

It has taken the Old Harrovian to the Andes, New Zealand, Patagonia and the South Pole, where his team broke the speed record by using kites to power them across the ice in 2002.

He is shaping up to join the ranks of such British immortals as Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the former SAS officer described by the Guinness Book of Records as "the world's greatest living explorer"; Ellen MacArthur, the girl from landlocked Derbyshire who became the fastest woman to sail around the world; and David Hempleman-Adams, bemedalled after his 31 expeditions.

Like Peary, Avery's five-strong team used traditional wooden sledges and Inuit dogs, with the same four resupply points, although they had the advantage of air drops from Twin Otter planes

if they were gauging by the fact it was difficult to avoid skiing into it."

To the world at large, Peary was the explorer so determined to go down in history as the first man to reach the North Pole that he cooked the books. With his assistant, a young man named Matthew Henson, he set out with 23 men, 133 dogs and 19 sleds, but this support team dwindled to just the two leaders and four Inuit for the 130-mile last leg.

However, just as Peary announced his feat, a rival named Frederick Cook claimed to have reached the pole first. A bitter controversy ensued. Although Cook was exposed as a fraud, Peary fought to the end of his life to substantiate his claims.

So what accounts for Avery's determination to vindicate Peary? "He was amazingly determined and was

Peary's starting point at Cape Columbia, 30 miles away.

First he had to find Peary's old base camp. By matching an old photograph, showing a twin-peaked mountain behind the camp, to existing terrain, they found the approximate site.

"We were desperate to see if we could find any evidence of Peary's presence. We started searching through the snow drifts and rocks at the foot of the hills. We found old fuel cans, sled runners and wooden crates. We could really feel his spirit there. We then trekked 1½ miles to where Peary had erected a big signpost pointing to the North Pole. That was the start of our expedition."

I ask Avery to return to an earlier point of departure — as a seven-year-old boy enthralled by a Ladybird book's account

another four years and was really got me interested in mountains and snow when we went on ski holidays in the French Alps."

At Harrow his wanderlust got another boost when the polar explorer Robert

he went to Bristol University to read geography and geology. Signing up as an accountant at Arthur Andersen, he appeared to be settling into a tame routine. "But it was never for me. My

that our expedition is over. There were times when we were wondering if we would make it to the pole at all. But you start to forget the bad moments and remember the good."



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