

# Agenda

FEATURES

PROFILES • REVIEWS • ARTS • BOOKS • TRAVEL

Songs in  
the key  
of life  
AGENDA



JULY 22, 2005



## NO MAN'S LAND

It was the last great Antarctic challenge. After three weeks of hard, unsupported trekking across the ice, Peter Blend and Jay Watson were only 12 kilometres from conquering what had eluded Shackleton and others before them. **Gray Tippet** tells what happened, one day short of the pair's goal.

**H**E should only have been out there a minute or so. It was maybe 30 below, snowing, and the January wind was banister-wailing off the Antarctic plateau so hard and angry that it made the skin of the tent drum and hum. So when Jay called and didn't get an answer, he assumed it was just because Pete hadn't heard.

They'd woken to the storm and tried, for a while, to push through it to the coast. But when it became clear it wouldn't let them go, they turned back and set up the tent again in the protective lee of a rock ridge. Jay crawled inside to weigh the thing down while Pete banged in the last stakes and

kayaks. But he shouldn't have been out there this long.

Jay unzipped the tent and stuck his head out. The two kayaks had been staked about 20 metres away. One was still there but the



other was gone, and so was Pete.

Between the tent and the remaining kayak was a fresh, bright scar, probably 15 metres across. Its edges were cut clean away and it was bowl-shaped, as if someone had scooped out all the snow with a terrible spoon. It had taken Pete, and with sudden, dread certainty, Jay knew exactly where.

The night before, after they'd pitched camp, he had scouted down the slope to where a crevasse cut a jagged gash through the glacier. So now he tied a rope to himself and in one of the tent stakes and carefully backed down towards it. He stood at the edge of the ice cliff, leaned over and looked into its mint-blue depths.

to a concrete-hard ice shelf. He was lying facing up at the sky. His hip looked like it had been stove in, his eyes were open but vacant, his head and arms were moving slightly but mechanically, and there was blood coming from his nose and ears. He looked like he had broken his back.

After three weeks and a couple of hundred kilometres of hard, unsupported trekking across the Antarctic Peninsula, they were only 12 kilometres - one tough day's walk - from the end.

Jay lifted his head and swore. "Oh, shit," he cried into the emptiness. "Shit, shit, shit."