

Vancouver Two-fer

Two missions, one island, 700 nautical miles

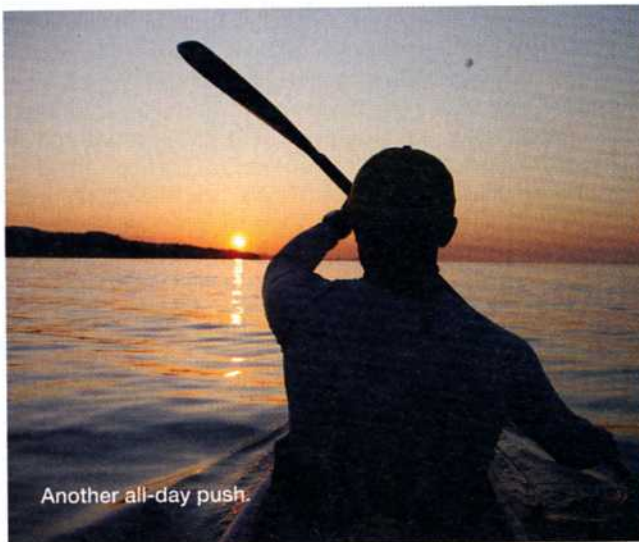
> WHEN HE MET EXPEDITION PARTNER

Jeff Norville for the first time, Kierron Tastagh was wearing a helmet with a motorcycle-style visor, a knife strapped to his forearm, and a float bag blown up over his paddle—in other words, he looked ridiculous.

“Jeff was horrified,” Tastagh says of the gag, “but he laughed about it afterwards.” Tastagh, a 28-year-old kayak instructor from the UK’s Isle of Man, and Norville, a 33-year-old geologist from Portland, Oregon, had only met on the internet. And within hours, the unlikely duo would climb into a hot-pink double kayak and began an extraordinary mission: A 700-mile speed run around British Columbia’s rugged Vancouver Island, which includes some of North America’s most-exposed coastline. The expedition would raise money for breast cancer research and for their mutual friend Ginni Callahan, who is fighting the disease.

American Leon Sommé completed the route solo in 28 days in 1998; Tastagh and Norville planned to finish in half that time. They dodged tree-climbing bears and massive log-towing barges, bucked relentless gale force winds, and, in the final few days, suffered a broken skeg. They lashed a spare paddle blade to the stern—“It was like dragging a drogue,” Norville says—and finished May 29 after 19 days.

None of that deterred Kamloops, B.C.-based marathon kayaker Joe O’Blenis, 41, who heard about their expedition and decided to make his own attempt on Sommé’s record. “It’s not a race. That would be in poor taste. It’s a friendly thing,” he says. While Team Pink sought every modern advantage,



Another all-day push.

including wing paddles and a carbon-Kevlar double kayak, O’Blenis chose to paddle solo with a Greenland stick. Most paddlers think the slender Inuit paddles are much slower than the longer, wider Euro blades—an impression O’Blenis is determined to prove mistaken. “It has comparable speed, but the real advantage is that it puts less impact on the body and on your joints. For long hours and long distance, the Greenland paddle pays off.”



TEAM PINK



TEAM GREENLAND

CRAFT	22-foot-long pink Sea Kayaking UK Triton double kayak	17-foot-long Sea Kayaking UK Greenlander Pro
GOAL	700 nautical miles in 14 days	700 nautical miles in 21 days
STARTING POINT	Orcas Island	Nanaimo
CRUCIAL SUPPLIES	Lightweight tent, satellite phone, electrolyte tablets	Paperback books, VHF marine radio, dehydrated meals
CAUSE	Breast cancer research and the medical expenses of their friend Ginni Callahan	To beat Somme’s record and prove the effectiveness of Greenland paddles
WHY IT WAS WORTH IT	“We landed in a cove and took a taxi—in all of our paddling gear—about 15 minutes to a shop that was just about to close. We bought pastries and cooked them in the microwave. Nothing has ever tasted so good.”	“I could have spent three weeks paddling around somewhere, looking at the scenery. Or I could do something silly like try to break a world record. I like doing things that are out of the box—that’s more my style.”