The goal of our 2-man, unsupported expedition was to cross Victoria Island, above the Canadian mainland inside the Arctic Circle. Being the 9th largest island in the world, it was surprising that such an expedition has not been tried until now. After studying maps, satellite photographs and gathering as much local knowledge as we could, we planned a route from the most easterly point of the island to its most westerly, a journey of just over 1000km. We gave ourselves 65 days to achieve this, with the first 1000 hours being perpetual daylight, hence the name of our expedition – Ocean Frontiers 1000 Hour Day Expedition.

Victoria Island is a hidden paradise in the Arctic - half of the island is frozen year round into the arctic ocean, while the other half partly thaws out in summer, forming part of the legendary 'Northwest Passage'. Far from being a monotonous icecap traverse, one of the great attractions to us of Victoria Island is that the terrain is so diverse. Everything from mud and swamps, through grassy plains, boulder fields and to tundra. The island is a patchwork quilt of lakes - almost as much land as water. Further, the island teams with spectacular wildlife including polar bears, musk ox, wolves, caribou, arctic fox, lemmings, geese and seals.

Being unsupported for 65 days means bringing a huge weight of food and equipment with us. For example, 16kgs of chocolate (high fat and carbs for its weight) and 7kgs of butter. To transport all this gear with us, we designed and built 2 combination kayak/sled/carts in my garage at home, from aluminium. Our 'PACs' (Paddleable Amphibious Carts) are essentially bulky kayaks with 2 demountable car wheels. Fully laden each would weigh a staggering 250kgs.

We had our 2 PACs sent ahead of time to Canada from Australia via cargo ship. Unfortunately once arriving in Vancouver, British Columbia had just entered into a trucking strike at the wharves. BC Businesses were loosing $30 mill a day - it was a major strike with thousands affected. Hence Clark and I were stuck in Cambridge Bay (A small community of 1500 people on Victoria Island) for 3 weeks while we tried to free our PACs from the strike so we could begin our expedition. Thanks to a lot of people working on our behalf and helping us out, we were able to have an exception granted for our shipping container, and it was released from the strike - 1 of only 2 shipping containers ever released. This was incredibly fortunate, as the strike continued for another 6 weeks after we got our PACs finally flown into Cambridge Bay.

Originally planned to be a summer expedition, our 3 week delay would push the tail end of our expedition into the beginnings of the harsh Arctic winter, but we were determined to set out.

We chartered 2 seaplanes to take us and our 2 PACs to our 'start' point, and from there we began our torturous route. The terrain was what we expected, but far more exaggerated. Pushing ourselves beyond our limits every day - feeling sick from exertion, a few weeks into it, it became clear we would not reach the other side in our allotted 65 days. This realization came as some relief though, as what we really came out there for was for the journey, the experience - not just to reach a destination - a simple point on a map. By pushing ourselves this hard each day we were utterly exhausted, and didn't have time to explore or document our surroundings. Much of the land we were crossing has never been visited before in the history of mankind. In some pockets, we did find evidence of Ancient Inuit - stone tent rings, bone tools (harpoon heads) etc. As this region is unexplored we were encouraged to photograph these archeological sites and take down their GPS positions and give this information to the Inuit Heritage Society.

Once we realized we would not make it to the far side, we adopted the attitude of just pushing on as far as we could each day while taking the time to stop and investigate things of interest. From then on, every day we discovered something new or had an incredible experience. We had an encounter with a Polar Bear, and wishing to remain downwind of it, setup camp early and slept within sight of it. Each night we setup a perimeter tripwire system we designed and built to warn of marauding bears, but thankfully this was the closest bear encounter we had.

We had two separate encounters with arctic wolves - the first one could have been a problem - I was ice fishing a few hundred meters from camp and was unarmed. I noticed the pack of 9 wolves heading towards me and bid an ever hastier retreat back to camp, sprinting the last bit as they bounded after me. At last within earshot, Clark emerged from the tent with shotgun and bear spray, but at the sight of two of us the wolves backed off, howled and walked away.

The 2nd wolf encounter was even closer - a pack of 5 assembled on a hill near camp, and the white alpha male came down to investigate us, walking around camp, at times within 4m. Looking from us to his pack and back again he howled several times just meters from us, perhaps trying to convince the rest of his pack closer, but thankfully to no avail. Eventually, after we got some great video and photographs, he left and the whole pack slid silently away. We went down to a nearby lake to cut through the ice for the water below, and turned around to head back to camp onto to discover the wolf had snuck within 2m behind us! We were quite unnerved, but remained calm, and confronted it in a playful manner. To our astonishment, the wolf apparently entered into the spirit of it and crouched down with...
Christopher Bray      5th November 2005

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