

ROAM GENERATION

PUBLIC RELATIONS

One Man, One Boat, One Ocean: Matt Rutherford's Solo Arctic Circumnavigation Challenge



*Caption - Matt Rutherford, American explorer, sailor, and founder of the Ocean Research Project - Photography
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Guinness World Record-holding American solo sailor Matt Rutherford, 45, from Maryland, Annapolis, is preparing to attempt the first nonstop, single-handed circumnavigation of the Arctic Ocean.

The expedition will see Rutherford depart for Greenland in June 2026, with the official attempt set to begin from Aasiaat on 25th June. He will sail more than 10,000 miles through the Arctic Ocean, the Northern Sea Route along the Russian Arctic coast, and the Northwest Passage through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago, before returning to Greenland. No sailor has previously completed this route alone in a single year. He will attempt it solo, nonstop and unassisted.

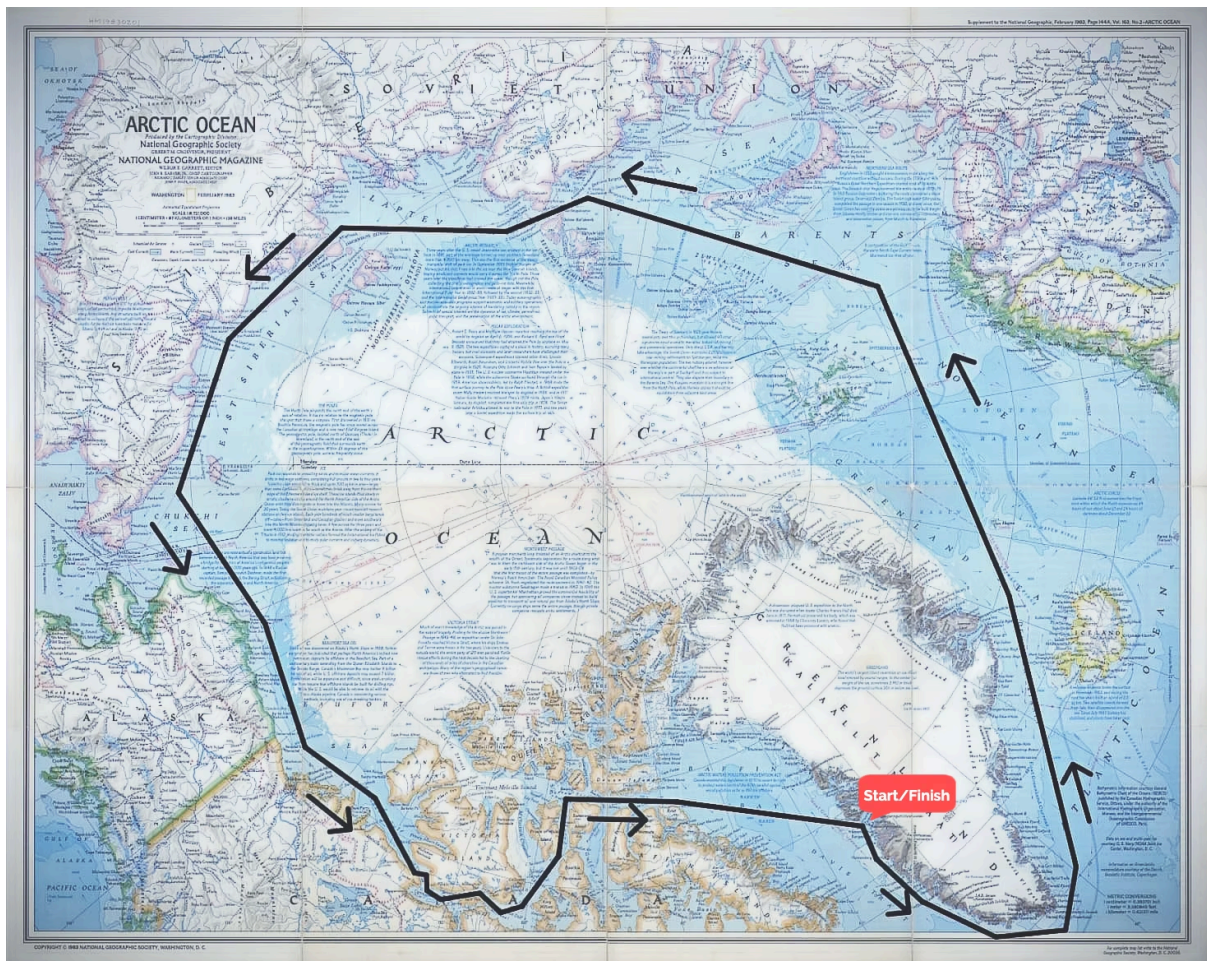
Rutherford is best known for his 2011 solo, nonstop circumnavigation of the Americas, during which he became the first person to sail the Northwest Passage alone in a 27-foot boat. The 309 day voyage earned him two Guinness World Records.

His journey is featured in the Emmy nominated documentary [Red Dot on the Ocean](#), which documents his record-breaking circumnavigation and supported fundraising efforts for [Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating \(CRAB\)](#), raising \$120,000 and going on to share his story on a [TEDx stage](#).

This latest Arctic attempt builds on Rutherford's previous expeditions and his work with [Ocean Research Project](#), the Annapolis-based nonprofit he founded in 2012 to support oceanographic research and monitor how human activities impact ocean health. Matt's organisation has been conducting climate research in the Arctic since 2015.

The voyage comes amid rapidly changing Arctic conditions, with declining sea ice contributing to increasingly navigable waters in regions that were previously inaccessible for much of the year. Rutherford and his team say the aim is to support awareness of environmental change and the importance of continued scientific research in the Arctic.

Matt Rutherford's Expedition



- **Official start line:** Aasiaat, Greenland, on June 25, 2026

- **Three phase Route:** Greenland to Russian Arctic coast (Northern Sea Route) to Northwest Passage to Baffin Bay, back to Aasiaat
 - Phase one from Greenland, south around its tip, then north above Iceland and Scandinavia to the Russian border.
 - Phase two is the most dangerous leg. Rutherford spends approximately one month sailing above Russia along the Northern Sea Route. Russia requires vessels on this route to carry a Russian pilot on board. An exemption for pleasure craft was introduced only last year. Rutherford has obtained a permit.
 - Phase three takes him north of Alaska, through the Northwest Passage, and across Baffin Bay back to Aasiaat.
- **Total distance:** 10,000+ miles
- **Target finish:** Early October 2026
- **Live tracking:** oceanresearchproject.org
- **Nonstop and unassisted:** Rutherford cannot anchor, cannot stop at land, and cannot receive outside assistance. He must take every storm at sea. He gives himself a 75 percent chance of completing it.
- **The size of the boat** - 42 foot Valiant
- **Permit for Russia** - Matt Rutherford has had his permit approved and has been granted permission by Russia to travel through the Northern Sea Route (NSR).



Matt Rutherford in the cabin of the 42-foot Valiant that he is using to sail to the Arctic. Date captured: 14/06/26. Photography Copyright - Ocean Research Project.

The Science Mission

Rutherford founded the Ocean Research Project (ORP) in 2012. Oceanographer Nicole Trenholm joined shortly after to establish the mission's science for expeditions that examine ocean health when faced with man-made pollution and climate change. Their campaigns to the Arctic have led to the mapping of uncharted waters, addressing the controls and impacts of melting glaciers, measuring the nutrient availability for plankton blooms and the degree of carbon burial. Their research is roughly five percent of the cost of a conventional research vessel. With 88 percent of US polar science funding cut in 2025, ORP's mission has never been more critical. As glaciers retreat, fjords respond to changes in freshwater and nutrient availability that directly affect phytoplankton blooms and the coastal Arctic's role as a global carbon sink hotspot. Phytoplankton produce roughly half of the world's oxygen and

form the base of the entire marine food chain, their productivity leads to 11% of the annual ocean carbon burial to occur along glaciated coastlines.

Science Director & Expedition Leader at the Ocean Research Project, Nicole Trenhom said: *“As the US government slashes our funding for polar research, Arctic research needs our attention now more than ever and Matt is our climate crusader. Circling the North Pole ice pack is one giant experiment. On the way to Greenland Matt will collect water samples that I will use to test NASA ocean models that monitor Arctic waters. By taking action and communicating the story of his journey, he can help achieve the hard-earned \$250,000 fundraising goal. Meeting this goal will directly advance Ocean Research Project’s science mission—sailing for science—during the United Nations–designated Ocean Decade.”*

Track the Voyage

Live tracking is available via the Ocean Research Project website and can be followed on their [YouTube](#) where videos of Matt Rutherford will be uploaded. Social media updates will be shared on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

People can donate and help fundraise for the Ocean Research Project here: <https://www.oceanresearchproject.org/support-us>

About Matt Rutherford

Matt Rutherford was born in Warren, Ohio, a rust belt town where nobody sailed. No one in his family ever had. He spent his early years in Kent Ohio, and by sixteen had been locked up five times and through rehab twice. He grew up in a religious cult, spent time on the streets, and found his way out through sheer force of will. Around the age of twenty-five, he discovered sailing, left the street life and never looked back.

In 2011, Matt became the first person in history to complete a solo, nonstop circumnavigation of North and South America, departing Annapolis, Maryland and sailing 27,077 miles in 309 days through some of the most dangerous waters on Earth. Along the way he broke a second record, becoming the first person to solo sail the smallest boat in history through the Northwest Passage. The voyage was later documented in the Emmy-nominated film Red Dot on the Ocean, which aired on PBS for eight years.

That journey changed the direction of his life. On returning to Annapolis, Matt founded the Ocean Research Project, a nonprofit dedicated to Arctic climate research, marine science, and exploration. Since 2012 the organisation has conducted more than a dozen scientific expeditions, mapping the Atlantic Garbage Patch, collecting microplastics samples on a nonstop passage from San Francisco to Yokohama, collaborating with NASA’s Ocean Melting Greenland program, and documenting the retreat of Greenland’s glaciers over nearly a decade. A glacier the team visited in 2015 had retreated four miles by the time they returned nine years later. Water temperatures at a key monitoring site have doubled.

ORP operates at roughly five percent of the cost of a conventional research vessel, conducting the same science for \$3,000 to \$5,000 a day that others spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 a day to produce. With 88 percent of US polar science funding cut in 2025, that efficiency has never mattered more.

In 2026, Matt is attempting something no one has ever done: a solo, nonstop, unassisted circumnavigation of the Arctic, sailing above Russia via the Northern Sea Route and returning via the

Northwest Passage. The route is only possible because the sea ice is disappearing. Matt gives himself a 75 per cent chance of completing it.

He is also a TED talk speaker, host of a widely followed sailing podcast, and a firm believer that no one person can do everything, but everyone can do something.

Guinness World Record Titles

- <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/106564-first-person-to-circumnavigate-the-americas-sailing-non-stop-solo>
- <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/109042-smallest-boat-to-negotiate-the-northwest-passage>

Matt's Heroes

Rutherford's inspiration for exploration came from historic adventurers such as Sir Ernest Shackleton, the renowned Anglo-Irish explorer best known for his Antarctic expeditions. At the age of 16 he began reading about historical explorers like Shackleton who later in life inspired him to take risks, buy a boat, and venture out to sea in pursuit of his own adventures.

Throughout his voyage and in many of his blog posts, Matt frequently referenced Shackleton's family motto, *Fortitudine Vincimus* ("By endurance we conquer"). This phrase reflected the mindset that guided him during his record-breaking solo, nonstop circumnavigation of the Americas. The influence of Shackleton is also highlighted in the documentary Red Dot on the Ocean, which explores Rutherford's journey and the explorers who inspired him.

Matt also has a picture of Thomas Crean hung up on his 42-foot Valiant, which he looks at in his cabin. Crean is known for exploring Antarctica and travelled at sea with Shackleton and Captain Robert Falcon Scott. Along with a picture of British Army and Antarctic explorer Lawrence Oates going out of his tent, it captures the moment before he sacrificed himself to help improve his three companions' chances of survival. He chose death as a way to relieve them of the burden of caring for him. He has this on his wall to remind him whenever he sets off at sea that, "No matter how bad things get on this trip, it is never going to be as bad as that." Having his heroes there to see helps motivate him on his expeditions.

Matt's Sailing Experience

In 2004, Matt Rutherford bought his first boat, a 25-foot Coronado, for \$2,000 in Maryland and taught himself to sail while cruising from the Chesapeake Bay to the Florida Keys. During that voyage, he was forced to adapt quickly and develop his seamanship skills as he faced numerous challenges, including equipment failures that he had to learn to repair himself. He also encountered several tropical storms, including Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne. After further developing his sailing abilities, Rutherford purchased a Pearson 323, refitted it in Florida, and in 2006 completed his first single-handed offshore cruise from St Augustine back to the Chesapeake Bay. He later continued his adventures in 2008 by sailing alone across the Atlantic and exploring the North Sea, sailing along the West African coast and sailing 180 miles up the Gambia River, where he experienced the jungle and had close encounters with wildlife like hippos, crocodiles and baboons from his boat.

Matt Rutherford's Exploring History Goes Beyond the Sea

Prior to his journey at sea, Rutherford discovered his passion for wildlife and adventure in his twenties when he began trekking and hiking, including trips to the Grand Canyon. In 2002 At the age of 21, he

had his first real taste of overseas travel when he biked alone for 100 days through Southeast Asia, exploring Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand.

This opportunity arose after Matt was given a Schwinn Mesa bicycle in recognition of his work repairing 20 bikes for an Indian reservation in Wyoming. During his time at school, he learned how to access, dismantle and repair bicycles, developing practical mechanical skills. These skills have since proved invaluable in his sailing career, helping him diagnose problems and carry out repairs when he is sailing on his own.

About Nicole Trenholm

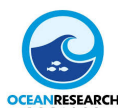
Nicole Trenholm is the Science Director of the Ocean Research Project and the scientific backbone of every expedition the organisation runs. Since joining in 2013 she has directed research at sea across more than 60,000 miles of ocean. Her work focuses on Arctic glacial fjord systems, investigating the physical and biogeochemical changes occurring as glaciers retreat and assessing what that means for coastal ecosystems and global sea levels.

Nicole holds a USCG Master Near Coastal Captains License and brings professional experience in oceanographic data collection and buoy system maintenance under NOAA contracts. She is currently pursuing a doctorate at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, Horn Point Laboratory, where she is a Ratcliffe Environmental Entrepreneurs Fellowship recipient. She is also a field grant recipient of the Explorer's Club, a NASA Jet Propulsion Lab sponsor, and has presented her research at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, the AGU Ocean Sciences conference, and multiple international symposia. As a flag-bearer of the Society of Women Geographers, she carries forward the spirit of women who know no boundaries.

Nicole Trendholm's LinkedIn Profile - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nicole-trenholm-58b90b4a/>

About Ocean Research Project

Ocean Research Project (ORP) is a nonprofit dedicated to Arctic climate research, marine science, and exploration. Founded in 2012 by Matt Rutherford, ORP has conducted more than a dozen scientific expeditions across more than 50,000 miles of ocean, collaborating with researchers such as the NASA's Ocean Melting Greenland program and operating at roughly five percent of the cost of a conventional research vessel. With 88 percent of US polar science funding cut in 2025, its work has never mattered more. Learn more at oceanresearchproject.org.



For more information about the expedition, or to arrange an interview with Matt Rutherford or Nicole Trendholm, please contact Jo Threlfall at jo@roamgeneration.com ; Jodi Karpes at jodi@roamgeneration.com ; Erin Casey at erin@roamgeneration.com

For high-res imagery you can access the images [here](#)