

To the Pole

On March 8, 1986, the Steger Expedition set off. Ann Bancroft was the only female member of the team. Bancroft, along with her seven male team members, set off from Canada's Northwest Territories. The goal was 1,000 miles (1,609 km) across the ice to the North Pole.

Unlike other expeditions, this one wouldn't depend on outside help. Airplanes wouldn't be dropping off food along the way. Using dogs and sleds, the team would carry everything they needed. They would have to ration their food and try to make it last the distance.

Bancroft found the journey grueling and exhausting. Once, the snow she was standing on gave way, plunging her into the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean. With quick thinking, Bancroft extended her arms, anchoring them on more solid ice. Then, using all of her strength, she wriggled up over the edge. Bancroft had avoided drowning, but now she was at risk of freezing to death. As quickly as she could, she changed into dry clothes and tried to raise her body temperature by pushing the sleds forward.

It took Bancroft two full days to feel warm again, but she didn't complain once. When Bancroft was young, school was especially difficult for her. Dyslexic, she had trouble learning to read and retaining information. Instead of complaining during the expedition whenever conditions were especially grueling, Bancroft would think, "School was harder."

Bancroft arrived at the North Pole on May 1, 1986, with five other members of her team. (Two members were airlifted out for medical reasons.) On that day, Bancroft became the first known woman in history to cross the ice to the North Pole.



From Where We're Going

Benjamin couldn't help but notice the dark mass in the distance. It was easy to spot because everything else, in all directions and as far as the eye could see, was white. Benjamin turned to alert his expedition teammate Marshall, but Benjamin could tell Marshall already had spotted the dark object, too.

As the two men temporarily abandoned their sleds and skied toward the mass, Marshall said, "Probably a meteorite. How strange and peculiar to see something that isn't white! It really stands out. Black really livens up a landscape, doesn't it?"

When the two adventurers reached the object, they saw that it wasn't a meteorite: it was a waterproof bag filled with high-energy food rations placed atop a mound of snow. "Seeing as how we have to consume three times our normal calorie amount to maintain our body warmth and energy level up here, I'm pleased with the find. But wherever did this come from?" asked Marshall, puzzled.

As Benjamin looked at a note attached inside the bag to the food rations, he said with a chuckle, "It came from where we're going."

"Now I'm even more perplexed," said Marshall. "What do you mean it came from where we're going?"

"Remember that the North Pole is located in an area of drifting ice," explained Benjamin. "It's not ice atop solid ground like the South Pole. There isn't a monument to mark its exact location, so we'll have to use our navigation equipment to locate it when we get close. We're not at the North Pole now, but this bag has been! It was left at the Pole four years ago by a previous expedition!"

