

**The adventure started in late summer 2005 when my wife spotted an article on the BBC asking for a dozen hardy folk, or 'crazy mushers' as I would later term it, to take part in a husky challenge 250 miles inside the arctic circle in northern Norway. The aim of the challenge was two-fold, to both raise money for, and awareness of, the Scott Polar Research Institute based at Cambridge University. The SPRI conduct vital work in the polar regions and do scientific studies of ice flow, density of the ice shelf, and studies in global warming.**

My wife and I sponsor a little girl in Bangladesh through World Vision. Shaggori Rani lives in a very low lying area of Bangladesh near Dhaka, and any increase in sea levels due to global warming will have a massive effect on her life, and that of her country. It was therefore something I felt I should get involved in and I sent off an application. I was staggered to be chosen to be one of the 12-strong UK team. No turning back now!

#### **250km in 6 days**

The months leading up to the challenge were long and arduous. First I had to raise a minimum of £3500 in sponsorship, and also had to get fit enough to complete the journey of 250km in 6 days. I trudged along Lowestoft beach on those winter mornings, and spent a portion of every day on a stepper or on a weight bench. In between I carried out the fund raising and website development. Oh yes, I also did my normal day job as Facilities Manager for ATP International.

My colleagues within the ATP Group dug deep and provided what was to become the largest single source of sponsorship I had. I am incredibly grateful for the support of those people in the company who backed me. I also gained commercial sponsorship from the company, and financial support from family, friends, and other external organisations. I exceeded my target and the money continues to come in even after the event.

Sunday morning in early March 2006, Heathrow's Terminal 3 was my first introduction to a group of people I would come to know well over the next week, and who I now regard as friends. For me the hardest part was these first few hours getting to know everyone. But with the ice broken and bags checked in we soon became team-mates rather than strangers.

#### **A frozen runway literally sticking out**

We flew with SAS from Heathrow to Oslo, and then with SAS Braathens from Oslo to Alta in northern Norway. One of the most nerve jangling moments of the entire week was landing on a frozen runway literally sticking out into the fjord in Alta, with the Boeing 737 skidding sideways and clouds of snow being thrown up by the engines.

We were whisked away from the last vestiges of civilisation which was by now in darkness to the small settlement of Gargia which was to become our base camp, where we had our first meal of reindeer.

The next morning we awoke to an amazing sight. Snow covered hills in the distance, and 72 huskies tethered to chains on the frozen lake.

We were greeted with what was to become the morning ritual wake-up call. I cannot replicate the collective howling of 72 huskies, but trust me it's a sound once heard you never forget.

The process of selecting the dogs was an incredible experience. We were to be lead by

Per Thore Hansen. Every inch the true Viking with a wind-blown, almost leather, skin and piercing eyes. We would be using his dogs and we were all to know it. When he spoke it was with an authority that no-one questioned.

#### **Breaking up fights between dogs**

The lead dogs are the runners who keep the pace of the team, and who make sure the team goes where it should. I was allocated a lovely little white female called Costella, and her friend Clara. It seemed a bit odd having two females in front, but they were to prove themselves many times over. During the week we became experts at breaking up fights between dogs in the same teams, and also between rival teams when a crash allowed the teams to come together. Per Thore gave us some instruction on how to harness the huskies, how to attach them to the main sled lines, and the rudiments of steering and braking. As he would say it, you can only learn on the sled.

The first day was 30km over some hilly terrain and then onto a frozen lake where the wind blew the snow into a white-out. The dogs kept a straight line even though we couldn't see the next sled in front. Eventually we came to our overnight camp which consisted of a few very basic cabins. One team would be allocated to drill for drinking water through two feet of ice,

while others would either feed the dogs or feed the dog sledders.

After crossing the biggest lake in Finnmark during a snowstorm and -30 temperatures, we then climbed for a full day up into the mountains. You have at least a foot of new soft snow underfoot. Now you have to run, all the way to the top in one go while pushing a sled uphill and trying to control four huskies. I lost 7lbs in 6 days on the event!

The last day was the best. After going uphill during the previous two days we then were going to go downhill through a pine forest all the way to base camp. Easy we thought, no problem... Wrong! Try taking the sled and husky team down the Cresta bobsleigh run and you have some idea! We had teams overturning, sleds in trees (me included), and general carnage and mayhem all the way down but what an adrenaline rush.

#### **The greatest adventure of my life**

We had started as 12 individuals and finished as the 2006 challenge team who had completed the event. We felt enormous pride but a real sense that our lives would never be the same again. It was, without any doubt, the greatest adventure of my life and one I will not forget. Life's trivia which seemed so important to me before I left now seems insignificant.

I hope I get an opportunity to do something like this again one day, and for anyone wanting to go on the 2007 charity event you can find out more at my website [www.crazymusher.com](http://www.crazymusher.com).

# HUSKY CHALLENGE

FINNMARK, NORTHERN NORWAY, MARCH 2006

ATP Facilities Manager Phil Jeffs gives a first hand account of his life changing trip to Norway to raise funds for the Scott Polar Research studies into global warming

