

Explorers, or boys messing about? Either way, taxpayer gets rescue bill

Helicopter duo plucked from life-raft after Antarctic crash

Their last expedition ended in farce when the Russians threatened to send in military planes to intercept them as they tried to cross into Siberia via the icebound Bering Strait.

Yesterday a new adventure undertaken by British explorers Steve Brooks and Quentin Smith almost led to tragedy when their helicopter plunged into the sea off Antarctica.

The men were plucked from the icy waters by a Chilean naval ship after a nine-hour rescue which began when Mr Brooks contacted his wife, Jo Vestey, on his satellite phone asking for assistance. The rescue involved the Royal Navy, the RAF and British Coastguards.

Last night there was resentment in some quarters that the men's adventure had cost the taxpayers of Britain and Chile tens of thousands of pounds.

Experts questioned the wisdom of taking a small helicopter – the four-seater Robinson R44 has a single engine – into such a hostile environment.

There was also confusion about what exactly the men were trying to achieve. A website set up to promote the Bering Strait expedition claims the team were trying to fly from North to South Pole in their "trustworthy helicopter".

But Ms Vestey claimed she did not know what the pair were up to, describing them as "boys messing around with a helicopter".

The drama began at around 1am British time when Mr Brooks, 42, and 40-year-old Mr Smith, also known as Q, ditched into the sea 100 miles off Antarctica, about 36 miles off Smith Island, and scrambled into their life-raft.

Mr Brooks called his wife in London on his satellite phone. She said: "He said they were both in the life-raft but were okay and could I call the emergency people."

Meanwhile, distress signals were being beamed from the ditched helicopter and from Mr Brooks' Breitling emergency watch, a wedding present.

Comment [s1]: Contrasted to ridicule the men as they aren't successful "explorers" instead they are immature boys.

Comment [s2]: Think about what they have asked in pause.

Comment [s3]: The cost goes to you (the taxpayer) due to their behaviour.

Comment [s4]: Harsh consonants used to show excitement. Ridicules as the men seem insignificant.

Comment [s5]: Dramatic word used in the short catchy introduction.

Comment [s6]: This is used to ridicule them as their previous expeditions seem like a joke.

Comment [s7]: The "Russians" seem grand in comparison to "farce" which further emphasises their insignificance.

Comment [s8]: Said with a childish tone to mock the explorers as they aren't serious about expedition.

Comment [s9]: Dramatic and adventurous

Comment [s10]: The men are insignificant (above).

Comment [s11]: Huge impact on another country emphasises cost

Comment [s12]: Long wait emphasised by the long paragraph which leads to tension.

Comment [s13]: Weakness similar to a child calling for their mother for help.

Comment [s14]: Triad of services needed to save them emphasises need for help.

Comment [s15]: Undefined group exaggerates the "resentment".

Comment [s16]: Both countries have been affected and costs money. Outrages the reader.

Comment [s17]: Vast sum emphasises the stupidity of men and the cost.

Comment [s18]: Undefined experts asserts knowledge and makes the men appear even more foolish.

Comment [s19]: Knowledge indicates that the men were unprepared for the expedition.

Comment [s20]: Dramatic and serious as well as very dangerous. Contrasts to the men's laidback approach.

Comment [s21]: Unknown aims

Comment [s22]: Pessimistic tone suggests that this is not the case.

Comment [s23]: Childish dream that has failed as they were "trying" but were unsuccessful.

Comment [s24]: Irony as the helicopter turned out not to work. This undermines the men.

Comment [s25]: Tone of parent describing children showing that the men weren't serious.

Comment [s26]: The men aren't serious about achieving their aims. Ridicules them.

Comment [s27]: Hyperbole makes us think of a play which is less serious than reality.

Comment [s28]: Very old to be acting like boys.

Comment [s29]: Full of himself as he gives himself a nickname copied from James Bond to look cool.

Comment [s30]: Unorganised as they are unprepared for these events.

Comment [s31]: Informal in a very serious situation shows the men's stupidity.

Comment [s32]: Repeated to emphasise dramatic situation.

Comment [s33]: Naive and childish to trust this in a serious situation.

The signals from the aircraft were deciphered by Falmouth coastguard in England and passed on to the rescue co-ordination centre at RAF Kinloss in Scotland.

Comment [s34]: Exact places shows the number of people involved (RAF Kinloss as well).

The Royal Navy's ice patrol ship, HMS Endurance, which was 180 miles away surveying uncharted waters, began steaming towards the scene and dispatched its two Lynx helicopters.

Comment [s35]: Have to go out of their way to collect the explorers which angers the taxpayers.

Comment [s36]: This makes the rescue seem dramatic but also gives us a sense of the cost.

One was driven back because of poor visibility but the second was on its way when the men were picked up by a Chilean naval vessel at about 10.20 am British time.

Comment [s37]: Specific information.

Though the pair wore survival suits and the weather at the spot where they ditched was clear, one Antarctic explorer told Mr Brooks' wife it was "nothing short of a miracle" that they had survived.

Comment [s38]: Mocking as they had all necessary equipment and the conditions were perfect so there shouldn't have been a problem.

Comment [s39]: Ridicules as they seem lucky.

Both men are experienced adventurers. Mr Brooks, a property developer from London, has taken part in expeditions to 70 countries in 15 years. He has trekked solo to Everest base camp and walked barefoot for three days in the Himalayas. He has negotiated the white water rapids of the Zambezi river by kayak and survived a charge by a silver back gorilla in the Congo. He is also a qualified mechanical engineer and pilot.

Comment [s40]: Between the men, there is a lot of experience. Next is a polysyndeton of experience (highlighted). Reader questions what went wrong so is mocking the explorers.

He and his wife spent their honeymoon flying the helicopter from Alaska to Chile. The 16,000-mile trip took three months.

Mr Smith, also from London, claims to have been flying since the age of five. He has twice flown a helicopter around the globe and won the world freestyle helicopter flying championship.

Despite their experience, it is not for the first time they have hit the headlines for the wrong reasons.

Comment [s41]: Shows they are foolish and don't learn from their previous mistakes.

In April, Mr Brooks and another explorer, Graham Stratford, were poised to become the first to complete a crossing of the 56-mile wide frozen Bering Strait between the US and Russia in an amphibious vehicle, Snowbird VI, which could carve its way through ice floes and float in the water in between.

Comment [s42]: Special technology is a hyperbole for power.

Comment [s43]: Dramatic and exciting as well as powerful and reliable sounding.

Comment [s44]: Contrast

But they were forced to call a halt after the Russian authorities told them they would scramble military helicopters to lift them off the ice if they crossed the border.

Comment [s45]: Powerless men against "Russian authorities".

Comment [s46]: Serious danger compared to their unserious approach.

Ironically, one of the aims of the expedition, for which Mr Smith provided air backup, was to demonstrate how good relations between east and west had become.

Comment [s47]: Irony ridicules the men's aims.

The wisdom of the team's latest adventure was questioned by, among others, Gunter Endres, editor of Jane's Helicopter Markets and Systems, who said: "I'm surprised they used the R44. I wouldn't use a helicopter like that to go so far over the sea. It sounds like they were pushing it to the maximum".

Comment [s48]: Emphasises the men's stupidity and thoughtlessness.

Comment [s49]: Real person has enough knowledge to question them.

Comment [s50]: The experts opinion is against them which proves they were wrong.

A spokesman for the pair said it was not known what had gone wrong. The flying conditions had been "excellent".

Comment [s51]: Danger in excellent conditions makes the men seem foolish and unprepared.

The Ministry of Defence said the taxpayer would pick up the bill, as was normal in rescues in the UK and abroad. The spokesperson said it was "highly unlikely" that it would recover any of the money.

Comment [s52]: Another authority that has been involved.

Comment [s53]: Outrages the public as they will have to pay. All about money in this paragraph after the reader has seen the men's stupidity so they will be enraged by the waste of taxpayer's money.

Comment [s54]: Makes the men seem wasteful and foolish.

Last night the men were on their way to the Chilean naval base where HMS Endurance was to pick them up. Ms Vestey said: "They have been checked and appear to be well. I don't know what will happen to them once they have been picked up by HMS Endurance – they'll probably have their bottoms kicked and be sent home the long way".

Comment [s55]: Punishment of a child contrasts to the serious consequences of the men's actions. Further reflects their unserious approach to the expedition.

Steven Morris
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