

# arctic junkie

TO EXPLORER GARY ROLFE, CLEAR VISION IS ESSENTIAL FOR SURVIVAL

'Summer never arrives, despite 70 days of perpetual daylight. Unless you want burnt retinas or snow-blindness, sunglasses are mandatory.'



NAME: **GARY ROLFE**  
AGE: **41**  
JOB: **EXPLORER**

Gary Rolfe is an explorer, a dog musher and an athlete. He loves adventure and is passionate about the Arctic. He has travelled over 11,000 summer and winter miles in Canada and Greenland with his dog team. Gary uses a mixture of traditional expedition methods and modern materials, communications and clothing.

The areas he explores are notorious for their violent storms, thin, cracked floe edges and debilitating cold. Here he describes how vital it is to have good eyesight in one of the world's few true remaining wildernesses.

'Study Greenland maps and you'll still find regions marked 'unknown'. Ittoqqortoormiit is the remotest inhabited place in the western world, home to 500 people and more than 500 working Greenland dogs, the only breed allowed above Greenland's Arctic Circle. This is where I live. There's a resident doctor and a dentist visits once a year. Opticians, however, never visit. It's a tough place. There's no plumbing. Re-supplies come twice yearly. Outsiders coming to work here have been known to freak out, panic and want out because it's so isolated.'

## EYES OPEN

'Winter and spring I travel over 2,000 miles with my 15 dogs and my vision must be perfect. Without corrected vision, if I hold my hands out in front of me I can't see them clearly. Spectacles are futile – the frames freeze to my face. A combination of contact lenses with ski goggles or sunglasses enables me to work to the best of my ability to achieve seemingly impossible tasks.'

## IN THE DEEP FREEZE

'In winter, the sun doesn't rise for 60 days. Gravity-spiced, cold, dense air can rush vertically down cliffs to create the colossal 100-knot Piteraq coastal winds. At home, windows pop out and houses can explode.'

'At sea, I have been pummelled by airborne stones. Making camp can be harrowing. The prospect of ice breaking up beneath my tent and having to scramble blindly out of water keeps me wide awake with fear. That's why I wear 30-day continuous wear contact lenses when I'm camping. Otherwise I wear daily disposables. Thawed from -40°C they're easy to insert and so comfortable I never know they're in. Chemical hand-warmers speed up the thawing process.'

'I often wear Category 1 goggles, which are specifically designed for use in low visibility. In bright sunlight, I wear Category 3 goggles which protect against dangerous UV light, chronic tear flow, spindrift... and stones.'

'We're always vigilant for polar bears wandering near our houses. They fear nothing and have a tendency to eat people. Parka hoods reduce peripheral vision, so I have to be alert to my dogs' reactions. Nobody walks far unarmed. From the age of twelve, kids can legally carry a firearm. I use a high calibre rifle and because I want the highest quality detail in poor light, it's mounted with a riflescope.'

## SNOW BLINDNESS

'With good visibility and flat ice I can see for a good six miles and work off my compass or GPS. If the spring sun is out I look at my watch and my shadow to calculate compass headings. Camera work is never easy. I save battery power by switching off the digital screen. The eyepiece on my camera juts out, preventing my cheek from freezing to the screen.'

'Summer never arrives, despite 70 days of perpetual daylight, and unless you want burnt retinas or snow blindness, sunglasses are mandatory. I wear sunglasses for protection against blinding water glare too. Standing up in our boats, we have to keep a sharp lookout to determine a route through pack ice. Iceberg 'feet' are many times bigger than what is seen on the surface and they are propeller wreckers.'

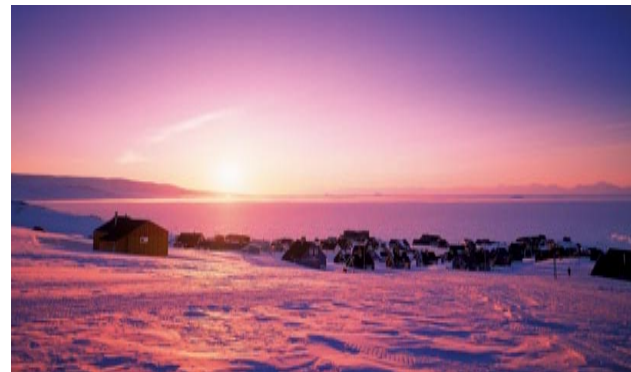
'With binoculars I can survey anything suspicious, judge distances and make the decisions needed to survive. In this harsh environment, the importance of good eyesight really cannot be underestimated.'

You could win an Arctic holiday – see page 32.

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ABOVE: Sea ice between cliffs in Hyttebugt, Greenland.

BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Gary Rolfe with one of his beloved huskies. Boiling water explodes into ice crystals at -40°C. Ittoqqortoormiit, Greenland.



A single snowstorm can drop 40 million tons of snow. Sunset over Scoresby Sund.

