

Heroes

SEE IT SHRINK Sea ice always recedes in summer and grows in winter. Lately, the lows are getting so much lower that researchers think summer ice might disappear by 2016. See an animation of ice cover from 1979 to the present at bit.ly/IceAnimation.



Take it from me...

Think big. Never let anyone convince you that an expedition isn't possible because it's never been done before. Start by researching the region. Read expedition journals, magazine articles, guidebooks, and online portals such as explorersweb.com.

Train hard, travel easy. Physical fitness improves decision-making, sleep patterns, and overall demeanor. Build strength and endurance by hiking with two or three gallon-jugs of water in your pack. At the turnaround of an out-and-back trail, dump the water out before returning to the trailhead.

Survive negative temps. Don't get too hot: Sweat causes moisture to form against your skin and ruins insulation. Cool off by removing your gloves, unzipping your jacket, and pulling down your hood. Dress in layers and adjust them regularly. Stay warm with a hat, neck gaiter, and balaclava.

Do your part Join one of Larsen's partners, the [Climate Reality Project](http://ClimateRealityProject.com), in supporting strict rules on carbon emissions from power plants: bit.ly/PeopleVsCarbon. Or find other ways to help via ProtectOurWinters.org.

Eric Larsen, 42

This explorer is headed back to the North Pole—on what could be the last expedition of its type, ever.

We're used to celebrating the first person to accomplish a daring feat: Hillary's Everest climb. Amundsen's trip to the South Pole. Powell's journey down the Colorado River. But is it worth trying to be the *last* one to do something? **Eric Larsen** thinks so. This spring, he and expedition partner Ryan Waters might well be humanity's final members to walk (and ski) unsupported to the North Pole. They'll be sending live updates* the whole way, and hope their trip will help the world notice as the path they've chosen melts behind them.

According to the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado, Arctic sea ice has been declining since at least the early 1950s, most likely caused by global climate change. The decline has accelerated in recent years, and is happening even faster than climate scientists predicted. While most of us have only read about the issue, Larsen has seen the changes firsthand.

"Last North," as he's calling this year's journey, will be his third visit to the North Pole. In 2006, he pulled off the first-ever summer expedition there, and in 2010, he became the first person to reach both poles and summit Everest in one year. That was also the last time anyone made it to the North Pole on foot. "From 2006 to 2010 it was very different," he says. "I'm curious to see how it's changed again."

The melting Arctic complicates a journey like Last North in two ways. First off, travel becomes harder. "There's more open water to swim," Larsen explains. "The ice is thinner, which means it breaks up into a rougher surface that's hard to navigate. And the drift patterns are shifting—we could wake up and be 2 miles farther south than when we went to sleep." Meanwhile, the time window in which to complete the journey is shrinking. Flights to the launch point on northern Ellesmere Island require daylight, so March 7 is the team's earliest start date. But getting picked up at the pole requires enough ice, either to get a helicopter from a nearby Russian base or for a plane to land. The base announced it was closing early this year—meaning a pricey, dangerous flight was Larsen's only choice. A plane is scheduled to pick the crew up by May 1.

So with all the challenges—including weeks of -30°F temps—why does Larsen return again and again to one of the harshest spots on Earth? To tell us about the places where climate change is showing up first. He'll be sending daily dispatches the whole way, including audio recordings and photos. He's carrying several pounds of camera gear, and plans to make a movie when he gets back. "This environment is one of the most unique on the planet, and it's existed in its frozen state for the entirety of humanity," he says. "Unless we act now to curb climate change, it will disappear."

BACKPACKER (ISSN 0277-867X USPS 509-490) is published nine times a year (January, March, April, May, June, August, September, October, and November) by Cruz Bay Publishing, Inc., an Active Interest Media company. The known office of publication is 5720 Flatiron Parkway, Boulder, CO 80301. Subscriptions are \$19.98 per year in the U.S., \$29.98 in Canada, \$41.98 elsewhere (surface mail). Periodicals postage paid at Boulder CO and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to BACKPACKER, PO Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. GST #R122988611. BACKPACKER publications, including GearFinder®, Waypoints®, and Adventure Travel®, are registered trademarks of Cruz Bay Publishing, Inc. © 2014 Cruz Bay Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Volume 42, Issue 312, Number 4, May 2014. Subscribers: If the postal authorities alert us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within 2 years.

***Did he make it?** Go to backpacker.com/lastnorth to get Larsen's from-the-field updates on the expedition.

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF MORGAN TILTON AND RACHEL ZURER