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## British biathlete lands in the county

By Lisa Roose-Church  
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Hugh Pritchard's slim build is easy to spot as he pumps his arms in rhythm, gliding along on roller skis at the Huron Meadows Metropark in Green Oak Township.

The 38-year-old native of the United Kingdom is an accountant by trade, and a 2002 Olympic biathlete at heart. Although Pritchard no longer competes at the Olympic level, he continues his training as a member of the local Nordic Ski Team.

"It's an immense privilege," Pritchard, of Green Oak Township, says about walking into the Olympic stadium in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 2002. "It was a terrifically moving experience."

At the time, Britain was one of the few countries supporting the U.S. effort in the Iraq War and as the British team walked into the stadium, Pritchard said there "was a great cheer" from the American crowd that overwhelmed him and his fellow athletes.

Pritchard's love of sports comes naturally. He is self-taught in the disciplines he pursued, including canoeing and biathlon, which is a combination of skiing and shooting a rifle.

His first love was canoeing, which is equivalent to kayaking in America. At prep school, the 11-year-old was introduced to white-water kayaking while on school trips to France.

By age 14, Pritchard was one of the best slalom competitors in East Kent. He eventually made the British Junior Team in 1985 and during the height of his career, his best finish was seventh place, which he says he thought was a fluke since he had no formal training.

He continued kayaking while attending Cambridge University, where he eventually earned a master's degree.

⊕ Zoom Photo



Photo by GILLIS BENEDICT/PRESS & ARGUS

Olympic biathlete Hugh Pritchard gets in some cross country ski training.

About Hugh Pritchard

Age: 38

Family: Wife, Julie

Hometown: Green Oak Township

How you might know him: Member of Nordic Ski Racer team and a 2002 Olympic athlete for the Britain team.

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At age 25, Pritchard was considered too old to learn skiing, but he learned how to cross-country ski through the Honourable Artillery Company, his Territorial Army regiment. The Territorial Army (TA) is similar to the U.S. National Guard.

"It was normal for Britain biathletes to be members of the TA," Pritchard explained. "I skied in France, Germany and Austria. I gradually got better and better and moved to the national sport."

Pritchard trained in Switzerland for two weeks and qualified for the National Championships at Les Saisies in France in the mid-1990s. He finished around 60th and thought he was done competing until someone told him if he was 10 years younger, he would be on the national biathlon squad.

Pritchard continued competing and was eventually invited to join the biathlon squad to compete for the European Cup circuit after placing second in the 15-kilometer classic at a national event.

At the time, he worked as an accountant, which he put on hold to relocate to Germany for about 18 months to train in an effort to compete on the 2002 Winter Olympic team.

"My ambition was to get to the Olympics rather than win," he said.

In February 2002, he reached his goal and went to Salt Lake City to compete in the biathlon.

In the biathlon, the athlete races cross country with a rifle on his or her back, then stops and shoots at targets. The targets are typically two or four shoots in a race, each at five targets about 50 meters away.

"Qualifying is fairly tough," Pritchard said. "I qualified on the relay team and I expected to do one race (at the Olympics), which I did.

"The weather was miserable that day," he recalls about the 2002 competition. "I was slightly disappointed we did poorly, but it's a terrific achievement. We put a team together when so many other countries at the time didn't bother, and Britain is not known for its skiing."

Although he no longer competes with Olympic dreams in his eyes, Pritchard trains and competes as a member of the Nordic Ski Racer team in Southeast Michigan.

Pritchard came to Green Oak Township after meeting his bride, Julie Pritchard, a Brighton Area Schools employee, through a mutual friend. When he is not skiing, he enjoys cooking, theater and literature.

"It's an awful lot of fun to have had," he says about his youth and Olympic experience.

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On the Net:




Nordic Ski Team — <http://www.nordicskiracer.com/>

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