

# FIELDS OF DREAMS

Jamaican-born, London-raised adventurer **DWAYNE FIELDS** escaped the estates of Hackney to embark on expeditions to both poles. His message: if I can do it, anyone can

WORDS CHARLIE ALLENBY

Click. Dwayne Fields was staring down the barrel of a gun, but he hadn't heard a bang or felt a bullet rip through his body. After confronting a gang from a rival north-east London estate who'd stolen his moped, the situation had become heated, putting Fields, then 21, in the firing line.

Click. "I've never heard of bullets misfiring more than once," says Fields, now 40. "On the 10-minute walk home, I stopped three or four times and lifted my shirt. I could feel tension in certain parts of my chest, but it was all in my head."

The incident was a culmination of an inner-city childhood that had become a feat of endurance. Since moving from Jamaica at the age of six to live with his mum, Fields had suppressed his love of nature and exploration to blend in with his peers. He was regularly robbed by students from other schools – "I learnt very early on to put my money in my sock" – and was stabbed in his late teens merely for running from confrontation. But the attempted shooting marked a turning point: "That's when I revisited the person I was as a kid."

In 2010, Fields became the first Black Briton to trek to the North Pole, which led to further adventures. Now a fully-fledged explorer, he has traversed central America's jungles, circumnavigated Jamaica and, most recently, recreated the expeditions of Shackleton and Scott in Antarctica. But rather than planting flags, his goal is to sow seeds, inspiring young people of all backgrounds to follow a different life path via nature.

**THE RED BULLETIN: When did you first fall in love with nature?**

**DWAYNE FIELDS:** I grew up in rural Jamaica with my great-grandma, and

I loved climbing trees. I'd always have a different animal with me: a bird in my pocket and a lizard in my hand.

**Relocating to London must have been a shock to the system...**

I felt isolated. My accent was different [from everyone else's]. Other kids didn't like messing with bugs. And my mum, who I'd met maybe two or three times up until this point, didn't like nature. My brain was saying, "Don't you want to go and explore?" but I just sat on benches in the estate, hour after hour.

**What broke the habit?**

[After being shot at] I got texts planting the seed of revenge. If I did that, I'd be that same kid going left when I wanted to go right. I thought, "You like the outdoors, but you need to do it on a mature level – something that'll inspire others." A few months later, a friend of mine, Etem Celebi, was shot and killed metres from where the guy pulled the gun on me. I thought, "You need to do something." I saw Ben Fogle and James Cracknell on TV [looking for a third team member for] their South Pole adventure. I applied six weeks too late – selections had already started – but then I got a message asking if I'd consider going to the North Pole.

**Did you ever doubt yourself?**

Every single day. I was laughed at while hauling tyres in Hackney Marshes to train for pulling a sled, so I decided to do it in Clissold Park [in Stoke Newington] late at night because there was less chance of being ridiculed. In the end I used some of my student loan, plus another loan and my wages from a part-time job, to raise the £23,000 needed. When fundraising, people would say, "Why don't you just walk around Hackney?" or, "Black people don't do that," so I stopped asking. It got

hard explaining that sometimes you need to be an example. If you want to tell the kind of kids I'd been hanging around with that "there's a better way", [you need] something to peg it to.

**How was that first expedition?**

There were days when it was mentally tough and felt physically impossible. But other days I was so much in my element and it felt like I was back on my path.


**And in January this year you went to Antarctica to relive the heroic age of polar exploration, using period kit...**

[That was] one of the most epic expeditions I've been on. I was terrified to give up [mod cons] to go into the unknown, but the kit was actually really good. There were days when it was minus 40 and you'd wish for a down jacket, but we put on our boiled wool outers and made it through. My biggest complaint was the reindeer sleeping bags – we'd wake up covered in hairs and be plucking them out from every crevice.

**What's next?**

My goal is to inspire people: "That guy looks and sounds like me. If he could do it, I can do it." I also want to grow the WeTwo Foundation [a charity co-founded by Fields that takes underprivileged young people on expeditions around the world]. Many of these young people have never left the city. The world would be a much more sustainable place if we could get more people to fall in love with the natural world. The marvel's out there.

**Watch *Endurance: Race to the Pole* on Channel 5 and My5; Dwayne Fields will be speaking at the Kendal Mountain Festival on November 18; [dwayne-fields.com](http://dwayne-fields.com)**

A man dressed in historical Antarctic expedition gear stands in a snowy landscape under a clear blue sky. He wears a white knit beanie, a white knit scarf, and large, round, orange-rimmed goggles. He is wearing a dark blue, textured wool sweater over a white shirt, a brown leather belt with a large buckle, and light-colored trousers. He is holding a wooden ice pick with a white, fuzzy, cylindrical cover on its handle. The background is a vast, flat, white snowfield.

**"People would say  
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around Hackney?'"**

Frozen in time: Dwayne Fields  
channels Shackleton – gear and  
all – on his Antarctica trip