

## **Episode 19: Dan bike to the South Pole**

I've lived in areas where it gets really cold, and I've lived where it's warm most of the time. I've lived up north in Ohio and in Maine, and now I'm in sunny Florida. I definitely prefer the warmer climate.

But today's story is about being cold. Really, really cold. Dan Burton brought his fat tire bike to the coast of Antarctica, and he biked from there to the South Pole. That's 750 miles, and it's uphill, and it's against the wind, and it's in temperatures that are colder than just about anyone would be comfortable with.

But he did it – and in fact, he was the first one to do it. And actually, it happened 5 years ago, and no one has done it again since then – at least not at the time we recorded this conversation, which is early 2019.

And I learned something really interesting. The elevation at the South Pole is 9300 feet. But only 300 feet of that is actual land. The 9000 feet of elevation on top of that land is solid ice. So at the South Pole Dan was standing on ice that was almost 2 miles thick. In fact, during our conversation he mentions that he actually walked over some mountains but he wasn't able to see them, because he was actually on top of them because of that thick layer of ice.

I'm always intrigued by stories of human endurance like this, so I really loved hearing this story first hand from Dan. And fortunately for all of us, he also blogged and recorded video throughout this expedition. And he's written a book about it. Links to all of those things will be in the show notes for this episode, at [WhatWasThatLike.com/19](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/19) – because this is episode 19.

And if you like this podcast, you're welcome to buy me a coffee – [WhatWasThatLike.com/coffee](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/coffee)

And now, here's my conversation with Dan.

---

**Scott**

Dan, what was the coldest temperature during this trip?

**Dan**

I don't really know the answer to that because I didn't have a thermometer with me..

**Scott**

That's incredible. You went to the South Pole but you don't know what the temperature is each day. That's interesting.

**Dan**

I kind of looked it up on the web - because they have a weather station there - and I think that it was somewhere below 40 when I was at the South Pole.

**Scott**

That just sounds miserable.

**Dan**

Actually, when you get used to it, it's not as bad as it seems.

**Scott**

Well, I kind of experienced that. We live in Florida. My wife's from Maine. We went and lived in Maine for 13 years. I don't really care about the cold temperatures myself. I prefer Florida. My wife prefers the cold temps up north. But you're right, the human body is pretty adaptable - wherever you're at, you kind of get used to it.

**Dan**

Yeah, I had a guy that used to come into my bike store a lot - he drove me a lot to do this. He was trying to tell me that cold is, kind of, a state of mind. I mean, there's obviously something real about being cold - I expected it to be super cold and miserable when I got there - and when I got there, I just accepted that it was cold and it was okay.

**Scott**

Because that's what you've expected. Well, what was the earliest germ of an idea that you had about doing this? What brought this on?

**Dan**

I had bought some fat bikes and rode them across Utah Lake when it was frozen. About that time, Eric Larsen started trying to bike to the South Pole and one of the guys that I worked with at the bike shop told me about this. So, I started reading his blog and following his expedition. So, that was, kind of, the beginning of the whole thing. Then, I had some guy - the guy that I was talking about earlier - who came into the bike store, kept saying that he was going to win the lottery, and when he did, we were going to bike to the South Pole together. There's no lottery in Utah and neither of us ever entered the lottery, so that was never going to happen.

**Scott**

So much for that financing idea.

**Dan**

Yeah. So, somewhere along that thing, it kind of got me going. My son was really strange - he had all these ideas of things that he wanted to do Kickstarter projects for. So, at some point, I thought, "Well, maybe I could Kickstarter this." That's when I started thinking about doing it myself. That's when I thought that, maybe, I could pay for this with Kickstarter.

**Scott**

Did the Kickstarter work?

**Dan**

No. In Kickstarter, you have to set your goal for how much money you need and if you don't meet that goal, you get nothing. So, I got nothing from Kickstarter.

**Scott**

I know that GoFundMe works differently - whatever you get up to, they send you a check for that. So, they're all a little different.

**Dan**

Yeah, I did a GoFundMe thing afterward. I don't know exactly how much money I got from GoFundMe - I guess I could go look it up on GoFundMe. Although I got some money from it, it was not enough to be statistically significant.

**Scott**

When you first started thinking, "Maybe, I really will do this," what was your physical condition at that time? How long did you give yourself for training?

**Dan**

I didn't train for it. I had been a computer programmer who had been in pretty bad shape - a little overweight, had high cholesterol and high blood pressure. When I, kind of, got panic, I thought I was going to die. I got into biking. So, after that, I started doing these crazy long mountain bike rides and then road bike rides. I was doing, like, a 200-mile road bike that wasn't officially a race, but I did that, like, once a year. So, I could jump on my mountain bike and do a 100-mile mountain bike ride at any time. So, physically, I was okay. The biggest thing for me was that a fat bike has wider pedals further apart than normal to be able to fit around that big fat tire. So, it gives you a different way to work the muscle, the joints, and everything. Just to make sure that I wasn't going to have a problem with that, all I rode was my fat bike - I put away my mountain bike and road bike, and I didn't ride them for a year - everything I did was on that bike. I even did triathlons on a fat bike.

**Scott**

So, that was primarily how you train, then, just to make sure you were okay on that bike for extended periods of time.

**Dan**

Yeah, I was putting in lots of riding time. The thing is I owned a bike shop that I owned, and I was at the bike shop, probably, for at least 10 hours a day and 6 days a week, so that didn't leave me a lot of chance to do a lot of training. It would have been really cool to be able to take a fat bike, ride it somewhere and, kind of, work out some of the things with pulling a sled and making it work. I had no opportunity to do that because when I decided to do it, it was late winter, which was, kind of, the end of the snowy snow bike season. I didn't have the ability to go up to Alaska or somewhere where I could actually test things out, so I just, kind of, had to go off with what I did.

**Scott**

Yeah, you just train with what you can train or train as you can and, then, just hope for the best - I guess.

**Dan**

Yeah. To some extent, you have to get out there and push yourself hard every day. Basically, the thing I had to be physically able to do is I had to be able to ride all day - for 13-14 hours straight - and if I could do that, then I'd be fine.

**Scott**

Typically, when training, you would do a hard workout for, maybe, two days and, then, take a rest day so that your muscles can rebuild before you would do it again. But in your case, there are no rest days - you were riding for 51 days straight, right?

**Dan**

On the first 2 Sundays, that was true. After that, I took Sundays as a rest day, not because I needed the rest as much for religious purposes.

**Scott**

I read all of your blog posts as you documented this trip before, during, and after. I understand you had frostbite as a child. So, going into extreme cold temperatures like this, did that scare you at all?

**Dan**

Well, yeah. When I was a little kid and riding on my mom's shoulders, the hood of my parka fell off - I was too young to know, and whatever - and I got frostbite on my ears. So, for me, Halloween was, like, the most painful holiday because you'd go out trick or treating in that cold air and my ears would hurt so bad. As I got older and older, that became less of an issue. So yeah, frostbite was something I was concerned and worried about. I don't want to come back with missing fingers and toes, so I was very diligent in trying to make sure that I protected myself from frostbite in all climbs.

**Scott**

Yeah. That's definitely a critical factor. Now, before we get into the actual trip, there was one of your blog posts - I'm just gonna actually read this blog post - talking about the mental aspect of this trip, and what you wrote is this, "One of my faults is that I don't know when to quit. When it comes to this expedition, I believe that fault becomes an advantage. However, my normal tendency to continue in spite of the conditions may not be enough. So I'm playing a bit of a mind game with myself. I'm intentionally building an attitude of continuing, as long as even the remotest possibility of success still exists. Quitting can just not be an option. So I'm fostering in myself the belief that I will succeed. There will be some who will say the challenge is too hard, or that for some reason, I'm not worthy of such an expedition, and that's fine - they can believe what they want - but I must believe that I will complete the expedition." So, how big of a factor was the mind game in reaching this goal?

**Dan**

I think that's probably one of the biggest factors. Eric Larsen had tried it the year before. A lot of what I wrote there was in response to what I was trying to do. I mean, I had been trying to do that. And people were criticizing me for my attitude thing, saying that I was arrogant, but it wasn't arrogance - it was an intentional thing. To me, from the outside, Eric looked like he was doing well and that he should be able to make it. But as I was reading his blog and stuff, I kept seeing this self-doubt in there - to me, that seemed like part of the reason why he didn't make it. So, for me, I was looking at, "Okay. Why did Eric not make it? What things do I have to change so that I can?" So, that's why I was saying, "I can't let any attitude of failure enter into my planning and what I'm working on, because it's too risky to have that in there. I must have an attitude of success because if you think that you might fail, you probably will."

**Scott**

Well, we talked a little bit before we started recording here. I've done some ultra marathons and long-distance running myself. It's amazing that you can deliberately make your mind believe something just by saying it or by doing something. I've found that if I'm out several hours training and I just don't feel good, I've found that I can just deliberately smile - even though I don't feel like smiling, just force yourself to smile - and for some reason, it just makes you feel better. It's like, "Well, okay. Things maybe aren't so bad."

**Dan**

Yeah, there are a lot of things. There's a lot more mental aspect to something like this than what you might think.

**Scott**

Right. Yeah, it's just as important as the physical, I think. Okay, let's talk about the trip itself. Can you describe the terrain? I understand you started at Hercules Inlet, which is by the coast - the South Pole is more than the geographical center of Antarctica - and you went from sea level to 9,300 feet. Can you just talk a little bit about that? What did you expect that to be like?

**Dan**

Yeah. Hercules Inlet is on the ice shelf, so it's technically on the ocean but it's frozen. They dropped me off at Hercules Inlet. When I look north, as far as I could see, it's just a frozen ocean. So, it's technically the coast, but there wasn't any water anywhere nearby. So, I started at sea level. The first thing you got to do is climb up - I know this from reading and reading other people's blogs and doing some research. The first thing you got to do is climb up from sea level up into the mountains, basically, up into the interior of Antarctica. So, it's a pretty big climb to start with. The thing that made it even more difficult is that it was pretty soft snow. So, that first climb up was so difficult. I mean, I can't even imagine how difficult it was anymore because it's been too long, but it was more difficult than anybody could possibly imagine. I knew that going in would be harder than I could possibly imagine, and it definitely was harder than even that. So, it was a pretty hard climb up. A lot of times, I would be putting my chest against the handlebar and pushing the bike up these hills with everything I got, because there's not only uphill and snow that soften everything, but there's also a headwind the whole way that you're going up against - it was killer. I had to make sure I didn't have anything in the pockets of my coat at the chest because - I had several GPS units with me - I think I had actually cracked the screen of 1 of my GPS because it was in there and pushing on it with my chest. So, it was extremely difficult.

Then you get up into the interior. Once I got in, there's actually a route that they use to drag fuel to, halfway, so that they can resupply or refuel airplanes. So, I figured that I can get up on that route that they're using to do that and that when I get on onto that route, it's going to be easier and I'll be able to go okay. Well, I got up to where that was, but the snow was drifting through it and it wasn't any better. Then, the other thing was climbing from sea level to 9,300 feet, basically, over 750 miles - if you spread that out, it's not that steep of a climb, but the problem is it isn't a slow, steady climb - it was up and down, up and down, and up and down the whole time, which was so frustrating. I got so mad at my GPS at times because when I was working so hard to go downhill, it was like, "There's no way this is going downhill." There was one time I just chucked my GPS across the ice because I was so upset with it, but it was right - I mean, I was going up and down and up and down. In the beginning, there was a pretty big climb to get into the interior of Antarctica. Then, there's a mountain range that goes through Antarctica - it's a pretty big climb to get up over that mountain range. I never saw the mountain range because it was completely buried in ice

**Scott**

Yeah, one of the interesting factors here that I didn't realize until I was doing research for this is the land itself is only about 300 feet above sea level

**Dan**

At the South Pole, yeah.

**Scott**

Yeah, at the South Pole. You were walking on ice that was 2-miles thick. That's just incredible!

**Dan**

Yeah. And the statistics - I might get this slightly wrong - I think, is something, like, 90% of the world's fresh water is frozen in ice in Antarctica.

**Scott**

Describe what you were carrying - your gear and your load. How did you carry all your stuff?

**Dan**

Yeah. When Eric had tried, he tried using panniers - bags that are mounted on the front and back wheels - and he had all his stuff packed in there. That sounded it would cause a higher wind resistance because of its pretty big wind profile. Maybe, if I put it down on a sled behind me, they'd slip through the wind better. So, I decided to take two sleds - I had two sleds that I was pulling from behind my bike - I had a mount that I created that hooked onto my rear axle and ropes from one sled to the other.

I had some people questioning the idea of two sleds - you should be able to fit everything in one sled. The thing is I could put everything on 1 sled, I could put it on 2 sleds, and I actually had two panniers on my bike. So when I got there, I had a lot of flexibility in how to set things up. I could put a large percentage of my gear in the panniers and then leave one or two sleds pretty lightweight, or I can put everything into one sled, or I could mix that up as how I wanted. What I found worked best was - at the halfway point where they refuel planes, I was able to say, "I don't need panniers." - to keep the bike absolutely as light as possible. So, I sent the panniers back on the plane at the halfway point and just used the 2 sleds - that's what worked best. I could put everything on one sled but the sleds would sink into the snow. So, it's better to put it onto 2 sleds and have it slide on top rather than on 1 sled and have it sink down the snow further. Just going into it, I knew that this was, like, on-the-job training because nobody had ever done this and knew what the best setup and the best way to do this was. The conditions in Antarctica are unique and the only way you can really know what works well in Antarctica is to try it in Antarctica.

**Scott**

You've given that information now. So, whoever eventually does this and, maybe, breaks your record will have that information as an advantage to start with.

**Dan**

There's one record they can't break - I'm the first and you can't break that. You can get faster, better, and all of that, but I hope, someday, somebody comes out and does it better than what I did.

**Scott**

It's inevitable, I think. So. Starting right off the bat, on day one, December 2, 2013, you were about an hour in, you went in less than a mile, and you thought you forgot your camera. Can you talk about that a little bit?

**Dan**

I guess I am bad at forgetting things - I just do that kind of stuff. So, when I got dropped off, we did some filming and stuff like that. Then, I packed everything in my bags and headed out. Then, I thought, "Oh, man, did I really get my camera packed in there?" So, it's kind of like that kind of thing, like, "Did I really remember to close the garage door?" So, I was like, "Oh, man. I had to check this now." So, I had to stop, set up my tent, and get in. Then, once I started going

through my gear, my camera was there, which is nice. Then, I looked up, saw the mountains out in the distance, and thought, "I'm going to get up and over those mountains." A week later, I was still working at it.

**Scott**

Well, you're right. You got to stay positive, right?

**Dan**

Yeah.

**Scott**

Were there any other surprises in those first few days or was it just you slogging forward as expected?

**Dan**

Again, I already said it - it was so difficult and hard. I knew it was I did. I guess the thing that was kind of weird to me is there was a guy who was trying to set the record for being able to ski from where I got dropped off to the South Pole in the shortest amount of time. In Antarctica, the earlier you start in the season, the softer the snow is going to be. So, when he started, the snow was too soft and the conditions were bad and stuff. So, he didn't get the speed that he needed to break the record. So, he turned around and came down again. As he went back up, I was thinking about how hard and bad it was for me to go up this thing, and I was like, "What kind of idiot would ever do this twice?" So, it was amazing to me that he would turn around, go back up, and do it again. Maybe, a lot of that was because pushing a bike up the hill is more difficult than skiing up the hill. I guess the thing that was surprising to me was that he would turn around, go back, and do it again.

The other thing that was interesting about that is, probably, like, less than an hour after he passed and headed to the other direction, I was following his ski trail, which makes a nice and easy navigation thing for me, so I didn't need to worry about what direction I was going. As I was doing that, I stepped down and my leg fell into a crevasse. On the same path that he had skied - I got a picture of it - you can see his ski tracks going right next to the hole that I fell in. So, that was one of the things that were known up front - that was an extra level of danger because I have to get off the bike and push it at some points, the points that I was going to have to push are probably the places that are going to be the most dangerous as far as crevasses are concerned because the crevasses are going to be in those places where the ice is moving more. So, the most dangerous place to be on foot was where I was, most likely, going to have to push and it was where I was pushing. So, I fell in. I don't know how big the crevasse was. I don't know if it was big enough to actually fall completely in. One leg fell in and I was able to pull myself up using my bike. I could see some nice hard blue ice, so I quickly got up on that. I didn't dare to go back and take a picture because I didn't want to be there for the rest of my life.

**Scott**

No, no way. Talking about a crevasse, that's a word that's, kind of, specific to this type of expedition - when the ice moves, separates, and creates these big gaping holes which are, sometimes, visible and not that visible. The danger was to just fall in and nobody could come and get you, right?

**Dan**

Well, yeah. There's a video out there - I think it's mostly for an ad for Iridium - about a lady who had gone a few years before I did. She had done some bad things in terms of the way she planned her route and mix two routes together. Anyway, it sent her across these crevasses that were known to be there. So, she went across that and she fell in. She dropped in far enough and she had to work her way up by poking a hole in the crevasse above with her ski pole and then get a satellite signal out, and they actually did get in and rescue her. Then, she continued on and completed her trip to the South Pole. So yeah, it's possible to get rescued if you can get a good signal out to a satellite. And if it's not a whiteout, they can actually come and get you. So, it's funny because there are a few things about this expedition. If I go back and watch and stuff, they'll just bring me to tears - watching that video from her is just very emotional for me. Although it's probably not that big of a deal, for me, it really hits - that whole idea of being in a crevasse and dying there is not a good idea.

**Scott**

Right. I watched that video. I think you have it linked or embedded in one of your blog posts. What a great ad for Iridium - it's a satellite phone, right?

**Dan**

Yeah, yeah.

**Scott**

She was amazed. She was down in this crevasse, not able to get out on her own, she took her phone out, and she got like 5 bars - a perfectly strong signal! So, she was able to talk to someone - that's got to be the biggest relief in the world! I'll have a link to that video on the show notes for this episode as well so that people can watch that.

**Dan**

Yeah. That's an amazing video to me. That also brings me to the point that I have things in place for an emergency situation - there is a backup and a plan to be able to get me out of there. Although they can fly in and rescue you and stuff, they can't do that if it's a whiteout condition. So, the weather condition in Antarctica is extremely difficult. I mean, they could not have gotten me to me for three or four days because the weather would not have permitted it. So, there's a certain amount of danger and I have to be able to survive on my own for however long it takes for them to be able to get there.

**Scott**

Just in itself, that's got to be a little scary.

**Dan**

It should be but, for some reason, I don't think I was as scared as, maybe, I should have been.

**Scott**

Now, when you were talking about them, you're referring to the company ALE - what does that stand for?

**Dan**

Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions.

**Scott**

Their cost was the primary or the majority of this trip because you didn't bring all of your supplies, right? How many times did they meet you throughout the trip? Or did they just drop things?

**Dan**

They didn't meet me that much. Basically, what they did was they flew into someplace along my route, dug a hole in the ice, bury my stuff in the ice, put a black flag on it, gave me the GPS coordinates of where they put it, and then tell me to go play geocaching for life.

**Scott**

Playing geocaching for your very survival...

**Dan**

Yeah. I had three resupplies that were done that way. I think I'm not supposed to say exactly how much it was because I think that's in my contract with them. I can't remember exactly - off the top of my head - how much it was, but it's somewhere around \$60,000 to \$70,000. They flew me from Chile down to Union Glacier where they have a camp that they put up and other things that they're running there to support everything. It's an amazing and awesome camp that they put there at the Union glacier. They did my food supplies. I called them every day on a satellite phone, gave them updates, and they kept track of me. If something happens to me, they can come and get me. They flew me back to Union Glacier after I'm done, and then flew me back to Chile. When you put it all together and say, "How much would it cost just to do that?" There's no way that they can do that for a living if it's just for me alone. The only reason it is cheap - I know that doesn't sound cheap - is because they've also got people going in and doing things like climbing mountains, seeing penguins, and other things that, I think, reduce the cost for an expedition like mine and make it possible.

**Scott**

You still got to do all the hard work but they got all the experience to tell you, "This is how you plan it. This is the way to work." So, what an amazing service! While you were out there, did you listen to music or podcasts? How did you occupy your mind all that time?

**Dan**

Yeah. I had an iPod with some music on it, but I started not listening to it. So, I spent - I don't know - maybe, a week or two before I started listening to music. It was really amazing to get out there and there's just nothing making any noise at all - even the wind, unless it's hitting me. My equipment made no noise because it didn't hit anything else. I've never experienced this silence anywhere else. So, just to be able to experience that was amazing. Then, later on, I started listening to music - music really helped me a lot. There were a lot of songs that have - well, maybe not a lot-- there was a certain set of songs that have a special meaning to me because of how I interacted with them during my expedition. So, I've got songs that just have a special meaning to me because of that.

**Scott**

You've recorded, kind of, your video journal throughout this trip - which I recommend everybody to watch. It's just awesome to see what it was like out there, what you did that day, and that kind of thing. I can't help but draw the comparison between this trip and the movie, *Castaway*, with Tom Hanks - it was just him, by himself. He had a toothache. So, he had to knock out his own tooth - I just cringe when I think about that. While you were out there all alone, did you have any kind of medical emergencies at all?

**Dan**

I almost killed myself, I guess. In the tent, you can't really get upright. So, most of the time, I had to, kind of, lay on my stomach while eating. As I was doing that, I got hiccups, but I continued eating anyway. Then, I had a hiccup and got some food stuck in my throat. Every time I tried to cough it out, I'd get hiccup again and it would relodge back into my throat - that just kept going on and on. There was, like, nobody to help me. So, that was probably my biggest major emergency - dying from hiccups. Nobody was there to help while I was choking to death. One of the things I did with ALE is calling them every day - if I fail to call them, they would send somebody out to find me and see what the deal is. So, it would be pretty embarrassing to say, "Well, look, there he is! He choked to death!"

**Scott**

It's a little late for the Heimlich maneuver...

**Dan**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Scott**

Did you use solar power to power your electronics and stuff?

**Dan**

Yeah. I had the Goal Zero solar panels that I had bought, but the problem with lithium-ion batteries is they don't work well in super cold temperatures. Sometimes, I had a hard time charging things. There was a time when the main battery - that had a little Wi-Fi adapter, that let me connect from my iPod to the WiFi adapter, and then to my satellite phone - eventually ran out and I couldn't get it to recharge. It couldn't recharge just because it's so cold and it's hard to charge things.

**Scott**

That's just one of those things that you don't know until you're out there.

**Dan**

Yeah. A lot of times, you can get things to charge and stuff, but there were a couple of batteries that I just couldn't charge. It was kind of funny because I went a couple of days with no blog posts. So, people started calling my wife and asking, "Is he alive? Is he okay?" So, eventually, I had to read it to my wife who would put the phone on record and go play games with people and ignore me. Then, she would transcribe that and put it up on the blog for me.

**Scott**

It sounds like you had many types of support systems on this trip.

**Dan**

Yeah. It's kind of funny because, like, just recently, there was Colin O'Brady who did an expedition from coast to coast - he's the first to do that unsupported and whatever. Then, there were people complaining, "Well, you are getting advice about what to eat and whatever, so that's not really unsupported." The reality is you can't do something like this completely unsupported. So, their definition of unsupported is not having somebody physically being there to help you.

**Scott**

How many hours of sleep did you usually get?

**Dan**

Not enough. I think I fall asleep really easily - I don't have any trouble sleeping normally. If you do a lot of training and stuff, you'd get in that 'overtrained' mode. One of the symptoms of being 'overtrained' is the inability to sleep - I was definitely suffering from that. If I were to do something at an effort that is sustainable, I can go for 13 hours. The amount of effort to make it sustainable was much less than what I had to do. So, an unsustainable effort would be going all day for 13 hours and then getting so beat up from that that it takes a long time to get to sleep - so, I was doing that, setting up the tent, eating, making my blog entries, calling Eileen, and all that stuff. I didn't keep track of how many hours of sleep that I was getting, but it just wasn't enough. Especially with that much work, you probably needed more than the normal eight hours of sleep - I was getting less than that. I was having a hard time sleeping. I didn't think the 24 hours of daylight was going to be a problem for me, but it was. One of the ways to get around that is to take your sleeping bag, pull that up over your head, and then it's dark. It was a nice new sleeping bag that I've gotten, but it turned out that I was allergic to that sleeping bag. So, I could only pull the sleeping bag up to my chest - I couldn't pull it up over my head. Otherwise, I'd wake up in the morning all puffy and hardly able to see. So, I would pull that up to my chest. Then, I put my parka over my head and my body to, kind of, help. But I woke up, typically, several times during the night and it's light. So, you'd think that it's time to get up, but it's only 11 or 12 o'clock.

**Scott**

All right. Just because of where you were on the planet, the sun never went away - it was light all the time.

**Dan**

Yeah, the sun just goes, in a big circle, around the horizon - at about 23 degrees above the horizon. The reason I say 23 degrees is because there's this really cool effect when any moisture in the air turns to ice and those ice crystals float, kind of, sideways, and the sun hits that and makes this really cool optical effect of a couple of rainbows and a halo - it's just an amazing sight. The first circle is about 23 degrees out from the sun and the bottom of that circle just hit the horizon. So, in the morning hours, the sun was about 23 degrees. At where I started, it would probably get a few degrees higher at the north of me. Then, when you get to the South Pole, it's just at the same elevation around the horizon the whole time.

**Scott**

Did you lose any weight during this trip?

**Dan**

Yeah. One of the things that ALE asked as I was getting ready was, "How much weight had you put on in preparation?"

**Scott**

So, part of the preparation is to gain weight ahead of time?

**Dan**

That was one of the things I tried but - I was biking to and from work on my fat bike - I just couldn't put on weight beforehand although I was eating as much as I could. So, I went in pretty

good shape and not quite as fat as I would have liked. When I got to the South Pole, I had absolutely zero fat left and my body was, basically, consuming itself - I was burning off muscle mass. You can't get undressed in Antarctica because it's, kind of, cold there and you can't take shower or anything. So, after 51 days of that, when I finally got back to the base camp at Union Glacier, they have a shower then and there. So, when I got out and tried to take a shower, I looked like one of those really terrible anorexics - I just couldn't believe how bad I looked. I lost too much weight.

**Scott**

There was one story that I read on the blog. Can you talk about when somebody gave you a bottle of Coke?

**Dan**

Yeah. So, at the halfway point, I had the ability to leave behind things that I didn't need. At that point, I had extra food - it wasn't really extra food because it was food I knew needed to eat. The reality was that there's only so much you can eat - your body can only digest a certain amount of calories. So, even though I needed more calories, there was only so much I could eat and digest. So, it's just impossible to get in enough calories for how much I was burning. So, I had what I thought was extra food at that point. So, I sent it back on the plane. I calculated how much I would need to make it to the South Pole and then I'd get a resupply. When I got that resupply, I had more food than I thought I needed. So, I made a batch of food, ate some of it, and the rest of it went into a hole in the ice, so I was wasting food. I was doing that because it was extra weight and stuff - I calculated how long that was gonna take me and I didn't need that. Well, it was kind of a dumb thing to do - I did several dumb things. One of the dumb things I did was waste that food. So, in the end, things didn't work out. Because of the whiteouts and the snow got soft, I was just so exhausted and wasn't getting the distance I needed. So, I had to stretch out my food to make it to the South Pole. At that point, I was surviving on a couple of small meals a day. In fact, one day, I took all the empty packages from the food I had eaten before and found the little pieces of frozen stuff in the corners of the package and ate that - that was my dinner.

**Scott**

Obviously, after you eat the food out of the packages, you have to keep those packages because you don't just leave them on the ground. So, you had to carry it all with you.

**Dan**

Everything you take with you has to come back out. You see somebody surviving on the streets and eating out of the garbage? It's not quite the same thing, but I still know what it's like to scavenge through my garbage to find something to eat. So, it turned out that I had, like, a couple of meals left. I was trying to eat a meal and get, like, 12 miles out of that meal, and then eat the next meal and get 12 miles out of it. But the problem was there weren't enough calories in one meal to get 12 miles. I would be completely exhausted, out of energy and, basically, collapse on the ice because I was out of energy. The thing was I was close to the end. So, I said, "Okay, I'm going to eat my last two meals instead of spacing them out." Then, I talked to ALE and said, "Okay, I'm completely out of food." They said, "Okay, we'll send Hannah down on a snowmobile. She'll come down and give you some more food."

**Scott**

How far out were you at that point?

**Dan**

About 20 miles. So, she came down with some food, and one of the things that she gave me was a frozen-solid bottle of Coke. I was like, "Oh man, a bottle of Coke never looked so awesome." So, I took the bottle of Coke, set up my tent, went through the food that she gave me, and ate a bunch of chocolate bars. I think the first chocolate bar I had was one that had, like, coffee in it - I don't do coffee and I think coffee tastes terrible. I also don't do coffee for religious reasons - but I didn't care and I just shoved the whole thing down my throat.

**Scott**

"Forgive me, God!"

**Dan**

Yeah, I'm not wasting that. So, while I was doing that, I set up my pot, got some water boiling, put the current bottle of coke in that, melted the coke, and got the coke all nice and warm. Then, when I started going, I didn't wear my parka while I was riding because the Parker would have been way too hot and I would have gotten sweaty and that's very dangerous. So, I would dress down while I was biking because I was working so hard. So, I took my parka, buried that coke in there, and packed it deep into my sled so that it'll stay nice and warm. It's like 20 miles left to go. So, after I've gone 15 miles or whatever and needed that extra boost, I would pull that coke out and drink it. When I got to where I decided, "Okay, now's the time to pull the coke out," - it was still warm - I opened up the coke. As I was opening it up, it started to freeze, so I was drinking this coke as fast as I can to keep it from freezing - and you know that whole brain freeze idea. I had gone 2 months with no carbonation, so that carbonation was just burning my throat as it goes down. I was drinking as fast as I could because I wanted to get as much of it out as I could - I got about half of it out before I couldn't get any more out. So yeah, that's my story. When people ask how cold it is, that's how cold it was.

**Scott**

The Coke freezes before you can even drink half of it.

**Dan**

Yeah.

**Scott**

Alright, the last day was January 21, 2014. Describe reaching the goal or when you got to be within sight of the South Pole.

**Dan**

Yeah. So as I was going up and down, I was watching my GPS. I know that the South Pole is at 9,300 feet. I've also read some blogs and stuff, so I know that you can see the South Pole. For a lot of people, traveling 13-15 miles a day from the South Pole is actually a pretty good day. So, I knew that I'd be able to see the South Pole from that far away. There's a research base there, so you can see the research base. They have a big telescope and some stuff out there that they're doing research with. So, I knew that I'd be able to see that. As I was going up and up, I was watching my GPS. I needed to get up to 9,300 feet. When I finally got up to 9,300 feet, I looked off in the distance and I could see-- at first, I wasn't sure if it was this South Pole Station or if it was just SRV - SRV is, kind of, like, snowdrifts that form down there and they're really amazing. I was looking off and I saw these. The problem is, at that far south, this SRV is just, kind of, non-existent. Then, after a little while, I was, like, "That's it!" So, when I realized that's really it, I could see the South Pole, it was the most wonderful thing that I've ever seen - it was

just, like, these 3 dots on the horizon. So, I was just, like, bawling, "It's so awesome! I can see the South Pole!" So, I pulled out my satellite phone, called my wife, and told her, "I can see it! I can see it!" She couldn't understand what I was saying through the tears - the tears of joy were very much there. I was just overwhelmed and stuff and it's so awesome. She was like, "What? What?!" And the phone line drops - that's how most of my phone conversations.

When you're going to the South Pole, they've got the research there, they've got antennas buried in the ice, they have all these different sections at this place where they're studying neutrinos, CO2, and all this stuff, so you can't go into different regions because if you do, you're gonna mess up their studies. There's a very specific route that you have to take to get into the South Pole. What that means is, basically, I've got to, kind of, not go straight towards the pole - I had to go off to the side a little bit and then turn in. So, as I was going, the South Pole Station would be visible off to my right. I had to, kind of, crane my head to the left a little bit and not look to the right because if I ever saw that thing, it was just so overwhelming that I'd just break down in tears again. Then, eventually, you drop back down into this big bowl and the South Pole disappears and everything - you can't see it anymore. You got this big drop. You got to go down and then regain all that out to do it again and stuff. So, it was just amazing - it's impossible to describe the joy of how awesome it was to see that. I was still 13 miles away, so it's still about 13 hours worth of travel.

At that point, I was back to having to push my bike most of the way because of the snow conditions there. So, I was pushing, stopping and looking around, and realizing that I'll never be here again. Even if I could come back to the exact same spot, I wouldn't be in this same thing - the first bike expedition to the South Pole. It's something that I need to enjoy even though I wanted to go home and be done with this more than you can possibly imagine. I was just, like, "Okay, I'm done! I can take the time, look around, see, try to figure out things, and try to enjoy the last few hours of that last day." Then, when I finally got to the South Pole, they have a section set aside for the non-government camping, so what isn't part of the government can go and camp there and whatever.

Usually, the ALE set up a camp, they have tents, a nice warm place to go in, some food to greet you with - cookies and chocolate. You get to talk to people, enjoy yourself being done, and everything. The problem is they ran that camp until January 20, and I got there on January 21. In fact, when Hannah brought that stuff down, it was basically, "Here's some stuff that you can have because we're leaving. So, they flew off and there was nothing there. You can see a couple of dents in the snow where their tents and stuff would have been. There wasn't anything there - I was there all by myself. When I got there, I don't even know what time of day it was, but I remember calculating it out. The people at the South Pole Station are running on New Zealand time frame, so for them, it was, like, early morning. So, they would all still be asleep and whatever - there's no sign of anybody else. So, I got out there. They've got this ring of flags around a pole in the ground - like, a barber pole type thing with a mirror ball on top - and that's not really a South Pole thing, that's just kind of a thing that got set up so that you can go there and take pictures. So, it's kind of a really nice photo op at the south pole.

### **Scott**

The touristy South Pole...

### **Dan**

Yeah. Well, it's just for pictures and stuff like that - the real softball is a little bit beyond that. So, I went to where the real South Pole is and they've got a stick in the ice, marking it with a little

emblem on the top. To me, that was kind of a very anti-climatic because I was there feeling so overwhelmed with joy, and then when I finally got there, it was like, "Okay, I'm here. Now, there's nobody around and nothing to do. So, I went back to my camp and set up my tent. They had another supply of stuff that I wanted at the South Pole, like a nicer camera and some things that that I had. So, they had that cash somewhere. So, I got my tents set up and everything. At that point, I was usually pretty drenched in sweat from my things, which is not a good thing because of what would happen. So, I was, kind of, wet-ish and stuff, so it's bitter cold there. So, I got my tent set up and everything. I know my stuff is out there but it's just too cold, so I'm not going out to find it. Then, the next day, after I was dried out and everything, it was still just as bitter cold, but it wasn't so bad at that point. So, I went out and find my cash and stuff.

**Scott**

What an awesome thing to get to the finish line. It's just amazing. The next day, when the people inside the buildings woke up and everything, were they surprised to see you there already? When did they expect you to be there?

**Dan**

Yeah. They would have known that there were expeditions going in from the South Pole or from the coast into the South Pole - there were probably, like, maybe 4-6 expeditions that year. So, there were other people doing it and the scientists there knew what was going on and kept track of what was going on. Not only that, before I entered into the path to go in, I had to make a satellite phone call and said, "Eileen, I'm here, I'm entering." So, they notified the scientists there. So, they all knew that I was there - so, it's not a surprise to them. Then, they came out and scheduled a tour for us. So, I got in and tour the station - it was pretty cool to go in and see all that stuff. One of the most miserable things I've ever done-- because I was so used to the cold, 40 degrees felt more comfortable to me than the 70 degrees or however warm it was in there - it was so sickening. I didn't know what it was like to be drunk, but I imagine that's what it was like to be drunk. I just felt so sick to my stomach and I couldn't stand up straight. It was awful because it was way too warm and uncomfortable to be in a place, so I couldn't wait to get out of that place. You would think, "Oh, yeah, nice. You can get out of the cold!" I was, like, "No, I couldn't wait to get back out into the cold because that was just so miserable." And so

**Scott**

How did the expedition and the notoriety that came with it? How did that affect your bike business?

**Dan**

I closed my bike shop. I don't think it really helped my bike shop much. I mean, I did get some publicity out of it, but my problem with the bike shop was mostly that I'm not good at being a businessman - I'm too much of a pushover, I guess. So, I gave away too much stuff and I know that it's bad. You can help more people if you stay profitable, but I was like, "Well, this isn't the best business thing, but I'm helping somebody, so I don't care. This is what I'm going to do." So, I was losing money year after year after year on the bike shop and it wasn't sustainable. Also, at that time, the bike shop was a lot of work and I had put a lot into it and stuff. At a certain point, I was like, "Okay, I'm ready to move off of that and do something else." so, I thought maybe that it could help with marketing on the bike shop, but it didn't help as much as I had wanted it to and I ended up closing the bike shop.

**Scott**

Since this happened 5 years ago, you still have some numbness in your feet - is that right? Or has that gone away?

**Dan**

Yeah. My feet are still having numbness - it's kind of hard to describe. When I first got back, it was, kind of, like, your face feels fat and puffy after you've gone to the dentist. My hands were like that, my feet were like that when I first got back. My hands, I think, are all okay. I mean, I have a lot of nerve damage in my hands from getting cut by pocket knives and things like that. So, my fingertips are not the greatest. I was a computer programmer before I opened the bike shop. When I first got back, I had a really hard time doing anything with the computer because of the numbness in my fingers - it was hard to type. The numbness and lack of circulation, I guess, in the fingertips - they didn't work very well on touchscreens when I first got back. Then, my feet were, basically, numb. When it's winter, I could take the garbage and stuff out to the street barefooted and it wouldn't bother me at all because my feet would just be completely numb. They're not that numb anymore, but when I walk around barefooted, there's still a weird numbness that I have and it just feels a little weird. I would forget about it, but when I walk around barefooted, it frequently reminds me that, "Oh yeah, your feet are still numb."

I don't know if they'll ever fully come back. I did some cold damage to them while scouting at the Klondike Derby campout where I got my feet too wet and cold one night, so my feet had poor circulation going into them. I think biking and sitting on a seat cut off some blood flow. Also, if I pedal for a long time, my feet tend to go numb. So, doing that every day for 51 days with the cold, I think, just did enough damage, so my feet don't do well with the cold. I like going out and biking with the fat bike in the snow but I don't do it much anymore because if I get out in the cold, my feet would get cold really quick and they would turn all black and purple. So, my feet don't handle the cold very well anymore, and that's part of why I moved to Florida.

**Scott**

You put your body through so much trauma for 51 days in extreme temperatures. I guess it's understandable that there would be some, kind of, lasting effects.

**Dan**

Yeah. I figured I had enough winter for a lifetime - although it was summer while I was down there - so, it's time for me to find some good tropical things to do. So, I'm staying in Florida right now. I have a house in Utah, and I need to get somebody to buy my house in Utah so that I can buy something smaller and more affordable here in Florida.

**Scott**

One extreme to the other, I guess.

**Dan**

Well, yeah. What I really want to do is to get a sailboat. My vision for that is to be able to go and sail that to different places where I can help people with, like, hurricane relief or with different levels of things you can do for humanitarian service. I will be able to sail to someplace and do some humanitarian service project, and then sail to another place and do that over and over - that's my fantasy, my vision, and what I wanted to do. We'll see what I'll actually be able to accomplish. My wife doesn't want to live on a sailboat.

**Scott**

That sounds like a pretty good retirement plan to me.

**Dan**

Yeah. And I can do it. If I sell my house and buy a sailboat, that would be much cheaper. With the house that I have right now, I can't afford to retire and keep the house that I have.

**Scott**

Looking back on it now, is there anything that you would have done differently?

**Dan**

Yeah, I wouldn't have dropped off so much food at the halfway point and wasted that. Obviously, there are a lot of things that I learned and could improve on - hopefully, somebody else can improve it. I wouldn't bother bringing the panniers to start with. There are some different ways that I would set up my sled. I talked to some guy - there was a guy who wanted to do what I did - and said, "Well, the easier way to do it would be to start at the South Pole and go to the coast, but nobody would really care about that. People are gonna be, like, 'Oh cool, you're the first person to bike to the South Pole.' They're not going to care if you bike from the South Pole to the coast, but if you bike from the coast to the South Pole, they're going to care about that. I mean, the real expedition is to go from the coast to the South Pole, but if you want to do it easier, you should start from the South Pole and go to the coast because then you're going downhill with the tailwind. Then, the other thing is to get wider tires." So, he built up a custom bike that was like 2-by-2 tires wide. My tires were, like, 5-inches wide. He took 2 of those and stuck them side-by-side, essentially, made a 10-inch wide bike, and tried to do that going the opposite direction, but it didn't work out too well for him. He ended up being picked up and flown out. His wife sent me a message saying how impressed he was with what I had done. She said that he was a super tough guy. I'm not trying to say that I'm better than him and he was worse or anything like that because everybody got different things. Maybe, the setup for the bike just wasn't the right setup and whatever.

But yeah, there are some things that I would definitely try which is to see if I could get a little bit wider tires. There's a lady who was planning on doing it the same year that I did, but she's still working on trying to get the funding to be able to bike to the South Pole. She got a 2-wheel drive bike that she's going to try to use, which is interesting. I've always said, "I don't think that's a good idea. I think there are way too many mechanical issues in terms of weight. I think it's not the right choice." But I could be wrong because, maybe, having propulsion at the front and back would allow you to bike through things that were very difficult for me - I don't know. It'll be interesting to see if she actually does it. I think it's the wrong choice. Eric thought that the sleds were the wrong choice, but I thought that he was wrong, and so on. Just because I think that's wrong, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is.

**Scott**

Yep, she might find it differently.

**Dan**

Yeah. Nobody else has really done that. There had been a couple of other biking expeditions out there, but nobody actually tried to go from the coast to the South Pole by bike since I did it. Maybe, they looked at what I went through and said, "That was stupid! I'm not going to do that!"

**Scott**

There's your video blog that serves to scare other people away from even trying it when they see what you went through.

**Dan**

Well, yeah. I may be wrong, but if I told ALE that I want to do this now, I think they would not gonna let me do it until I get some more polar experience in some crevasse training because when I did it, I opened up a crevasse and fell. I think somebody else pushing a bike may have opened up a crevasse too - I'm not positive on that. There are definitely crevasse dangers that are worse for being on a bike than skiing because you do have to get off and push at some points and add extra risk. I know that there's another guy whom I've talked to that's trying to do an expedition from coast-to-coast on a bike - he got some pretty good experience in that - but they told him, "No, you can't do this until you get some crevasse training. So, I think, maybe, they're being a little more careful about that because of the problems I got. The reality is... the thing that usually stops people from doing this is just the sheer cost of it.

**Scott**

Yeah, I can imagine. Dan, this is an awesome story. I love hearing stories like this. I know that you are all over the web - you've got your YouTube channel, Facebook, Wikipedia page, and of course, your blog that documented everything throughout as well as video documentation throughout the trip. I'm going to have all of that linked on the show notes for this episode so that people can go and watch that and get an even better idea of what you are going through. I think it's just it's pretty awesome and I appreciate you sharing your story with us.

**Dan**

Well, thank you. It's always fun to share it. In some ways, I feel that one of the obligations after doing something like that is to write a book and share it with everybody that you can. So, I got a book, I got the videos that I put together that go through the whole expedition, and my blog that is out there.

**Scott**

Excellent. So, we'll get all that out there. Good luck and have a great retirement in Florida!

**Dan**

Thanks.

**Scott**

Thanks for listening to this episode. My goal for each show is to introduce you to people and stories that you just won't find on other podcasts. If you want to help support the show, you just need to subscribe! That way, you'll never miss an episode. You can click on any of the 'Subscribe' buttons on the website, which is [WhatWasThatLike.com](http://WhatWasThatLike.com). You'll see all the links right there at the top, where you can subscribe directly to this show on Apple podcast, Google podcasts, Google Play Music, Spotify, Stitcher, radio, or on whatever app you use to catch your podcasts. You'll see there are also links to Twitter and Instagram - so, you can follow us there and I hope you do. If you really want to connect with me and get in on the discussion with other listeners to the show, you can join our private Facebook group. You can find that at [WhatWasThatLike.com/Facebook](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/Facebook). Of course, you can always email me directly at [Scott@whatwasthatlike.com](mailto:Scott@whatwasthatlike.com), or just go to the website and click on 'Contact'. I'd love to hear what you think of this episode or a previous episode. Thanks again for listening and I'll see you on the next show where we'll once again ask the question, "What was that like?"