

# HK yachtsman plans voyage via perilous Northwest Passage

**Barclay Crawford**

In a few months, a yachtsman will swap the sweltering humidity of a Hong Kong summer for the icy seas at the top of the world.

Cameron Dueck, a Hong Kong-based journalist and avid sailor, will board his 40-foot sailing yacht Silent Sound in June in Esquimalt Harbour near Vancouver and attempt to take her through the fabled Northwest Passage at the top of Canada.

To make this perilous, four-month journey, he has spent all his savings, remortgaged a property in Canada, and quit his job at a time when most people would be determined to hold one at all costs.

Only 35 pleasure boats had ever completed the trip, Dueck said. In winter, the passage was solid impassable ice, with open water appearing only briefly in summer.

The aim of the trip, he said, was not just adventure, although that was admittedly a part, but to see firsthand the damage being wrought by climate change on the Arctic and the Inuit people who live there.

"As a reporter, that's also a big part of the challenge, to tell the tale as well as I can," he said.

The former *South China Morning Post* business reporter, who is now assistant editor at the *Financial Times'* Hong Kong bureau, plans to write a book about what he finds and film a documentary of his journey through the famous passage.

"When I was working at the *Post*, I was writing stories about the environment and about global warming, but it's hard to visualise how it is actually affecting people and their lives," he said.

"There are few places where you can find climate change really happening and not just in scientific studies, numbers and theory.

"This [the Arctic] is clearly a place where climate change is really affecting people in discernible ways, more so than places like Hong Kong."

The idea of the expedition took seed in 2004, when Dueck left a job in Singapore to sail from Asia to the Caribbean. He said he realised he wanted to do another big sailing trip but one with more purpose.

The Northwest Passage captured his imagination. The "North", as it is



Cameron Dueck plans to sail the Northwest Passage on his yacht Silent Sound. Photos: Cameron Dueck



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known in Canada, conjured images and tales of romance and history, and held an important place in the nation's psyche, history and culture, Dueck said. But none captured the "climate change issue and the romance of the place".

The crew comprises Singapore-based Elaine Chua, Asia's top female solo ocean racer as first mate, and Germany-based Tobias Neuberger, who will also be expedition doctor.

But another is needed. "We're looking for a filmmaker, but if we can



find someone else that brings something unique to the boat, we'd consider it," Dueck said.

The expedition is also looking for corporate sponsorship.

More details are available at [www.openpassageexpedition.com](http://www.openpassageexpedition.com).

# Officials stymied by landowner in efforts to clear illegal dump

**Daniel Sin**

Three weeks after the *Sunday Morning Post* reported on the dumping of construction waste near Tai Lam Country Park, the government appears to have hit a roadblock in its attempts to clear up the mess or move against the perpetrators.

The dumping has turned a once-lush piece of land – part of which is government property – in Lui Kung Tin in Pat Heung, Yuen Long, into a barren wasteland.

Residents of Lui Kung Tin, a small village with around 200 inhabitants, had complained to the government several times, but apart from putting up warnings, nothing was done. Government notices requiring the removal of the waste by December 4 stand like scarecrows amid the piles of rocks, concrete and other construction debris.

Five days after the *Post* report on January 25, the Lands Department set up a guard post, the purpose of which it said was to "deter further occupation". It said it had not been able to find out who was responsible for the dumping.

The department said it was unable to remove the waste from the public land because the site was surrounded by private land on three sides. While an access road for emergency services goes along one side of the public land, a steep, shrubby slope separates it from the plot.

The department says that despite repeated attempts, it has not been able to gain permission from the owner of the private land, Sun Hon Investment and Finance Limited, for access to clear the dump.

"The Yuen Long District Office has not heard from the lot owner so far. We are liaising with the Planning Department and the Environmental Protection Department to contact the lot owner for consent to gain access," said a spokeswoman for the Lands Department. She did not explain why it was taking so long. Meanwhile, the Environmental



Part of the once-lush site near the Tai Lam Country Park which has been used as a dump for construction waste. Photo: Ricky Cheung

**Nobody seems to care or [bother to] tidy up the mess. People just think it is not their responsibility and would not take the initiative to protect the environment**

**Leonora Sullivan, resident of Lui Kung Tin**

Protection Department said it was "still investigating the possible violation of the Waste Disposal Ordinance with respect to landfilling of government land".

But past records show few successful prosecutions. There were 2,732 complaints of fly tipping last year, but only 16 convictions. Thirty-

five fixed-penalty tickets were issued in the same period.

The Planning Department said that Sun Hon Investment and Finance – which was believed to have consented to the dumping on its portion on the site – was in breach of the Town Planning Ordinance.

It said Sun Hon Investment, along with others, had not responded to the government's enforcement notice which expired on September 22 and that it was "assessing the case and would instigate prosecution proceedings... as appropriate".

Leonora Sullivan, who lives in Lui Kung Tin and has seen the field of flowers turned into a wasteland, was frustrated with the lack of progress.

"Nobody seems to care or [bother to] tidy up the mess. People just think it is not their responsibility and would not take the initiative to protect the environment," she said.

Her six-year-old daughter Samantha summed it up neatly: "Look at that. It's so bad for the environment... We will all be dead before anything can grow there again."

photo in site

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