

Arctic adventure

Arctic explorer Gary Rolfe has not let asthma hold him back from conquering some of the world's most extreme climates.

In May 2002, Gary Rolfe successfully completed his third consecutive Arctic expedition with dogs, again totally unsupported with no supplies from the outside world. This is no mean feat for anyone, but for Gary it is particularly inspiring because he has asthma.

Diagnosed at the age of five, Gary has had asthma for more than 32 years, but refuses to let it get in the way of his passion for Arctic adventures. 'As a child my asthma condition frightened me when I couldn't breathe' he says, 'but once I was diagnosed and prescribed an inhaler it soon stabilised and fortunately I was soon able to venture into the wildest places on earth, without fear of asthma being a problem.'

THE CHALLENGE

Gary describes himself as an 'adventurous child', whose love of mountaineering and climbing, combined with his rapport with dogs, made him a natural solo adventurer. 'I wanted to embark on something that would consume my whole life. When I found climbing wasn't fulfilling me enough I knew I had to move on to something more challenging.'

The dedication needed within his craft is certainly all consuming. When training for an upcoming expedition, he runs more than 100 miles a week, weight trains every other day and eats a special diet consisting of around 4,500 calories each day. Optimum fitness and aptitude are essential for an environment that experiences

temperatures of -40°C. Ice taller than a London bus has to be traversed, extreme conditions can mean it takes eight hours to move just 400 metres and liquid turns to ice the second it leaves the human body. Unlike most people's preconceptions of husky-accompanied expeditions, the adventurer is not pulled by the dogs in a sled, but has to be able to ski alongside the dogs and sled, in order to stave off hypothermia.

COPING WITH ASTHMA

Interestingly it is while training in London that Gary's asthma is at its worst: 'Being in the city really worsens my condition and I need to take my preventer and reliever regularly,' he says. Yet although coldness can often trigger asthma, in the extreme temperatures of the Arctic, his symptoms are relieved: 'I do take my inhaler just in case, but I generally don't need it in

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the Arctic – the huskies don't seem to be a trigger either,' explains Gary. 'It is only training during the Arctic summer months, which see 24 hours of sunlight, that the pollen really brings out my asthma.'

Gary's resumé is an impressive one.

His first international expedition was in spring 2000 as a member of a UK team, which, with 21 huskies, covered 5,600km across Yukon, the Canadian Northwest Territories and the coastal plains of the Arctic Ocean's Beaufort Sea. He followed this with a summer of intense training in the western Arctic, then winter training throughout 24-hour darkness in Canada's Northwest Territories.

All this effort was in aid of Gary's first solo expedition, which took place in spring 2001. As he explains: 'Having gained lots of experience in team expeditions, it seemed like a natural progression to go solo.' The unsupported trip covered 840km of Arctic ice, but was followed by an even bigger challenge. For his most recent expedition in May 2002, Gary built his own sled and, with nine huskies for company, embarked on the 960km trek from Inuvik in the western Arctic, to Herschel Island, returning via the Yukon North Slope.

ONE OF A KIND

Against expectations, Gary has managed to control his asthma and complete a

series of amazing expeditions, and the adventures aren't over yet. 'Every now and then someone very different from each generation appears who is capable of pulling off the unexpected,' says fellow explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes. 'I believe Gary is one such person.'



Name

Gary Rolfe

Profession

Arctic explorer

Age diagnosed with asthma

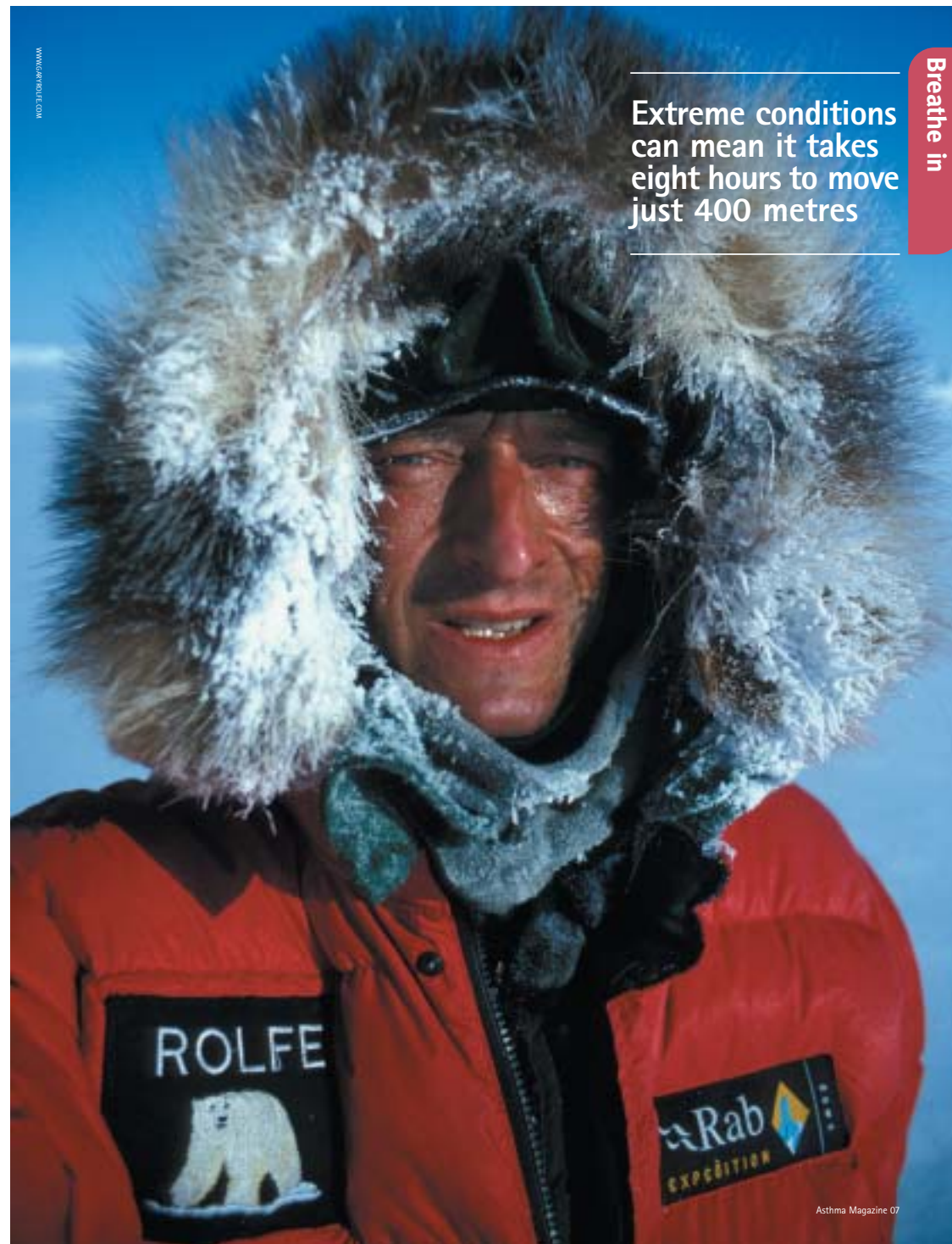
Five

Triggers

Pollution, pollen

Symptoms

Heavy wheezing, gasping for breath



Extreme conditions can mean it takes eight hours to move just 400 metres