

A FORMER ROYAL MARINE, WINTER OLYMPIAN AND NOW A SPORTS BROADCASTER, PATRICK WINTERTON HAS LED A VARIED LIFE. MOST RECENTLY HE HAS BECOME KNOWN FOR A SERIES OF AUDACIOUS, SELF-FILMED SEA KAYAKING EXPEDITIONS AROUND THE SCOTTISH ISLANDS AND BEYOND

# Patrick Winterton

## Expedition sea kayaker, 47, Stirling

**M**y Dad was in the Forces and into adventure training. One posting was to a training centre on the south coast of Norway, so as a kid I had access to a toy cupboard the size of an aircraft hangar. I was given the freedom to get into everything.

**Dad and his mates were big on expeditions.** Some of my earliest memories are of them having maps out on the table months before a trip and a kit-list halfway down the kitchen wall. The enthusiasm was infectious.

**I learnt alpine skiing young,** but then in Norway you pick up cross-country because it's a common mode of transport for six months of the year.

**The Forces offered fantastic opportunities for sport.** I opted for cross-country skiing, although it was probably the wrong choice. Unless you have the heart and lungs of a horse, you will never reach the top level.

**I was in the Royal Marines team but also skied for Great Britain.** It was a great life, but very shallow. The days are split into thirds: eating, sleeping and skiing. Trying to do anything else such as study or work only had a detrimental effect on performance.

**I went to the Calgary Winter Olympics in 1988.** It was a fantastic occasion, but my best memories are of races where I had a realistic chance of getting into the top three. That wasn't the case in Calgary.

**Skiing led to the media work.** Initially, presenting was just a nerve-wracking, challenge, but there comes a stage when you just relax and be yourself.

**Cross-country skiing stands you in good stead for physical challenge.** Constantly inflicting pain gives you a good idea of how far the body can be pushed.

**The paddling began in Norway** where I would go out alone as a kid. When I moved to Scotland, I got a call from someone who was selling his old stock of boats. I bought the lot and every weekend when the weather was fine, groups of us would take off, exploring the west coast.

**The first really big step** was when a mate mentioned St Kilda. Suddenly it was about commitment, paddling to something you couldn't see.

**On the first St Kilda trip, we left in a rush.** When we got to Uist, I realised that I had picked up a calculator rather than my GPS. We ended up relying on guillemots and razorbills to guide us as they straight-lined it from the islands to their feeding grounds.

**After 11 hours of paddling,** we arrived in Village Bay [on St Kilda] at the same time as a big yacht. The skipper had brought out champagne to celebrate getting there. Our arrival in kayaks, white as sheets and covered in vomit after being ill most of the way, probably spoiled their moment.

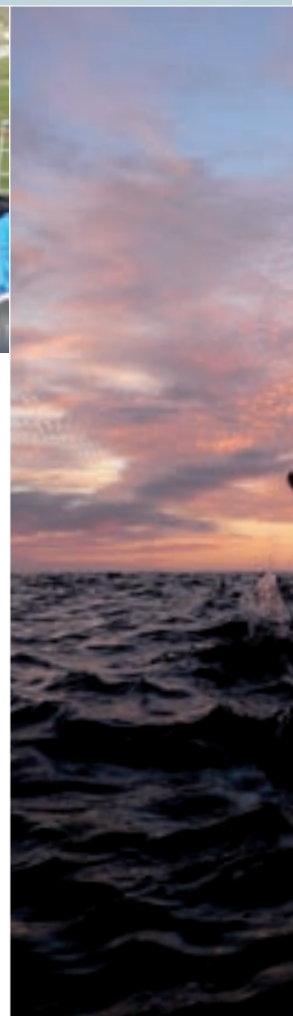


**I realised then that going to an extraordinary place is only extraordinary if you have to work to get there.**

**In 2006, I spent six weeks paddling solo** from Glasgow to Muckle Flugga in Shetland, via St Kilda. There are paddlers that have done far more than me, but everything seemed to be about the record time around this or that. With a route designed around Scotland's most dramatic places, I wanted to stop and see things.

**Long-term, my plan was to paddle to the Faroes one day.** I tried last summer, following the route of Irish monks from West Wales [see map above], but injured my back in Oban. I slipped when getting out of the boat and landed on a rock.

**After a month of rehab,** I teamed up with paddling partner Mick Berwick to





Creature comforts: improvised nose clips (far left); sunset paddling (below left); catching up on sleep while waiting for the tide (left); filming off Mingulay, Western Isles (above)

attempt the crossing from North Rhona. However, a combination of bad luck and poor decisions put us in a dangerous position off Cape Wrath. We had to bury our pride and call out the RNLI.

**We start again in June, this time raising funds for the RNLI.** I will paddle from Oban to join Mick at the Butt of Lewis. Then it's 55 miles to North Rhona and another 185 miles to the Faroes. The final leg will take three days and involve at least two nights out at sea.

**The big problem will be staying warm.** As part of our training, we will do a non-stop trip around Skye that will take two days and one night. If we can't do that, we won't go.

**Doing a big crossing,** especially around Scotland, is a bit like going into space. You don't aim where you are going, you aim for somewhere else and

predict where the current and winds will take you.

**I don't do the really hard training any more.** Physically, you are not aiming at optimal fitness for a race, which is what I did for years. It's about doing enough to make sure you don't get injured, but not so much that you dampen your enthusiasm. It's much more pleasant.

**My first film** [*Scottish Extremities*, about the Muckle Flugga trip], went down well but happened by accident. I didn't think about making a film for other people to see until I saw the tapes. I just wanted to capture anything unusual that happened along the way.

**I feel passionate** that filming should be genuine. I want an adventure to be an adventure and not made up. A lot of stuff today is over-dramatised.

**I saw my first minke whale** when paddling to Colonsay. It just popped up, close enough to smell its breath. My ambition is to paddle with orcas, although that would be a very different feeling.

**Being in the middle of a gannet feed** is unbelievable. In one tidal race off Islay, a gannet hit the water close to me and came up dead. I'm not sure what it hit down there.

**Paddling allows access** to places that you just can't reach in a boat. It also means you can camp in luxury. You can include a duvet, wine and books if you like.

**My whole attitude** towards the outdoors has changed. Fifteen years ago, it would have been about being the quickest. Now it's about people, places, wildlife and filming. ■

*Patrick Winterton gives regular presentations and film shows, details of which are available on his website.*

*For this summer's expedition to the Faroe Islands, Patrick will be raising funds for the RNLI. For details of the trip and how to donate, visit [www.patrickwinterton.com](http://www.patrickwinterton.com)*

PHOTOGRAPHY: PATRICK WINTERTON