**Jim McNeill – A Modern Warrior**

‘Extreme environments show what is happening in an early capacity, for the rest of the world.’ This is the ethos that explorer Jim McNeill takes forward with his various expeditions – whether it is forging through ice and snow, or climbing sand dunes and mountains, Jim explores the extremities of our planet with the goal of gathering data for the research of climate change and how our planet is changing.

With partners like NASA and Cambridge University, he gathers valuable data on species population, pollution levels, acidification, topography and anything that he, and his team, can measure to try and find any tipping points that might indicate a large change in the environment. Jim informed me that geographical satellites can sometimes be 3-4 months behind on what they can detect (especially in the poles), due to conditions, so going there to validate data is crucial to us knowing quite how serious the situation with our planet is.

Jim is most well-known for his polar expeditions, including his upcoming ‘The Last Pole’ mission, where he and his team will be undertaking one of the most difficult expeditions known to man – making it to the Northern Pole of Inaccessibility. It is the very centre of the Arctic Ocean, roughly 350 miles further than the geographic North Pole and 800 miles from the edge of the Arctic Ocean. There’s a reason that no one has made it there before.

However, Jim isn’t a man *frozen* in his tracks. Although he founded and has run the Ice Warrior project for the last 21 years, he has plenty of experience in other climates. This is why he is starting the Global Warrior project. An idea that he and his teams will explore the Poles of Inaccessibility in each region possible (as he explained to me, every climate has a ‘Pole of Inaccessibility’ – the one spot that is almost impossible to reach), to gather data and pass it on to scientific bodies, so that the extremities of our planet can help us predict what comes next.

If you think you’re the sort of person that can rise to such a challenge, then visit Jim’s website at <https://www.ice-warrior.com/>. Taking part is no cheap feat, but if you think you can cut it, then Jim can help by teaching you how to raise the money and get sponsors to fund your expedition. With his own sponsors, Jim has an interesting ethos. Seeing as the majority of pollution and global warming contributions come from large corporations, Jim is trying his best as such; ‘My goal is to get in to these commercial companies and have them as sponsors, which should make it easier to try and guide them in the right direction… Dirty industries make up about 40% of global emissions, so by making connections with them, we can try and make a real difference.’

However much of a remarkable man Jim McNeill is, what was truly inspiring was how much of a down to earth and easy to talk to person he is. When asked about things that he missed most whilst on expedition, he responded with, ‘Red wine, craving comes in at about two weeks. Not so much beer, because I know that I’ll come back to it. Oh, I miss a good scotch. I miss my partner, my family. I’ve got three kids and two grandchildren. The longest trip I’ve done has been 93 days on my own, and after that amount of time you really do miss the things that matter most. I’ve been doing this for so long, that I’ve built up an expectation of what it’s going to be like in my head. I feel like, if there’s one asset that I’ve really got in life, it's that I’ve got a good imagination, so I can set the expectations of what I’ll miss.’ Jim later went on to mention how it’s been a close call a couple of times he’s been out, almost having lost his life twice. I asked what kept him motivated, after coming so close to death, he simply said, ‘It’s always about finding out what’s going on. It was something that was ingrained in me at a young age. When I was younger, I used to go out into a field of flowers and try and identify as many different types as I possibly could. Which, for a strapping rugby player, I got some strange looks for, but I loved it. Being inquisitive is one of the best traits that we can have.’

Another thing that I asked him was something that I was curious about – when he takes regular people on expedition with him, after acclimatisation and orientation, what is the thing that they struggle with the most? Jim told me that ‘before we go, most people think that it’s all going to be a physical challenge. To about 30%, it is stresses and strains, but the other 70% is entirely in the mind. I’ve had the fittest people, special forces etc, come through the system, but when you put a person in to the cold environment, if they don’t know what to do, then it’s immediately life threatening. Even though I’ve trained over 500 people now to be polar competent, I can never predict whether people will make it through. The environment is completely unforgiving.’

Overall, Jim McNeill is a true modern warrior – he is ruthlessly pursuing a world where our environment won’t suffer from the choices that we, as a species, have made previously. And he will, quite literally, travel to the ends of the Earth to make it happen.