

# The National

## Emirati will be first Arab woman to reach North Pole

Alison McMeans

Last Updated: March 02, 2010 12:34AM UAE / March 1, 2010 8:34PM GMT

Dubai // The al Qasimi family agrees that Elham got her adventurous spirit from her father. But no one expected it to take her to this extreme.

In April, Elham al Qasimi plans to become the first Arab woman to ski cross-country to the North Pole.

“If a picture could be taken, I would be a stick man standing on top of the Earth,” said the Emirati, 27. “I thought that was cool.”

The North Pole, she said, “is the exact opposite of my natural environment here in the UAE”. Precisely what she wanted to take her “out of my comfort zone by exposing me to an entirely different environment”.

Ms al Qasimi chose to publicise her expedition when she learnt that she would be the first Arab woman to make the round-trip journey of 100 nautical miles, a trip that will last between 10 and 14 days.

She said the planning for the trek spiralled “from a personal, physical goal” into a journey she hopes can inspire people in the region to “go out there and be ambitious and seek big challenges”.

She is also using the opportunity to raise money for charity. Starting today, people can nominate charities in the UAE or Middle East on her Twitter account, @PolarBent. In addition, she is raising money for PEAS (Promoting Equality in African Schools) which builds self-sustaining secondary schools.



Elham al Qasimi trains in Minnesota. Courtesy Elham al Qasimi

How did a woman working as an investment manager in London end up training to ski to the North Pole?

“I was thinking that it had been a long time since I’d had a good physical challenge,” said Ms al Qasimi.

“We focus so much on our careers but we don’t dedicate the same energy to our adventures. The North Pole was something that I thought about years ago but immediately wrote it off as impossible.

“I thought it would never be fit enough for it, that I would never have the time to train for it.”

But she found the time, starting in November. She spends hours at the gym every day improving her stamina and building up her muscles. Because she may have to haul 50kg of equipment and supplies, part of the training involves dragging tyres, mostly in public parks. This gets her more attention than she might prefer, but she prefers it to the monotony of the cross-trainer.

Last month, she went through a five-day training session in Minnesota with the two guides who will accompany her to the North Pole. She jumped into an ice hole in a frozen lake to prepare her if she falls into the Arctic Ocean.

What the training could not replicate is the extreme cold of the Arctic, temperatures as low as minus 30°C. She took off her face mask to speak with her instructors, but at the Pole that action could lead to frostbite.

One of the most difficult aspects of her planning is the worry she knows the trek will cause her parents. But they were not taken by surprise: of their five children she has always been the one most likely to take a risk, they said.

“She gets it from her Dad,” said her mother, Fouzia Mahmood. “Her father is an explorer and everywhere we go he wants to see every single detail. She’s an adventurer like him. She always wanted to go one step further, to be the best.”

When her parents discuss the journey they can name every risk their daughter may face. She could get frostbite. The ice could break. She could be attacked by a polar bear.

But they support their daughter’s adventure, and they clearly are proud of her courage.

Ms al Qasimi believes in setting goals, she said, “that seem just a tiny bit impossible”.

[amcmeans@thenational.ae](mailto:amcmeans@thenational.ae)

Have your say

Please [log in](#) to post a comment