

A Boy's Own Adventure

Paddling
round
Tasmania
with Pete Goss



▲ Above: heading for Port Arthur in heavy conditions. It got quite alarming at one point. Main picture: the sail was a great aid to paddling. Our record was 11 knots

From Vendée Globe racing to sailing to Australia in a Mounts Bay lugger, Pete Goss loves an adventure. Now he's on a kayak trip around Tasmania – and he's loving it

I always say I don't have a career, I have a series of daft ideas. For once, though, the idea wasn't mine. My good friend Andy Warrender was about to take early retirement and I asked what he was going to with all his energy. He is a successful businessman who joined me on an expedition to the North Pole and a RIB trip from Lerwick to Norway and up above the Arctic Circle. Andy had been a top sea kayaker in his early days and his dream was to kayak round Tasmania, but he needed a partner. I love anything that floats, am up for a challenge and have always fancied a crack at sea kayaking. There is something lovely about a sea kayak, its efficiency, obvious sea keeping ability and with its DNA harking back to the Inuit, it just looks right. The trip was on.

Tasmania has it all. It is shaped like an inverted pyramid and each side is completely different from the others. Its climate is varied for it hangs under the continent so the top of it feels like Australia and yet the bottom of it is in the Southern Ocean. You can have three seasons in a day on any part of its 1,500km coast. This would be a serious two-month expedition.

Both wiser for being in our fifties we scoped out the trip, our motivation and aspirations such that we would blend them into a harmonious unit. We decided on separate two man tents for space, back-up and privacy. Decisions would be joint, but if either of us was unhappy with conditions then we would run with that. We would push, but

► Right: we carried two small tents for privacy and camped mostly just behind the beach

wanted to have time for safety and exploration. I wanted to take sails for when the conditions allowed.

As a complete novice I thought we should start with a paddle in Cornwall so I could have a taster and Andy could size up my ability. It sold it to me. My paddling style, learnt from YouTube, and ease in the kayak gave Andy heart. As with any expedition, it all comes down to equipment, training and knowledge. Andy's depth of knowledge was essential. Gore-Tex supported us with bespoke equipment.

We started to paddle

We shipped the kayaks ahead to Melbourne, flew in on 28 December, unpacked them, bought flares, gas, etc, and boarded the overnight ferry. Watching the sun rise over the mountains of Tasmania and our new adventure was a rare thrill. All that work had paid off and it was with a degree of unreality that we started to paddle. Jet lag be damned.

I have many memories of the trip; Robbins Passage was a highlight. The night before we had camped in a penguin colony. Tip of the day: if



All photos: Pete Goss

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PETE GOSS



A former Royal Marine, Pete Goss MBE is probably best known to yachtsmen the world over for his heroic rescue of fellow competitor Raphael Dinelli in the 1996/97 Vendée Globe.

He subsequently put his energies into the ill-fated innovative catamaran *Team Phillips* designed for The Race, but which was lost in a storm in the Atlantic.

Since then he has become involved in activities as diverse as travelling by RIB to the Arctic Circle and building a 32ft lugger, a replica of the original *Mystery*, and sailing her to Australia with his youngest son.

He writes, gives inspirational talks and looks around for the next big adventure.



My favourite part was without doubt the south-west coast; it was vibrant. The pounding Southern Ocean called for a heightened state to counter the sense of vulnerability as we dragged our way south, hand over hand in our tiny craft. This, coupled with the fact that it is truly wild, did it for me.

One of our most exciting days was when we rounded Low Rocky Point in rough seas. The height of the waves meant that it was easy to lose sight of each other and we tightened what I called our ‘circle of risk’ to a couple of boat lengths. It was tough, dangerous and fun as we rounded the headland and made for the Giblin River. It would become a 70km day.

Committed, by the conditions, we had three hours to consider what was obviously going to be a challenging landing. The wind rose, the swell built and we were very conscious of Nature corralling us into a landing we didn’t fancy. As in a funnel, we were inextricably drawn to the narrow and shallow mouth of the Giblin River.

Pile of roaring water

Andy was just ahead of me at the entrance when a huge wave came out of nowhere, lifted me up like an elevator before rolling on and engulfing Andy as it broke. All I could see was the final foot of his kayak as it stood on end and then there was just a pile of roaring water.

I frantically back paddled as a set of massive waves rushed in for the kill. If I could get beyond their break line I would be OK. I made the first wave and accelerating up it I glanced forward to see Andy’s head pop up. There was no sign of his kayak. I glanced back and there was that moment of truth when you know you are absolutely stuffed.

With no time to worry I was conscious of a vertical wall engulfing the back of the boat and the next thing I was standing on my rudder pedals looking down the face of a huge breaker. It was a perfect pitchpole, something that wasn’t covered on the YouTube lessons!

A huge roar followed and I lost

▲ Above: rounding Cape Raoul in heavy weather

Left: a perfect campsite on the south coast

you want a good sleep stay away from penguins. I had a pair just outside my tent that rowed all night, they squawked, screamed and funniest of all they rapidly stamped their feet, which, being webbed, sounded like a slapping machine gun.

A long open crossing opened up Robbins Passage where we hoisted the sails for the first time and slipped into a magical world. The sun refracted through wavelets illuminating the white sandy bottom, only feet below. Nature’s disco lights played on the seabed, matched by seaweed swaying in the tide. Crabs danced a six-legged tango and best of all big stingray flurried away from our shadow. On the surface huge flocks of black swans took off, their wings sounding like the distant crackle of firecrackers as they beat the water, all watched with regal superiority by huge pelicans.

Crunch. We had run out of water and had to walk with the kayaks in tow looking for a way through the sand bars, paddling where we could. There was a real sense of urgency in the air for if we didn’t make it through we would have been stranded for 12 hours with sand as far as the eye could see. To say it was fun would be an understatement – we loved it.

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▲ Above: we didn't generally camp on the beach as the sand got in everything, but we made an exception here on the east coast. We kept an eye on the bush fire smoke, though

■ I lay there thinking how lucky we were to be doing this. I could see the outline of trees above me, the sea was whispering on the beach and the night was alive with sounds ■

all bearings as the water pulled me in every direction. Even under water it was noisy. I was thrown out of the boat, but managed to grab the kayak as we emerged from the maelstrom.

As ever the sun was still up and between waves all was well with the world. I had to laugh for at some level this was really good fun. I struggled to the front of the kayak, grabbed a handful of deck lines, took a deep breath and ducked under the next breaker. I nearly lost my grip, but there was no way I was going to be separated from the kayak. My hand burnt as I felt myself dragged along. Suddenly the water went very warm as we were swept into the river. Two legs, two arms and sense of humour intact – it could well have been a lot worse.

Sense of peace

We regrouped on the beach, had a quick cuppa from the flask, and paddled up the river to look for a campsite. It was stunning – such a contrast to go from wild seas to a tranquil river. The sense of peace was all pervading.

When the swell eased we headed on south. The coastline was breathtaking as we opened up Port Davey, a huge inland harbour. We could have spent weeks exploring, but our sights were on South West Cape, the 'Cape Horn' of our trip. And it lived up to its reputation. Suddenly we were caught in the glow of a vivid day, the sea changing from dull grey to a lovely deep blue. The headland revealed its rugged self, contrails twisting away as the sea air condensed above its lofty pinnacles. Awesome, vivid, wild and with the capacity to make your heart and soul soar – yes, I felt acutely alive that day.

Another of the many moods and facets of Tasmania was captured by Wineglass Bay. I was woken up by the wildlife at 0200 and lay there thinking how lucky we were to be doing this. Thanks to the moon and clear sky I could see the outline of the trees above me, the sea was whispering on the beach not yards away and the night was alive with sounds.

I unzipped the tent to a stunning view. The mountains across the bay came to life as the sun rose. A bright beach and turquoise sea lay at my feet. We took a day off, celebrated with a slap-up meal, bottle of wine and pancakes before getting back to the business of paddling round Tasmania.

The whole trip took us 50 days, 34 of them on the water. During that time we covered 1,430km and we reckon it took 750,000 paddle strokes each to get round. We used accommodation to have a rest, wash and stock up every now and then. We camped in the scrub just above the beach.

The warmth of Tasmanians is legendary and wherever we landed we were embraced with generosity. A bikini-clad lady met us with cold beers on one landing; we were treated to a Sunday roast on another; and attended a couple's golden wedding anniversary. Tasmania has a big heart.

From a sailor's perspective I spent the entire trip thinking what an amazing place it would be to cruise. There are lots of safe havens and if you want wilderness there is Port Davey, where the only access is by boat or seaplane. Otherwise the east coast is stunning with an endless number of perfect anchorages. If a yacht is too big and a kayak too small then why not take something like a BayRaider by Swallow Boats?

PLANNING FOR A VOYAGE BY KAYAK



KAYAKS

For personal preference and size difference Andy had an 18ft Nordkapp while I had a carbon and Kevlar C-TREK18 by Kirton Kayaks. It weighs 20kg, is 566cm long, 58cm wide and has a payload of 180kg.

You sit very low to the water and thus have a close relationship with it and wildlife isn't intimidated at all. There are three watertight compartments and the cockpit is kept watertight with a spray deck. Although a production boat, mine was made with some extra laminate for this trip.

SAILING

I spent a lot of time developing the sails with Tom Gall and Paul Larsen. I was after light-wind performance and the ability to reef. We steered with our feet and used the paddle as an outrigger by skimming it across the water. It's amazing how much righting moment this provides for little drag.

We could sail with the wind just forward of the beam, but it really came into its own further aft. It was very much an aid to paddling and was a blast. Our record was 11 knots!

ELECTRONICS

I can't speak highly enough of a spot tracker. It is small, runs on AAA batteries and sends preset messages so if ever we hit the beach I could say we were OK. The package includes your own web page



although on my site we have our own system by www.webexpeditions.net, who are excellent

I used an iPad for blogs and weather and protected it with a waterproof Lifedge case – fantastic.

For charging all equipment in the bush I used a www.newtrent.com external battery charger. Small, light and robust.

My camera was a Panasonic LUMIX dmc-ft3 and I can't speak highly enough of it. I kept it on deck for two months bashing about and it never let me down.

PERSONAL GEAR

Gore-Tex provided us with bespoke drysuits by Kokatat and they were amazing. We lived in them and they made the biggest contribution to comfort and safety. We were very exposed at times and they were a great source of confidence. I didn't once get a rash of any kind and that for me is amazing given that we were on the water for two months. Thermals were Musto Active Base Layer.

I trialled a Spinlock Deckvest Lite, which was as good as I expected it to be: light, comfortable and didn't cover the Gore-Tex suit like a normal paddle vest and so allowed breathability.

Everyone warned us about snakes, bugs, waves and sharks, but the greatest risk was sunburn. We used Foreign Legion-style Tilly Hats. I had not used this style before and it was fantastic.

WEATHER

Tasmania has great mobile coverage so we could pull down weather forecasts to our iPads. You need to be careful though for the weather can change very

quickly and I kept a careful eye on my watch barometer and the clouds.

We also watched the swell forecast – they didn't necessarily marry up with the weather. Once we landed in good conditions and two hours later a massive swell was crashing in, seemingly out of the blue. It was the period as much as the height that was important. A small wave with a long period could produce big waves on the beach.

When we were beyond mobile coverage Andy's wife would text the forecast to us via satphone.

NAVIGATION

Navigation was hands-on with waterproof map cases strapped to the deck. We used Ordnance Survey maps, which had more relevant information. Safe havens were marked on the maps with their landing characteristics. A handheld GPS gave us course and distance to preset waypoints.

Interestingly the tides seem to have a mind of their own, particularly on the south-west coast. The tide doesn't always follow the predictions.

ROUTINE

When pushing it we would get up at 0500 to be paddling by 0700. Breakfast was baked beans and toast; we would have a bar of chocolate every two hours throughout the day. Lunch was half a packet of crackers, cheese and a piece of fruit. Supper was a big pasta meal with meat.

If conditions allowed we would come ashore for the odd break. We could be in the kayak for up to ten hours. At times we would be up to 7km offshore to avoid swell breaking over hidden reefs, seemingly at random – very frightening.

We could keep up this routine up for six days before feeling in need of a day's rest. We lost a lot of weight, but felt fit and as the trip went on could seemingly paddle forever provided we kept eating.

STORES

We could carry all our kit and 12 days' food and gas. We drank from streams, which at times were brackish and dark with tannin. It was imperative that we kept a close eye on dehydration. We had little wood-burning stoves to supplement our gas.

For more details see www.petegoss.com

