

## EXTREME FEATS

# PLUNGE AND LIVE!

What's it like to free-fall 189 feet over a waterfall—and survive? Paddling phenom **Tyler Bradt** can tell you.

BY NOAH JOHNSON

He was just 6 years old when he sat in a kayak for the first time. Today, Tyler Bradt is a 24-year-old record-breaking extreme athlete who is shattering the limits of white-water sports—and human survival. In 2010, his insane 189-foot free fall over Palouse Falls in Washington state set the world record for the tallest waterfall ever paddled. We recently caught up with Bradt and got his step-by-step account of how he survived this death-defying plunge.

### 1) PLAN AHEAD

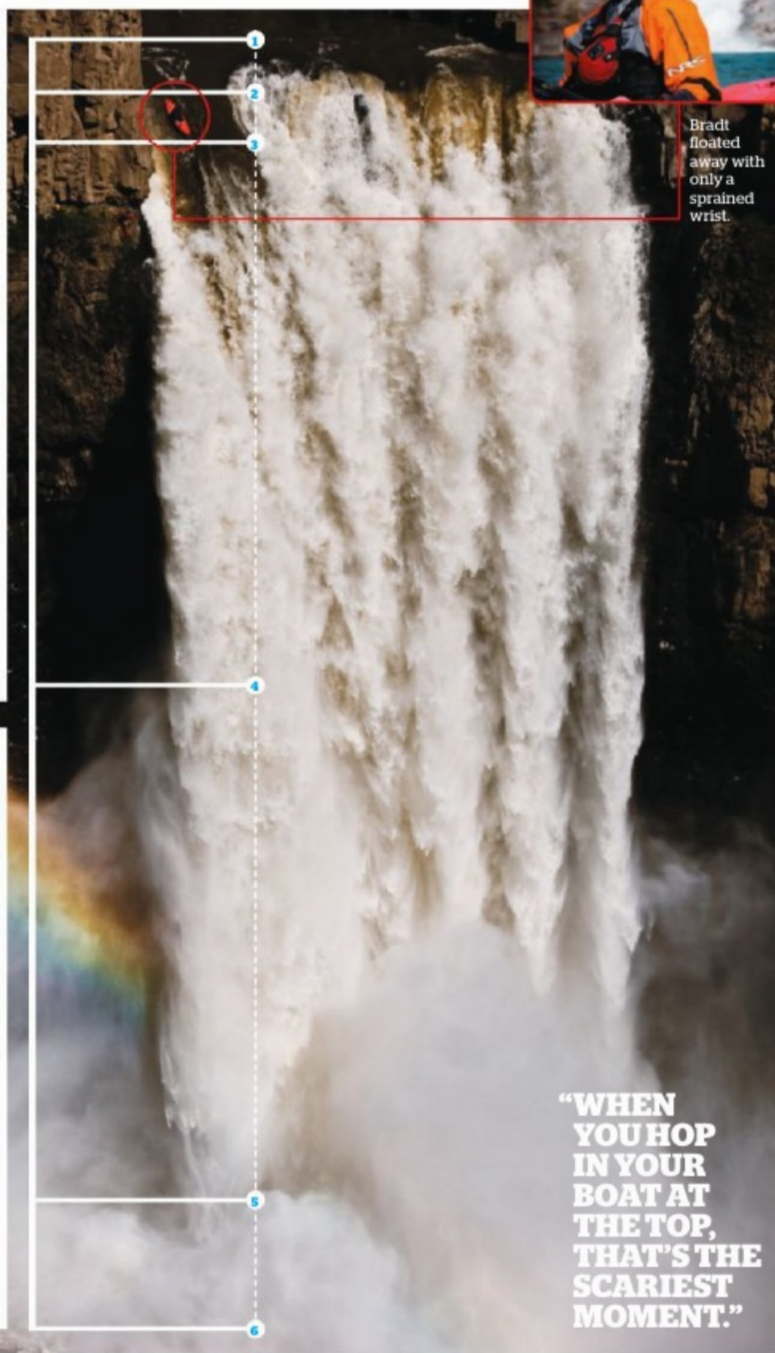
"The first thing you need to do is scout things out. Everything has to be perfect—the team, the weather, the water level. Then you need to visualize. Every waterfall is different, so there's no way to practice except in your mind. I plan out what strokes I'm going to take and what my reaction will be as I'm going into free fall. Once I actually go and run the falls, it's as if I've already done it a hundred times."

### 2) GETTING WET

"When you hop in your boat at the top—that's the scariest moment, up there on flat water getting ready to drop over a very big horizon. You've got to really control your emotions and thoughts. You can't have an 'Oh, shit' moment, or things are going to go wrong and you're going to crash. Once you're in the kayak and approaching the



Bradt floated away with only a sprained wrist.



**"WHEN YOU HOP IN YOUR BOAT AT THE TOP, THAT'S THE SCARIEST MOMENT."**

PHOTO CREDITS: WATERFALL/LANE JACOBS; INSET: BRK BOOMER

falls, keep one blade in the water to control the angle of your approach. When you're paddling toward the lip of the waterfall, the key is to take a couple of strokes to get going just a little faster than the water around you before you drop."

**3) GOING OVER THE LIP**

"You're thinking, 'Am I making the right decision? Is this a good idea?' But at that point, there's no turning back. **The adrenaline hits right at that moment where you're looking 200 feet straight down.** The enormity of your situation is overwhelming, but it's also the moment you need to react. That's when I move into my tuck so I won't land flat on my back or go upside down. When you land you want to be fully forward on the front of your deck with your paddle off to the side so it doesn't come back and hit you."

**4) FREE FALLING**

"You actually free fall for longer than you anticipate—you want to look at what's going on, to see when you're going to hit the bottom, but you can't. Knowing that, I just stayed tucked. The one thought that kept going through my head was, 'Wow, this is really a long way down!'"

**5) STICKING THE LANDING**

"The goal is to land with your boat vertical. You want to land feet down so that you're penetrating the water surface with the least amount of impact. When I hit the bottom of Palouse, it was a full explosion. I got jackknifed out of my tuck position and hit the back of the kayak. My paddle snapped. It really dazed me. It's an impact that I've never felt before—like a car crash. It knocked the wind out of me for well over a minute. I surfaced upside down and was underwater for probably 10 or 12 seconds."

**6) MOMENT OF GLORY**

"When my kayak turned over, there was so much mist around me that I couldn't really see anything, so I just sat there drifting, making sure I was OK. It was surreal. I immediately started to do the self-assessment—'Am I OK? Is everything intact?' Other than a sprained wrist, I was fine. **As the mist cleared, and I was able to take a couple of strokes with that broken paddle, the elation hit me.** Looking back at the waterfall to see what I'd just come down was a moment of real relief. The world record was secondary to just surviving, especially when the chances of breaking my back—or worse—were so high!"

# THE BEST APP-VENTURES

Three new iPhone apps that'll get you ready for any excursion



**THE SNOW REPORT BY THE NORTH FACE (free)**

► Contains almost every ski resort in the country—and includes weather forecasts, conditions, and trail maps.



**TRAILS (\$4)**

► Use GPS to record your trail when hiking, biking, or running, as well as your current speed, distance covered, plus more.



**RIVERGUIDE FOR KAYAKERS (\$5)**

► Check river conditions and thousands of stream-flow gauges across the continental U.S.

**MF PICK**



**DAGGER NOMAD 8.5**

• This is the kayak Bradt used at Palouse Falls. It's fast, stable, and easy to maneuver—qualities you want when charging big waterfalls and treacherous rapids, or just enjoying a leisurely float. Six rescue attachment points will help if things ever get a little "too" fun. [\\$979 @ dagger.com](http://$979 @ dagger.com)

**FIT TIP**

**PADDLE HARDER**

The Russian Twist builds a strong core



• Hold a kettlebell, medicine ball, or weight plate and sit on the floor with your torso at 45 degrees. Extend your arms in front of you and twist to one side, then twist to the other side.

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