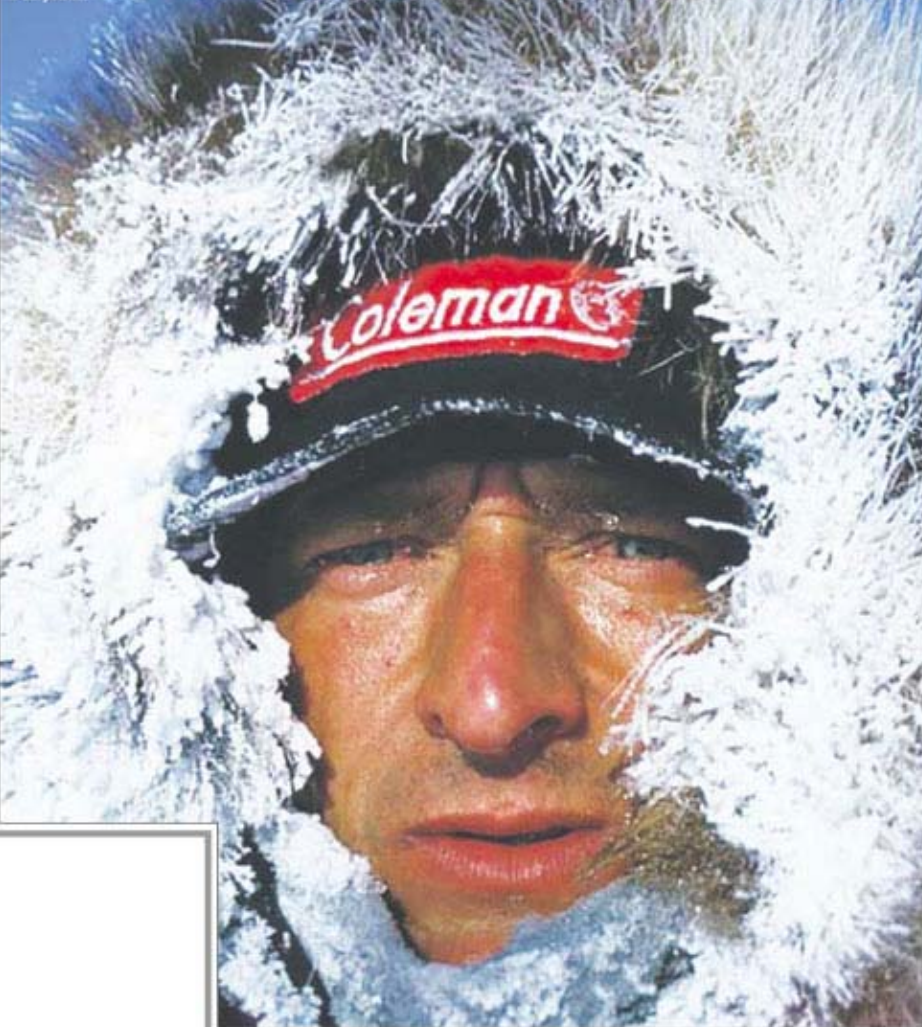


**LIVING ON THE ICE**  
EDGE: Arctic explorer  
Gary Rolfe. All  
photographs copyright  
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### GARY'S ARCTIC EXPEDITIONS SO FAR ...

#### SPRING 2002.

Solo expedition. Unsupported. 950km (600 miles) with nine huskies. Built own sled. Set out from Inuvik in the western Arctic and reached Herschel Island out on the Arctic Ocean. Returned via the Yukon North Slope. Rabid fox and bear encounters.

#### SPRING 2001.

Solo expedition. Unsupported. 840km (520 miles) with eight huskies. From the frozen Mackenzie River to the sea ice of Mackenzie Bay in the Beaufort Sea crossing the tundra of Elice, Pitt and Olivier Islands.

#### WINTER 2000-01.

Trained through entire 24-hour darkness of the Arctic winter in Canada's Northwest Territories, while based in a 13R by 8R

trapper's cabin on the mighty Mackenzie River. Wolf pack and moose encounters.

#### SUMMER 2000.

Trained through entire Arctic summer based in Mackenzie Delta, western Arctic. Bred sled dog team litters and carried out expedition reconnaissance flights.

#### SPRING 2000.

International expedition. As UK team member covered 5,600km (3,470 miles) with 21 huskies, through the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and on to the coastal plains of the Arctic Ocean's Beaufort Sea ice.

#### WINTERS OF 1998/99/00.

Thousands of varied ice condition training miles with huskies in Minnesota and the Canadian wilderness boundary waters.

# What drives this man to spend months on the ice with just eight huskies for company?

**IT'S very difficult to explain to anyone why I have to be in the Arctic, alone except for my huskies in an environment which is among the harshest known to man.**

But I have a passion for the place, its awe-inspiring beauty, a true wilderness which is totally unforgetting.

I've only just got back after spending a month on the latest of my expeditions.

It was a solo journey of 100 miles upstream on the frozen Mackenzie River. Temperatures dropped to minus 20 degrees centigrade – and we had encounters with moose and wolves.

But I'm already making plans to go back in the summer.

People have been asking me for the last decade what drives me to these extremes and why I want to be alone in the most inhospitable of places.

The answer must lie in what went before. After going to school in Corwood I came up to Lincolnshire with my father and we settled near Grantham.

I did all the adventure stuff and had an interest in climbing. When I was 15 I ran 20 miles for the first time – alone.

As I got older I progressed to Scotland, Wales and the Alps, but I still wasn't satisfied.

There was something there which took me three years to fathom when I was in my mid-20s.

Now I'm 38 and living in London, I realise that 15 years ago I was reaching a crossroads in my life.

At that time I was working on a farm 10 miles from Grantham and at the George Hotel in the town, waiting on tables.

So I naturally ran to work at the farm and back – then to the hotel, where I often didn't finish until after midnight.

**B**y this time I knew I had to do something really special with my life and tried to save literally every penny.

Now, this sounds bizarre now, but I was so hungry that I used to eat the leftover food on the plates when I cleared the tables!

When I was eventually caught at it the lads in the kitchen took pity on me and made sure I didn't starve.

I was mixing with people with military backgrounds because of my interest in extreme sports and pushing myself in conditions most people wouldn't understand.

So it came to a choice – I would either try to join an elite Army unit or devote my life to becoming an explorer.

Because I just couldn't ever imagine having to kill anyone, I decided to follow the example set by Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

I got in touch with the great man and he's been fantastic all the way.

He encouraged me to the extent that he's now become my patron. But he's been at it for well over 30 years.

Part of my 'training' was the two years I spent at the De Montfort University in Lincoln in the mid-1990s.

Now part of the University of Lincoln, it was my home until I gained a higher national diploma (HND) in outdoor recreation

*It's a far cry from Lincoln – the sub-zero conditions of the Canadian Arctic wastes. But former mature student Gary Rolfe has just returned from a month living in temperatures as low as minus 25 degrees*

*centigrade – with just eight huskies for company. Today Mr Rolfe looks back on his time in Lincolnshire and tells reporter Chris Hall the amazing story of his determination to become a respected Arctic explorer...*



**BEAR POWER:** Nobody survives a polar bear attack and these half-ton creatures are equipped with giant pads which they use to bludgeon their prey to death. All photographs copyright © Gary Rolfe.

management.

Living at Riseholme in the north of the city was great because I was always out running. And all the staff were brilliant, really encouraging me.

But not everyone's been supportive. I've had plenty of people telling me I'd never make it as an explorer.

It's been hard work. But my journeys have many functions. I have many different sponsors and companies who produce goods that are said to be the best in the world.

From Panasonic laptops to RAB clothing, specialised foods to pet food for the dogs, I test them in the most challenging of circumstances.

My days are difficult at the best of times. But there's little point in doing any of this unless I can share

the experience.

That's why I take only the best and most modern equipment to enable both myself and the dogs to operate at the best of our abilities.

And I'm in constant touch with the people who supply me with everything I need to sustain life in the Arctic.

All my gear leads a very tough existence just keeping us all safe.

And there's the constant possibility of running into natural killers like wolves and polar bears.

The thought of ice breaking up beneath me while I sleep is only surpassed by the vision of a pitiless, crushing white blow punching through my tent.

Nobody survives a polar bear attack!

Despite this constant threat, most of my time is spent away from the outside world.

And the areas I favour are infamous for their violent storms, thin, cracked floe edges – much favoured by hunting polar bears with their cubs – and debilitating cold.

I think the modern polar expedition trend has in many ways detracted from the old-fashioned connections and the respectful understanding of these regions.

But I believe I've backed that trend – creating a subtle expedition method by blending the traditional ways with modern materials,

communications, clothing and feeding practices.

I have a huge appetite for both physical and mental challenges.

This drive sustained me when I was planned down on the ice for nine days. And I know I still have, at 38, a massive thirst for knowledge.

All the best and most famous explorers have done their best work in their mid-40s, so perhaps the best is still to come.

Yet I'd hate anyone to get the idea that I'm persuading companies to pay for me to go on holiday.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It's hard, freezing and utterly wild. There's one good reason why I go alone – except for the dogs.

I've been to Canada with teams of people before. All everybody else seemed to do, all day long, was to grizzle about the cold. What were they expecting?

Now I'm making plans to apply for permanent residency in the Canadian Arctic.

My dogs are over there, pulling me back with an invisible thread.

But it's so cold out there that your breath turns to ice.

### A WORD FROM GARY'S PATRON

SIR Ranulph Fiennes, the world's most famous living explorer, is patron of Gary Rolfe's expeditions.

He paid the former Lincoln student the highest compliment in a tribute today.

"The Arctic can be savage. There alone in 2000 I almost paid the ultimate price with my life.

"Gary's consistent and proven track record sees him now at the highest level as an exponent of a skill few have mastered, the craft of handling huskies in polar regions.

"It's a specialised area that makes huge demands on people, dogs, critical gear and skills alike.

"The fact he travels alone is testimony to his ability, combined with the magical bond between him and his huskies.

"I respect that handling huskies is a skill that takes time, determination and patience to develop.

"But ultimately, to be any good, it demands talent.

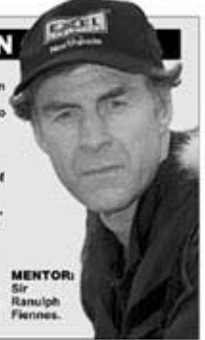
"Gary has over the past seven years cut his teeth alongside the world's most skilled of polar

travellers.

"It's a craft learned from strong personalities – both men and women who suffer no fools.

"Every now and then someone very different from each generation appears who is capable of pulling off the unexpected. I believe Gary is one such person."

■ Sir Ranulph is no slouch himself. Last November he ran seven 26-mile marathons on seven continents in seven days – four and a half months after a heart operation!



**MENTOR:** Sir Ranulph Fiennes.