

# Bringing Inspiration in from the Cold: Four Teachers Expedition to Antarctica

*The team in the Lake District on a training week-end - October 2006*

by Ann Fuchs

All teachers recognise the benefits of fieldwork and the first-hand experience of engaging students. It makes the learning relevant and stimulating. But how do you create that sense of the familiar for places and conditions that are completely alien? The danger is that exciting places and exciting concepts wash over the students without impact due to the lack of a personal link.

In 2007 the Fuchs Foundation will send four outstanding teachers on an expedition to Antarctica. They will camp in the Ellsworth Mountains for four weeks and conduct scientific research. The aim is to interest children in Geography and Science through the inspiring experiences which will be posted onto websites live from the field; and by the data from their research projects used to create exciting, innovative teaching resources. Students can relate to teachers and so, through them, the wonder of the last great wilderness can be made familiar, and relevant.

This expedition will also celebrate and mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commonwealth Trans Antarctic Expedition successfully led by Sir Vivian Fuchs. Fuchs was foremost a scientist and through the regular reports in *The Times* he kept the British nation riveted by his heroic and serious expedition. He showed a generation of school children a sense of curiosity, self reliance, self determination and challenge.

It is with this in mind, 50 years later, that these impressive teachers from Surrey, Hertfordshire, Warwickshire and Sheffield are defining their research projects. They will work both separately and together on such diverse subjects as understanding how humans survive temperatures as low as -90C (plus wind chill of course!). They will be lending their bodies to the study and while surviving in Antarctica will have their faces and hands regularly plunged into iced water.

They will search for and study lichens which are extremely sensitive to environmental pollution and which potentially can be used as bio indicators for atmospheric changes resulting from human activity.

## Fuchs Foundation Antarctic Expedition 2007

They will be looking at the micro-fauna, tardigrades (or Woolly Bears) which survive by entering into a state of cryptobiosis to endure the most punishing temperatures. And importantly to ecologically aware teachers of geography and science they will research the impact of the ecological footprint of the Fuchs Foundation Antarctic Expedition.

An exciting addition will be a virtual field trip to the Union Glacier accessed by classrooms throughout the UK through the Fuchs Foundation website.

The conversion of the teachers to Antarctic scientists started in April with a gruelling three day selection involving strenuous hill walks, search and rescue missions and sleep deprivation exercises. It continued in October with a more relaxed team building weekend in The Lakes. Future training will be in Norway and will include crevasse rescue drills, learning to cross-country ski while pulling 80kg sledges and possibly cold water immersion tests! You can follow their training and the expedition on [www.fuchsfoundation.org](http://www.fuchsfoundation.org).

The first challenge is not physical but creative. It is to raise the £10,000 each teacher needs to contribute to the total costs of the expedition. ■

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Trans Antarctic Expedition in 1956/8, the Fuchs Foundation is supporting four teachers, two men and two women, on an expedition to the Ellsworth Mountains in Antarctica during November and December 2007. The teachers will carry out science projects under the umbrella of coping with extremes and defining the ecological footprint.

These remarkable teachers, three of them at the start of their career, had to undergo a gruelling three-day selection process and came through with excellent credentials and total commitment to the project. They will have an inspiring opportunity to experience, at first hand, the science and geography they will teach their students. They will have to draw on all their resources, both mental and physical to succeed in this expedition and they will go on to inspire their students with their experiences.

The run up to the expedition will focus on the vigorous preparation of undergoing expedition and polar training. On their return they will produce teaching materials which will be available for all on the Fuchs Foundation's website.

This will be the first Fuchs Foundation Expedition. It is planned to carry out annual trips to the Polar Regions and use the expertise gained to inform and educate other teachers and students. In order for these expeditions to continue to bring alive science and geography and inspire teachers to inspire students, the Fuchs Foundation has to raise £70,000 a year and, also each teacher will be working hard to raise a significant £10,000 locally to participate in this innovative project.

[www.fuchsfoundation.org](http://www.fuchsfoundation.org)

Photographs from the Fuchs Foundation

*Union Glacier, Ellsworth Mountains, Antarctica 80<sup>deg</sup> South*

