

# Paddle from Stirling to Port Edgar

32.5 miles in 4 hrs 21 mins, 30th March 2025

I'm not a sea kayaker, although I do paddle on the sea a lot, and have done so since 1962, when I started canoeing at the age of 15. I'm 78 now, to save you the calculations. All my canoeing since 1968 has been done in racing boats: K1s and River Racers (RR). I've paddled round St Kilda, Gigha, Fair Isle, Rathlin Island, Iona, and Scarba, to name but a few, always in a RR. I do all my paddling of this nature solo, which I prefer. I've also paddled from Arisaig to Rum in a K1, but the older type, which was more stable than the latest boats. See picture below taken at Rum. I used to paddle from Ardrossan to Brodick in the same K1, and once did it at night.



That makes me unusual for sure. Some would say eccentric or even foolhardy, and that's fair comment, because I'm unaware of anyone else daft enough to do what I do.

Why a RR? Most regard them as unsuitable for the sea, as they are too unstable and have none of the features of sea kayaks. I have never found stability a problem, because in comparison to a K1 they feel rock-solid. But you do have to hold on to your paddles all the time to prevent capsize – I can't sit back and have a cup of tea in the waves. They also don't have a rudder or skeg, which makes broaching inevitable on large waves. So, 15 years ago, I had an understern fin rudder fitted, with T-bar steering, just like racing K1s. That has made a huge difference to my paddling on the sea, and I regret not fitting a rudder forty years before.



*The Marlin with fixed fin rudder.*

So, why the RR? They are very light. Mine weighs only 10kg. I have done a camping trip in one once, using waterproof bags for kit. I paddled from Plockton to Applecross, then Skye and back to Plockton, but didn't enjoy it much, so that was that. All my paddling is on day trips only, and for that, a fast, light boat is the business. The MX5 of the sea! I paddled round St Kilda in 90 minutes, and wasn't racing, just enjoying the scenery; fifteen miles round Rathlin Island in 2 hours 15 minutes, with some tidal help. The speed is useful, because I can cover long distances in a short time, and when I was with friends or family, I would often do big paddles before breakfast. Brodick round Holy Isle and back by 8am (12 miles), then breakfast, and the rest of the day with the family. All the Scilly islands in a week, one each day, before breakfast,

and a 14-mile trip round Bishop Rock and back by 7.30am. That way, I've had my paddle, and I can spend the rest of the day, relaxing with family or friends, drinking coffee and eating cake with a clear conscience.

And so it was with the 32 miles from Stirling to Port Edgar, completed in 4 hours 20 minutes, from 6.35 to 10.55 on the morning of the 30th March 2025. Crazy, yes, but that's the way I like it, and it's always solo. The massive benefit of this quick-fire approach is that I've managed to fit canoeing into my entire life, even when I had a young family, was running a school Boarding House with 50 boys, seven days a week, and teaching full-time. In the seventies, when I taught at Broxburn Academy, I'd often paddle twice a day, before and after work, or at lunch for a flat out 22 minutes on the local canal. Yes, I still remember the time!

Now, all of the above gives you background to my paddle down the Forth. All I want to do now, is give you the rather bizarre statistics, to show you what's possible, even for an old man.

Up at 3.30am old time, and on the water at 6.35 new time (clocks went forward that night).

**Training:** None as such. I just keep fit by paddling regularly all the year round. c 50 miles per month in the winter, usually 2 to 4 miles at a go, but max effort. My  $VO_2$  max is 46, and I weigh just under 60kg.

## The week before:

Tuesday – 8 miles flat out in a 20-foot Surf Ski on the canal at Falkirk, along with four chums. 6.3mph (10kph)

Thursday – 10km along Loch Earn in under an hour, with my training mate, Gilbert Speirs. Force 4 following wind. He paddled a Ski and was well ahead of me in my RR. Some good wave riding in the last three miles. (6.5mph)

Food: Dinner the night before very light: yoghurt, honey and nuts. Porridge at 5am, and 100 ml of milk just five minutes before setting off. Took no fluids with me. Three little cubes of marzipan (50g in total = 250 calories) lying in the slot where the spray deck fits the deck of the canoe. Just sweeties to give me a glucose boost.

Why such sparse food and drink? Like many old men, I have a degree of prostate trouble, and I didn't want to have toilet stops on the way to Port Edgar, because there's virtually no place to stop – the banks are all thick mud, especially so as the tide goes out. If any of my male readers are in the same position with regard to their prostate, the trick is to avoid both protein, and big meals before bed. In my view, all the other remedies are worthless and expensive – I never use them. The kidney works hard after a proteinaceous meal, and that will give you problems overnight. So, my paddle to PE was trouble-free in terms of a toilet stop. When I arrived at PE I was neither thirsty nor hungry. Keep in mind, our digestive systems tend to shut down when we are exercising hard; the hunger and thirst come much later. Keep in mind, the metabolism of an old body is much slower, so the demand for nourishment is less. Now I'm eating half what I used to eat. I would have carried 500ml of juice if the weather had been hot.

**Starting point:** Stirling, where there's a super wee spot at the end of Castle Vale Road in Cornton. That's just two miles upstream from the rowing club. Because I had parked my car there at 6.15 and left it all morning, a thoughtful member of the public reported the car to the police. The roof rack with V-bars and the number plate K1YAK, gave it away of course. The police contacted me at 11.30 to check all was OK, which it was. Very impressive on all fronts... and appreciated.

**Finish:** Port Edgar marina, where friends were waiting to pick me up and take me back to my car after, changing into a full set of dry clothes. I gave them a rough ETA which turned out to be optimistic by 20 minutes.

**Tide:** High tide at 4am in Leith and 5am in Stirling, and it was a very high equinoctial spring tide. The river was one metre up when I arrived at 6.30, and the flow was fast, as there had been a fair bit of rain the day before. Low tide at Leith – 10am.

**Weather:** See details later. Wind, a bit too strong for my liking. I had hoped to get big waves to surf down the Firth but it didn't quite work out as expected. The gusts were so strong in the river, I had to down tools to stop being blown over – the wind catches the underside of wing paddles very strongly – they are 'wings' after all. That's one of the advantages of using the long thin wooden 'Greenland' paddles – great for rolling, and much reduced windage, but hopeless for fast paddling, sadly.