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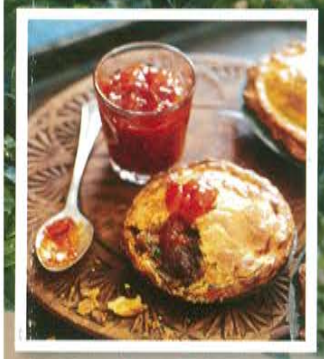

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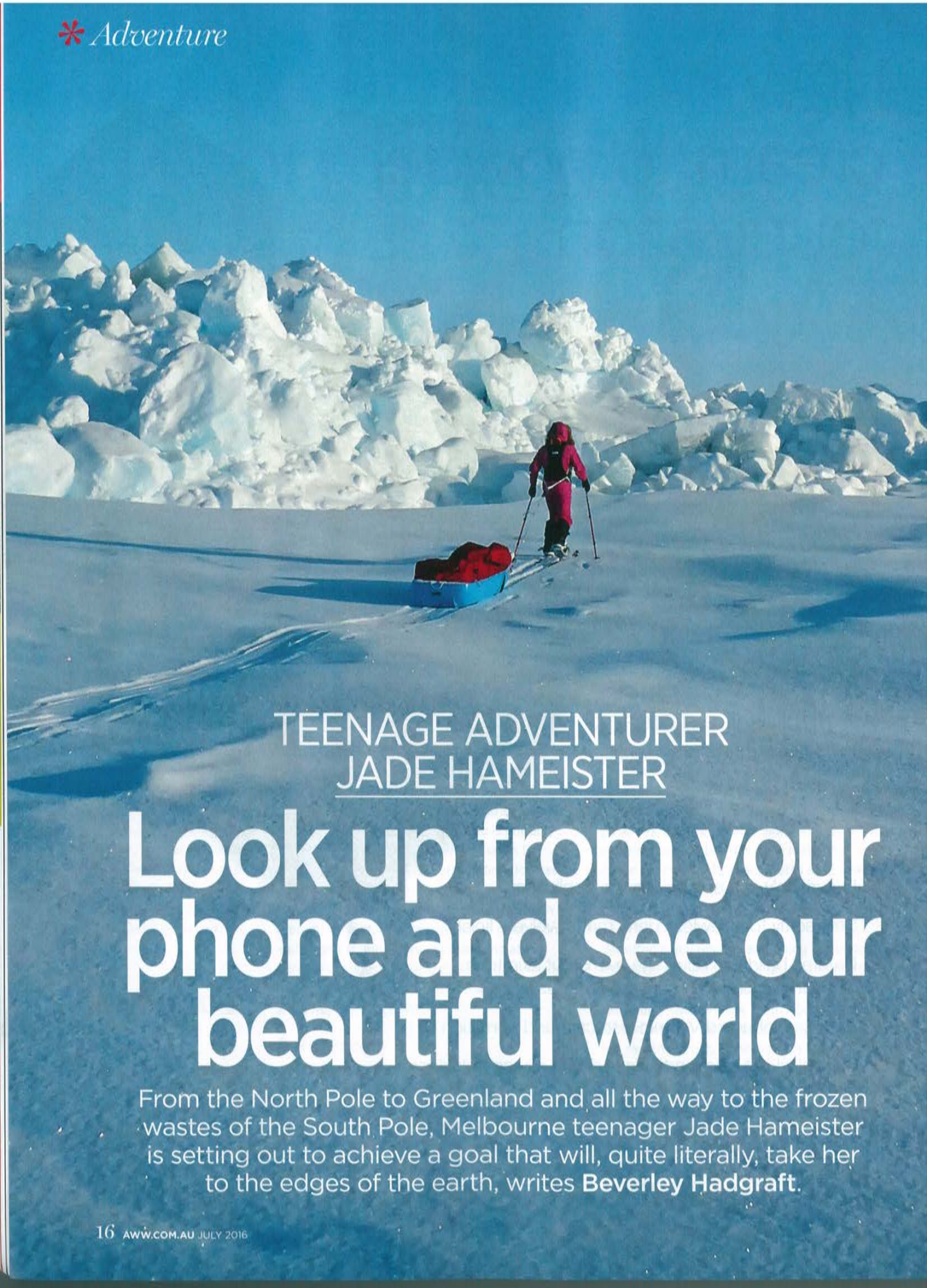


TEENAGE ADVENTURER JADE HAMEISTER

Look up from your phone and see our beautiful world

From the North Pole to Greenland and all the way to the frozen wastes of the South Pole, Melbourne teenager Jade Hameister is setting out to achieve a goal that will, quite literally, take her to the edges of the earth, writes **Beverley Hadgraft**.

With the North Pole conquered, Jade Hameister has Greenland and the South Pole in her sights.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER ANDRUS

Clockwise from top left: Jade and her dad on the trek; Jade and her mum, Vanessa; with *The Weekly*'s writer Beverley Hadgraft; in training for the trek on the beach; and with her guide, Eric Philips.

JADE HAMEISTER WAS 13 when she sat down to her usual family dinner and made an announcement: she wanted to become the youngest person ever to ski to the North Pole. It was something she'd been dreaming about for the past year, she said, and since the dream wouldn't go away, she wanted to see if she could make it a reality.

Most parents would probably have laughed and told Jade to finish her vegetables. Luckily for Jade, she doesn't have most parents. Her dad, Paul, immediately began investigating how to make it happen.

"If your kids have a dream, it's important to take action and find out if they can do it," he says. "It's better to have a crack and fail than to run away in case things don't work out because you're going to learn so much more from that."

In her school uniform at her home in Hampton, Victoria, laughing away like any other teenager, it's hard to imagine Jade scaling three-metre ice boulders and dragging a 50-kilogram sled across that frozen waste. Having survived the North Pole, she will add a 540km trek across Greenland and skiing to the South Pole next year, making her one of the few people ever to complete the "polar trifecta".

Jade, who turned 15 this month, is doing this, she says, to inspire other teens. "I want to remind them to look up from their smartphones and not forget what a beautiful world we have; to be active, have adventures and to chase their dreams."

Hopefully, Paul will inspire a few parents as well, as he accompanies her. He has been stoking Jade's furnace of courage her whole life, teaching her the difference between irrational and rational fears, and to have a crack. These are lessons, he believes, that are parents' to teach and too important to be delegated to schools.

Jade's polar dream first took root after a family trek with her mum, Vanessa, younger brother Kane, 13, and her dad to Everest Base Camp. She met a young woman there who had skied the South Pole solo. "It sounded incredible," Jade recalls.

"Adventure is the thing I love most – getting outdoors and challenging myself – and this seemed like the extreme of the extreme. To do it at my age would be an achievement that would be with me forever. I knew it was going to be incredibly hard, but it was there and in reach."

She and her dad began an extreme fitness regimen that included crossfit – at her peak, Jade was squatting with 80 kilograms across her shoulders – dragging tyres along the beach, plus a crash course in cross-country skiing.

The week before their departure, Paul felt unwell. The night before, the pain was so excruciating, he went to hospital. It was a large kidney stone and he needed surgery. He had it immediately, woke up from the general anaesthetic at 5.30pm and was on his way to the airport at 7pm.

He had a plastic stent from his kidney to his bladder. It was only meant to be in for seven days. He had it for four weeks and it calcified so that the surface was like rough coral and carved up his body's internal tubes until he urinated blood. "But there was no way I was going to let my daughter down," he says.

He skied behind her, partly to make sure she was okay and partly so she couldn't see him wincing. "Every day, I'd find myself looking at the back of this incredible, committed young

woman and thinking, 'I want this vision imprinted on my memory for ever'."

"That's love," Jade says when she recounts her version of this. "He kept saying, 'Forget about me. I'm just the one pulling bags at the back.'"

What were her favourite moments of the 11-day trek? "The best was actually reaching the Pole. It was weird, my stomach kind of dropped. I couldn't get my head around the fact I was standing on the top of the world."

And then it's hard not to laugh when she adds, "Another best bit was getting into the tent in the evening, eating Pringles and putting the stove on, which was probably very dangerous for a 14-year-old!"

She loved the surreal white landscape and spotting polar bear footprints. "That was cool, although I'd have freaked out if I'd seen a bear." She loved being just four people out in that great white wilderness – guide Eric Philips and cameraman Petter Nyquist joined them – and she loved snuggling into her 40cm-thick sleeping bag at night, falling into the kind of deep slumber that only those who've worked really hard for it can know.

"When it was over, I was really sad," she recalls. "Eric had said to me one lunchbreak, 'You know, there's this thing called the polar bug and if you get home and desperately want to be back, I think you might have that.'

"I said, 'I'm missing it already and I haven't left yet!' I don't know why I want to be back there, freezing my arse off, eating dehydrated meals and pushing myself that hard. I just loved it."

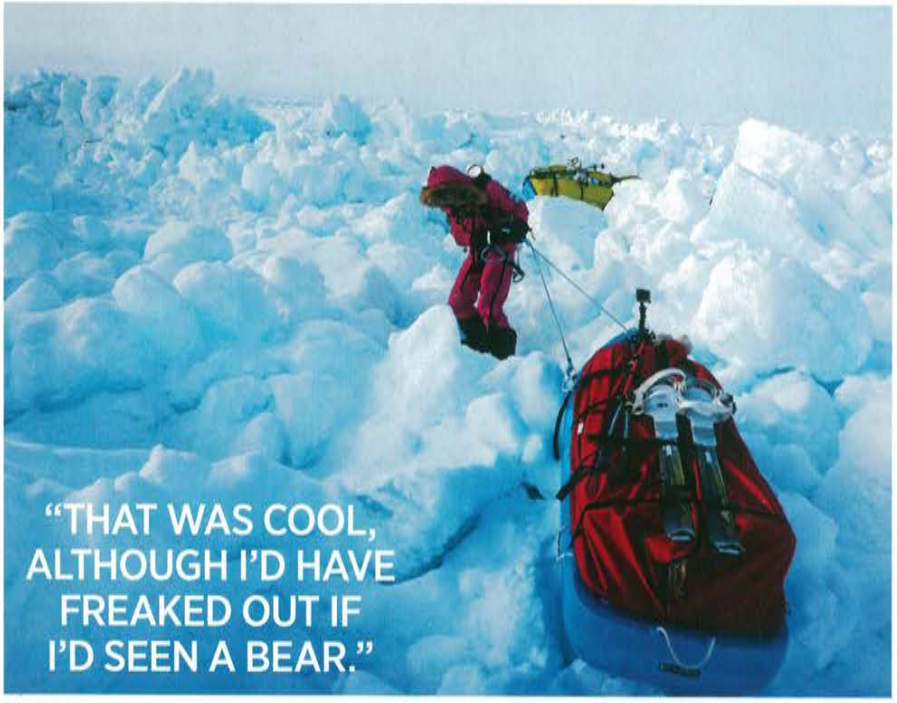
And speaking of freezing her arse off, the only thing that got her down, she says, was going to the toilet.

"It's something you take for granted and, suddenly, there's all this hassle and cold." She got frostnip (early frostbite) on her hands and bottom as a result and admits it was the only time she wept, but that just made things worse – even tears freeze at the North Pole.

Interestingly, it was the training the Jade found toughest. It had to be uncomfortable to prepare her for what she was going to endure. "I had these thoughts that maybe I'd been too cocky and thought I could do something I couldn't," she says.

"But I worked on my weaknesses. That's something Dad taught me. When I was younger and did my first open water swim in a triathlon, I panicked, but Dad took me to the beach and we worked on trying to get me comfy swimming in the ocean. I kept bursting into tears, sitting on the beach, going out, bursting into tears – but eventually I just swam and now the swim is my favourite leg.

"People often ask Mum and Dad how they can let me ski the North Pole, but as Mum says, she's let me go to school camp with a random bus driver and camp instructors we don't know. On the North Pole, I was with three men she knew and who knew what they were doing."



It's clear that Paul and Vanessa are a great combination. Vanessa is the homemaker, the safe sanctuary and comforter when things get tough. Paul is one of only a few Australians to have climbed the Seven Summits, including Everest. He is also a successful businessman, yet it's clear his value system has nothing to do with macho ego and everything to do with family values, and not leaving his children's self-esteem to the whims of the education system. He is also currently making plans for an adventure with their son, Kane.

So how do you find that line between giving your children wings and not pushing or bullying them? "I'm very conscious of making sure that what we're doing is about the kids and not looking vicariously for our own self-esteem through their achievements," Paul says.

"But I do think our culture has become too protective of our children. If it rains, we tell them to come inside, if they don't like their food, we get them something else to eat … that's not how life works. People who are good at life know how to push through hardship."

Paul will finish the polar trifecta with Jade, although he's so impressed with how she handled this year's trip he thinks she'd be fine without him as long as Eric and Petter are supporting her.

Hearing this, Jade's smile disappears for the first time.

"It was a really special thing to do with my dad," she says. "I'm so happy I got to share it with him. If Dad wasn't there, I don't know if I'd want to do it." ■

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