

Adventurer heading for the Antarctic two months after open heart surgery

An adventurer who had open heart surgery in August is preparing to row one of the world's most dangerous crossings in Antarctica just after Christmas.

Jamie Douglas Hamilton has few records left to break. He already has seven Guinness World records and is now joining a crew to undertake a record-breaking row across one of the most dangerous ocean crossings from Drake Passage to South Georgia.

Jamie will be speaking at a fundraising event for the British Heart Foundation at The Royal Scots Club in Edinburgh on Wednesday 14 December from 7 – 9.30pm.

In July of this year after feeling unwell, Jamie had immediate open heart surgery when a leaking aortic valve was discovered. This is the result of a hereditary condition and the news shocked Jamie who was treated at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. He now hopes to raise more than £100,000 for the British Heart Foundation.



Jamie recovering after surgery in Royal Infirmary Edinburgh
The Scot will undertake the journey in honour of Harry McNish the Glaswegian carpenter on Shackleton's ill-fated Endurance voyage, to bring attention to "Chippy" McNish who was denied a Polar medal.

Jamie said: "When I was a boy I read Endurance about Shackleton's rescue voyage when they sailed from Elephant Island to South Georgia in a small lifeboat and I couldn't believe the hardship they went through. I'm excited to be going on this adventure in memory of Harry McNish. We have

named our expedition boat 'Mrs Chippy' after his cat who accompanied the Endurance.

"It was a shock to me when I discovered the issue with my heart and that I needed immediate open heart surgery. I felt as if my life had been turned upside down, however, it turned out to be the biggest blessing of my life. The operation makes you feel like you have been hit by a bus and the recovery takes a long time but I feel so much better now and my fitness levels are increasing. I'm ready to take on the challenge and am incredibly honoured to be rowing on behalf of Harry McNish, who I believe ultimately saved Shackleton's crew from disaster."

Jamie's surgeon, Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, Vincenzo Giordano said, "Jamie is one of the youngest and fittest patients I've operated on.

Extremely ambitious and determined, he has been through an exceedingly challenging clinical journey.

"Just last May it was discovered he had a congenitally abnormal aortic valve with 2 leaflets instead of three (a condition that affects 1 in a hundred people). Because of this congenital malformation the valve has been malfunctioning with a progressive and substantial degeneration over the last year. This resulted in a severe valve leakage, followed by an enlargement of Jamie's heart and onset of first signs and symptoms of cardiac failure.

Due to the significant changes of his cardiac function and worsening of his symptoms at the beginning of August I expedited his procedure replacing his aortic valve with a bioprosthesis and the proximal part of his aorta which appeared enlarged.

"As expected, his post operative recovery from this major surgery has been outstanding, partly due to his level of fitness prior to surgery and his determination with the end

goal of participating in the expedition. After reviewing him three months down the line, I'm pleasantly confident based on his clinical progress he will succeed.

"I wish Jamie all the best not only in his pending expedition but in all future endeavours."



Jamie with John McNish, great nephew of the intrepid carpenter Harry McNish

John McNish, Harry McNish's great nephew said, "Our family are incredibly touched that Jamie is rowing the treacherous seas of the Antarctic which my great uncle sailed in the early 1900s and that the journey will be made in honour of him. Our

family is incredibly proud of my great uncle, and we have always believed it to be very unjust that Chippy wasn't given the Polar Medal. It is very exciting that this expedition, The Harry McNish Row, will highlight just how brave and courageous my great uncle was."

On 10 January the crew of the Harry McNish row will set off on a 950-mile journey without wind power following the same route the James Caird boat took from Elephant Island to South Georgia. The brave crew ultimately saved Shackleton and the men on the Endurance which had been sunk by pack ice in October 1915.

The relationship between Shackleton and the outspoken McNish was difficult and Shackleton awarded almost all of the team the Polar Medal excluding McNish. Believing this to be a great injustice, Jamie is calling out for the Polar Medal to be awarded to Harry McNish's family posthumously.

Jamie explained, "None of the crew would have made it back if it was not for Harry McNish. Not only did he build the boat that saved the whole crew with the most limited of tools, but he created the crampons for Shackleton, Crean and Worsley to cross the mountains of South Georgia to the whaling station on the other side. Without McNish speaking up to Shackleton on the pack ice the lifeboat hulls would have been irreparably damaged. He was portrayed as a mutineer but was the real hero."

The crew have already rowed from Cape Horn in South America to mainland Antarctica across the Drake Passage. No-one has ever rowed the waters between Antarctica and South Georgia.

The adventurers will take their turn in 90 minute shifts, rowing 24 hours a day for three weeks in cold to freezing conditions.

There are three records to be set with this journey: first to row from the Antarctic continent, first to row the Scotia Sea

by human power alone and first to row the Southern Ocean from South to North.

Jamie will be leaving the UK on January 2nd 2023 from Edinburgh Airport and will meet his crew in Ushuaia, Argentina. They will set off from Antarctica on January 12th and aim to arrive in South Georgia 16-20 days later.

The expedition can be followed online with updates on social media @actiphwater.

To donate to Jamie's British Heart Foundation cause please visit:<https://www.justgiving.com/page/jamie-row-challenge>



screenshot from a previous expedition





Pictured Jamie Douglas-Hamilton at the slipway in Port Glasgow, Inverclyde Scotland All images © Gibson Digital 2022.