

Earlier this year extreme adventurer Felicity Aston became the first woman to ski alone across the continent of Antarctica. This article gives details of some of the specialist clothing and equipment she wore during the two-month trip.

One women's wardrobe for warmth in a world of snow and ice

Earlier in 2012 English adventurer Felicity Aston became the first woman to ski alone across Antarctica.

Ms Aston set out from the Ross Ice Shelf at the foot of the Leverett Glacier to start her journey on November 25 last year. Skiing up the Leverett Glacier, through the Transantarctic mountains, the 1,744-kilometre route next took her onto the Polar Plateau and the geographic South Pole, where she was able to re-stock her supplies with the help of specialist expedition support and tour operator Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions.

Her trek continued across the Polar Plateau to the coast of Antarctica at the edge of the Ronne Ice Shelf. On January 22, Ms Aston issued a message on Twitter saying she had reached her destination, the Hercules Inlet, after 59 days. She said a plane was on its way to pick her up and that she was looking forward to a hot shower and some red wine.

Later, in a statement through her main sponsor, Moscow-based IT security company the Kaspersky Lab, Felicity Ashton said: "I cannot express how happy I am to have finally made it. The expedition represents a culmination of everything I experienced and learned before on other challenging journeys. I prepared for it



Felicity Aston on her way to becoming the first woman to ski across the continent of Antarctica.

 Kaspersky Lab

The trek took two months and covered more than 1,700 kilometres of the bleakest landscape on earth.

 Kaspersky Lab

physically and mentally for a very long time. And finally here I am having reached my destination, having got through some rather severe conditions, but most importantly of all having overcome my own fear. I will never forget this moment, and I'm sure the memory will lead me on to other ventures in the future."

Bitter wind

Her protection from the elements on the two-month journey included Extreme salopettes from UK outdoor brand Montane, based in Northumberland. Made with high-performance fabric from Pertex, the garment has a pile lining to provide vital insulation against the bitter Antarctic wind that blows outward from the South Pole. Ms Aston explained before setting out that she would be walking into this headwind for the first half of her journey but that she was confident the salopettes would help protect her from cold-injury. Montane also provided a Bionic long-sleeve zip-neck baselayer garment, worn next to the skin. They are made from the Sportwool mix of merino wool and polyester. Ms Aston revealed that, in spite of the bitter wind, whiteout conditions and many challenges from the elements, there were also times on the trek when the sun was so warm



The Bionic baselayer top from Montane. There were occasions when this was protection enough for Felicity Aston to bask in a bit of Antarctic sunshine.

 Montane



Amortan, a special treatment on the Redline mitts from Mountain Equipment worn by Ms Aston, prevented the Pittards leather from cracking in the extreme conditions.

 Mountain Equipment

that she stripped down to her baselayer garments so as not to feel too hot. The same company also provided her with a wind-resistant, water-repellent and breathable Jaguar mid-layer jacket.

Cheshire-based Mountain Equipment also supplied life-saving clothing for the expedition, in this case the lightweight, breathable Kongur Jacket, which has plenty of ventilation zips to help wearers regulate their temperature, and the Annapurna down jacket to conserve body heat during rest periods.

Helping hand

Mountain Equipment also supplied its Redline mitt to help protect Ms Aston's hands, a critical part of her equipment, not least because women are physiologically more prone to cold extremities. The Redline has an inner pile liner that can be used on its own and a down outer that can be worn over the top on really cold days. Insulation technology in this glove comes from Primaloft, with other components including durable and water-resistant Armortan goatskin leather from specialist leather supplier Pittards.

Armortan is a technology that improves the abrasion-resistance of glove leather, which works by encasing the fibril bundles in the leather's structure with microscopic ceramic plates, making the leather more resistant to abrasion.

Reacting to the news, Pittards' sales director, Mike Dodd, said: "We've had quite a bit of positive feedback from outdoor brands who have supplied gloves made with Armortan goat leather for polar expeditions and we are

delighted to have another satisfied user in Felicity Aston."

He explained that this type of specialist leather was particularly suited to her journey because of the extra tactility leather can offer compared to substitute materials. More tactility means more dexterity, which in turn means the wearer can carry out more tasks before feeling obliged to take the glove off, exposing themselves to the risk of frost-bite. Secondly, its durability means a glove made from Armortan leather will not crack in the coldest conditions and even after constant friction against a ski-pole for days on end.

Since returning safely from the trip, Felicity Aston has devoted much of her time to giving talks to business and community groups on her experiences and visiting many schools to answer questions from pupils. She says she has found the children's questions about Antarctica inspiring, while they have enjoyed sampling some of the freeze-dried food she had to live on for two months. One school, Hartsdown Technology College in Margate, Kent (close to where she comes from) raised money to help Ms Aston buy the specialist outdoor clothing she needed for this project and has decided to inaugurate a Felicity Aston Award for Inspiration for students who show particularly impressive determination. As part of a conservation project, one school has adopted a polar bear, calling it Felicity in her honour. "I hope the bear is a female," the adventurer says.



The Annapurna down jacket from Mountain Equipment was important for conserving body heat during rest periods.

 Mountain Equipment