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Pioneering a new route along the Fimbul iceshelf in Antarctica

Polar explorer and Arctic Trucks founder Emil Grimsson tells us about the challenge and excitement of mapping a new route over fast flowing ice and large ice-rises in one of the world's most remote environments

Over 8 months in route planning, analysing data and risk-assessment were necessary to establish a potentially safe supply path between the landing point of the icebreaker vessel and Whichaway Camp in Antarctica. White Desert, the luxury tour operator of this camp, commissioned Arctic Trucks to provide vehicles and expert support to establish a land route for a future supply line. The team studied more than 1500km with a main focus on finding a safe route along the Iceshelf. No vehicles had travelled this route before.

The main challenge in finding a new route was crevasses created as the glacier moves over ice rises and the Jutulstraumen, an ice flow that moves up to 4 meters per day through otherwise slow moving ice shelf. The Arctic Trucks team was faced with an unexpected amount of icemelt but their training and persistence allowed them to successfully navigate the situation.

Building on decades of experience travelling in crevassed areas in Iceland and having pioneered a route from NOVO ice runway up along the Shcherbakov mountain range up to the Antarctica high plateau in Queen Maud Land, Arctic Trucks undertook this challenge with confidence. The team used their expertise, environmental training and vehicle handling knowledge to their advantage to tackle the harsh conditions and successfully complete the expedition.

Using satellite data and the latest GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) the expedition collected 11GB of scanning data, documented suggestions for further operational improvements and also took unique photography and video footage. The data has already been made available to University of Iceland will be shared with the scientific community.

The expedition used two Arctic Trucks AT44, one 4x4 and one 6x6. The vehicles are re-engineered Toyota Hilux, fitted with very large low air-pressure tyres, a setup that has now successfully recorded 277.000km driven in Antarctica. For this type of operations the Arctic Trucks vehicles travel about 3 times faster and use about 1/6th of the fuel the common belt vehicles that are being used in Antarctica. This allows for huge cost savings in fuel and more scientific research to be conducted during the season. In addition it leads to a big reduction of the Co2 emissions and has proven very reliable. Arctic Trucks have already supplied vehicles to India, Germany, Sweden, Finland and China Antarctica Programmes.

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