



A drummer paddling to his own beat.

PHOTO: JEFF FOLMSBEE

Marcus Demuth

THIS EXPEDITION PADDLER IS THE REAL DEAL. A FORMER PRO MUSICIAN WHO TRADED IN HIS BROOKLYN DRUM STORE TO FOCUS ON PADDLING, HE'S NOW TRYING TO CIRCUMNAVIGATE THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AND ICELAND IN ONE SEASON

BY JOE GLICKMAN

It was an inauspicious start to a doomed trip. A day out of Reykjavik, Marcus Demuth encountered violent offshore winds that threatened to blow him out to sea. On day six, a breaking wave slammed him on the rocky shore, leaving seven holes and a foot-long crack in the hull. He lost his spare paddle and pager, which meant he could no longer receive the weather forecasts he'd relied on each day.

He was told that a fisherman 50 miles up the coast might be able to repair his boat. Forced to stop every 10 minutes to pump, he arrived in Hellisandur two days later physically ill, his confidence shaken.

The kindly boat-builder shored up his craft and provided food, lodging and moral support to boot—all for a bottle of whiskey. Such acts of random generosity are easily bestowed on this gentle, wry, wide-eyed 39-year-old, who only discovered kayaking five years ago and is now quietly building a paddling resume of note.

Born and raised in Frankfurt, Germany, the son of two architects, at age 16 Demuth became obsessed with drumming. "That's all I did," he says. A decade later, he left Germany for the U.S., hoping to make it in music.

He hustled in New York for a year, but when he ran out of money he went home and found a job at a drum shop. But he had fallen in love with New York and in 2001 he returned to open his own drum shop in Brooklyn.

Five years ago, at a trade show on the west side of Manhattan, he was smoking a cigarette outside and staring at the Hudson River when a kayaker cruised by. Demuth had never sat in a kayak, never been athletic and had smoked for more than a decade, but he was so bored at the show that he vowed to treat himself to a session in a kayak once it ended.

He was the only person to show up to paddle at the Manhattan Kayak Company on that

cold and rainy October morning. His instructor was Eric Stiller, the hyperkinetic owner of MKC and author of *Keep Australia on Your Left*, which chronicles his attempt to circumnavigate Oz. Under the sway of Stiller's enthusiasm, Demuth found his first paddle "electrifying." When Stiller mentioned an upcoming 32-mile jaunt around Manhattan on Halloween night, Demuth signed on. The midnight ramblers finished at 6 a.m., got sloppy drunk and, before you could say "watch out for the Staten Island Ferry," Demuth had purchased a plastic kayak. Though he had no drysuit and could not roll, he paddled alone all winter.

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In the fall of 2005, Demuth and two friends did a two-week trip in Nova Scotia. The following February he headed off alone to Chile. He'd never done any travelling alone and kept telling himself that the upcoming trip was "just an experiment." Paddling through the fjords and islands of the surreal Patagonian landscape and interacting with farmers and fishermen who ate and laughed and danced and drank and sang with him was "so flavourful...so very intense!"

The experiment created a paddling monster. Demuth returned home inspired by the "amazing encounters" he experienced travelling by kayak. He sold his drum shop so that he would be free to head out again.

In January 2007 he arrived in Perth for a 400-mile paddle on the south and west coasts

of Australia. Despite two crash-and-burn landings, the three-week stint in Oz provided invaluable lessons in everything from handling big breaking surf and reading the weather, to the necessity of getting a home beer-brewing kit. By the time he headed back to Brooklyn, he felt certain he wanted to do a longer trip.

That summer, the rainiest on record in Ireland since 1837, Demuth headed to Dublin. Infuriated by the cold driving rain, overwrought and exhausted by the endless hours of paddling into the wind, he was nonetheless moved by the verdant Irish landscape, the warmth of the people and the rich taste of Guinness ale. He covered the 1,085-mile circumnavigation of Ireland in 42 days—a record for a solo paddler—and was hungry for more.

Last June he arrived in Reykjavik, Iceland. But just one day after that fisherman fixed his boat, Demuth paddled into trouble. After spending the night on an uninhabited island halfway across a bay, he was out at sea when the barometric pressure plunged. In minutes offshore winds gusting to 60 knots turned the frigid water into a frothy cauldron. For three panic-stricken hours he fought toward the next island, which stubbornly refused to get closer until finally, he was there.

Buffeted by the wind and spray from breaking waves on his treeless refuge, Demuth waited for four days. "It took the life out of me," he says. On June 18, just two weeks after he'd begun, he paddled back to shore, caught a bus to Reykjavik and flew home to New York.

But, to borrow a quote on Demuth's website, "The roots of the tree grow deepest when the wind blows hardest." After bashing around Ireland in record time, Demuth had figured he'd do the same around Iceland. "I hit my limits and it was very humbling," he says. "But it provided an excellent platform to grow and become a better paddler."

Demuth plans to return to Iceland this summer. But first, as of January, he's off to the Falkland Islands, a stunning archipelago 300 miles off the coast of Argentina in the South Atlantic. If he completes the planned six-week, 800-mile solo around all 776 islands, he will be the first to do so. As a child, Demuth thought of these remote islands as "an exotic land at the end of the world." As he talks about the seals, penguins and orcas he expects to see, an infectious, unbridled enthusiasm infuses his voice and makes it impossible not to root for the charming musician to succeed.

Follow Marcus Demuth's Falkland Islands and Iceland journeys at www.marcusdemuth.com.

Brooklyn, N.Y., freelance writer JOE GLICKMAN is an internationally ranked ocean kayak racer and the author of *The Kayak Companion* (Storey Books).