



Tyler's backyard. by Tyler Fish

This Sunday morning was my first early morning ski of the year. It was 20 below this morning and calm. I was on the snow-covered ice by 7AM, which due to my northern latitude is at least an hour before sunrise.

If you've never had a "first time on snow," I can tell you it is a wonderful feeling. Some might say it's like flying, and that might be true. I engage every part of our body for the sole purpose of gliding. I sense the breeze on my faces, the smooth motion under my feet and a pleasant feeling the stomach that says, "keep going."

Today my thoughts wandered in different directions than the usual early morning ski. Everything I noticed I related to the North Pole expedition. It's -20°F this morning (that's -28 celsius), it'll be that cold more often than not on the Arctic Ocean. There are frost flowers on the ice where it has expanded, water seeping up and refreezing. We see frost flowers aplenty on newly frozen leads on the Arctic Ocean.

The ice makes cracking sounds as I ski over it--this is good thing and it is not caused by me. The cracking sounds come from the ice freezing and expanding. It booms, echoes with impressive snaps and deep throated pings. Early on in my career as a winter outdoor educator this would have scared me. Now I realize, due to the deeper tones of the ice, I am very safe.

Light, high sounding pings would have me worried.

Knowing I am safe allows me the opportunity to revel in the sounds. The ice on the Arctic Ocean will feel and sound differently? Ice may grow and expand, but it will also grind and crush, offering completely different noises.

In my path, wolf tracks cross and mingle with the tracks of sled dogs and dogsleds. The wolves must have been curious as they wandered in through this area in the night. I see the tracks of a lone fox made it's way over untouched snow, leaving the smallest, lightest footprints. I wonder what tracks will we see on the Arctic Ocean? Will we see any wildlife at all.? I'll perfectly happy if we never see a polar bear.

As I continue skiing along the shore, around the lake and into bays, I notice the morning light. It's dim, gentle, for there's no sun yet. It's been at least an hour, and the sunrise has been very slow to grow. The beginning of our expedition will be spent in light like this.

As the sun does show itself and I return to the Outward Bound basecamp, my colleagues there marvel at the amount of frost on my shoulders and head. On the Arctic Ocean it will just be John who will look at me, but after a few days the frost from perspiration will be old news. Myself, I'll just feel it on whiskers, eyelashes, hat and neck. Every once in a while it will fall and tickle, just to remind me that it's there.