

A walk in the park



The spirit of Adrien de Gerlache is alive and well. On January 15, 2006, a team of four Belgians and two Canadians will attempt to cross Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario... on snowshoes.

Unsurprisingly, this method of winter crossing has never been done before – but why do it at all?

Well, apart from the adventure, the team are raising funds for two charities, SOS Children's Villages Canada and SOS Kinderdorpen/Villages d'Enfants Belgium.

"I was working on another project for SOS Kinderdorpen," says Bert Poffe, a 36-year-old communications specialist from Leuven. "It took a lot of work, and I was trying to think of something I could do after it to wind down."

A winter expedition might not be everybody's first thought, but Poffe is an outdoors nut. He's been to Canada several times, where he met Roy Perritt, a 43-year-old former paratrooper who works as a guide, ranger and trapper.

Perritt will lead Poffe, Wilfried Van Gompel, Dirk Michiels, Ludovic François and fellow Canadian ranger Dan Wilmore across the 7,725-square-kilometre park, which is situated along a landform of ancient granite and gneiss moulded by glaciers. The team's main challenge during the three-week trek will be the deep soft snow, which will require trails to be forged ahead of their toboggan. Frostbite and snow-blindness will be constant threats. The crossing will be in the tradition of the Algonquin First Nation people who first inhabited the region: all six men will live in one tent, with one gas lantern and one stove. For more information – and to sponsor the trip – see www.wintercrossing.com.