

TEAM HESCO

OCEAN FOURS ROWING RACE 2006

TEAM HESCO IS COMPETING IN THE SHEPHERDS OCEAN FOURS ROWING RACE 2006

Jun 8, 2006

OCEAN ISOLATION IS WORLD CUP PANACEA



Team Hesco's boat, *Mount Spirit*, preparing for the race on the Hudson River, New York

Four British Army Commandos have found the perfect solution to avoiding the World Cup fever that will dominate British life for the next four weeks.

Rather than tuning in to England's opening game against Paraguay on Saturday afternoon, Major Pete Rowlands, Captain Mark Waterson, 2Lt Charlie Martell and SSgt Ben Fouracre, calling themselves Team Hesco, will instead take to a 29ft rowing boat, ease themselves down the Hudson River past New York's Statue of Liberty and prepare themselves for the journey of a lifetime: attempting to row the 3,118 miles to Falmouth, Cornwall, and better a 55-day record that has remained intact for 110 years.

"It won't be easy, it won't be comfortable, and there'll be times when all we'll want is a beer, a hot bath, and probably a decent stretch of the legs," says Major Rowlands about the two-month journey. "In order to cover the distance, we'll be rowing at least 60 miles every day of the journey, in two-man shifts each lasting two hours.

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“Sleep deprivation, mental and physical exhaustion and severe blisters will be our biggest enemies, but to anyone who’s served as a Commando, such things are routine. We’re determined to complete the crossing and set not one, but two new records.

“The first will be the time record; the second will be to become the first team to row between the US and UK mainlands, a feat no-one has yet achieved.”

It was on June 6, 1896, that the two Norwegian fishermen George Harboe and Gabriel Samuelsen left New York’s Battery Park, at the southern tip of Manhattan, to row across the

Atlantic Ocean to the Scilly Isles. In their wooden boat *Fox*, they achieved what many then thought was both impossible and foolhardy by reaching St Mary’s just 55 days later.

Today, Harboe and Samuelsen are widely regarded as the ‘founders’ of ocean rowing, an extreme sport which is growing in popularity. Last year, it finally achieved mass recognition and celebrity status, when Olympic rower James Cracknell and TV presenter Ben Fogle rowed from the Canary Islands to Antigua. However, while the warmer east-to-west route is regarded as tough, the west-to-east crossing, in the cold and stormy North Atlantic, is only for the committed.

“Although we’ve been planning this trip for three years,” says the group’s campaign manager Adrian Bell, “Fogle and Cracknell’s crossing helped massively in raising awareness of ocean rowing as a sport, albeit an extreme one that is not without its dangers.

“Five people have been lost at sea attempting the west-to-east route over the last forty years, and several others have had to be rescued after getting into difficulties. The boat is laden with equipment that would have been alien to Harboe and Samuelsen, such as satellite phones and GPS receivers.

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“Unlike them, however, we intend to make a fully unsupported crossing. The Norwegians’ log shows how they used to dine on the occasional passing steamer when they ran low on food; that’s strictly forbidden for our boys.”

Team Hesco was established in 2003, following the sudden death of Major Rowlands’ son Gareth from meningitis. The team has so far raised more than £55,000 for the charity, and expects the total to exceed £100,000 on arrival in Falmouth. Three other teams will be competing in the Shepherd Ocean Fours Rowing Race: two English and one American.

“The big question everyone asks, having seen Fogle and Cracknell, is ‘Will you be rowing naked?’, recounts Major Rowlands. “Fortunately for us, the answer’s no; the North Atlantic is simply too cold!”

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About Team Hesco

1. Team Hesco, powered by Commando Joe, comprises Major Pete Rowlands, 46, and Captain Mark Waterson, also 46, both of Long Riston, Yorkshire; 2Lt Charlie Martell, 36, of Cirencester, Gloucestershire; and SSgt Ben Fouracre, 36, of Chivenor, Devon.
2. The Atlantic crossing is the second of three ‘extreme’ challenges being undertaken by the Commando Joe team to raise funds for the Meningitis Trust. In 2005, they skied 320 miles to the Magnetic North Pole in a record-breaking nine days, 17 hours and 39 minutes. In 2007, a gruelling race through one of the world’s great deserts is planned.
3. Since George Harboe and Gabriel Samuelsen made their crossing in 1896, just one other person, a Ukrainian called Theodore Rezvoy, has attempted the same journey from New York harbour; he was forced to end his attempt just eight days later.
4. The most recent west-east crossing was made in 2005, by Englishman Ollie Hicks, who at 21 became the youngest person to row the Atlantic in a time of 123 days.
5. Successful crossings have been made along Ocean Rowing Society recognised routes from Canada and Newfoundland, although none has reached the UK mainland.
6. The Meningitis Trust is the UK’s leading meningitis charity, raising awareness of the disease through education and training, and offering practical support to those affected by the disease. It relies on donations for 99% of its income.

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7. Meningitis is a life-threatening infection which affects the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. Often associated with septicaemia, the disease can affect anyone at any age and can kill within hours. About 3,000 cases are reported each year; this is believed to represent about 50% of the total.

More information and photographs are available from the Commando Joe website at www.commando-joe.co.uk.

Contact Adrian Bell, Team Hesco campaign manager, for further information or to receive any images in high-resolution:

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