

CYCLE STAR ON HER LATEST GLOBAL CHALLENGE

■ **Fiona Russell**

Paralympic hand-cycling champion Karen Darke has pulled off another extraordinary triumph – cycling the length of America.

The Inverness-based athlete, who is paralysed from the chest down, rode 2000 miles from Canada to Mexico using only her arms for power.

Each day, she hand-cycled between 50 and 75 miles and spent an average of seven hours in the saddle.

She completed the ride along the full length of the US west coast in 37 days and had just three days off the bike.

Karen, 46, said: "I have never before ridden for so long each day, and day after day, and with very little rest."

"Of all my many adventures, this has been the toughest long-distance ride yet."

Karen was 21 when she suffered her life-changing injury after falling from a sea cliff while rock climbing in Aberdeenshire.

Her top sporting successes include hand-cycling gold in the Rio Paralympics 2016, a silver medal at the London Paralympics 2012 and gold in the same year at the ITU Paratriathlon World Championships.

She has also hand-cycled over the Himalayas, skied across the Greenland ice cap and scaled the 3000ft El Capitan rock face in Yosemite National Park, California.

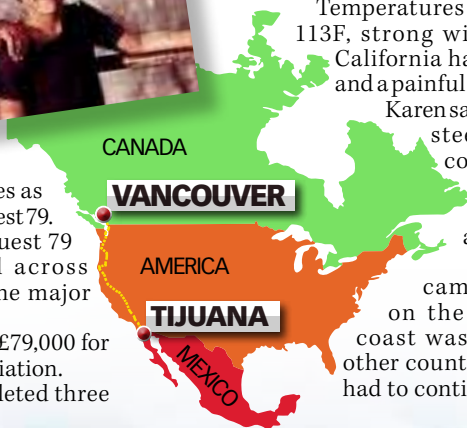
Now she is in the middle of another



JOY
Karen arrives in Mexico. Far left, California wind left her dirty but still happy



NO FEAR
Karen aged 10 with her dad and brother in Yosemite National Park. Below, her route



expeditions of Quest 79. The Golden Way was the first when she trained for – and achieved – gold in Rio.

The Wild Way was a hand-cycle of almost 800 miles through Patagonia. The most recent is the Canada to Mexico ride, nicknamed The Express Way.

The route started in Vancouver before crossing the border to America. Temperatures soared as high as 113F, strong winds in southern California hampered progress and a painful injury hit one arm.

Karen said: "The pedals and steering system are combined and both are controlled by my hands and arms."

"I found that the camber of the roads on the American west coast was steeper than in other countries. This meant I had to continually pull harder

with one arm to stay in a straight line and this gave me a very sore left forearm for most of the ride."

She also had specialist medical packages delivered by pharmaceutical company B Braun to four bike shops along the route.

Karen said: "Because I'm paralysed, personal care is critical at all times for my continued good health and wellbeing."

"But when you are spending so long on a bike each day and in unfamiliar places, it is even more important. I had to be extremely careful to look after myself properly."

Karen says she will never forget when she crossed the border to Mexico.

She added: "I was very tired and hungry but it felt like such an incredible moment too."

"All the impossibles had been made possible and all the hardships had been overcome. I felt very uplifted and happy."

set of daunting challenges as part of a project called Quest 79.

Over several years, Quest 79 will see Karen travel across seven continents in nine major hand-bike rides.

She is aiming to raise £79,000 for the Spinal Injuries Association.

She has already completed three



TOP GEAR
Karen, below, wins silver at the London Paralympic Games, left
Pic Getty



Home of the brave Hands of the free

Paralympic champ's 2000-mile journey down coast of the US



CRIME Brookmyre

Chris I wish hero Jack was a woman

Hit crime writer Christopher Brookmyre has said he wishes he'd made his hero Jack Parlabane a woman.

Cynical reporter Parlabane was played by James Nesbitt in the TV adaptation of the author's first novel *Quite Ugly One Morning*.

Books featuring the character have sold more than a million copies in Britain and Brookmyre, 49, has another in the pipeline.

But the author said: "If there's one thing I could change about Jack Parlabane it would be to make him a woman."

"It took me a long time to realise I'm more comfortable writing from a female point of view. I don't do macho very well."

"I find writing from a woman's point of view much more interesting – it changes how your character views the world."

The lead characters of his latest novel, *Places in the Darkness*, are two female police officers who can't stand each other.

Brookmyre added: "I wanted to write from the point of view of women who would not be remotely impressed by people who solve problems with violence."

Places in the Darkness is published on Thursday.

Fielding an apology

A mysterious message spotted in a field has been revealed as the handiwork of a "grumpy" farmer.

Social media was full of speculation after the letters "SUE x" were found etched in letters on a field in Tetsworth, Oxfordshire.

It turned out George Graham had created the message for his wife Sue to apologise for being moody.

Scientists go ape

Scientists have identified a new species of great ape on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The species has been named the Tapanuli orangutan.