

Polar Exploration Community Declares Support for National Geographic Exposé on Colin O’Brady

Forty-eight leading adventurers, including Will Steger, Conrad Anker and Jon Krakauer, release plea for truth and integrity in adventure.



Generic photo of South Pole skier. Credit: Eric Philips/icetrek.com. Free for media to use in conjunction with articles about this press release and declaration

February 28, 2020 — Forty-eight of the world’s leading polar explorers, guides and adventure specialists released a joint statement today declaring their support for the recent National Geographic article detailing Colin O’Brady’s false claims about his 2018 crossing of a portion of Antarctica. The in-depth article, published on February 3, quoted a variety of experts stating O’Brady misled the media and public about the nature, risk, difficulty, and historical significance of his highly publicized trek.

“O’Brady and his exaggerated self-promotion was strongly and widely rejected by the polar community,” says Eric Philips, president of the International Polar Guides Association. “We’ve been grappling with how to set the record straight ever since and the National Geographic article aided our efforts and was greatly appreciated.”

In late 2018, Oregon-based adventurer O’Brady completed a 932-mile journey in Antarctica he called “The Impossible First,” also the title of his recent bestselling book. While his expedition was an impressive personal success for someone with little polar experience, it did not measure up to the expeditions of truly pioneering polar explorers. O’Brady claims his feat was considered

impossible, people had been trying to accomplish it for a century, a previous explorer died attempting it, and he was often beyond rescue. Each of these claims is false.

On February 13, O’Brady released a 16-page statement accusing the article of being “widely inaccurate” and demanding National Geographic issue a full retraction. The 48 polar and adventure luminaries signing the following statement, who together have achieved many of the greatest feats in Antarctic exploration history, support the article and National Geographic for taking a stand for the integrity of their field and exploration in general.

Our declaration is partially inspired by O’Brady’s February 20th appearance on the popular Joe Rogan podcast, where his false and misleading statements further damaged the integrity of the polar expedition community. On Rogan’s podcast, O’Brady mischaracterized the article’s key points and the issues that have been raised with his conduct.

“Now more than ever, telling the truth matters, so it was disappointing to hear Colin continue to use misleading statements and ignore the core themes of the arguments made against him,” says Eric Larsen, a noted polar explorer who personally guided O’Brady on a weeklong expedition to the North Pole in 2016. “As polar professionals, we want to preserve the integrity of our sport for future generations and Colin’s deceptive statements hurt those who have come before and those who will come after.”

Due to the confusion caused by O’Brady’s inflated claims, leaders of the polar community have joined to create a new system, the [Polar Expedition Classification Scheme](#). Though O’Brady claims his trip to be the first solo “unsupported, unassisted crossing of Antarctica,” PECS now classifies it as “supported” and a more limited “crossing” instead of a ‘full crossing’

The signees of the following statement hope it can help correct the record and encourage an honest, level playing field for explorers and adventurers in the future

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SCROLL DOWN FOR ACCOMPANYING DECLARATION

DECLARATION OF SUPPORT

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

In regard to the article originally entitled 'The Problem with Colin O'Brady' written by Aaron Teasdale and published by National Geographic, we, the professional polar adventuring, exploring and guiding community, support the article in its entirety.

We request that the article not be retracted and stand as testament to the importance of preserving truth, integrity and history in our field of endeavour.

Yours faithfully,

The 'Polar Community', signed:

Eric Philips. Skied five times to the South Pole. President, International Polar Guides Association and IPGA Master Polar Guide

Børge Ousland. First solo full unsupported crossing of Antarctica, 2845km. IPGA Honorary Member

Mike Horn. 5100km solo full kite-ski traverse of Antarctica

Will Steger. *Transantarctica*—longest traverse of Antarctica, 6020km. North Pole crossing and expedition

Geoff Somers. *Transantarctica*—longest traverse of Antarctica, 6020km. Polar adventurer and guide

Damien Gildea. Author of *Mountaineering In Antarctica* and leader of 10 expeditions to Antarctica

Robert Swan. First to ski to both the North and South Poles

Dixie Dansercoer. Multiple North Pole and South Pole expeditions and crossings. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Richard Weber. 2020km return kite-ski expedition to South Pole. IPGA Honorary Member

Liv Arnesen. First woman to ski solo and unsupported to the South Pole, first women crossing of Antarctica

Ann Bancroft. With Liv Arnesen first women to kite-ski across Antarctica, 2747km. North Pole by dogsled

Lonnie Dupre. Rolex-award winning Arctic explorer, North Pole expeditions and Greenland circumnav

Paul A Landry. Guided 5 expeditions to South Pole and Pole of Inaccessibility. IPGA Honorary Member

Eric Larsen. Multiple North Pole and South Pole Expeditions, Everest

Ryan Waters. Longest unsupported Antarctic ski crossing, 1800km. Everest. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Ben Saunders. Record longest polar ski journey, 2889km, with Tarka L'Herpiniere

Lars Ebbesen. Skied to South Pole, 7 times across Greenland, polar expedition manager. IPGA Honorary guide

Pen Hadow. Unsupported ski to South Pole, North Pole solo

Geoff Wilson. Two kite-ski crossings of Antarctica including the longest solo polar journey, 5300km

Christoph Höbenreich. Multiple South Pole and Antarctica expeditions. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Conrad Anker. Pioneer of multiple climbing routes in Queen Maud Land, Antarctica and Ellsworth Mountains, Antarctica

John Krakauer. First ascent of Rakekniven, Queen Maud Land and Vinson Massif east face

Gordon Wiltsie. National Geographic photographer. Led and documented 10 Antarctic expeditions

David Roberts. Author of *Great Exploration Hoaxes*

Ann Daniels. First British all-women's team to ski to the South Pole. Polar guide.

Bengt Rotmo. Multiple polar expeditions including South Pole. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Conrad Dickinson. 2020km return kite-ski expedition to South Pole. Retired IPGA Polar Guide

Hannah McKeand. Skied 6 times to South Pole and former speed record holder. IPGA board member and Polar Guide

Doug Stoup. Skied 18 times to South Pole, twice on SPOT road. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Ramon Larramendi. First wind-powered vehicle crossing of Antarctica and to South Pole

Christian Eide. Fastest unsupported ski expedition to the South Pole.

Thomas Ulrich. Multiple North Pole and Greenland expeditions. IPGA Master Polar Guide

Inge Meløy. North Pole, South Pole, Everest

Justin Jones. Joint longest unsupported polar ski expedition, 2260km

Inge Solheim. Multiple North and South Pole expeditions, polar guide

Harald Kippenes. North Pole to Canada ski expedition, polar guide

Matthieu Tordeur. Youngest person to ski solo and unsupported to the South Pole

Alan Chambers. Full unsupported North Pole ski expedition and IPGA board member.

Odd Harald Hauge. One of the first to ski to South Pole. Greenland crossing record holder for 25 years

Michael Charavin. Greenland full kite-ski circumnavigation, 5067km. IPGA Polar Guide

Keith Tuffley. Cycled and skied unsupported to the South Pole via a new route

Martin Hartley. Polar photographer and Arctic Ocean adventurer

Einar Finnsson. Skied to the South Pole and four times across Greenland. IPGA Polar Guide

Bill Spindler. Three South Pole Station winters including station manager 1976–77

Heath Jamieson. Skied twice to South Pole, once on a new route. IPGA Polar Guide

Kathinka Gyllenhammar. Guided South Pole expedition, polar guide

Alex Hibbert. Former record holder longest polar ski journey.

Victoria Nicholson. Manager WWTW South Pole Allied Challenge, largest expedition to South Pole

Experiences listed here are condensed for the sake of brevity and may not reflect current polar classification terminology.

SOLO CROSSINGS, FULL CROSSINGS AND PARTIAL CROSSINGS OF ANTARCTICA

MODE OF TRAVEL

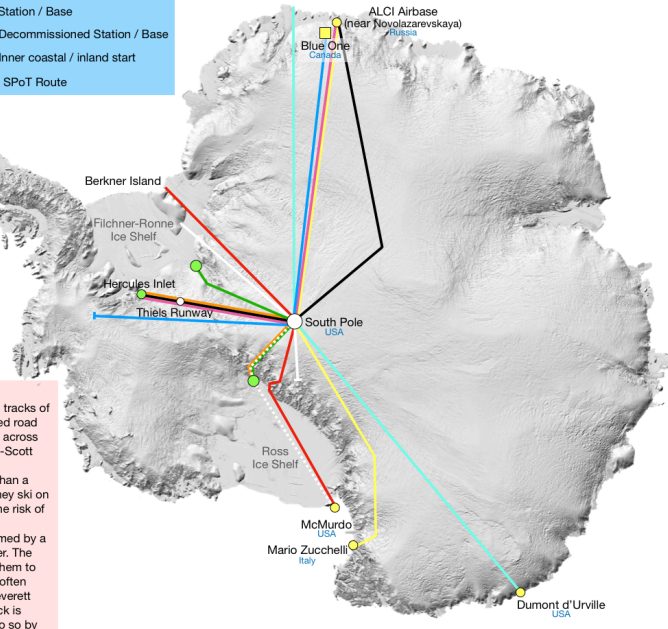
Ski denotes a skier using human power to haul a sled.
Ski and Kite or **Kite-Ski** denotes a skier using human power and wind/kiting equipment to haul a sled.
 Kite-Ski expeditions are commonly a mix of both skiing and kite-skiing. Very rarely can a kite-ski expedition solely rely on wind however there have been some examples.
 Scott and Nansen's expeditions used a rudimentary sail on their sledges but with little advantage.
 Early kites and kiting equipment (as used by Ousland and Ohba) were relatively basic and offered little more than downwind kiting. Modern steerable kites allow expeditions to travel further and faster but energy requirements are comparable to that of a skier.

SUPPLIES
 A **resupplied** expedition is one that benefits from food and/or equipment that has been delivered or cached, which is not part of the original load at the onset of the expedition.
 A resupplied expedition is **Supported**.
 A **non-resupplied** expedition is one that relies only on food and equipment which is part of the original load at the onset of the expedition. Such an expedition is regarded as **Unsupported**.
 A **self-supplied** expedition lays caches of food and equipment that is part of the original load. These caches are collected during the return journey. For an expedition to be classified as **Unsupported** it must deny use of both resupplies and roads.

TRACK AID
 Expeditions often benefit from roads, tracks and/or flagged routes, including the ski tracks of previous expeditions. In 2005, after three summers of construction, a graded, flagged road (South Pole Overland Traverse - SPoT) was opened, running from McMurdo Station across the Ross Ice Shelf, up the Leverett Glacier and across the plateau to the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. An expedition using this route significantly eases the burden of navigation and sled-hauling over sastrugi (wind-formed ridges of snow often more than a metre high). Any expedition that uses the Leverett Glacier, irrespective of whether they ski on the road, gains assistance by benefiting from a safer route which in turn mitigates the risk of failure.
 Many expeditions departing from or ending at Hercules Inlet benefit from tracks formed by a tractor traverse carrying aviation fuel to a runway near Thiel Mountains each summer. The tracks are not always an advantage for skiers because freeze-thaw cycles convert them to icy corrugations but they do assist with navigation and mental state. Vehicle tracks often exist on the route between ALCI Airbase to South Pole. Any expedition using the Leverett Glacier or deliberately traveling on or within sight of a graded or flagged road or track is **Supported**, except when within the perimeter of a station or base and advised to do so by authorities.

START AND FINISH POINTS
 A **coastal** start or finish is on, or as practically close to, a coastline fronted by sea or annual sea ice - a nautical coastline. This includes the seaward edges of ice shelves. Very few modern expeditions start from a nautical coastline. Any crossing utilising Coastal starts margins is regarded as a **FULL CROSSING**.
 An **inner coastal** start or finish is typified by a coastline not fronted by sea or annual sea ice. Such points are often on the inner or southern perimeter of an ice shelf, are usually buried below ice (not detectable by eye) and are significantly closer to the South Pole. The term 'coastal' in the context of Antarctic expeditions is confusing, for example the region where the Axel Heiberg Glacier meets the Ross Ice Shelf (650km from the sea) is called the Amundsen Coast. Any expedition utilising Inner Coastal margins is not regarded as full and is referred to as a **CROSSING**.
 Very few expeditions start from a seafloor. For example the common start point at ALCI Airbase is at the southern perimeter of the Lazarev Ice Shelf, 80km from the sea and almost 600m above sea level.
 An **inland** start or end is inland of any coast and regarded as a **PARTIAL CROSSING**.

- Station / Base
- Decommissioned Station / Base
- Inner coastal / inland start
- SPoT Route



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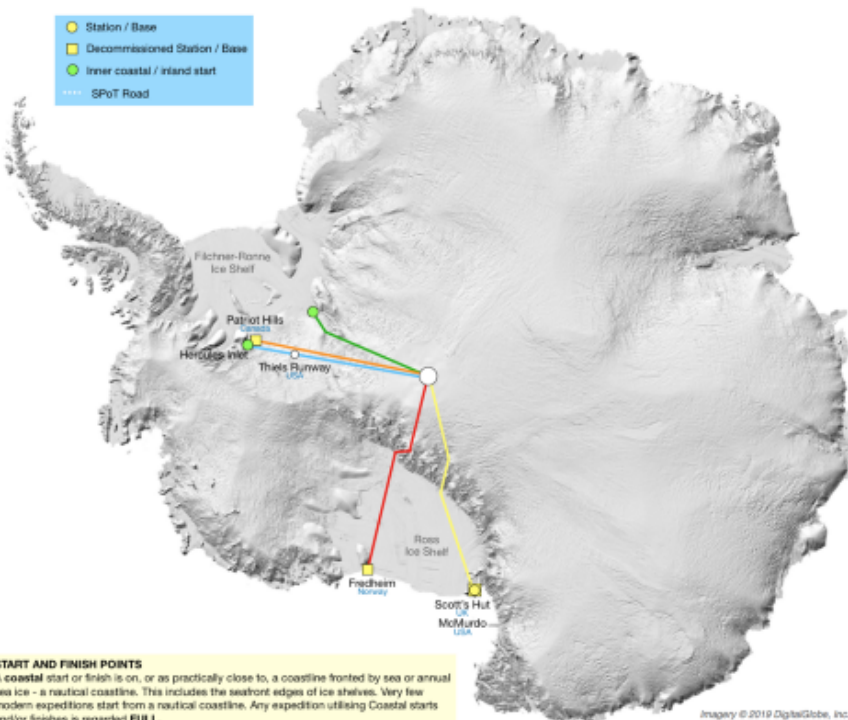
Expedition	Year	Days	Distance	Notes
Borge Ousland	1996-97	65 days	2845km	• ski and kite • no resupplies • coastal start and finish
Mitsuro Ohba	1998-99	94 days	3630km	• ski and kite • resupplied at South Pole • coastal start, inner coastal finish
Rune Gjeldnes	2005-06	124 days	4804km	• no resupplies • inner coastal start and coastal finish
Felicity Aston (first female)	2011-12	59 days	1640km	• ski • resupplied at South Pole & Thiels • used SPoT route support • inner coastal start and finish
Geoff Wilson	2013-14	53 days	3270km	• ski and kite • no resupplies • coastal start, inner coastal finish
Frederic Dion	2014-15	55 days	4383km	• ski and kite • resupplied* • coastal start, inner coastal finish
Henry Worsley †	2015-16	71 days	1459km	• ski • no resupplies • inner coastal start, intended inner coastal finish
Mike Horn	2016-17	57 days	5100km	• ski and kite • no resupplies** • coastal start and finish
Colin O'Brady / Lou Rudd	2018	54/56 days	1455km	• ski • no resupplies / • used SPoT route support • inner coastal start and finish

- * Frederic Dion collected food supplies at the South Pole but completed his trip without requiring them. He also had a replacement sled delivered on the plateau.
- ** Mike Horn accepted a meal at the South Pole but was otherwise non-resupplied. He is the only solo expedition to have accessed and exited Antarctica by sea (sailed in by yacht [his start point was 405km offshore] and out by ship). All others were airlifted to and from their start and finish points.
- † Henry Worsley was evacuated due to bacterial peritonitis and subsequently died in hospital of organ failure.

Credit: Eric Philips/icetrek.com. Free for media to use in conjunction with articles about this press release and declaration

RETURN and ALTERNATE RETURN SOUTH POLE/PLATEAU EXPEDITIONS - Unmotored

- Station / Base
- Decommissioned Station / Base
- Inner coastal / inland start
- SPoT Road



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START AND FINISH POINTS
 A **coastal** start or finish is on, or as practically close to, a coastline fronted by sea or annual sea ice - a nautical coastline. This includes the seaward edges of ice shelves. Very few modern expeditions start from a nautical coastline. Any expedition utilising Coastal starts and/or finishes is regarded **FULL**.
 An **inner coastal** start or finish is typified by a coastline not fronted by sea or annual sea ice. Such points are often on the inner or southern perimeter of an ice shelf, are usually buried below ice (not detectable by eye) and are significantly closer to the South Pole. The term 'coastal' in the context of Antarctic expeditions is confusing, for example the region where the Axel Heiberg Glacier meets the Ross Ice Shelf (850km from the sea) is called the Amundsen Coast. Any expedition utilising Inner Coastal starts and/or finishes is not regarded as full.
 Very few expeditions start from a seafloor. For example the common start point at ALCI Airbase is at the southern perimeter of the Lazarev Ice Shelf, 80km from the sea and almost 600m above sea level.
 An **inland** start is inland of any coast and regarded as a **Partial** expedition.

MODE OF TRAVEL
Ski denotes a skier using human power to haul a sled.
Ski and Kite or **Kite-Ski** denotes a skier using human power and wind/kiting equipment to haul a sled. Kite-Ski expeditions are commonly a mix of both skiing and kite-skiing. Very rarely can a kite-ski expedition solely rely on wind. Early sledging expeditions of Nansen and Scott used rudimentary sails on their sledges but with little advantage.
Dog-sled denotes a dog team hauling supplies on a sledge, however expeditioners were often on skis.

Amundsen, Bjaaland, Wisting	1911-12	99 days	2700km	• ski, dogs • resupplied, self-supplied • coastal start and finish
Scott, Wilson, Oates	1911-12	129 days	2570km	• ski, dogs, ponies • resupplied, self-supplied • coastal start, died on return journey
Cornelissen, Van Rooijen	2000-01	66 days	2170km	• ski and kite • resupplies • inland start and finish
M McNair (guide), S McNair-Landry	2004-05	69 days	2280km	• ski and kite • no resupplies • inland start and finish
Chapple, Brown, Hunter, Mattin	2006-07	71 days	2170km	• ski • no resupplies • inland start and finish
Aleks Gamme	2011-12	88 days	2260km	• ski • no resupplies • inner coastal start and finish
Castrission, Jones	2011-12	89 days	2260km	• ski • no resupplies • inner coastal start and finish
Weber (guide), Archer	2011-12	57 days	2500km	• ski and kite • resupplied • inner coastal start and finish *
Saunders, L'Herpiniere	2013-14	106 days	2898km	• ski • resupplied • coastal start and finish
Johansen (guide), Gicquel	2014-15	74 days	2020km	• ski • resupplied • inner coastal start and finish *
McDiarmid (guide), Edge	2015-16	49 days	2000km	• ski and kite • resupplied • inner coastal start and finish *
J Davidson (first female solo)	2016-17	57 days	2260km	• ski • resupplied • inner coastal start and finish
Risto Hallikainen	2016-17	71 days	2260km	• ski • meals at South Pole • inner coastal start and finish
Styve (guide), Doherty	2018-19	61 days	2045km	• ski and kite • resupplied • inner coastal start and finish *

* **Alternate Return** expeditions start and end at the same ice shelf system but their return route is different. When compared across the same mode of travel such expeditions would be more difficult as they do not benefit from self-deposited caches, however all teams were resupplied at South Pole thus lightening the starting sled weight.

SUPPLIES
 A **resupplied** expedition is one that benefits from food and/or equipment that has been delivered or cached, which is not part of the original load at the onset of the expedition. Resupplies are a form of **Support**.
 A **non-resupplied** expedition is one that relies only on food and equipment which is part of the original load at the onset of the expedition. Such an expedition is regarded as **Unsupported**.
 A **self-supplied** expedition lays caches of food and equipment that is part of the original load. These caches are collected during the return journey.
 For an expedition to be classified as **Unsupported** it must deny use of both resupplies and roads.

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