One cool guy

How Parker Liautaud aims to save the world, one polar expedition at a time

There are things that you expect to see **etched** into the face of every polar explorer: broken veins; the scars of a few battles with frostbite. On meeting Parker Liautaud at Venice Beach in sunny California, I see he has yet to gain a single one of these. Appearances can be deceptive, though. At 17, Parker has already taken part in three serious polar expeditions. It's also worth mentioning that he happens to have **impeccable** manners and that quiet sense of self-confidence common among the products of expensive boarding schools. Born in California, he and his four siblings spent their formative years in the UK, after their father, a successful businessman, decided that the family might benefit from spending some time in London.

Until 13, Parker was an ordinary kid. That changed after he met polar explorer Robert Swan. They began an email correspondence which **escalated** into a friendship that eventually saw the then 14-year-old invited to join a trip to the Antarctic. He said yes almost instantly. Friends and family, to whom he'd so far shown he had no particular interest in outdoor pursuits, particularly polar ones, were **perplexed** – to say the least. 'I was the second-choice goalkeeper for the third-lowest football team in school. So the prospect of me hauling a sled across miles of snow was kind of a **farce**, and I was really not taken seriously,' he recalls. He ate lots of chicken, spent a long time in the gym, and proved them wrong.

The following year, Liautaud cooked up a more ambitious plan: to become the youngest-ever person to trek to the North Pole. He found a new accomplice, the veteran explorer Doug Stoup, and through a mixture of charm and luck raised the roughly $150 000 cost of the record attempt. Then disaster struck. The early months of 2010, when the duo set out were among the warmest on record. The Pole, which is essentially a GPS location on a constantly-drifting collection of ice sheets, became virtually inaccessible, surrounded by patches of uncovered ocean. A trip which had intended to raise awareness of melting ice caps had been obstructed. By melting ice caps. 'We would get up, battle through these difficult conditions for 15 hours, then wake up the next morning and find that we were further away from the Pole than we'd started the previous morning,' he says. After 14 days' trying, and with rations running low, they admitted defeat.

Liautaud came home and decided to try again. He raised another six-figure sum and set off in spring 2011. Conditions were cold but perfect, and he and Stoup reached the Pole in no time. 'By complete coincidence, we arrived at the moment when a helicopter landed to drop off a group of tourists who'd paid to spend ten minutes there,' he recalls. 'Explorers call them "champagners". Anyway, it was all a little weird. It felt like I had just finished a cross-country ski race, or something.' Ignoring the onlookers, he promptly 'checked in' to the North Pole on the social media site, Foursquare. At the time, that was also a first.

While it might not have made him the youngest North-Poler, the success did give Liautaud a platform to continue advocacy against climate change, through both his campaigning website, *The Last Degree*, and work with pressure groups. His view is that it's his generation, rather than the one that today's world leaders belong to, that must push hardest for cuts in carbon emissions. They are the ones with the most at stake. Scientific opinion regarding the existence and scale of the problem is pretty much settled, he argues, adding that the portion of the public which still doubts the reality of man-made climate change – and remains hostile to legislation that might solve it – is largely ill-informed, although 'that isn't necessarily their fault'.

Liautaud's advocacy work has made him enemies. When Anthony Watts, a prominent climate change sceptic, wrote a scathing blog entry attacking one of his polar expeditions, Liautaud was referred to as a 'joke' by media figures. But Liautaud's high-profile polar trips are certainly shaping the climate-change debate. He has already contributed to research projects carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency and will soon set up two stations to record weather data. It must be an exhausting life, fraught with hostility. But Liautaud seems to relish the fight. When you've hauled a sled across hundreds of miles of frozen tundra, lived off freeze-dried food for weeks, and learnt how to ward off a hostile polar bear, attempting to save Planet Earth is all in a day's work.

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1 When the writer met Parker Liautaud at Venice Beach, he was

A impressed by his level of maturity.

B amused by his youthful appearance.

C concerned about his uninformed beliefs.

D prepared to find reasons to dislike him.

2 When Parker agreed to go to the Antarctic with Robert Swan, other people

A attempted to talk him out of it.

B advised him on aspects of preparation.

C were puzzled about his decision.

D were supportive of his plans.

3 Parker and Doug Stoup were prevented from reaching the North Pole by

A the movement of the ice.

B the failure of equipment.

C the severity of the weather.

D their own physical limits.

4 What is Parker emphasizing in the sentence 'It felt like I had just finished a cross-country ski race.'?

A his sense of relief on completing his trek

B the desire to celebrate a hard-won victory

C the fact that a crowd had witnessed his achievement

D the contrast between his previous attempt and this one

5 What does the writer suggest about Parker and his fight against climate change in the fifth paragraph?

A His arguments must be based on proven fact.

B He needs to adjust his approach if he wants a wider audience.

C He is yet to understand the complexity of politics.

D It is younger people that he wants to target.

6 What point does the writer make about the criticism directed at Parker?

A It is the reaction of a minority of people.

B Parker is quite capable of dealing with it.

C It has become increasingly unfair.

D It is not something that Parker pays attention to.

Reacting to the text

Is Parker Liautaud the sort of person you might admire? Why/Why not?

Parker has been able to fund his trips by getting large corporations and charities to sponsor him: why do you think these organizations were willing to help?

Talk about one of your own personal achievements. If possible, comment on what motivated you, your preparations and the feelings you experienced.

LIVEWORKSHEETS