

majesty



Dr Tristan Pearce from the University of the Sunshine Coast and a friend navigate through the rough sea ice outside of the hamlet of Ulukhaktok.



Dr Tristan Pearce from the University of the Sunshine Coast and Rowan Schindler on a relatively clear day.

I felt myself changing. Inside of my mind something was happening. I was being bitten. It is like a challenge is being mounted inside me – against myself. Challenging all my prior thoughts, opinions and biases.

I realised I needed to get over myself – this is the major lesson I have learnt.

All my prior knowledge and experience is useless. It makes up who I am but it is only a slim piece of me, completely built from western bias and all the junk that comes with it. I realised the Inuit relationship to the land is spiritual to the core. Nobody can teach them anything, I, for one, can only learn from them.

The wonderful knowledge and rich life experiences I gained in Ulukhaktok will stay with me forever. Everyone has an amazing story to tell

and each person I spoke to surprised me with something new, without even realising it.

I sat at that table and made a friend for life.

While I may never get an opportunity to go back there – which saddens me deeply – those that taught me have a huge place in my heart and will never know how much they have affected me.

I tried to absorb everything I could but realised I had nothing to give in return but my friendship, respect and something that bit much deeper.

An emotion somewhere between sadness and happiness. A happiness for friends who live their lives day by day, and a sadness for a waning way of life, culture and traditions that I can't help but feel guilty for.



ARCTIC ADVENTURE: Rowan Schindler on the frozen sea ice of the famous Northwest Passage in full arctic clothing.

Cold, hard realities on ice

THE arctic wind hit me, biting deep into my bones, through my parka and several layers of clothing. I felt like I was drowning in the frigid ocean, it was sapping the strength from my body. I turned around so the wind hit me from behind and pulled my hood around my head. Cupping my hands around my face, I was allowed a few quick breaths to acclimatise. I had just stepped outside and my body was confused. Born and raised in sub-tropical Australia, my fragile frame was in an alien world.

I jumped aboard the snowmobile and gave my driver the thumbs up. We raced off across the frozen ocean.

My professor was driver for this trip. We headed out onto the sea-ice for a look around. A light in front of us warned of an approaching snowmobile heading in our direction.

A hunter ranged up beside us. A caribou was slumped across the seat, blood freshly frozen around its back, clearly broken. The hunter had run over the animal, as he didn't have time to grab his gun and make the shot. Running the prey over was a quick thought. You have to be quick and resourceful out here. Only the best hunters consistently make a kill.

We congratulated the Inuk on his prize. He couldn't wait to get to town. They'll all be talking



FROZEN LAKE: A fresh water lake, the source of the town's drinking water. The ice is metres thick and needs to be cut out by hand. Fresh water is clear when frozen and salt water is cloudy and white.

about him for days.

We forged on, following a track to the community's duck hunting cabins.

The landscape was dreamy in its beauty and desert-like condition. Jagged rocks and ice everywhere, the cabins silent, scattered across the shoreline, foreign objects in an exotic land. Simple box buildings with a door and a window. Made for a purpose, not for comfort. It was too cold to speak, each breath hurt, freezing my face and making my eyes ache.

While admiring the scenery, we spied snow being whipped off the mountaintops to the north. Bad weather

approaching, probably a white-out. We leapt onto the snowmobile and blazed a trail back towards town.

Soon we were engulfed in pure white. The term "white-out" doesn't do it justice. A whole world of white, with us as the only coloured blight. A minuscule droplet of ink on pure white paper. We stuck to the trail, barely two metres visible. We knew it led to town so we followed it closely. My professor's gun barrel swung in front of me as I sat behind him. I tried to dodge it. I guess it is only one thing of many likely to kill you out here.

Then we stopped. My comrade hopped off the vehicle, enjoying the moment. "All in a day's work," he said.

The white-out dissipated and we could see a few hundred metres.

The Australian in me couldn't wait to get back to the hamlet, to warm tea and bannock-fried bread. Sitting on the back of a snowmobile is the best place to get bitten by cold.

The adventurer in me wanted to stay out there. But I knew I would die in less than a day.

I remembered an Inuit elder's words: "wherever you are in the north, something is watching you."

The landscape is a vast canvas, and I was a tiny black smudge a perfect landscape.



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