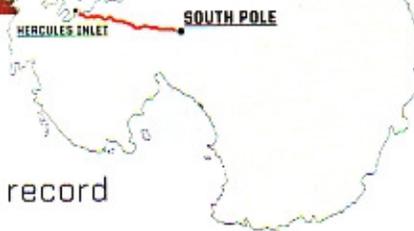


THE RACE IS ON: VALLELY, WEBER, AND ZAHAB ARRIVE AT HERCULES INLET, ANTARCTICA.



ANOTHER VICTORY ON ICE

Team Canada sets a new South Pole record

They did it—with five days and change to spare. Three Canadians now hold the title for the fastest, unsupported trek to the geographic South Pole. Ray Zahab, Richard Weber and Kevin Vallely set out from Hercules Inlet on Antarctica's Ronne Ice Shelf on December 5, 2008 at 8 a.m. They reached 90 degrees south on the morning of January 6, 2009. Their time of 33 days, 23 hours and 55 minutes smashed the previous record of 39 days and seven hours, set by American Todd Carmichael last December.

We asked the trio to compare this record-breaking achievement to their other extraordinary feats and to share some of the highs and lows they experienced on their 1,130-kilometre race due south. Zahab, a 39-year-old ultra runner from Chelsea, Quebec, is most famous for his Sahara Desert traverse when he and two others ran 70 kilometres a day for 111 days straight. The 49-year-old Weber, also from Chelsea, is a veteran Arctic explorer who together with a Russian teammate made the first unsupported expedition on foot to the North Pole and back. Vallely, a 44-year-old Vancouverite, is an experienced adventure racer who in 2003 biked along the frozen Yukon River from Dawson City to Nome, Alaska—roughly 2,000 kilometres in 49 days.

HOW DID THE SOUTH POLE COMPARE TO THE TOUGHEST ADVENTURE YOU'D DONE BEFORE?

ZAHAB: You look at 7,500 kilometres of running in the sand [in the Sahara] or 1,100 kilometres starting at sea level, going up to 10,000 feet in extreme cold with whiteout conditions while dragging a 170-pound sled. Which is tougher? I have to say, physically, in some respects, this was tougher. Mentally, running the Sahara was definitely more of a challenge.

WEBER: You almost can't compare the Poles because they aren't the same. In a way, Antarctica is not that hard. It's like going to run a mile—it's not that difficult to do. But to suddenly have to run that mile in four minutes, that's pretty hard. That's what it was all about. In the last two days we did almost a degree—by far the most I have ever trekked with a sled. **VALLELY:** Bikes on Ice was longer and probably colder, but this was physically more demanding. Ray and Richard are elite athletes,

extremely experienced and they move really, really fast. I was trying to take good quality photographs and film while trying to keep up. That was tough.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

ZAHAB: The fact that I did the whole thing on foot, in polar conditions, while dragging a sled. **WEBER:** Navigating for hours and hours in whiteout conditions. **VALLELY:** Just getting my head around the fact that I would be

doing this for 30 odd days without a day off and it would be long and hard.

WHEN WERE YOU THE MOST PHYSICALLY UNCOMFORTABLE?

ZAHAB: My feet were very bruised by 88 degrees. I attribute that to the weight of the sled pulling me back and down with me constantly trying to keep up on snowshoes and to move at a rapid pace in deep snow.

WEBER: Trekking in the whiteouts. Normally, even in [a blizzard], as your skis pass over the snow, it makes a little shadow, so you can see a little something under your feet and you can balance. But there were conditions there where I could see nothing. If you can't see where you are walking it's exhausting because suddenly your legs are adjusting all the time. In three hours, my legs turned to jelly.

VALLELY: It was probably at around 87 degrees and I started to feel the altitude. That conspired with dehydration and exhaustion so that I was getting a really awful headache. I couldn't eat, so I started to bonk as well and I was getting really light-headed. I also had some heart palpitations. By the end of the march I thought I would collapse. The guys rallied around me, got some food into me and something to drink, and then said, "Okay, let's do the next march." I made it through that day and we ended up traveling 18 nautical miles.

WHAT WAS YOUR LOWEST MOMENT?

ZAHAB: On the fourth-last day when we only did six nautical miles. It was the whiteout to end all whiteouts. We had done over 18 nautical miles every single day and all of a sudden the best we can muster is six. I remember all of us sitting in the tent and feeling like the record was slipping away, and that we were letting the kids down who were watching us.

WEBER: The last day, I got a little ill in the morning and was thinking I don't know if I can finish the day.

VALLELY: The day the altitude got to me. I was overwhelmed thinking I still have 180 nautical miles to go. I feel like this, and I still have to ascend so much higher.

DID YOU EVER THINK YOU WEREN'T GOING TO MAKE IT?

ZAHAB: On the first day we were crossing crevasses and it was very steep. I jumped over one, pulled my sled behind me, and immediately it collapses through