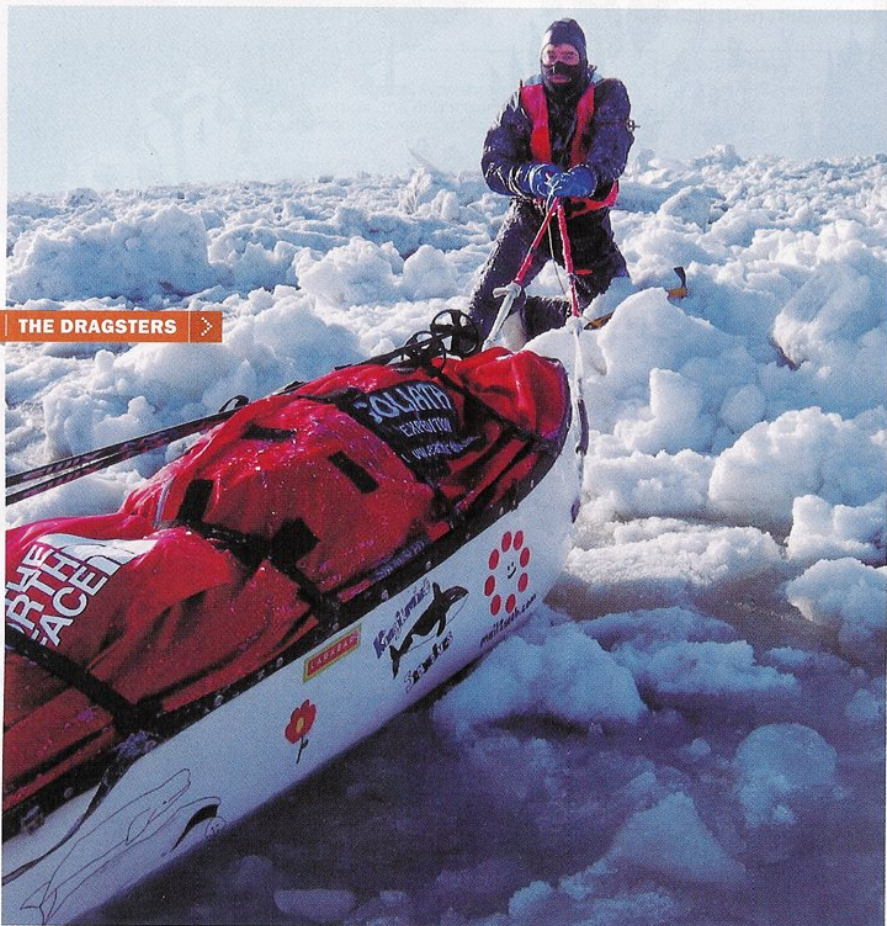


How to walk on water from Alaska to Russia (across the Bering Strait)

>> Dimitri Kieffer, 40, information-technology manager
>> Karl Bushby, 37, former British paratrooper



THE DRAGSTERS >



Dimitri Kieffer (left) and Karl Bushby

REVERSE YOUR COURSE. “On five of the 14 days we had to swim between floes. We swam backward so our faces wouldn’t freeze. We wore dry suits with gloves and neoprene hoods attached and used ice axes to pull ourselves out of the water. We knew we could handle a hundred yards—but not much more. If we had hit any giant bodies of water, we’d have been hosed.”

DON’T CRACK UP. “Cracking ice makes a strange sound—like an animal screaming. That sound woke us up at 5 a.m. one morning. We rushed outside to find two cracks coming toward us. We dragged the tent 150 feet away. I became more concerned with cracks than polar bears.”

PUMP IRON. “The hardest thing was going up and down ice ridges—that’s where two pieces of ice have slammed together. They go straight up like barricades, sometimes 30 feet high. We didn’t anticipate how much upper-body strength we’d need.”

ASK PERMISSION. “Our Russian visas only allowed us to enter the country through Moscow. That caused problems when we landed in northeast Russia and walked two miles into the village of Uelen in Chukotka, a highly guarded autonomous region. After five hours, Russian border guards arrived and arrested us. They wanted to deport us, but we pressed for legal proceedings to keep our records clean.”

TELL IT TO THE JUDGE. “The FSB [successor to the KGB] was quite impressed with what we’d done. They asked, How could you do this without a military background? Did you contact Homeland Security before leaving U.S. shores? What was the full name of your Russian grandmother? (I’m one-quarter Russian.) We won the case, but not before one officer exploded at us: ‘You have no respect for our laws! All you care about is the *Guinness Book of World Records!*’” ▲

We have no clue how long it took ancient humans to walk across the frozen land bridge from Asia to America tens of thousands of years ago. But we do know how fast a couple of fit adventurers can make it back: 14 days and 30 minutes. That was the time clocked in April by Frenchman Dimitri Kieffer (above) and Englishman Karl Bushby. Hopping and swimming from one ice floe to another for 56 miles, they became the first men ever known to have crossed the Bering Strait on foot from east to west. Kieffer, an avid adventure racer, and Bushby, who has spent the past eight years walking from Chile to England on his self-styled Goliath Expedition, pulled custom-made sleds packed with 400 pounds of gear, braved -40°F temperatures, and survived ice breaks beneath their tent. On April 1 they strolled into the tiny Russian village of Uelen and received a most unexpected welcome: 54 days in detention for visa violations. Here, Kieffer guides us through some of the lessons learned from their impressive feat. —Roy M. Wallack

GRIN AND BEAR IT. “No one in recent times had successfully completed the crossing from either shore, so we were prepared for multiple attempts. But unusually cold weather allowed us to glide quickly across sections that resembled frozen swamps. Also, we got lucky: mild winds and no bear problems. Despite seeing a large amount of tracks, we only encountered two polar bears, 15 minutes apart on the same evening. They watched us from a distance, then wandered off.”

PHOTOGRAPHS, FROM LEFT: KARL BUSHBY, INGI R. INGASON