

Title: Paddle

Subtitle: A Long Way Around Ireland

Author: Jasper Winn

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Contents: 321 pp, sketch maps, b&w photos

Cover: softcover

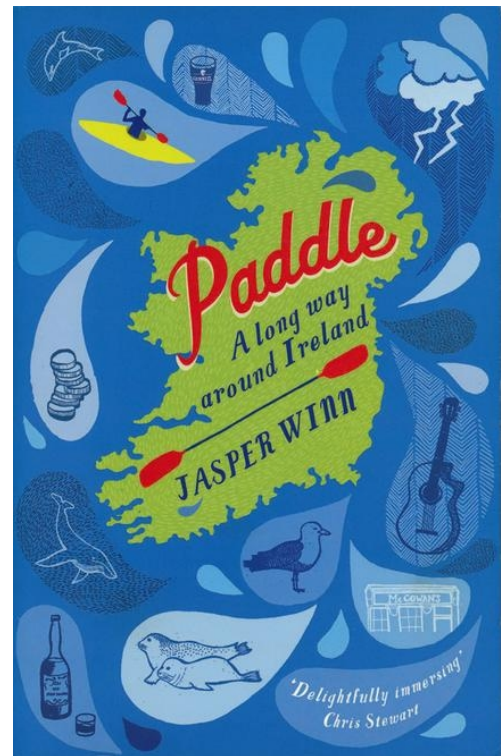
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Review: Paul Caffyn



I thoroughly enjoyed reading this narrative about an Irish bloke paddling around his home island. Although there are well written books by Brian Wilson (*Dances with Waves*) and Chris Duff (*On Celtic Tides*) on earlier solo trips around Ireland, once I started reading *Paddle*, it was my bedtime reading until it was finished.

Jasper's boyhood was in West Cork (Southern Ireland) and he left school at the age of 10 and educated himself by reading, riding horses, learning farming/rural skills and playing music. As a teenager he spent a summer paddling a fibreglass kayak out of Dublin, along rivers and canals that carried him across the country, then south through England and down the full length of France. In the mid 80s with two mates in two folding kayaks, he paddled 2,000 kms down the Danube. Apart from a short trip to Patagonia, the earlier trips had all avoided the 'big grey seas outside'.

A circumnavigation of Ireland was in the back of Jasper's mind for nigh on three decades but a first attempt by Jasper and his partner Elizabeth in 2006 came to a sudden halt after only four days with a painful gallstone attack. Two stays in hospital left him barely able to walk 100 yards with a stick. However on 9 June the following year, Jasper set off solo in a yellow plastic Necky *Narpa* from South Cork and headed westwards for a clockwise paddle around Ireland.

The writing flows nicely with a good mix of all the highs and lows of solo expedition paddling, the morning climb into a damp, cold wetsuit, wretched wet and windy weather, trying to find a sheltered, level campsite at dusk, but great encounters with locals from friendly seals, to a huge intimidating shark, and the evening missions to find a local pub and join in with a jam session.

Jasper's descriptions of the coastline, fauna, flora and locals he met are easy to visualize with no over dramatization or embellishment. Aside from the writing style, I like the expedition style of this bloke – no sponsorship, no website to update each night – very much on the bones of his arse trip.

Below are a few comments from a website which mentioned the book:

It's the pubs that make Ireland a rather better bet to paddle around than, say, Australia. Company and talk was a large part of what my trip was intended to be about. From the age of seven, I grew up in rural West Cork and, although I left as a teenager, I still think of it as home. I wanted to test out my Irishness – to talk, drink and play music.

The trip also gave me a reminder of just how gorgeous the place is. My exploration of Ireland had been patchy before setting off in the kayak. I have travelled along some of its canals, ridden around County Cork, and lived for a spell in Dublin.

But when you work your way, slowly, around a thousand miles of a country, you start to see places in a different way. You get to camp in solitude on uninhabited islands. You get to see wild places, such as Inishmurray or the Blaskets, where the harshness of life finally drove the population to the mainland in the Forties and Fifties. And one long day, I paddled past the Aran Islands, the home of TV's fictional Father Ted. Looking at the distant rocks, I was reminded of Father Dougal's take on relativity: 'Ah, Ted, that cow over there is very small, isn't it?' 'No Dougal, it's not, it's just a long way away.'

I felt on many occasions that a similar misconception summed up my own trip. Ireland isn't that small at all. And out at sea, it can seem an awfully long way away.

The book is paperback size, which leaves the four section maps with lettering a tad small for older eyes. The only photos in the text are included as chapter headings. The only colour pics are six small photos on the inside cover and a small photo of the author on the inside cover.

I recommend *Paddle* as a fine kayaking reading companion, fitting easily into a kayak compartment, for bedtime reading and bad weather days. But given how well written it is, I would have liked to see a hardcover edition produced with more pictures in the text, such as the 'journey's end' picture which I nobbled from a website.