

Both men are experienced adventurers. Mr Brooks, a property developer from London, has taken part in expeditions to 70 countries in 15 years. He has trekked solo to Everest base camp and walked barefoot for three days in the Himalayas. He has negotiated the white water rapids of the Zambezi river by kayak and survived a charge by a silver back gorilla in the Congo. He is also a qualified mechanical engineer and pilot.

He and his wife spent their honeymoon flying the helicopter from Alaska to Chile. The 16,000-mile trip took three months.

Mr Smith, also from London, claims to have been flying since the age of five. He has twice flown a helicopter around the globe and won the world freestyle helicopter flying championship.

Despite their experience, it is not the first time they have hit the headlines for the wrong reasons.

In April, Mr Brooks and another explorer, Graham Stratford, were poised to become the first to complete a crossing of the 56-mile wide frozen Bering Strait between the US and Russia in an amphibious vehicle, Snowbird VI, which could carve its way through ice floes and float in the water in between.

But they were forced to call a halt after the Russian authorities told them they would scramble military helicopters to lift them off the ice if they crossed the border.

Ironically, one of the aims of the expedition, for which Mr Smith provided air back-up, was to demonstrate how good relations between east and west had become.

The wisdom of the team's latest adventure was questioned by, among others, Günter Endres, editor of *Jane's Helicopter Markets and Systems*, who said: 'I'm surprised they used the R44. I wouldn't use a helicopter like that to go so far over the sea. It sounds as if they were pushing it to the maximum.'

A spokesman for the pair said it was not known what had gone wrong. The flying conditions had been 'excellent'.

The Ministry of Defence said the taxpayer would pick up the bill, as was normal in rescues in the UK and abroad. The spokesperson said it was 'highly unlikely' it would recover any of the money.

Last night the men were on their way to the Chilean naval base Eduardo Frei, where HMS Endurance was to pick them up. Ms Vestey said: 'They have been checked and appear to be well. I don't know what will happen to them once they have been picked up by HMS Endurance – they'll probably have their bottoms kicked and be sent home the long way.'

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

On the surface, this may appear to be an information text, as the article explains what happened to the two men and how they were rescued. However, the writer also takes a strongly critical stance on what he sees as irresponsible behaviour on the part of the two explorers. The key to understanding the article is in recognising how the writer makes his opinions clear.