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SUNDAY



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Alaska beckons daring architect



**BILL
BROWNSTEIN**

ON A MONTREAL ADVENTURER

"Valley thinks he has only few more extreme years before retiring to a sedentary life of architecture and bungee jumping."

Some like to carp about the cold. Others simply learn to deal with the demon that is winter. And then there's Kevin Valley. He's different. He not only chooses to confront the cold and the ice and the snow, but he has also upped the ante - considerably. The Montreal adventurer is going where few folks with active brain cells purposely go.

Valley and two buddies have just begun a 2,100-kilometre trek from Dawson City to Nome in the state of Alaska, where it gets colder than your freezer right about now. They will be

'We will survive'



taking the road less travelled, mostly along the rock-hard Yukon River, in their quest to do what no mere mortal has done for 103 years. Oh yes, and Valley and his buddies will be undertaking this expedition on ... bicycles. They expect to complete it by April 15.

It will probably come as little surprise to locals that Valley built up his endurance for winter and lunacy by having toiled as a bike messenger on the mean and messy streets of Montreal.

He has come a long way since those days of extreme biking in Montreal. Among other feats, he has skied the entire length of Alaska's 1,800-kilometre Iditarod Dog Sled Trail from Anchorage to Nome - a stone's throw from Russia. (If Valley happens to be tossing the stone, that is.)

Nor is Valley averse to the heat. He and a crony sought to become the first people to ascend all 13 of Java's 3,000-metre high volcanos in 13 days on bikes. And but for some political tension in Indonesia, they would have accomplished the feat, instead of finishing just half of it.

Valley is also a competitive rock climber, marathon runner, kayaker and swimmer. But he's no one-dimensional jock, either.

He is also an architect, having graduated from McGill and having been awarded the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Medal and the Hugh McLennan Travelling Scholarship bestowed upon the top graduating student. He was also named Canadian Commonwealth Scholar at Cambridge University in England, where he did post-grad studies.

And right about now, you're starting to feel real inadequate about a pathetic existence where extreme sport entails walking the dog on icy sidewalks and heading to the dépanneur for a six-pack. Valley isn't intending to make you feel bad. In fact, given his druthers, our amiable over-achiever would just as soon knock back a brew with you and watch a little hockey on the tube.

He just happens to be overly antsy. And at age 38, he figures he only has a few more extreme years ahead of him before he retires to a sedentary life of architecture and bungee jumping.

Why the Dawson City to Nome bike trek? Turns out that a miner called Ed Jesson did it back in 1900 and, though many have tried since, none have succeeded. Valley loves a challenge.

He credits his stint as a bike messenger here, while studying architecture, for his stamina. "Talk about a training exercise," says Valley, when contacted during a break in Eagle - about 250 kilometres from Dawson City.

"The streets were so cold in the winter, but at least there was a respite when you entered a building. Here, there's no respite. The temperature dips to minus 35 and there's nowhere to hide."

Of course, Valley doesn't have to dodge Montreal motorists on the frozen Yukon River.

He cites other positives. "We will be biking through some of the most beautiful and untouched nature reserves in the world.

"But it is so utterly remote. We won't be able to wash for weeks. We'll have to melt snow for our water. This is the ultimate survivor test. This is for real. If anything goes wrong, we're cooked. Actually cooked would be nice," he quips. "We'd be frozen solid."

Take that, wusses on TV's Survivor who dine on beetle larvae and bake on tropical sands.

Plus, Valley and his fellow bikers might have to contend with Grizzlies and wolves, although their biggest fear is moose. "They get really ornery this time of the year," he notes.

And when you add ornery to 500 kilos of moose, that's the makings of a mess.

But Valley would rather focus on the brighter side, which happens to be a snack at this moment.

In the spirit of pioneering, you're thinking pemmican, right?

"Nah," Valley shoots back. "Pop tarts. Times change."

Besides, you don't want to bug the moose any more by munching on remnants of their kin.

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PHOTOS BY PHIL CARPENTER THE GAZETTE

Vanier College student Suzanne Faulkner digs in to build her snow shelter at the Tamaracouta scout camp near St. Jérôme.

Winter survival school teaches CEGEP students important lessons about helping each other to overcome obstacles

The first semester of CEGEP is always the toughest. It's when students, fresh from high school, are most likely to fall behind in class, or fail altogether.

To smooth this transition, Vanier College runs a special program for students who had poor marks in high school, or who need to take extra classes to get into their program of choice in CEGEP.

The Explorations II program is a lesson in life skills. It teaches students to use common sense and tenacity both within the classroom and outside during a compulsory survival course.

Last weekend, Gazette education reporter Allison Lampert and photojournalist Phil Carpenter saw how the Explorations students fared at minus 15C.

TAMARACOUTA SCOUT RESERVE - Carrying an overstuffed bag in her hand and a knapsack strapped over her chest, Camille Phillip teetered as she walked along the snowy path.

Along with makeup, clothes, sheets and a pillow, the Vanier College student had packed a bag full of provisions: eggs, two chicken dishes, roti, bread and pancake mix for the three-day winter camping trip.

"I came very well prepared," said the overloaded Phillip, grinning broadly.

"I am ready for this. I am ready to survive."

Her grin would fade fast.

Soon, Phillip and the other 26 students were looking for sites to dig "quinzies" -

igloo-like snow shelters that would serve as their homes for the next two nights in this large, wooded and very chilly Scouts Canada reserve, about 50 kilometres north of Montreal.

Already, a mixup by the school's bus company on Friday had delayed their arrival, and teacher Guy Quinn was worried the sun would set before they could finish shovelling.

"We're pressed against the daylight, so use that as your gauge," Quinn reminded the young adults, who had been divided into teams of three. "Conserve your energy, watch out for each other. Work as a team. Don't let anyone get totally fatigued."

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Bridget Sarpong Dam, Lauredana Charles and Denise Tittle trudge through snow on their way to a campsite.



Cory Watson digs his "quinzie," or snow shelter. The students found the weekend difficult, but learned to help each other accomplish tasks they needed to survive.