

EXCLUSIVE

Scottish winters taught polar hero to handle the cold – now he wants to save the ice

Pen Hadow made history as the first person to trek solo from Canada to the North Pole – now he has a new mission

By Sandra Dick

ARCTIC adventurer Pen Hadow stood on top of the world, a solitary, exhausted figure with a bright red tent flapping in a frozen white world.

He'd just made history as the first person to trek solo from Canada to the North Pole, trudging for 64 days over the ice and, where it had melted, swimming in open water to reach his goal.

The foundations for his epic expedition had been laid years earlier in rural Perthshire: as a child he sat beside a softly-spoken Welsh nanny listening to vivid tales of the famous polar explorers she'd met, and how she cared for the son of one of the most famous, Scott of the Antarctic.

Meanwhile, his father's determination that he should be raised to be tough and resilient – like the polar explorers of old – saw the young Hadow spend hours outdoors at the family's Glen Devon farm, minus warm clothes and with teeth chattering.

Now, in the deep freeze of the Arctic, and after three attempts spanning 15 years to reach geographic North Pole, he was eyewitness to an icy world on the brink of change. That was in 2003. But the changing climate was making its presence felt – what was meant to be a trek had involved up to 40 hours swimming as melting ice gave way to the sea. His journey made global headlines as, with dwindling supplies, he became stranded for days at the top of the world.

His story, however, was only starting.

Determination

BACK home, the impact of what he had seen sparked a determination to highlight the melting ice and do what he could to protect the highly vulnerable biodiversity of the North Pole region.

Later this summer, he will be in Shetland to begin planning his latest



Hadow is campaigning to protect the Arctic. He says: 'Scotland's northernmost waters are pretty much level with Anchorage in Alaska'

challenge: to change perceptions of Scotland's place on the map and our ties with the northernmost tip of the world.

Next year's Arctic Connections expedition will take him and a collapsible kayak to Out Stack, the rocky patch north of Unst and the country's northernmost tip, then onwards to the most southernmost parts of the British Isles.

Setting off from John O'Groats, he plans to navigate the choppy waters of the Pentland Firth in the 17ft kayak, take in the coastline of Orkney and Fair Isle, Yell, and the rocky stack of Muckle Flugga with its Stevenson lighthouse.

On the way, he plans to tell the stories of the seabirds and mammals that travel into Scottish territories, rebooting perceptions that the Arctic Ocean and its wealth of biodiversity is too far north and too remote to really encroach on life and wildlife here.

He points out that Scotland and the wider British Isles share far more in common with the Arctic region and the creatures it sustains than we might realise. "We are on a mission to get conservation measures in place to protect the wildlife and ecosystem of the Arctic Ocean, and the first stage is to help people understand how close the Arctic Ocean is to Scotland and the wider UK,"

he explained. "Scotland's territories extend further north than St Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm, Oslo and the southernmost tip of Greenland.

"The northernmost waters are pretty much level with Anchorage in Alaska.

"Scotland is far further north than most people necessarily appreciate because the Gulf Stream current gives us a much milder climate.

"But it's only about 440 miles from Scottish waters to the Arctic Circle – that's around the same distance as Edinburgh to London.

"There are species moving between Scottish and UK waters and the Arctic Ocean. There's an ebb and flow between the two systems.

"The more people are aware of the proximity and integration, the more care and conservation there will be. It's a transformation of public perception and understanding that we want to make happen."

Conservation

THE multi-layered expedition spanning kayaking in open water and land-based events is part of his 90 North Foundation's campaign for conservation measures that will protect the wildlife and ecosystem of the Arctic Ocean.

Its prime hope is for a North Pole Marine Reserve which would throw a protective shield around it as the world's largest wildlife reserve, safeguarding its biodiversity and ecosystem.



But it's a race against time. As sea ice melts, the Arctic Ocean is being eyed up by countries and companies seeking to exploit opportunities, from new fishing grounds to sea routes, for defence and military purposes and deep-sea mineral mining.

Pressure is growing. Norway recently offered large areas of the Arctic region for its inaugural seabed licensing round, with aims to award exploration permits early next year. That will make it the first country in the world to start commercial deep-sea mining for minerals required for solar panels, wind turbines and electric car batteries.

The move has been condemned by global environmental charity WWF,



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Pen Hadow, after a water crossing, in his immersion suit
Picture: Martin Hartley

founded in the 1960s by Robert Falcon Scott's son, Sir Peter Scott, around the same time as his former nanny, Enid Wigley, was regaling Pen Hadow with her polar stories.

"Enid was in her seventies by then," Hadow remembered. "Her first job as a teenager had been to look after Peter.

"I can still hear her voice, incredibly soft and gentle with a Welsh lilt."

She arrived in the Scott household soon after the Antarctic explorer's body had been found in a tent with letters by his side. One implored that Peter be raised with an interest in the natural world, and able to withstand the rigours of the great outdoors.

Outdoor regime

PART of Enid's role was to oversee a tough outdoor regime intended to build his resilience to the cold.

Enid later worked for the Hadow family as nanny to Pen's father, Nigel, who resolved that his own son should be raised to experience the same "polar conditioning treatment". That only came to a halt, recalls Hadow, when his



Pen Hadow with his father and nanny Enid Wigley

mother was alerted to him having frostnip – a mild form of frostbite.

"Enid had met all of the great men from a golden age of exploration," recalled Hadow. "She heard them speaking, and sitting on her knee as a small child, these were the stories I heard

too. Her stories and that hard, cold life sowed the seeds for me."

His 2003 expedition caught global attention as he battled to complete a 478-mile trek from Ward Hunt Island in Canada to the North Pole in temperatures that dropped to -45C.

Out of contact

HAVING reached the North Pole with dwindling supplies and out of contact with his support team, he faced an eight-day wait to be airlifted out.

The warming climate and loss of sea ice means it's unlikely anyone will ever replicate his journey. "Current predictions suggest that Arctic sea ice will not be there in summer as soon as 11 years from now," said Hadow, who later returned to the Arctic to gauge ice over in part of the Beaufort Sea. It found the average thickness of the ice was just 1.8m, much thinner than scientists had thought.

"Over the next 80 years or so, we are looking at having nine months of open water, with no sea ice at all."

As well as the impact on the

ecosystem, he warned the melted ice opens new routes for ships and commercial fishing, mining and tourism.

He said that makes the establishment of a North Pole Marine Reserve – providing maximum protection to help ensure the vulnerable ecosystem has the best chance of survival – crucial.

Hadow hopes next year's UK-wide expedition will help raise fresh awareness not just of the issues, but how close to home the Arctic is. "When I started this work in the 1980s, the public tended to regard the Arctic Ocean and sea ice cover up to the North Pole as irrelevant, lifeless and pointless," he adds. "Now for Scotland in particular and for geopolitical reasons, that region is hugely relevant.

"Every cubic centimetre of sea ice and the areas below it are rammed with life and it is changing. There are huge knock-on consequences that are completely inescapable. The longer one leaves it, the harder it is to get the conservation measures in place."

■ 90 North Foundation:
www.90northfoundation.org