

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 "trusty 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 [t1]: Making the explorers look immature and ridicule them.

Comment [t2]: Taxpayer (the readers) will suffer anyway. Inevitable

Comment [t3]: Reference to the reader to interest them and make it clear that they have a stake in this issue

Comment [t4]: Makes the explorers look helpless, suggesting they are useless and immature.

Comment [t5]: This extreme situation makes their expedition look foolish and ill thought through

Comment [t6]: Time clauses and facts to make the article informative and sound reliable

Comment [t7]: Look helpless and look foolish.

Comment [t8]: This is dramatic, to make the rescue look exaggerated and over the top.

Comment [t9]: A list of three to exaggerate the rescue mission. This also suggests that the rescue involved many people, implying it was expensive and caused an unnecessary amount of trouble

Comment [t10]: Reference to the readers, and suggests that the readers (taxpayers) suffered due to the foolishness above in the previous paragraph.

Comment [t11]: Backup from expert to support the writer, and make the article and the writer side sound more reliable.

Comment [t12]: Use of technical information makes the writer sound knowledgeable in contrast to the "boys".

Comment [t13]: An irony to make the explorers sound foolish, since they think their trusty single engine helicopter would get them through the expedition, but it failed.

Comment [t14]: Another reliable source of information, makes the article informative and sound credible and reliable in contrast to the boys

Comment [t15]: Make it sound like the explorers are immature boys with toys (helicopter). This ridicules the explorer and make them look foolish.

Comment [t16]: Hyperbole = foolishness.

Comment [t17]: They were adults, but not mature which is reinforced by the childish nickname Q - the name from James Bond character, which is fictional, suggesting that these explorers are unrealistic and childish

Comment [t18]: This suggests that they are helpless and useless, making them looking foolish.

Comment [t19]: They are not equipped properly, they are using a present as their equipment thus they were not professional.

Comment [t20]: The mission is exaggerated and over the top again, to show how foolish this was.

Comment [t21]: The explorer are helpless.

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 [t22]: Make this sound as if this is positive, even though it is a waste of money. This again makes the explorers look foolish.

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 [t23]: They were experienced, but these facts are included off hand in the middle of the article meaning that the overall impression that readers are left with is that they are just "boys messing about"

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 [t24]: Here the author undermining the opposition making Smith sound unreliable

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

Comment [t25]: The implication is that they never learn, thus they are immature. This also a big "but" to cancel out all the good things in the previous paragraphs.

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 [t26]: Sounds impressive, but due to bad planning / lack of foresight this once again fails – note however that this is not the same pair as were involved in the more recent helicopter crash, even through the opening paragraph implies that it was – even though Mr. Smith was otherwise involved

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 [t27]: The big 'But' here cancels out all the impressive things in the previous paragraph.

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 [t28]: This made the explorers looked helpless and foolish

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 [t29]: Pointed out that they have failed badly, and has failed their aim and evoke the opposite. Making them look foolish and useless.

Comment [t30]: Use of experts to backup the writer side. This make the article and the writer sounds more reliable.

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

Comment [t31]: The implication being that it was not due to bad luck, but to the explorers' fault.

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 [t32]: This means that the readers are the one who suffer – which will provoke anger. Although it is not stressed that this is the same service that the British will all benefit from if they are sick / injured abroad. This is intentionally underplayed so the reader does not grasp the benefit of the service that the Ministry of Defence provides

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 [t33]: The childish punishment is once more demeaning to the two men but its inadequacy after costing such a lot of money and causing a lot of trouble may also provoke readers / taxpayers anger

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