

# Olly Sanders

Expedition Sea Kayaker and Mountaineer and Level 5 Coach

## Cold As Ice

Coming from a background of whitewater and climbing the close shaves I have had from these sports has been very different from those associated with sea paddling. The scary moments have normally been to do with the realisation that you are in a remote area with little chance of help and the situation is slowly getting out of hand. I have had many of these, one that sticks with me happened on my first trip to Greenland

It was a week into the trip, we were inexperienced of the conditions we were encountering and most days were a massive learning curve. The sea ice came in most days and we were paddling through very narrow leads in the ice, that were constantly opening and closing. We took it in turns to lead to avoid arguments and slowly we were getting a feel for where to go to take us out to more open water. In the sun it was warm, but as soon as the sun dropped, or you ended up in the shade it was Baltic, we had small ocean cockpits and were wearing mountain waterproofs, open necked sea cags and welly boots, and if you ended up in the water you were in big trouble! We had taken no form of backup in terms of communication and were basically on our own, in a very remote setting. Although the sun doesn't really go down at those latitudes we had ended up on the edge of a shaded area, due to the high mountains around us. We had no choice but to enter it to get to a campsite and the ice leads were closing in.

We were forced to do the one thing we had so far avoided, we had to get out of the boats onto the

ice, and this was to prove very difficult due to the cockpit size and the smooth nature of the ice. We were forced to drag the boats across slabs of ice, probing the ground in front with the paddles to check it was solid and then getting back in the boats, before coming to the next slab and repeating the process. I remember we said very little to each other during this time. I also remember the hours seemed to last forever and the cold was seeping its way into us and the shivering had started a long time before. There was little wind and in the distance we could see the warm sun on the sea as we were going through our own icy epic. We were struggling with our decision-making and our co-ordination when at last we pulled up onto a small, flat headland. Again nothing was said as we quickly set up the tent and rushed in to change into warm clothes and get into our sleeping bags to try and warm up. We had been starkly reminded of the remoteness, and the danger of the place that we were in and just how easily the balance can shift. I've been to Greenland, and many other wild and remote places since in my sea kayak and I always treat them with the utmost care and respect.

