

# Crippled and trapped in a crevasse at minus 30deg Ice man's great escape

Adventurer Peter Bland spent three days lying crippled in a tent at the bottom of a crevasse. Partner Jay Watson tells HEATHER GRAHAM about the ordeal



Safe at last: Peter Bland.

**J**AY Watson avoids speaking of death when he describes the fear that gripped him after his partner fell into a 40m crevasse.

Checking on their campsite during a storm on January 30, Peter Bland was taken by an avalanche about 10m from their tent.

Mr Watson heard nothing but, sensing something was wrong, emerged from the tent.

"I called out to him and couldn't see him — I could see the site of the avalanche. The fear was that he was dead," he says, his voice trailing away.

The pair decided to become the first in the world to cross the Antarctic Peninsula unsupported, in a bid to raise awareness about the chronic neurological disease multiple sclerosis.

It was "the most spectacular trip", Mr Watson said with enthusiasm — until disaster struck.

The journey began in a yacht that took the explorers to Hope Bay in the Antarctic where they began trekking on January 10.

Then, one day before they were due to meet the yacht again, an avalanche left Mr Bland trapped at the bottom of the crevasse.

With a strange sense of calm, Mr Watson packed up his old school friend's backpack with his sleeping bag and tent and threw it down to him.

Then he abseiled down, relieved to find his friend conscious, although worried about the bleeding from his nose and ears and lack of movement from his lower body.

Mr Watson set up the tent and cut a hole in its bottom, placing it over his friend's inert body.

He radioed the yacht that had been due to meet them a mere 8km further on.

The captain organised for his support crew to trek in to help.

They spent the night

shivering — with temperatures hovering around minus 30deg. — lying on ice with sleeping bags draped over them.

"If he survived the first night, I thought he'd be OK, 'cos he's a pretty tough bloker," Mr Watson said.

During the 40 hours the explorers stayed trapped in the crevasse, minor avalanches fell on them.

Mr Watson covered his friend's body with his own and held up the tent.

**W**HEN the rescuers arrived, they hauled Mr Bland out on the pair's kayak.

Three days after his fall, Mr Bland was winched to safety and is recovering in a military hospital in Punta Arenas, Chile.

He is receiving treatment for broken ribs, injured legs and feet, a fractured skull and frostbite.

Mr Watson went on to experience "a magro ski out" for the remaining 8km. And, yes, he would visit the Antarctic again — perhaps with his mate, Pete.



Icy prison: Peter Bland's tent lies at the bottom of a crevasse. Pictures: JAY WATSON



Makeshift hospital: Bland's lair at the bottom of the crevasse.



Home: Jay Watson arrives in Melbourne. Picture: JOHN HART



All bundled up: Jay Watson stands by as rescuers prepare to fly his mate to safety.