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South Pole adventurer off to Norway to train

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AT the end of the year, Datin Paduka Sharifah Mazlina Syed Abdul Kadir will embark on a perilous journey that no woman has attempted. If she succeeds, she will be the first woman in the world to trek across the Antarctic from the South Pole.

To prepare herself for this undertaking, the 38-year-old sports lecturer with Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) went on a daring solo pre-expedition exercise to the Antarctic in January, which lasted five days and four nights.

Prior to that, she spent five days training around Patriot Hills, a base camp on Antarctica. Now, as the scheduled date of her actual expedition draws closer, she will continue her training in Norway, the homeland of her coach Ronnie Finnas.

A well-known polar adventurer, Finnas is the one who trained Sharifah Mazlina for her pre-expedition.

Next month, she will be at two Norwegian ski resorts in Finse, where the core of the gruelling training programme is downhill skiing, something that she is expected to do at least seven hours a day.

Her time in Norway will also be filled with ski-sailing, kite-sailing and improving on her camping skills.

"I've got to reduce the time spent on pitching a tent," said Sharifah Mazlina at a Press conference just before leaving for Norway last Thursday. "It takes me an hour to put up a tent; it's difficult to move fast with such thick gloves on."

When she returns, she will continue training, with at least an hour cycling, on the treadmill or step-up exercises every morning. At night, she will spend two hours in the gym, pumping iron and building up her strength.

"I hope to train at another ski resort after I get back from Norway," she said. "But all this depends on sponsorship and whether we can find an ideal location."

Canada, where she first learnt to ski and lived as a student, is one destination she has in mind.

However, without funding, she will have to settle for the artificial snow house in Genting Highlands to acclimatise herself to the weather. In addition, she will continue to learn rope skills from a senior firefighter at a fire station in Petaling Jaya.

If the weather permits, she will set off on the actual expedition on Dec 12, which will cover 1,100km and take her from the South Pole to Hercules Inlet on the edge of the Antarctic. The journey is expected to take 30 days.

If she manages to reach her destination a week ahead of schedule, she plans to climb Mount Vincent, the highest peak on the Antarctic, located near Hercules Inlet.

"It's very ambitious of me since it takes most people at least nine days to reach the top," she said. "But I may as well give it a go if I finish the expedition ahead of time."

Sharifah Mazlina will be wearing two special watches for the expedition.

One is the Acti-Watch, which monitors sleeping patterns and helps her see how weather conditions affect mood variations.

The data collected will help athletes in adjusting their strategies when performing in low temperatures.

The other is the Protek Watch, which checks on the altitude. It also functions as a wind gauge, barometer and an automatic compass with a sensor. Sharifah Mazlina said that she could not have come this far if weren't for the help of certain individuals.

Among them are Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the Sultan of Johor, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, UiTM Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Ibrahim Shah, Associate Professor Dr Mohd Kamil Ibrahim and Hazimah Zainuddin.

"I'm very grateful for their support; they've been encouraging from the start," she said. "I also hope that all Malaysians are behind me. If anybody wants to get in touch with me, they can send me an e-mail at goodpschup@hotmail.com."