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THE INDOMITABLE SNOWMAN

NORMAN VAUGHAN FIRST SLEDDED IN ANTARCTICA AT 24; HE PLANS A RETURN THIS YEAR, AT 87

AMY NUTT

MEN WANTED FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY

Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful—honor and recognition in case of success.

Norman D. Vaughan was only a year old when Sir Ernest Shackleton advertised for volunteers for his expedition to the South Pole by placing this notice in the London Times. The year was 1907. Teddy Roosevelt was president, and the Great War was still years away. But by 1928 Vaughan was old enough—and some thought foolish enough—to heed a similar announcement, in the Boston Evening Transcript, of an Antarctic expedition to be undertaken by the great American explorer Admiral Richard Byrd.

A year later, in 1929, when Byrd made his historic flight over the South Pole, Vaughan became the first American to travel by dogsled in Antarctica when he led the expedition's support team in an overland thrust across hundreds of miles of unexplored, uncharted territory into the heart of the coldest continent. Next month, at the age of 87, Vaughan will also become the last American to dogsled across Antarctica.

On April 1, 1994, an international environmental treaty will take effect, banning all nonindigenous animal life from Antarctica. Before then, however, Vaughan, his 51-year-old wife, Carolyn Muegge-Vaughan, four companions and two dog teams will spend 40 days journeying 500 miles into the interior of the largest snow mass on earth. If all goes according to plan, Vaughan will conclude his Antarctic odyssey on Dec. 19, 1993—his 88th birthday—with the first ascent of the 10,302-foot peak Mount Vaughan, so dubbed by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in 1942 in recognition of his contributions to Byrd's original expedition.

Growing up in Salem, Mass., the oldest of three children, Vaughan first dreamed of visiting colder climes when he read a book about the north country at the age of 12. "There was no way to go up north back then except by dogsled," says Vaughan, "so my best friend, Eddie Goodale [who would also be part of the 1929 Byrd expedition], and I decided to make our own rope harnesses and attach them at one end to my German shepherd and Goodale's collie, and at the other to a Flexible Flyer. We thought all we had to do was say 'Mush!' and they'd take off, but they didn't know what the word meant. They just ran back to us and licked our faces. Finally one of us had to go out in front and call them, and that's how we got started."

It wasn't until Vaughan was in the middle of his sophomore year at Harvard, however, that he thought to put his childhood experience to practical use. With the Transcript's story about Byrd's impending Antarctic trip tucked in his pocket, Vaughan took a trolley from his Harvard dorm to Byrd's house on Beacon Hill and eventually talked his way onto Byrd's expeditionary team.

In December 1928, sailing aboard the ancient square-rigger *The City of New York*, Vaughan and the 42 members of Byrd's ground support crew were approaching Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf through the Bay of Whales when that thin white hint of land, the edge of the most inhospitable place on earth, appeared on

the horizon. This was the starting point for the trek to the South Pole, which would be the holy grail for most of these adventurers for the next three months. For Vaughan, however, the lure of Antarctica would continue for the rest of his life. Mushing dogs became a passion of Vaughan's. Two years after returning from Byrd's expedition to the South Pole, he drove a dog team to a 10th-place finish in the 1932 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid—the only Games to include mushing as a demonstration sport. He spent much of his time after the Olympics as an ad executive until joining the Army at the outbreak of World War II.

During the war Vaughan commanded a group of 40 sled-dog drivers and 425 dogs for the U.S. Army's Search and Rescue operations in the U.S., Canada and Greenland. In 1942, after six P-38 planes and two B-17 Flying Fortresses were forced to land during a blizzard on the Greenland Ice Sheet en route to joining the first Allied aerial thrust against the Nazis, Vaughn was sent to the site.

A dog team led by a Navy officer rescued the crew members. But left behind in one of the planes was a Norden bombsight, an experimental device used to pinpoint targets by using infrared radiation. An American secret second in importance only to the Manhattan Project, the bombsight was at risk of ending up in enemy hands. Ordered to beat the Germans to the device, Vaughan drove his dog team 130 miles inland from the east coast of Greenland, found the planes, removed the 60-pound instrument and loaded it onto his sled. With German submarines patrolling just off the coast, Vaughan mushed back to the shore, where he was picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard.

After a stint in the Pentagon's psychological-warfare department during the Korean War, Vaughan returned to Massachusetts and ran a small equipment and snowmobile dealership in Ipswich for 22 years. When both his business and his third marriage went bust in 1974, Vaughan packed up what little he had, stuffed his last hundred dollars inside one of his shoes and, with a plunging barometer as his compass, headed out in search of ice and snow. He found plenty of that in Anchorage, Alaska, but no job. For six weeks Vaughan lived at a YMCA, shoveling snow in exchange for food. Finally the 70-year-old adventurer and war hero landed a job—as a nighttime janitor at the University of Alaska. Only after he was forced to retire 6½ years later did Vaughan begin to plot a return trip to the site of his greatest adventure, the bottom of the world.

Vaughan and Muegge-Vaughan, his fourth wife, are now in the final planning stages of that trip, which will cost more than \$1 million and will be funded by several corporate and private sponsors. They have spent much of the last 10 months at their cabin 120 miles north of Anchorage, training rigorously for their journey. The cabin is 18 miles from Trapper Creek, the nearest settlement, and during the winter it can be reached only by snowmobile, dogsled or cross-country skis. Between household chores—pumping water and shoveling snow—Norman, Carolyn and their four-member support team take daily mushing runs of up to 15 miles with 10-or 12-dog freighted sleds.

As he weighs the risks involved in his party's long journey into the heart of Antarctica, what Vaughan fears most are the hidden crevasses that may suddenly snake across one's path and just as suddenly swallow human interlopers. In heavily crevassed areas, skiers travel in single file, roped together.

Vaughan's experience in Arctic and Antarctic climes—he himself once fell into a crevasse and survived because he was roped—has helped him to become particularly adept at reading the snow. "You study the snow as you ski along," Vaughan says. "You're always looking for changes, looking for telltale streaks or lines, which mean a crevasse. The narrow ones are the most dangerous because they're hidden so

well. Sometimes you have to go five miles out of the way in order to get around a crevasse. Make one mistake, and you're gone."

Vaughan has made a few mistakes of his own during his seven decades of adventuring, and he has the scars to prove it. Thirteen entries in the Iditarod, the grueling 1,150-mile Alaskan sled-dog race, all made since he turned 70, have left him with a fused right ankle, a right knee made of plastic and metal, and a healthy respect for the dangers of hypothermia—to say nothing of the half-dozen ribs he broke in one campaign.

The images Vaughan carries in his mind are still vivid: the sky, the water, the shadows on the snow—each a different shade, a different degree of blue. And the sound he hears, the sound he has heard every day for the past 65 years, is the long, loud roar of the Antarctic wind.