British adventurer reaches safety at Yangtze expedition halfway point

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Death-defying British adventurer Ash Dykes has reached safety at the halfway point of his mammoth world first expedition, having faced immense threats to his safety whilst attempting to walk the entire length of China's Yangtze River in just a year.

This is no mean feat, as the Yangtze is the longest river to flow through a single nation and stretches almost 4000 miles from west to east China, through eleven provinces, diverse ecosystems and multiple major cities including Chongquing and Shanghai.

It has taken Ash 136 days and 2000 miles of intense trekking across some of the world's most dangerous and remote provinces to reach the halfway point in the small Chinese city of Panzhihua, having set off from the Yangtze River's true, scientific source in the Tibetan Plateau on 26th August last year.

In one of the few remaining 'firsts' to be attempted by man, Ash and his team have faced huge challenges on this first half of the expedition, with eight out of nine of Ash's teammates dropping out mid-mission due to injury, illness or fears for their safety.

The mission got off to a difficult start when Ash's Tibetan guide suffered the serious effects of altitude sickness on the way to the source of the river and required urgent medical attention, delaying the expedition's start date. Since then, bears travelling down the mountain to find food before hibernation have posed the greatest threat to Ash's life; closely followed by wolves. Ash was tracked by a pack of wolves for two days straight not long after the trek began, and has faced the very real threat of aggressive wild yaks, cobras, and giant hornets along the way.

Other natural elements have also made this challenge particularly immense, with temperatures as low as -20 degrees Celsius, snow blizzards, glacial river crossings, and landslides pushing Ash to his limit and, at times, forcing him to detour and lose precious days.

Although the most remote, dangerous and uncertain leg of the expedition is now behind Ash, the remainder of the trek will pose threats of different kinds. Rather than bears, wolves and wilderness, Ash will encounter heavily populated cities and some of the most polluted areas of any river in the world. The hot, rainy season means the river is more likely to flood, and as the river widens so do its tributaries, meaning crossings will be more difficult and could lead to further detours and delays.

Despite this, Ash remains positive. He said:

"Without a doubt, Mission Yangtze has been the biggest challenge I've undertaken to date. Physically I was as prepared as I could be, but mentally it's hard to get ready for the harsh and remote landscapes, sub zero temperatures, and the difficulties these bring. I have trekked through some of the most breathtaking and unspoilt parts of the world, but I've never felt so vulnerable to the elements and predators as I have done over the past few months.

China is an unbelievably diverse country, with each province I've crossed bringing unique terrains, climates, wildlife and challenges. I was actually stopped on five occasions by the police, as government officials worried for my security and safety. Despite having to retrace 40 miles worth of the trek after being detained, we managed to push on with the backing of the Qinghai Government and CBCGDF, and really appreciate their concern.

Despite the challenges, I've been completely overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality shown by the people I've encountered so far. I always say that the locals make or break an adventure, and so far the Chinese have been amazing. It's been hugely rewarding living and integrating with locals, meeting schools and families, and learning about their lives and traditions.

The Yangtze has also been incredibly clean so far, as the Tibetan people will not so much as fish out of the river, let alone throw rubbish in it. I know the second half will be far more polluted, but it's a common misconception that the entire Yangtze River is being destroyed by the effects of industrialisation. I'm really interested to see how China's wild west compares with its more industrial and densely populated eastern region.

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The expedition hasn't been straightforward but it's been an incredible experience so far, and I'm really looking forward to seeing and learning even more about this amazing country as I enter into the second half of the mission. Bring it on!"

You can follow Ash as he prepares for and embarks on the second half of this record-breaking challenge on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Weibo (@AshDykes) and track his progress live on www.ashdykes.com. You can also get involved by sharing your own adventures using the hashtag #MissionYangtze.

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