

# What polar exploration taught me about investment and innovation

*Ben Saunders is a world-leading polar explorer. A record-breaking long-distance skier and one of a small handful of people to ski solo to both the North and South poles, Ben holds the world record for the longest ever polar journey on foot.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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His multiple expeditions to the polar regions have pushed the limits of human capability in some of the world's most extreme environments.

And recently, he's been an investor committed to funding planet-positive startups.

Ben will be sharing his story at [Blue Earth Summit](#), joining a team of keynote speakers including green industrialist Dale Vince OBE, environmentalist Ben Goldsmith and Dragon's Den, Deborah Meaden. Taking place in London between 16-18 October, the event will gather 5,000 innovators, startups, corporates, politicians, investors and campaigners in a mission-led manifesto to fast-forward planet health solutions.



À lire aussi

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## What inspired Ben to start investing?

Since age 23, Ben's polar expeditions gave him a firsthand view of the effects of climate change. In his words "a front row seat on Antarctica and the Arctic"

*But it was an unfolding disaster movie he didn't want to see the end of.*

Finding connecting points between extreme adventurers and the world of finance might appear challenging but Ben learned he had more in common with financiers than he expected.

"I discovered through fundraising that people who worked in finance and VCs were driven, ambitious and not afraid of risk. They worked hard. It was a world that had more crossover with me than disconnection".

He explains that planning and implementing an expedition is like running

a business. Leading a team, driving operations, problem solving and being able to engage potential sponsors and raise funds are all essential attributes. Having the mental fortitude and physical capability is only one part.

These skills not only helped Ben fundraise his expeditions, but also sharpened his determination to support innovators tackling the devastating effects of environmental change that he saw on his travels.

The impact of climate change on Antarctica and the Arctic ocean magnified over the course of his expeditions. In fact his inspiration for his first big expedition in 2001 was rooted mainly in emulating his boyhood heroes. But by the 2nd and 3rd expedition, his motivation had changed.

“For the first time, I saw open water where previously there had been ice. By 2004, open water meant it was no longer possible to cross from the North Pole to Russia. I was one of the last to do so”

Ben was witnessing more than melting ice. Plastic rubbish in the pack ice and plastic fuelled pollution was rife. He recalls his team melting snow for drinking water in Antarctica “which should have been the purest water”. However tests by the University of Canterbury in New Zealand revealed Antarctic snow was packed full of microplastics. This type of pollution had been carried over 1,000 km.

“For a while, I was raising awareness around what I had seen. And that seemed good, but now I had to maximise my own personal impact. I also had to recognise my own expeditions had left a carbon footprint”.

Ben’s motivation flipped to direct action “to protect the environment I loved”. Helping to accelerate innovation seemed the most rapid solution to the problems he was seeing.

Ben started investing in planet-positive startups at seed and pre-seed

stages.. He was led by his previous experiences - eager to find founders who were wired like him. “I am not used to wading through balance sheets..... but at that early startup stage, the numbers are purely forecasts so the only thing you can assess is the founding team. How strong is their purpose? How resilient? How motivated? How open to flexibility and learning. Recognising these skills is where I’m able to deploy my best work”.

Ben has invested in seven startups to date including Gentian - AI precision monitoring to optimise biodiversity and General Galactic who are developing renewable synthetic fuels.

“I wanted to invest in a range of startups,” he explains. “I recognise that ‘software as a solution’ has been singularly popular with climate technology investors but I also know we’re not going to code ourselves out of the challenges we face”.

I am an optimist - I always have been” he says. “Human ingenuity got us in this mess but it can also get us out. That’s why I’m looking forward to joining such a diverse community at Blue Earth Summit. Whether startups or policy makers, we have to move as a species (who all share the same planet) to ways of living and consuming that are regenerative”.

For more information about Ben Saunders and other headline speakers at Blue Earth Summit, visit [Blue Earth Summit](#).



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