

Team Bowenarrow

Interviewer: Jen Vincent

Interviewee: Bruce McTaggart

Q All right. Well, it's a great pleasure to chat with you today, Bruce, and I'm really excited to learn about your campaign and your reasons for doing the R2AK and all the things that you want to share with us.

A I'll do my best.

Q All right. Well, let's start with what got you here. What got you here to this point where you're applying and we're talking?

A It's a bit of a long story. It goes back a couple years ago. I actually sold my company two years ago, and part of my retirement plan was to do a paddling trip from Bowen Island up to Prince Rupert.

Q Wow.

A And in preparation for that, I was considering

doing the Race of the Yukon challenge, and a buddy of mine who is going to be in this race as well is Martin Rother [phonetic]. When he heard -- because he had done the race, the Yukon race. And when I was chatting with him about it, he said don't waste your time doing the Yukon. Do the Race to Alaska. So he worked on me for a little while and it caught my imagination that I want to do the Prince Rupert trip. And I love racing. I do a lot of racing with surf ski and years past of marathon canoeing and such. It's one of those things, it captures your imagination and you say I think I can do that. That would be exciting. Racing gives you a different perspective than doing a solo trip on your own or doing a private trip, you know, among some buddies to do the same destination, the race. This adds a little different dynamic to it. So that's that. And again, within all that, I remember telling my

wife when we were traveling back from visiting our daughter in Whitehorse, Yukon, and we took the inside passage ferry back, that further captured my attention to hey, this could be done. Living on Bowen Island, you're connected by water. You can paddle anywhere in the world from Bowen Island. And that whole idea of connection with the waterways to Prince Rupert, et cetera, it made sense to me. Anyways, we put everything together and got accepted, so now it's reality.

Q And you have paddled in a lot of places around the world and some fairly significant distances too. How much of the BC coastline have you done before?

A Quite a few miles. I've done a lot of paddling out in Tofino, Vargas Island. Done lots of paddling in Georgia Strait down to Victoria. Done a number of crossings down from Bowen Island to Nanaimo. And then worldwide

I've paddled -- had a great experience in Bora Bora.

Again, it's one of those things that captures your imagination, and there was a race, Vanilla Island to Bora Bora, about a 45-kilometre crossing. So lots of experience in paddling.

But nothing like Race to Alaska for that amount of days and the logistics for that. I find that exciting.

Q What do you expect your campaign to look like?

What do you think this race is going to be for you?

A One day at a time. So I like to break down a lot of those big projects into small increments and take each day as it comes and plan my day according to what comes my way. You can put a lot of planning from Victoria or Port Townsend, even Port Townsend to Victoria is a good challenge, and the weather plays a huge role. And that's just a roll of the dice. So as far as planning, it's working with the weather and

not exposing myself to conditions that are outside my skill set. Not taking too high of risks just because from my experiences, the weather does settle down to a level that you can engage and then make a lot of time on. So you don't have to rush or push yourself through some really difficult waters because there's no need to. That's part of my strategy of the whole race is to work with the weather and use it to your advantage. Use the tides and currents. Sometimes that may mean getting up awfully early or doing some night paddling, but use the currents to your advantage. And work with the weather.

Q And what has your attention right now? What are the things you're most concerned about or most focused on preparing for as you look ahead?

A Mentally, with the unknown of Cape Caution. There's just so many stories of just how rough and difficult that is. And it involves a

crossing. So that's on my mind, how to work with that situation, such as -- I'm pretty good at navigation and using charts. And I would also say what the weather throws at the racers come Juan de Fuca. I've looked at all the races and studied, you know, all the weather conditions since the race started, and it seems Juan de Fuca, that's the biggest crux at the beginning of this. I think if you can get across there with the right weather, then the remaining trip up to Ketchikan will be obviously quite challenging, but you have more flexibility to plan your time and work around weather. Where the stage one, there isn't much options there. You got your 36 hours. I think was it not last year, '22, where they had the gale winds and some folks headed out early and then things went awry fairly quickly halfway through. So yeah, I'm concerned about Juan de Fuca and the weather.

Q Yeah. Well, what does your preparation look like now? You mentioned you were out paddling yesterday. Are you out regularly now?

A Yeah. I put a lot of hours last year in. I actually logged in about 3,300 kilometres last year. But in preparation, it's making sure I have all the right gear, practice with my gear, focus weight training, better weight training. And it will then move into on-water training preparations.

Q You mentioned that your wife paddles and races with you. Did she have any interest in participating in the race?

A Not at all. We watched the movie, the Race to Alaska movie a couple days ago. And she said, and why are you doing this? It's hard to explain. It's hard to explain. It's just one of those things that it captures your imagination. It did not capture hers, but she's looking forward to meeting me up there. And

then we are talking about maybe doing some paddling trips in the area of Prince Rupert.

Q And as you're getting ready, I'm sure that you've got friends and neighbors who are paying attention to this undertaking you've committed to. What are they all saying?

A Lots of great support, wishing me well, and they're very interested in following my progress in the race. But yeah, lots of support, all support. Not too much -- very little you're crazy. None of that. It's all been, yeah, great support. Which will be important, especially as you're out there on your own and things get really rough and you can sometimes spiral into a mind set that may not be helpful at all. And a lot of times friends and family, you know, a little word here or there can make a big difference. So it's great having friends that are supportive of it.

Q I think that's something that captures the

imagination of I think everybody, the racers and the people following the race. Particularly for you solo campaigners, how you maintain your own mental health and your own motivation in the face of such a huge undertaking. And sometimes not seeing people for days.

A True. Although for better or for worse, I'm comfortable being in solitude. So going for -- I've done a lot of solo tripping over the years, and yeah, I'm okay with being alone for a while. But certainly I enjoy the company of people and look forward to that after those days of solitude.

Q Tell us a little bit about your boat. Did you select this boat specifically for this year's race or have you been with this boat for some time?

A No. I went through -- when I sold the business I knew I wanted to do a lot more paddling. And running your own business interfered a lot with

doing multiday trips or even one or two night trips because the nature of my business had me on call all the time. So it was more difficult to go away. So I did a lot of day paddling. That's where my surf ski paddling came into play because I could go out and do good adventures for the day. So when I sold the company, then I had the opportunity to say okay, what kind of kayak do I want to get? And the Stellar Expedition 18 is the one I purchased. Met all the criteria I was looking for. It's designed to do multiday adventure racing, gives me the capacity to carry a lot of gear. It's quite a light boat. So having to haul it from shorelines up to campsites is not as difficult as the more traditional heavy Kevlar and fiberglass boats that can be quite challenging. Especially, you know, doing this kind of race.

Q When you finish the R2AK, what's after that?
What big project would you tackle then?

A It's hard to say. I think the Race to Alaska is going to be quite an adventure. If I did it again it would probably be with a group of friends and at a more leisurely pace than the race. But so a lot more tripping ahead. That's definitely in the cards.

Q It sounds perfect. Thank you so much for chatting with me today and I look forward to meeting you in person on the docks.

A Yes, same here.