

## Big Finish: Boomer Details the Ellesmere Adventure



August 23. Jon is assisted by Global Rescue Paramedic onto plane, from Grise Fiord, for medical reasons soon after we completed the circumnavigation. Photo: Erik Boomer/First Ascent

Discounting Alert (pop. 5) and Eureka (pop. 0), Ellesmere Island in the high Canadian Arctic has one settlement that might be called a community, and that's Grise Fiord (pop. 141), according to 2006 census figures. Located on one of Ellesmere's southerly tips, Grise Fiord is home to at least one nurse. It's also where Jon Turk, 65, and Erik Boomer, 26, launched their 1,495 statute-mile circumnavigation attempt of the island, on May 7.

On Aug. 19, 104 days later, the duo paddled back into Grise Fiord, having completed the island's first circumnavigation. They skied and walked, towing their boats, about 850 miles, and paddled the remaining 600 or so. The finish, though, was strangely anti-climatic at the time, according to Boomer. "There was no hooray moment, 'we made it,'" Boomer says. "And 36 hours after finishing the adventure, the adventure kicked back on again with Jon's renal failure."

Major organ failure is a serious situation no matter where you are, but it's ever more dire in Grise Fiord. Three days after the onset of his kidney failure, when fog cleared and enabled a medivac jet to fly in, Turk was flown to definitive care in the U.S. And while Turk's condition has stabilized—he is now resting at home in Montana—he said it's not clear yet whether he will make a full recovery. In separate interviews, though, it's clear both Turk and Boomer's sense of

humor—that hard-to-quantify, yet essential ingredient for success on far-flung, out there expeditions such as this one—remain in tact. Said Boomer, with a chuckle: "Jon should be getting the catheter out anyday now, and he should be fired up for that."

Boomer made it back home to Boise, Idaho, on Sept. 2. And in an extensive interview with C&K, on Sept. 9, he went deep in detailing the one-of-a-kind adventure with Turk, a guy he hardly knew beforehand and a guy he now describes as, "like a brother... a 40 year age-difference brother."

**C&K: Let's start at the end. How did things play out with Jon's health situation?**

"It was about 36 hours after we completed the expedition. We stayed a night in a house where we began the trip. And he woke up in a lot of pain, without being able to pee. We zipped him over to a health office—they have one nurse for the entire community—and they ran a bunch of tests, and they found out his kidneys weren't working."

"So we called in Global Rescue, which is an awesome, awesome rescue company by the way. We had to wait three days before a jet was able to get in there, because of the fog, and once he got further south they ran all the blood work. And they were all pretty appalled at how bad his blood was, and really glad they got him down there when they did. ... Right when they went to hook him up to the dialysis machine, his kidneys kicked back on and started working. So he was in the hospital for six days, but he's home now in the forest of Montana."

**Do you miss him?**

"Yeah, [laughter], but you know, it's nice to do your own thing after being in such a tight and intense relationship. But I'll be over there soon to see him, and I'll probably have a big smile on my face when I do."

***As far as medical emergencies go on Ellesmere Island, your timing was pretty good there.***

"I don't know what we would've done if it happened a week earlier or whatever, because there are no other landing strips. Who knows how long it would've taken to get a rescue up there. So we were extremely fortunate it worked out the way it did. But we had a whole lot of that kind of luck the whole way. Things couldn't have worked out any other way..."