupported to the North Pole and back. He's also led 45 Arctic expeditions since 1978. But even Weber is on unfamiliar ground at the opposite end of the earth. He has never been to the South Pole and looks forward to some new scenery. Adventure racer Kevin Vallely is similarly keen.

"I jumped at it like a dog for a piece of meat," admits the 44-year-old Vancouver native.

The trio will set out from Hercules Inlet on December 1, dragging the equivalent of their own body weight behind them on sleds, eventually gaining 10,000 feet in elevation across some 1,100 kilometres to the geographic South Pole. Weber and Vallely will ski, but Zahab is just going to leg it. "I can't ski," he admits.

Zahab is known for loftier goals than simply achieving superhuman feats for their own sake. This expedition is no different. Dubbed Impossible to Possible, Zahab hopes it will inspire youth to pursue their dreams. Also, along the way, the adventurers will try to leave the smallest carbon footprint they can. Fossil fuels will be needed to melt snow, but computer and camera equipment will be powered by the sun.

Vallely predicts the mental challenge of just being out there for more than a month will be the toughest part of the expedition. That, and enduring the unwavering diet of Weber's high-fat concoctions, such as old-fashioned pemmican. (Despite the immense caloric intake, each adventurer will lose 15 pounds or more.) Zahab thinks dealing with the cold will be the most difficult challenge for him. And Weber? "Keeping up with these young guys," the 49-year-old says. "I'm getting kind of old for this stuff."

"That's bull," counters Vallely. He fully expects Weber to lead the way, leaving him and the 39-year-old Zahab "hanging on for dear life."

—Kate Barker

FOR MORE INFO:
impossible2possible.com