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“Arctic Circle to Africa” triathlon a journey of triumph over tragedy

Public invited to support, follow the progress on happyvalley.com

State College, PA, March 30, 2026 – This summer, Penn State University international student and Ph.D. candidate Matthew Hollingham will test the limits of human endurance by undertaking a personal journey that will span 61 continuous days, 3,500 miles and 10 countries while covering almost the full length of continental Europe. The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) will be with him every step of the way, sponsoring the incredible undertaking and giving the public an opportunity to support and follow his progress.

Far more than an athletic achievement, Hollingham is undertaking the “Arctic Circle to Africa” triathlon in memory of his fiancé, Lovisa, a fellow international student from Sweden who died in a tragic accident in State College, PA in 2023. In honoring her life, he hopes to raise funds locally for the Centre County Youth Services Bureau and the international charity Save the Children.

Beginning on May 31 and concluding on July 30, the native of Wheathampstead, England will endure:

- 3.8km (2.36 miles) extreme cold water swim across the Arctic Circle
- 37 back-to-back marathons for 970 miles
- 2,580-mile cycle (112 miles a day), reaching North Africa

It is a remarkable undertaking rooted in love, remembrance and gratitude for the outpouring of kindness Hollingham received from the Happy Valley, PA community and beyond following Lovisa's death.

"This is a story of personal triumph over tragedy, of testing the limits of human endurance out of respect for a loved one and of recognizing the incredible and heartwarming kindness Matthew received during his lowest point," said HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith. "The decision to sponsor the endeavor came from wanting Centre County to be seen as more than the training ground for Matthew as he prepares for this monumental challenge. As he proudly wears the Happy Valley logo, we want Matthew and the world to know that this is a special community where something good and inspiring grew from a very difficult time. We are privileged to be part of what he is attempting to accomplish."

Hollingham expressed gratitude for the HVAB partnership.

"The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau has been nothing but excellent to work with, and this undertaking would not happen without them," Hollingham said. "Admittedly, it is such a bizarre ask from their perspective – a British Ph.D. student walks through their doors and asks for money to fund raise. Instead of saying, 'who are you, go away,' they said, 'yes, how can we help?'"

Part of that help is the creation of a special landing page – www.happyvalley.com/arctic-to-africa – so that the public can follow Matthew's journey and contribute to his chosen charities. A map will be added to the page to track his progress. One mile along the route will be dedicated to individuals donating \$1,000 or more to either charity.

In addition, the page will eventually contain a gallery of photos that Matthew takes in real time.

The HVAB's sponsorship will also enable a team to document Hollingham's feat and support the creation of a documentary to be shown during the 2026 Centre Film Festival.

"We encourage the community to follow and share his journey beginning on May 31," Smith said, noting that The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau is planning a sendoff reception for Hollingham in mid-May.

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Read more about Matthew and Lovisa's story

The March/April issue of [The PennStater Magazine](#) takes an in-depth look at how Lovisa's life and tragic death inspired Hollingham's upcoming endurance journey.