



AS THE CROW FLIES

Written by Ian O'Grady
Photography by Ian Burton

Having worked hard for three years, everything was in place. The concept was simple – to travel the length and breadth of the UK in a straight line. The execution, however, had become a beast of a project. The demands of planning for such an audacious project required the upmost tenacity and the keenest eye for detail. Press releases, team photos, biographies, radio interviews, TV appearances and media launches sapped any remaining time and energy we had after our gruelling

winter training regime. Nevertheless we were ready.

Our strong team of 4 had trained relentlessly for over a year and consisted of Ian O'Grady an RAF Helicopter Crewman and creator of the Beeline Britain concept, Adam Harmer a professional kayak coach and University Lecturer, Nick Beighton a retired Royal Engineer, double amputee and Team GB Paralympian and Tori James who was the first Welsh woman to stand on the summit of Mount Everest.

Our equipment was tried, tested and loaded. Food and supplies had been stored on the safety boat. The route had been meticulously studied, and our support and media crews had been selected and trained accordingly. However, the one factor we could never have planned in advance was the weather.

December 2013 and January 2014 were the two wettest UK months for 250 years. A run of exceptional storms culminated in serious coastal damage and widespread, persistent flooding across the UK. Lasting until mid-April, this is now highly regarded as the most violent UK winter in living memory.

These were of course terrible training conditions for the first two stages of our journey – the 2 longest sea kayak crossings ever attempted in UK waters. My only solace throughout our winter training had been that often used phrase 'train hard, fight easy.' In the six months of winter we had been battered by 60kph offshore winds, caught out in squalls that reduced the visibility to zero, broken sailing masts and been faced with some of the biggest ground swells and sea states a sea kayaker would ever wish for.

We had set the 18th May 2014 as our start date over a year beforehand – and subsequently spent all winter dreading the day – anticipating that the conditions could be hideously inappropriate. The winter came to an abrupt end in April, and with great fortune and a wry smile, the mid May weather was perfect. We hurried down to Land's End a day early, and on the 17th May at 1300 hours we departed north in our tandem sea kayaks. On a bearing of 012 degrees, and with 220km of open sea in front of us, this was the start of the most incredible journey.





Director of Photography Ian Burton explains a little more about what it took to create the film from this extraordinary journey.

‘I had a phone call from Beeline team member Adam Harmer about filming the trip. Initially I wasn’t overly interested when he suggested filming a Lands End to John O’Groats journey. However, when he told me that it was going to be in a straight line, and having to look at an atlas to see where the straight line went, I fell in love with idea. The concept was brutally simple but included some seriously brutal terrain. As a producer, I tried to keep my approach quite relaxed and didn’t worry too much about logistics for the film in the months leading up to the start of Beeline. I knew that when I arrived at Lands End, with a camera in hand, I would be able to shoot the film. This ended up being the ideal mind-set, because I was able to react positively to the constantly changing nature of the trip.’

‘After the first training weekend with the team 18 months ago, I realised that the trip would be huge, and would need a defined and – dare I say, epic – look. I knew, from the first time I met them, that I had to take the high-speed camera with me, and from that moment the look of the film was born. Bearing in mind that these high-speed cameras are normally reserved for filming fast action in order to slow it down, kayaking is not a fast action sport, so i would be

slowing down an already slow activity. See for yourself what the results are like, I do not regret taking it.'

'Modern adventure filming is often controlled as much as possible: waiting for the best light, looking for the ideal position, trying to make the picture look as good as possible. This approach was not going to work for this trip. The team's only objective was to get to the finish line as fast as possible and the film was a distant second as objectives go. There were no opportunities for re-takes and no going back. So I had to deal with what was in front of me in each moment of filming. If I missed it, or the light was awful, then that was it, no second chance. This was the biggest challenge for me as I wanted the film to look beautiful and also tell the story, but how could I do this when I was always racing the team to get ahead of them! In the end it became a competition between us: if they cycled passed me as I was still unloading the van then they won. Fortunately most of the time I was faster – otherwise this would be a very short film! This banter is all part of an expedition and good fun, but it also highlights the reality of producing a film based around time critical journeys and a fast approaching finish line.'

As *The Crow Flies* is featuring at the Kendal Mountain Festival as part of the [Planet Fear Endurance Session](#) on Friday 21st November, and premiering during the [Adventure & Exploration](#) session on Saturday 22nd.

On Friday 28th November, there is a screening and lecture at the RGS, London. For tickets visit, [eventbrite.com](#) or [Facebook](#) for more information.

On Friday 13th June the Beeline Britain team completed the first ever straight-line journey from Land's End to John O'Groats, a total of 1,100km. The Beeline Britain team, which is supported by Prince Harry's Endeavour Fund, kayaked, cycled, mountain biked and hiked their way across the UK, completing two record breaking sea crossings on route, including the longest open sea kayak crossing in UK waters; 34 hours of non-stop kayaking over 200km.

The journey was completed in 28 days and the team's fundraising for [BLESMA](#), the limbless veterans charity continues. Visit [beelinebritain.com](#)

Ian Burton is a freelance cameraman and director of photography for 17 years, mainly focusing on adventure sports and mountaineering. For more information [imageimpossible.co.uk](#)