

ADVERTISING PROMOTION

**HILLEBERG**  
THE TENTMAKER



Felicity finds both beauty and clarity of purpose in the polar regions [below] A researcher, a leader, and someone who simply loves to spend time in the outdoors

# Celebrating experience

For polar pioneer **Felicity Aston**, science and adventure go hand in hand – but above all she is driven by the humility and wonder inspired by being in the most extreme places on the planet

IN HER TWENTY-PLUS years as a polar explorer, Felicity Aston MBE has experienced a rich lifetime's worth of adventure. In 2012, she became the first woman to ski across Antarctica solo, a journey of 59 days and a distance of 1084 miles (1744 kilometres); she has led expeditions to the North and South Pole; she has performed research for the British Antarctic Survey; and she has worked

closely alongside the BBC. But to use an appropriately polar metaphor, these accomplishments are just the tip of the iceberg. All of them, including the ones that can't be so easily put into a list, are worth celebrating. And all of them comprise the adversity she's overcome, the meaning she's derived from adventuring, and the impact she's had sharing her experiences.



Felicity has travelled to polar regions primarily as a climate researcher, with a focus on collecting data. But for her, it is equally important to record how an environment feels, because she believes numbers alone cannot illustrate the variety and scope of



Keron GT tents are the de facto standard tent for polar exploring because they are utterly dependable

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those regions. “Science is a wonderful thing, but science and mathematics is only one way of recording an environment. The way we as human beings experience the world is hugely varied from sound to sight, to photography, to art, to different ways of expressing that experience; it's endless. I think it's a pity that more value isn't placed on the other ways of experiencing environments,” she says. It doesn't matter whether you're on a casual overnight trip in the summertime or a major expedition, joy in the outdoors happens everywhere.

### SHARING IS THE BEST PART

Research may have been her core focus, but Felicity also finds herself intensely affected by the outdoors. “I'm always encouraging people to spend time alone... it really feels like a joy to just have some time to think... we never give ourselves time to do that and yet it so important,” she says. The outdoors offers this opportunity to anyone who is willing to experience it, which is a big part of why, in the 1970s, Bo Hilleberg began building tents that could take anyone anywhere they wanted to go.

Felicity chooses to adventure in the most extreme places on the globe and feels awe for the beauty of the landscape. Being there deepens her understanding of her

own position in it. “Suddenly the numbers in your bank account, the title on the door of your office, the label on your clothes, what car you drive... none of those things make any difference in wild places,” she says. For her most recent trip, the 2018 Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition, she partnered with ten women with little to no expedition experience. “Expeditions can be used to shed insight, and to explore more than just the geography and the landscape. You can really explore not only yourself, but your relationship with others,” Felicity says. It is often inside the tent that a sense of commonality and trust between teammates – which is so crucial to the outcome of the trip – is earned.

On one training expedition on a glacier in Iceland, foul weather forced the team to be stormbound for three of their five days. The team was initially disappointed; but, says Felicity, “in fact, after we spoke about it, the things that were really valuable – getting to know each other – had all been achieved in the tent. That time in the tent is really useful,” she continues, “a precious time to get to know your teammates in a way that's really helpful.” Without a trustworthy tent, the trip might have actually been a total loss, but with their Keron GTs, they felt completely reassured. “If you go out on a

training expedition and have beautiful blue skies and calm weather every day, I think you come away not really knowing the limitations of your kit and learning to trust your kit,” she says. “Whereas, having been in that most enormous storm, we all learnt to trust the tent, because we'd all seen exactly what it could deal with.”

### HILLEBERG IS HOME

Felicity uses only Hilleberg Keron GT tents, which have been the standard for polar expeditions since their introduction over 40 years ago. Without their protection, many of her trips wouldn't be possible. And beyond just mere possibility, they ensure they will be comfortable and enjoyable. “It's just a really livable space,” Felicity says. She and her teammates utilise the Keron GT's extended vestibule in many ways and appreciate the spaciousness of the near-vertical inner tent walls. “You don't feel like you're having to curl up into a ball,” she laughs. “I think that's what makes it feel so homely. With a Hilleberg it really does feel like your own little space.”

She has trusted Hilleberg tents for years because, with them, she can focus on the experience, knowing her shelter will handle anything she may encounter. They've been part of the reason why she's been able to achieve the goals she set for herself long ago. Once young and timid, Felicity is today a confident, skilled professional. Her journey has been decades-long, and during that time she has never ceased to make new discoveries, about both herself and the world she's part of. She speaks and writes of her experiences often, hoping they will in some way affect someone else. “Whether you have an office job all your life, or whether you carve a career out being outdoors, or whether you're a musician... we all have these human experiences that boil down to the same down circumstances and responses, and I find that endlessly fascinating,” she says.

A UK native, she grew up idolising British explorers who boldly tested their human spirit, and hoped to one day do the same. “It's quite an emotional thought, as you travel through life, whether you've made true on those kind of promises to yourself. It's a huge relief when you think, ‘Actually, yeah, I think my 15-year-old self would think I've done alright.’ You haven't lost all that hope and curiosity... You're still out there and enjoying it,” she says proudly.

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