

February 13, 2020

Susan Goldberg  
Editor In Chief  
National Geographic  
1145 17th St NW  
Washington DC 20036-4707

Dear Ms. Goldberg:

I respectfully write to request a retraction of the National Geographic article about me which was published on February 3, 2020. The article is widely inaccurate. It misrepresents a historic polar expedition by omitting key facts and fails to contextualize a number of items. My route and methods were announced publicly and were acknowledged as valid by polar experts and polar authorities who define the classification definitions of expeditions of this nature. The expedition was conducted with the utmost transparency as it was tracked on live GPS for anyone to observe in real time. It was followed very closely by reporters of the *New York Times* and other major media outlets who did their own fact-checking, none of whom found anything controversial with my crossing or route while it occurred.

The article delivers a false and misleading narrative, critiquing the expedition as not an “unassisted” crossing, and thus not a valid “first.” It claims that I “exaggerated” the dangers I faced during my expeditions. In addition, the article asserts that I do not recognize or credit Borge Ousland, one of the great Antarctic explorers, for his 1996-97 renowned crossing. All of these assertions are demonstrably incorrect.

This letter will show in detail, supported by citations and documentation that:

- 1) Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions (ALE) – provides clear classification definitions that confirm my expedition to be a solo, unsupported and unassisted crossing and a “first.”
- 2) The “unassisted” classification definition was strictly adhered to by both Captain Louis Rudd, the other individual attempting this same crossing at the same time, and me. We transparently shared our plans and our route which included the use of the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road”. We did exactly what we said we were going to do. This was acknowledged in writing by some of the same individuals who are quoted in the article now criticizing our route.
- 3) The “no rescue zone” is not an embellishment of the danger of crossing Antarctica, but rather a fact that has been reported by many highly regarded polar authorities who acknowledge, on the record, the challenges of plane rescue given certain terrain features and weather.

- 4) I have on many occasions publicly credited the great explorers who have come before me, especially Borge Ousland. This is evident in my book, on my website and in many of my social media posts.

The reporter was provided documentation on all of the above information. Basic standards for fair reporting and fact checking were not followed. As an example, in the second paragraph in the article, two quotes are pieced together, one quote from page 214 of my book *The Impossible First* and another quote from page 50 of my book. The quotes from my book were about separate topics, but in the article they are represented as a singular misleading comment. [\[LINK\]](#) (See Appendix below for more details).

The only long form phone conversation I had with the reporter occurred over a year ago, in January 2019 following the completion of my expedition, in a completely different context. Through his process of reporting on this story, I only spoke to the reporter twice when he contacted me unscheduled. In this context we spoke briefly; once while I was boarding a plane and once for less than five minutes when I was between meetings on my book tour. Both times I asked if he wanted to schedule a formal long form interview, however both times he suggested an on the fly “quick call” was all that was needed. Given the length and depth of the article of which I am the subject, a formal long form interview would seem appropriate for fair and balanced reporting.

I was never contacted by a fact checker, which in my other experiences with media and articles of this scope is common practice.

I am providing citations, URLs, photos and emails as supporting information and evidence for your review and correction.

I stand by every word in my book.

Below, please see “Request for Retraction - Core Issues” and “Request for Retraction - Appendix.” Thank you.

Sincerely,

Colin O’Brady

## Request for Retraction - Core Issues

- 1) **Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions (ALE) – provides clear classification definitions that confirm my expedition to be a solo, unsupported and unassisted crossing and a “first.”**
- 2) **The “unassisted” classification definition was strictly adhered to by both Captain Louis Rudd, the other individual attempting this same crossing at the same time, and me. We transparently shared our plans and our route which included the use of the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road”. We did exactly what we said we were going to do. This was acknowledged in writing by some of the same individuals who are quoted in the article now criticizing our route.**

Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions (ALE) is the primary logistics operator for the vast majority of non-government expeditions in Antarctica. As stated on their website, “With more than 30 years of experience, ALE is the leader in polar expeditions and the premier provider of deep-field experiences, private retreats & logistical services supporting responsible tourism in Antarctica.” I worked with ALE from the inception all the way through the end of my expedition to ensure that I was following all of their protocols and classification definitions to comply with a fully “unsupported” and “unassisted” solo crossing. Below are the explicit definitions that I used. Captain Louis Rudd, one of the world’s most renowned polar explorers also used these definitions as he was attempting the same first, solo, unsupported, unassisted crossing at the same time that I was.

Definitions for “unsupported” and “unassisted” below from the ALE website: [\[LINK\]](#)

*\*ALE defines unsupported expeditions as those that start the expedition with all the equipment and supplies for the whole journey. They have no pre-placed depots, no resupplies, no support vehicles, and receive no outside help.*

*\*\*ALE defines unassisted expeditions as those that are human powered and do not use external power aids for significant speed and load advantage. Assisted Antarctic expeditions typically use wind power (kites and ski-sails).*

On January 16, 2020 I shared the above definitions with the reporter via text message. See [\[LINK\]](#) for screenshot of text message. These fundamental definitions were omitted from the article.

The article calls into question whether Captain Louis Rudd’s and my route was “assisted” due to the use of the South Pole Overland Traverse (SPoT) for the final approximately 360 miles of the crossing from the South Pole via the Leverett Glacier to the Ross Ice Shelf which some have described as a “road.” However, the use of the SPoT route on the Leverett Glacier falls within

ALE's classification definition of a route that qualifies as "unassisted," as both Rudd and I were crossing using only human power and not using kites, dogs, or "external power aids." ALE, still to this day, has on their website the following:

"We received several inquiries from soloists interested in attempting to be **the first person to complete a solo crossing of the Antarctic landmass without resupply (unsupported) and without kiting or ski-sailing (unassisted)**. In the end, two people had the resources and support to start, and both **Colin O'Brady and Lou Rudd succeeded in completing their crossings.**" [\[LINK\]](#)

"Professional triathlete turned adventurer, Colin O'Brady, took on one of the most challenging objectives this season – **a solo, unsupported, and unassisted transantarctic crossing**. One of two men attempting this route, Colin was dropped off on November 3 at the Messner Start. From there he skied to the South Pole arriving on December 12 and continued on, reaching the base of the Leverett Glacier on the Ross Ice Shelf. **He completed his crossing on December 26, covering roughly 900 statute miles (1450 km) and becoming the first person to successfully complete this objective.**" [\[LINK\]](#)

My plans, intentions and results were and are still public on my website, on social media, and in my book, *The Impossible First*. I have always been upfront about the route I used, both during and after my expedition. I transparently write about using the Leverett SPoT "road" route in my book on page 201.

Furthermore, due to safety concerns with the other routes, **the Leverett SPoT "road" was the only route that ALE was willing to support logistically for soloists that year, a fact that Steve Jones of ALE confirmed to the reporter**. However, in the article, the reader is misled when presented with a statement by Steve Jones that Jones had corrected before the article ran.

Louis Rudd described the experience of the Leverett SPoT "road" route best in his blog shortly after the expedition ended when he writes on January 14, 2019:

"I selected the Leverett Glacier quite simply because it was the safest option for a solo expedition. The crevasse risk on this route is well understood and mitigated. As a husband and father of three, safety was always my utmost priority with this trip, any other approach would be irresponsible. The route is used by the US to resupply the South Pole station from their base at McMurdo. It's been described by some as a 'road' which is misleading. It's quite funny watching people comment on it when I know for a fact they've never even seen it let alone skied 300 miles along it. A tracked vehicle convoy traverse this route several times in the summer season, but having now used it I can tell you it's a churned up heavily rutted surface that is mostly buried in soft spindrift. For most of the time it was a hideous surface to ski on and actually skiing parallel to the road on the much firmer flanks was mostly a better option. It is marked every 400m or so with a bamboo pole again which some claim is an artificial aid but having

successfully navigated over 2,500 miles across Antarctica previously without them I don't think they were a deal breaker! Without them I still would have skied exactly the same course." [\[LINK\]](#)

Some of the individuals quoted in the article, who are now criticizing my 932 mile route and style, knew of my intentions and route prior to my departure and during my expedition and acknowledged the validity of my solo, unsupported, unassisted crossing. The National Geographic article references a November 13, 2018 email between Eric Larsen, an American polar explorer, and Jenna Besaw, my wife and expedition manager. In fact, the final quotation of the article is from this email. This email exchange occurred when I was ten days into my expedition and the details of my route had been made public. Larsen, who in the article is a strong critic, goes as far as to say, "It's an outright lie saying unsupported, unassisted when you get on that road..." However, in Larsen's email, after acknowledging I was using the Leverett SPoT ("road"), he goes on to say, **"Therefore, it is important to remember that this will be the first SOLO crossing that is both unassisted and unsupported, not simply the first crossing."** Larsen clearly acknowledged the proper classification of my crossing while I was doing it.

Yet this is not reported in the article, although the reporter apparently had access to this email given the reference to it in the article.

For transparency, the full email is [\[LINKED\]](#) here with personal details redacted.

Captain Rudd announced his project which was the exact same route and objective as mine by saying he was going to attempt, "A solo, unsupported crossing of Antarctica, using muscle power alone with no resupply - although attempted - has never yet been completed." [\[LINK\]](#)

Captain Rudd is widely respected inside the polar community. He has made the exact same claims as I have, and was never questioned at the time of his announcement nor during our expeditions, as we both followed the ALE definitions of the time.

Not only did we both follow the established ALE classification definitions, but importantly both Captain Rudd and I followed historic precedent. As seen on ALE's website, Ben Saunders, another of the most respected polar explorers in the world was attempting "...to complete the first solo, unsupported, and unassisted transantarctic crossing..." in 2017, the year before Rudd and I made our crossings [\[LINK\]](#). Saunders' project was covered widely in the media, and discussed in the polar community. Saunders explicitly stated his plan to use the Leverett Glacier SPoT "road" route. However, after arriving at the South Pole, he decided to end his crossing after running low on food supplies. The over 6000 word article cites numerous polar authorities and historic expeditions, yet makes not a single mention of Saunders' widely publicized attempt, nor uses any quotes from him, despite his expedition having the identical stated goal of Rudd's and mine - "first, solo, unsupported, unassisted crossing" including the explicit intention to use the same SPoT "road" portion of the route. By omitting this fact, the article misrepresents the

totality of the accepted historical precedent that Rudd and I were working from. (See appendix below for more details on this point).

In the National Geographic article, Eric Phillips, who is the cofounder and president of the International Polar Guides Association, states O’Brady “didn’t do what [he] advertised.” I had email communication with Eric Phillips in October of 2018 following the announcement of my expedition but before I began. Phillips was made aware of the specifics of the route including the use of the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road.” Phillips never raised any objections about the validity of the expedition at that time. Furthermore, Phillips followed up with an email sent to me on December 29th, 2018, three days after the conclusion of my crossing, with the subject line “Congratulations.” In the email Phillips writes, “Hi Colin, First and foremost, congratulations on an outstanding achievement, a remarkable feat of endurance and skill made even more exciting by the ‘race’ with Lou.” He goes on to say, “There is no debate over your spectacular feat of endurance or authentic intention, only that the current labeling system of unsupported/unassisted is hopelessly inadequate and has not served you well. For this and on behalf of the wider polar community, I sincerely apologize and have taken it upon myself to begin the process of developing a new classification system.”

For transparency, the full email is [\[LINKED\]](#) here with personal details redacted.

Although Phillips here is reckoning with his own desire and perhaps the desire of the “polar community” to create a new classification system for the future, his email clearly acknowledges that I acted with “authentic intention” by doing exactly what I “advertised” by following the classification system and rules that existed at the time. This email communication from Eric Phillips shows that his statement in the article claiming that I did not do what I “advertised” is incorrect. I did exactly what I said I was going to do with full transparency and “authentic intention.”

The reporter and others quoted in the article characterize me as dishonest, when in fact I followed all of the ALE classification definitions of the era and was explicit with my intentions from the beginning.

**3) The “no rescue zone” is not an embellishment of the danger of crossing Antarctica, but rather a fact that has been reported by many highly regarded polar authorities who acknowledge, on the record, the challenges of plane rescue given certain terrain features and weather.**

Another example of the inaccurate reporting has to do with the “no rescue zones” cited in the article. The article claims that I exaggerated the dangers and compares the ease of arranging for a plane to come rescue me, in the event of an extreme emergency, to “. . . requesting an Uber.” This is patently false.

Other renowned Antarctic explorers validate the dangers I have written about. For instance, in her book, *Alone in Antarctica*, Felicity Aston, the first woman to ski across Antarctica solo in 2011/2012, addresses this issue. Referencing the same region on the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” route where I was traveling, she states, “Now I felt stripped of all safety nets. Whatever happened on this glacier, there would be nobody coming to rescue me, no one there to help.”

[\[LINK\]](#)

In response to an interview question last year, “If you had needed a rescue, what would you have done? How long would it take to show up?”, Borge Ousland the first person to make a solo and unsupported crossing of Antarctica was quoted, stating, “It depends where you are, due to the terrain and the enormous distance. In some places rescue is just hours away, other places on the route are beyond rescue. For example, in the sastrugi fields (fields with large snowdrifts) that stretch for several hundred kilometers, no plane can land there.” [\[LINK\]](#)

Ben Saunders’ team when providing one of the reasons that Saunders elected to stop his Trans-Antarctic solo expedition in 2017 states, “...with air rescue being difficult or impossible during the final sections of his descent of the Leverett Glacier.” [\[LINK\]](#)

Before my expedition, ALE’s Travel Safety Department supplied me with a detailed route description explaining logistical challenges on my route. I sent this document to the reporter on January 16th via text [\[LINK\]](#). The document states, “From “TANGO 3” to “PAPA CHARL” + 24 miles (S86o 40 to S87o 51) presents rough, sastrugi terrain. This area is known as the “Sastrugi National Park”. High winds and ground blizzards are not uncommon in this area, there is flagging at 320m (1/5 mile) intervals to aid visibility. This is approximately a 130km section of dense, hard and well formed sastrugi. The roughest section lies between “PAPA BRAVO” and “PAPACHARLIE”. **Off strip plane landings are not normally possible in this area making any resupply or medivac inadvisable.**”

Additionally, the reporter of this article wrote an earlier article which was published by National Geographic on December 21st, 2018, during my and Rudd’s crossings, with the headline “Antarctic explorers enter no-rescue zone.” That article states, “Due to the sastrugi density, potential rescue planes, which require smooth “runways” of snow, cannot land here.” [\[LINK\]](#).

There is no doubt that weather and conditions of terrain can prevent rescue by plane.

**4) I have on many occasions publicly credited the great explorers who have come before me, especially Borge Ousland. This is evident in my book, on my website and in many of my social media posts.**

One of the other foundational arguments made in the article is that I diminished the accomplishments of those who came before me, particularly Borge Ousland. The article states, “O’Brady claims to be the first person to ski alone and unsupported across Antarctica, but in the opinion of many of the world’s leading polar guides and historians, that distinction belongs to

Norwegian Borge Ousland, considered by many to be the modern era's most accomplished polar explorer."

However on pages 49-50 of my book I write, "The Norwegian adventurer Borge Ousland in many ways defined the terrain of astonishing modern Antarctic feats, becoming the first person to cross Antarctica solo when he traveled eighteen hundred miles alone in sixty-three days from late 1996 to early 1997. Not only did he cross the entire landmass of Antarctica, but he also crossed the full Ronne and Ross Ice Shelves from the ocean's edge. Ousland's expedition, which had deeply inspired me, was unsupported in that he'd hauled all his food and fuel with no resupplies, but importantly, *assisted* in that he'd used a parachute-like kite called a parawing, harnessing the wind to pull him across on the ice. "

Both of our projects were solo and unsupported. Ousland's expedition predated mine by over two decades. Ousland used a kite (assisted), and very impressively went nearly twice as far as I did covering the landmass and the ice shelves. I crossed just the landmass, 932 miles, using only human power (unassisted). Two different 'firsts.' Apples and oranges.

I have been vocal about my reverence of Ousland in my book and I have widely acknowledged him on social media. My Instagram post from December 27th, 2018, written in gratitude the day after I completed my crossing, was titled "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants" [\[LINK\]](#) and goes into depth about Ousland and the many other polar explorers who came before me, who deeply inspired me and for whom I have the utmost respect.

On January 30th, a few days before the publication of this National Geographic article, I posted on Instagram with the title "Respect" about Borge Ousland and Mike Horn's recent North Pole crossing describing it as, "By far one of the most impressive expeditions of all time." [\[LINK\]](#)

Despite the article's claim that I diminished the accomplishments of those who came before me, the record clearly shows otherwise.

#### Acknowledging Mistakes:

I want to express my sincere apology to anyone who feels that I was harsh with them during my previous expeditions. It was never my intention to treat anyone poorly. While my recollection and documentation of the events in Greenland and the North Pole do not match what I read in the article (See appendix below for clarifying details on these expeditions), I recognize that some feelings were obviously hurt, and for that I am deeply sorry. My 54 day solo Antarctica expedition gave me the time to reflect and prioritize what matters most, and this year has been a cathartic process to put my experience and perspective down on paper. In my book I vulnerably share the truth about both the ups and downs of my own personal life and journey including acknowledging mistakes I have made. The last chapter of my book is titled "Infinite Love" and shares what's really in my heart and soul. I am an evolving human and I am constantly striving to be a better version of myself. My biggest goal with this expedition was not



to stake my claim on a heroic feat, but rather to test the limits of my own potential for personal growth while communing with the power and beauty of the earth. My intention was to share my story with students through my nonprofit as well as with the general public, in the hope of inspiring others to be stewards of the environment and realize that they have reservoirs of untapped potential inside of them to take on whatever challenges and adventures they desire.

Whether my route was as hard as someone else's is subject to anyone's interpretation. However, saying I exaggerated the dangers or difficulty or made false claims about my crossing is simply untrue. I did something that no one had ever done before. My route was public, my goal was public and my exact whereabouts for the entire crossing were live for the world to see and follow on GPS tracking. I pulled a sled that started out weighing 375 pounds for 932 miles across the landmass of Antarctica solo from the edge of the Ronne Ice Shelf at the Messner Start via the South Pole down the Leverett Glacier SPoT route to the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf. I had no food or supply drops (unsupported) and I was completely human powered (unassisted). I stated what I was going to do and then I did it. I have been truthful and forthright.

In that spirit, it is my sincere hope that the editors of National Geographic will review the facts now more clearly on display. At its core, this disputed article is about integrity and ethics. I have been a lifelong fan of National Geographic, and in an era of click bait headlines and "fake news," National Geographic for me still stands as a beacon of ethical journalism. I look forward to you correcting the record by retracting this article.

The below Request for Retraction - Appendix outlines several additional factual inaccuracies with supporting documentation for your reference.

## Request for Retraction - APPENDIX

Below is a list of additional statements that were inaccurately reported in the National Geographic article, as well as omissions, quotes taken out of context, and basic fact checking errors. All items include supporting evidence to further correct the record.

### Historical precedent for “unassisted” expeditions:

Below is a list of some recent expeditions that used the same ALE classification definition for “unassisted” and used or intended to use the SPoT “road” via the Leverett Glacier. All of these expeditions are celebrated and widely accepted as valid in the polar community. O’Brady researched these expeditions prior to his expedition, consulted with ALE on this route and acknowledged these expeditions as inspirations.

1. 2017 Ben Saunders “The Trans-Antarctica Solo Expedition” (occurred the year prior to O’Brady’s expedition). As seen on his website, “Ben Saunders is one of the world’s leading polar explorers...” [\[LINK\]](#)
  - a. Saunders’ goal was the same as O’Brady’s; a solo, unsupported, unassisted crossing of the landmass of Antarctica.
    - i. From ALE’s website 2017 Expeditions Review, “This season Ben set out to complete the **first solo, unsupported, and unassisted transantarctic crossing**, paying tribute to his late friend Lt. Col. Henry Worsley, who attempted the same feat in 2016.” [\[LINK\]](#)
    - ii. Chase Expeditions, Saunders’ Expedition Manager, stated on their website: “In November 2017, record-breaking polar explorer Ben Saunders set out to make **the first solo, unsupported and unassisted crossing of Antarctica**. This west-to-east traverse from Berkner Island to the Ross Ice Shelf via the South Pole was planned by Ben’s close friend Lt Col Henry Worsley, who nearly completed the expedition before falling ill and passing away in hospital in Chile in January 2016.” [\[LINK\]](#)
  - b. Saunders’ intended route utilized the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road,” same as O’Brady and in the same direction of travel.
    - i. Saunders’ intended [route](#): Berkner Island (Ronne Ice Shelf) – South Pole – Ross Ice Shelf via the Leverett Glacier SPoT “Road” to Ross Ice Shelf
      1. Saunders’ route intended to include the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road,” but Saunders’ ended his expedition at the South Pole prior to this portion of the route and thus did not complete the crossing.
      2. Saunders’ route would have been “unassisted” according to ALE classification definitions had he completed his intended crossing.
2. 2017/2018 Ice Maidens’ Expedition (the year prior to O’Brady’s expedition). Ice Maidens’ state on their website, “Six British women have become the first all-female team to use muscle power alone to ski coast-to-coast across Antarctica.” [\[LINK\]](#)

- a. From ALE’s website 2017 Expeditions Review, “On January 20, the Ice Maidens skied the final 19 miles (30 km) to Hercules Inlet, **completing their goal of an unassisted transantarctic crossing** in 61 days.” [\[LINK\]](#)
  - b. Ice Maidens’ [route](#): Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” (Ross Ice Shelf) – South Pole – Hercules Inlet (Ronne Ice Shelf).
    - i. Ice Maidens’ route included the Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” making their crossing according to ALE classification definitions “unassisted.” O’Brady used the same portion of the route Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” to South Pole, but in the opposite direction of travel.
3. 2011/2012 Felicity Aston’s Kaspersky ONE Trans-Antarctic expedition
- a. According to her website, “In 2012 she became the first woman to ski alone across Antarctica.” [\[LINK\]](#) And, as per her Amazon book page “...she became the first woman—and only the third person in history—to ski across the entire continent of Antarctica alone. She did it, too, with the simple apparatus of cross-country, without the aids used by her predecessors, Norwegian men who employed either parasails or kites.” [\[LINK\]](#)
  - b. Aston stated she was “the first person in the world to cross Antarctica alone and the first person to do so using just muscle power (no kites or machines).” [\[LINK\]](#)
    - i. O’Brady and Aston are similar in their solo and muscle power or “unassisted” crossings. However Aston received two resupplies, making her crossing according to ALE classification definitions solo, unassisted but supported.
  - c. Aston’s [route](#): Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” (Ross Ice Shelf) – South Pole – Hercules Inlet (Ronne Ice Shelf).
    - i. O’Brady used the same portion of the route Leverett Glacier SPoT “road” to South Pole, but in the opposite direction of travel.
    - ii. ESPN reported on Aston’s crossing as “unassisted” saying, “Otherwise, her feat was unassisted.” [\[LINK\]](#)
    - iii. In Felicity Aston’s book, *Alone in Antarctica*, she describes on pages 58-59: “**Placed originally by the SPOT traverse as a navigational marker LOO-JW had gained significance in recent years as a visible indicator of the Antarctic coast.** Located just north of the 85<sup>th</sup> line of latitude, the post stood almost exactly over the coastline marked on the few available maps of the region – a coastline that was otherwise completely undetectable from the surface. Nobody seemed to know what the initials ‘LOO-JW’ carved into the top of the post stood for but Valdi and the Moon Regan Transantarctic Expedition he had been part of had used it as the end point of their transcontinental journey, and so it became the official start point of mine. Just to make sure there could be no doubt that I had started my crossing on ice floating on the ocean and not on the Antarctic landmass, the plane had flown me a little further north to be well beyond this unassuming coastal marker.” LOO-JW was O’Brady’s final waypoint, marking the end of his expedition. Aston and O’Brady both

used the same portion of the route Leverett SPoT “road” but in opposite directions.

Quotes taken out of context, larger factual inaccuracies, misrepresentations and/or omissions

1. Reported as: “While skiing across Antarctica, American Colin O’Brady, the self-proclaimed first person to ski alone and unassisted across the frozen continent, came to what he describes in his new book *The Impossible First*, as “a hellish stretch...one of the hardest places on the continent to get across.” A polar wind he estimates at “fifty or even sixty miles an hour” lashed him as he entered a precarious area that was “off the map—unreachable and inaccessible.” Potential rescue aircraft cannot land here, he explains, because the terrain’s jagged, wind-whipped ice formations “made landing impossible.”
  - a. Response: “made landing impossible” is a quote from page 214 of O’Brady’s book, but leaves out a critical piece. It’s not just the sastrugi that makes landing impossible, it’s the weather too, the combination. The full quote from O’Brady’s book with context reads, “... weather permitting, the great sastrugi zone made landing impossible.”
2. Reported as: “Before he began his journey, O’Brady writes, safety managers for the company that would rescue him in an emergency, Antarctica Logistics and Expeditions (ALE), ominously told him of this area, “If you call for help in here, you won’t get it.” This perilous reach of Antarctica was one of many reasons no one had achieved this crossing before, he writes, “and why so many people thought it impossible.””
  - a. Response: The article quotes from page 214 of O’Brady’s book “If you call for help in here, you won’t get it” and puts it in sequence with “and why so many people thought it was impossible” from page 50 of O’Brady’s book, which creates the false impression that O’Brady said something that he didn’t. The “call for help” quote is in reference to rescue in an emergency situation and the “...and why so many people thought it was impossible” is in reference to the food/math equation and has nothing to do with rescue or plane landings with travel safety. [\[LINK\]](#)
    - i. As for the food/math equation that was taken out of context here, O’Brady is referencing not just his own assertion, but also from 2016 Wired Magazine article which states, “It’s straight-up impossible to take enough calories with you to get across the continent of Antarctica.” [\[LINK\]](#)
3. Reported as: “Dansercoer wants to get the different generations in the same room to find common ground, but worries, he says, “The young ones couldn’t care less if they’re caught lying. See in [the United States] what’s happening—it’s becoming the new normal.” But in the context of the article implies that Dansercour is speaking about O’Brady specifically.
  - a. Response: After reading the article, Dixie Dansercoer, Executive Director of Polar Circles and mentor of O’Brady’s expedition, emailed a statement via Julie Brown, Managing Director of Polar Circles and Dansercoer’s wife, referencing the above

- quote and stating, “I am however aware that one of my comments was placed in a completely different context than originally shared.”
4. Reported as: “According to one group member, O’Brady had ignored the guide’s warning to pitch his tent close to the group to avoid a nearby crevasse field. Hearing O’Brien’s [name misspelled] shouts, the guide went to check on him and, according to Gundlfinger and others interviewed, reported back to the group that the crevasse was shallow and not dangerous.”
    - a. Response: The crevasse was, in fact, deep and dangerous.
      - i. [A photo of the crevasse](#) that O’Brady fell into in Greenland, metadata time and location (September 14th, 2018 6:21pm), which was written about in O’Brady’s book on page 243 “...I felt nothing below my legs but air. I’d caught myself with my outstretched arms as I went down, which kept me from falling farther, but everything beneath my armpits was dangling in the crevasse.”
      - ii. [Another photo](#) shows the size of the hole when compared against others items in the picture, the sled, stove box and shovel.
  5. Reported as: “Two days later, with 10 percent of the journey still remaining, O’Brady called for a helicopter and left to catch his flight. A short while later, his website declared his crossing of Greenland a “success.” The helicopter went unmentioned.”
    - a. Response: The helicopter is shown on O’Brady’s live GPS with a waypoint titled “Heli” with further information including “Sat, Sep 15, 2018 6:52 AM Elevation: Lat: 67.148150 Lon: -48.762769”. [\[LINK\]](#) This was public then and still is today. O’Brady regularly calls attention to his live GPS tracking and shares a link for the public to view. The helicopter waypoint is in the public domain and not hidden in any way as suggested in the article.
      - i. O’Brady was using experience in Greenland as a training mission for his Antarctic trek. In context, the “success” is based on training success for Antarctica. O’Brady’s Instagram post September 14, 2018 says, “...I’d say my training is successfully complete.” [\[LINK\]](#)
  6. Reported as: “So how can O’Brady claim a first crossing? Ousland pulled his sled with his own muscle power, a method known as “manhauling,” for a significantly greater distance than O’Brady’s entire journey, but on a few limited occasions, he jury-rigged a small kitelike device to boost his speed when the wind was just right.”
    - a. Response:
      - i. Reports indicate that Ousland used his kite on more than a few occasions and that he used his parawing kite for 1/3 of his journey (559 miles).
        1. Outside Magazine reports in an article Feb 20, 2018 “...Ousland estimates that a sail helped rip him along for about a third of the distance. (Imagine a kite-surfing rig, only you’re on skis and towing a capsule-like sled.)” [\[LINK\]](#)
      - ii. It wasn’t some “jury-rigged” “kite-like” device. It was reported as a specifically designed aid.
        1. See report from Expeditions Equipment article [\[LINK\]](#)

2. From the manufacturer of his Parawing, the maker of the kite is quoted here saying, "BØRGE OUSLAND - the Parawings were of great help when crossing the Antarctic alone in 1996/97. In good wind and with the big sail he covered 226 km on a 16h day." [\[LINK\]](#)
3. [A photo](#) inscribed by Borge addressed to maker of Parawings
7. Reported as: "At the time, the polar community did not consider Ousland's simple sail as assistance, but rather as an elegant innovation."
  - a. Response: Six years after Ousland's Antarctica crossing a controversy broke out around Ousland for using a kite on a subsequent expedition in 2003 after crossing the TransPatagonia ice cap. Some veteran explorers expressed concerns about Ousland and his partner, Thomas Ulrich, using kites as aid. The explorers were also dismayed by some media reporting their crossing as "the first":
    - i. ExplorersWeb article on Oct 31, 2003 01:45 am EST said, "Their expedition stirred the polar community straight from the start." [\[LINK\]](#)
    - ii. [Photo](#) of Borge using a kite in Patagonia

#### Polar community's recognition of O'Brady's expedition

Below is a list of additional congratulatory notes sent to O'Brady and/or Besaw following the completion of O'Brady's expedition from numerous polar authorities who had followed O'Brady's expedition and route details closely, with no indication of controversy.

1. Email from Steve Jones, Expeditions Manager ALE, to Besaw on Wed, Dec 26, 2018, 1:11 PM
  - a. "Firstly, huge congratulations to Colin. A really impressive final effort at the end of a really well executed expedition."
2. Email from Tom & Tina Sjogen, founders of ExplorersWeb, to O'Brady on Wed, Dec 26, 2018, 2:22pm
  - a. "Huge congratulations Colin and Jenna! Tom & Tim"
3. Email from Lars Ebbesen of Ousland Explorers, whom O'Brady utilized for Greenland logistics, to Besaw on Thu, Dec 27, 2018, 12:53 AM
  - a. "Many congratulations on Colin's great trip. That was very convincing as well and exciting, of course."
4. Email from Dixie Dansercoer, Executive Director of Polar Circles and O'Brady's mentor, to O'Brady on Thu, Dec 27, 2018 at 12:34 PM
  - a. "You did it!!!!!! Respect, man... I had no doubts and could only have hoped that my small contribution was stowed somewhere in your sled. I will keep it short and sweet as I kinda remember from 1997-98 how crazy things get ....:) I am still at Wolf's Fang in Queen Maud Land and will fly (alone !) in the jet back to Cape Town on the 29 December and will join Julie and Robin who are there to celebrate your success and the New Year at the same time! Your next challenge:

solo, unsupported crossing of the Arctic Ocean !!!! Never been done :) When the dust settles and you find a moment, let's talk. Again my heartfelt congratulations! Dixie”

5. Email from Julie Brown, Managing Director Polar Circles and Dixie Dansercoer's wife, to Besaw on Fri, Jan 11, 2019, 1:47 AM
  - a. “Hi Colin, Hi Jenna, I'm following all related press & media regarding your amazing accomplishment. I simply want to congratulate you both on your tireless push to get the message out for making the impossible ... possible.”

#### North Pole context & omission:

1. Reported as: “For his ski to the North Pole he hired legendary Belgian polar guide Dixie Dansercoer, who has two record-breaking Antarctic journeys of over 2,500 miles in his lengthy resume. Also in their group was a British father and his two young adult sons, who Dansercoer says wanted to fully enjoy the experience” The record in his sights, O'Brady had a different agenda. There was a discussion and Colin was very overpowering,” says Dansercoer, who describes O'Brady as a “very ambitious young man.” Dansercoer laments the effect the Explorer's Grand Slam has on people's experience in polar regions. The family group, he says, was there for a “deeper experience.””
  - a. Response:
    - i. Omission: The article states that the British family merely wanted to have a “deeper experience,” when in fact, due to an unfortunate nine day delay caused by a cracking runway on the sea ice at Barneo Station, the British family decided they no longer had the time or desire to complete a full “Last Degree” expedition to the North Pole, but instead would complete a shorter distance. See Dansercoer's Polar Circle's blog on this expedition which clearly shows they were dropped off at: N 89° 35' 00, only 25 nautical miles from the North Pole, rather than the full ‘Last degree’ which begins at N 89° 00' 00 and is 60 nautical miles. [\[LINK\]](#) The goals of the British family and O'Brady were no longer aligned. O'Brady was attempting to break the speed record for the Explorers Grand Slam (Last Degree), and so to abide by all rules of that record and complete a full ‘Last Degree’ North Pole expedition, O'Brady changed groups to stay within the rules of his stated goal.
    - ii. Context: The article states, “Larsen says he and other guides were surprised at the aggressive way O'Brady handled the transition, describing it as, “Excessive—we still talk about it.””
      1. Larsen is critical of O'Brady's behavior in reference to the ‘Last Degree’ North Pole expedition, however in an email to O'Brady's wife sent the month after the expedition on May 18, 2016, 11:11 AM, Larsen writes, “As I'm sure Colin mentioned, I very much

enjoyed having him on the trip. He is a great guy and I wish him the best.”

2. Larsen’s sentiment and actions immediately after the ‘Last Degree’ North Pole expedition were dramatically different than expressed in the article. Larsen even reached out to O’Brady later that year to see if O’Brady wanted to complete an expedition together - his pitch including the two of them teaming up for an expedition across the Gobi Desert. A sponsorship proposal that Larsen created indicates a significantly different perspective.

[\[LINK\]](#)

Basic factual errors/misspellings:

1. Reported as: “Before he began his journey, O’Brady writes, safety managers for the company that would rescue him in an emergency, Antarctica Logistics and Expeditions (ALE)...”
  - a. Response: Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions is misspelled as “Antarctica Logistics and Expeditions”
2. Reported as: “Hearing O’Brien’s shouts, the guide went to check on him and, according to Gundlfinger and others interviewed, reported back to the group that the crevasse was shallow and not dangerous.”
  - a. Response: O’Brady is misidentified as “O’Brien”.
3. Reported in a National Geographic email blast promoting the article about O’Brady written by *Debra Adams Simmons*: “So, what makes something “a first”? And what do we want to believe, in an age where the signal of truth is often hard to find amid the noise of public relations, social media exaggeration, and of the expectation of legit superhuman accomplishments, such as Alex Honnold’s 2018 free solo climb of Yosemite’s El Capitan?”
  - a. Response: Alex Honnold’s climb occurred June 3, 2017. [\[LINK\]](#)