

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 "rusty 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.

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.

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.

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 [K1]:** Initially positive connotations, quickly undermined by the derogatory use of 'boys' and the belittling / demeaning 'messing about'. Note the one the author actually agrees with comes last
- Comment [K2]:** Question used to grab attention poked the reader's interest as they will be a taxpayer
- Comment [K3]:** 'Either way' is also dismissive reinforcing the ridicule in the first line. Also implies that the real focus of the article is that you will be paying – the absence of the word 'the' focuses attention on the key words
- Comment [K4]:** Present tense makes this seem immediate and habitual
- Comment [K5]:** Absence of articles – makes it attention grabbing and forceful – sums up the entire story 3Ws – pyramidal structure for the Newspaper article
- Comment [K6]:** Absence of modal verbs – opinion presented as fact / truth. The majority of the start of the article is opinion intended to colour our reading of the subsequent facts
- Comment [K7]:** Failure foregrounded
- Comment [K8]:** Absence of context makes this seem even more ridiculous
- Comment [K9]:** Connectives of time – recount structure – these are used throughout to structure the article
- Comment [K10]:** A huge noun – highly nominalised to create a sense of formality but also include maximum info
- Comment [K11]:** Complex sentences to combine ideas together simply
- Comment [K12]:** Commas of apposition to add detail
- Comment [K13]:** Listing here to emphasise how many people involved – hence the cost, later
- Comment [K14]:** This vagueness is a clever way of provoking outrage without actually attributing it to anyone
- Comment [K15]:** Pairs of dashes used parenthetically to give more information
- Comment [K16]:** Passive construction of the sentence again allows vagueness – an attack without actually attributing it to anyone
- Comment [K17]:** Makes the whole enterprise seem ill-conceived and amateurish
- Comment [K18]:** Derisive, mocking tone
- Comment [K19]:** Foreground to show disagreement and confusion
- Comment [K20]:** Mocking tone – especially for a 40 year old man
- Comment [K21]:** Simple structure – easy to understand, also makes the couple seem simplistic
- Comment [K22]:** Slightly simpler connectives here
- Comment [K23]:** Something faintly ridiculous about this – the understatement and colloquial 'emergency people' for someone stuck in Antarctica
- Comment [K24]:** Implying that this is more important
- Comment [K25]:** Understatement of the rescue attempt again belies the fact that the situation was life-threatening

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 [K26]: Undermining the 'miracle'

Comment [K27]: Experts and eye-witnesses used throughout to add credibility

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 [K28]: Simple, short, factual, assertive sentences

Comment [K29]: List of exotic locations creates some sense of expertise but, given the frequent disasters, this begins to come across as excessive or eccentric - especially the honeymoon - suggesting he has a strange predilection for danger and is disaster-prone

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.

Comment [K30]: Second use of this word - successfully undermines the credibility of his claims

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

Comment [K31]: Short simple sentence undermines this list of successes

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.

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 [K32]: The bathos (anti-climax) after the big build up (and the implication that such an obvious problem wasn't considered) further undermines the goals of the two men, making them seem little more than children carried away by a pipe dream

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 [K33]: Faintly ridiculous image of their vehicle being lifted up like a kicking, screaming child

Comment [K34]: Humour is emphasised

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 [K35]: Use of a specific expert with credentials

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

Comment [K36]: None of these comments are really damning and, indeed, pushing it to the max could really be brave but, given the rest of the article, this statement takes on a more critical, bewildered tone

Comment [K37]: Again - the implication is that the men somehow 'messed up'

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 [K38]: Sudden shift in focus to leave us with, perhaps, the main point of the article - the cost to the taxpayer. Modal verb suggests certainty to provoke anger

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 [K39]: Implies that this is happening all the time and millions of pounds are being wasted on spurious adventures, however these rescues would include perfectly legitimate cases of accidents

Comment [K40]: The article ends on a final belittling image of school boys being punished, undermining them and perhaps prompting the reader to question the severity of the punishment and desire something more harsh

Steven Morris
From *The Guardian*, 28/01/2003

Good History

Bad History