

Safety At Sea

With the increasing membership of the club it is perhaps time to give more thought to safety when paddling on the sea - at Mudeford in particular, because it is here that the less organised events take place and familiarity is more likely to breed contempt.

I certainly don't want to give the impression that it is dangerous - just that everyone needs to be aware of the dangers & consider how to plan even the simplest outing.

First of all the **weather** - wind is important - is it offshore or onshore?

Tide and currents: is the tide rising or falling? Which way are the currents going and where are they? Look at some charts of tidal streams and work out how the currents can be used to advantage (not battled against)

What about the **sea condition**? How big are the waves? Is the surf clean or dumping?

The Canoeists: how competent is everyone? particularly, how competent and experienced is the weakest? It may be easy going out but what about coming back?

Do you carry flares? a tow line?

Do not be misled by perceived dangers instead of real ones - a big surf with rising tide and onshore wind could be a lot safer than a lower surf with an offshore wind and falling tide. If someone capsizes and fails to roll in the former they will end up on the beach. If the latter, may be the Isle of Wight! A few examples spring to mind:

1. Two canoeists (only 2!) paddling out into quite small surf with a Force 7 offshore wind. The chance of a capsize and failure to roll might be small. but

if it happened the consequences could have been very serious

2. A small group with one very inexperienced paddler all playing about in the current off Hengistbury Head - at least that is what most of us thought. However, the inexperienced paddler was really just paddling like mad to stay where he was and became exhausted. We should have realised and he should have said something, but it did happen and getting back was not easy. It involved a capsize and rescue and it could have become a very difficult situation.

When out at sea make sure you know where you are going - not where you are heading, as these are often far from the same thing. Keep looking at reference points on shore to check where wind and tide are taking you - it is easy to drift a long way very quickly.

Three people is usually considered a minimum for going to sea. I don't agree that this is always necessary, but I do believe that if this 'rule' is over-ridden it should only be after very careful consideration. I think that the important points to consider are:-

1. what **could** go wrong?
2. how **likely** is it to happen ?
3. what do we **do if** ?

Mudeford is a really good place to learn about paddling at sea and very safe if sensible precautions are taken. The last thing I want to do is put any new paddlers off, but I don't want to lose any either!

If everyone thinks about the safety aspect before setting out we will avoid any serious misadventure.

Paul Toynton



CANEWS

Spring/Summer 1996

1st June 1996

A Mornings Paddle at Keyhaven: 11th February 1996

Steve, John and I arrived at the launching point to find everybody getting kitted up. I had brought along a *Reflex* to paddle, but it was decided that I would swap this boat for the Pirouette, making things easier for Claire (who would take over the *Reflex*). This gave me a chance to test the 'S': as I have had a go in almost every type of boat in the club.

The weather was very cold and we had managed to find the windiest spot to change. The tide was well out and we had to ferry the boats through the shallows to reach some depth of water. The conditions could not have been more difficult for Claire - with the incoming tide and a strong wind from behind. Claire was soon using a stern rudder under Barry's guidance.

There was an abundance of birdlife and, during the paddle, we saw Brent Geese, Plovers, Egrets, Dunlins and Lapwings to name but a few.

The group split into two, one group heading out to sea while the others headed further inland. We all met up at Hurst Castle for lunch. Crocodile Toynton exclaimed "*I smell a fox*" and, sure enough, as I stood up we discovered that I had sat on some Fox S____. We found the fox hole and examined a bunch of feathers lying outside. While Paul was wondering what type of bird had met its fate here, someone suggested that, in view of the weather, it was probably a penguin.

We headed back towards the egress point - while some moved quickly, Barry, Paul, Bev, Graham G, Claire

and myself took a more leisurely pace, with Barry assisting to keep Claire (who was paddling the boat that turned in circles) to paddle a straight course.

Well done Claire, and thanks to the organiser - it made a change from Mudeford.

Mike Scott

Foam on the Frome : 3 March 96

Fifteen of us made this years trip down the Frome - and we split into two groups. Having congregated at the Warminster services for a cooked breakfast, it must have been after 10.30am before the first group were on the water at Beckington Bridge.

As usual for this river, the first half mile or so was spent dodging the lines running from the early season anglers

The river level was low, but still managed to provide us with plenty of fun.

The 'hole-in-the-wall', at Langham Farm, although notably less fierce than last year, provide a good venue for practising high crosses, stern-dipping and eddy turns.

The stopper at the bottom of the shoot gave us a little more play time, while the diving boards situated on the bank, in a field, provided further amusement.

Our 'egress' was Ifod - at around 3pm. It proved an excellent day trip. Thanks to Peter for the organisation.



Croyde Bay, Devon. 18 February 1996

Unfortunately it turned out that we wouldn't be able to tackle the river Tavy due to the water not being high enough, so it was decided that we would head for Croyde Bay. As we came over the hill I looked down into the bay and the sea was completely white. The fact that not one surfer could be seen at one of Britain's paramount surfing beaches should have given us an idea of what we were about to be letting ourselves in for.

Managing to get ourselves down onto the beach was hard enough. Clambering over some awkward rocks with the wind blowing a gale, sometimes hardly being able to stand, was just the start. Finally into our kayaks and out to sea, it was all you could do to stay upright.

The problem we now had was that, after going out so far, we would be confronted with a huge dumping wave. I decided to paddle up to the dumper and capsize, not only because I didn't want my teeth knocked out, the theory being that my body would act as an anchor and I would at least remain in the same position when I rolled back up. This had worked on other beaches, but unfortunately for me it didn't work on this one and, rag doll like in the drowning position, I headed back towards the shore.

At this point I decided to have a rest and see what the others were doing. No one else seemed to be able to get past either, so I didn't perhaps feel quite so foolish after all. Off I went back out to sea only to find myself in Graham Bland's way (oh dear) before I knew it he had ploughed straight into me. I still have a yellowish bruise to show for it. Later I found myself twice trying to take John Beeson out, only for him to

intentionally capsize on both occasions seemed a much better idea.

These white waves were very difficult to control ones self on, so the conditions were far from ideal, but I for one had a lot of fun and was glad we had something to do after the disappointment of not being able to paddle the Tavy.

I cannot leave this without saying anything about the Sea Empress disaster.

Only a week later and I am reading of the oil pollution that has spread from Milford Haven to Woolacombe Sands and Croyde Bay. Experts estimate the contaminated area exceeds 500 square miles of the Bristol Channel.

It is clear that with hindsight the salvage operators should have towed the Sea Empress out to sea to lessen the damage of our bird life and shoreline. But in my opinion the oil companies must take a large proportion of the blame, some being as rich as small countries, with the knowledge that this disaster could have been averted if the ship was double skinned. Here is another devastating consequence of human greed.

Steve Hunt.

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Weddings

Two since the last issue of Canews!!

It must be something in the water!! although it is hard to explain why this took 15 years to filter through to Nick (is there a correlation with his snoring?)

Congratulations



Anyway, congratulations to both Richard and Ruth and Nick and Marion

While the water level was, sadly, low (grade 2) it still provided a great paddle, with some play spots to keep us amused. The hole above Dulverton weir, and the stopper at the last drop of Beasley weir and at Bridge weir gave us an opportunity to pump circulation back to frozen extremities.

It was close to 5pm before we were off the water at Exebridge, exhausted.

Westrel Tourist Trail: Sunday 30th June

Westrel Canoe Club is organising a casual time trial starting from Basingstoke Canal Centre at Mytchett, Surrey. Entrants can pick a distance (6, 12, 20 or 30 miles) and a time and then try to achieve it.

If you are interested, telephone Jeff Simmons on 01784 255085

Highcliffe : November 95

After trundling our Canoes down the cliff face at Highcliffe I sat on a rock to recover. The surf was quite loud, crashing on the beach, and the wind was helping it in. From the top of the cliff the sea had looked inviting, but from the beach I wasn't so sure. I had been on the sea several times but had not paddled in surf like this.

Once in my kayak I was pushed out beyond the breakers to where I could face the waves and ride over the top of them (most of them anyway!). The others spent a wonderful hour surfing but did not manage to persuade me to join them. I was quite happy bobbing up and down over the rather large (to me anyway!) waves. I say quite happily but actually I was already considering the inevitable - *how was I going to get back to the shore?!!*

Eventually I told the others I was getting cold and would like to go in and Mike Scott said he was ready too. We made our way back to the start as the tide had taken us quite a way down the beach.

I was quite scared by this time, even contemplating getting out of the Kayak and swimming in, but I had not bargained on Mike's confidence and strength for both of us. He talked me all the way into the shore - when to turn my back to the wave (and not to look back!), when to paddle and which way to lean. I relied on him totally for my every move.

Needless to say we reached the shore successfully and, as I got out to throw my arms around Mike in thanks, my legs were like jelly! Apparently he sensed how scared I was but he never let me know that.

Since that day I have surfed and now enjoy it - but I will never forget my '*knight in shining armour*' on my initial surfing expedition.

Mandy

Bradford on Avon 24 March 96

A good start!, having arrived at Limpley Stoke at 10am we discovered that the Canal navigation was closed. After much debate, we elected to put in at Semington, paddle along the canal to Bradford on Avon and, from there, to Limpley Stoke on the River Avon.

A small armada took to the water: 18 of us, across 13 kayaks and 2 Canadians. If it had not been for the Swan attack on Frances at Bradford on Avon, the mornings paddle would have passed without incident.

After a leisurely lunch stop at the side of a lock the Canadians paddled back along the canal while kayakers chose to negotiate the two weirs on the river Avon. It was on the second weir that the only spillage of the day occurred. The stopper at the bottom of the drop took Frances (and many others) by surprise - but she came up smiling.

While the trip was marked by the general tranquillity of the kayaking, paddle technique livened up proceedings. Frances clouted the Ed around the head with her paddle. Karl damaged Eliots nose with his - so Kit joined in and drew blood from Karls snout. Indeed, we ended up with more injuries on this trip than we have ever experienced paddling more boisterous and demanding rivers!

Thanks to Graham G for organising the trip and providing another fine day out.

Barle: 31st march 1996

This day trip was arranged at short notice - to provide one last river run before the close of access. Despite the short notice, however, there were 8 kayaks and 2 Canadians on the water.

Having overlooked the fact that the clocks were due to go forward the night before, the full implications were brought home when we had to hit the road at 6am (5am GMT!), in order to make the breakfast venue at Kilmington by 8am. However, Kilmington breakfasts have a tried and tested ability to rid the body of the last vestiges of sleep. After the long shuttle, and by the time we were on the water (11am) we were ready to paddle the full 10 miles from Tarr steps to Exebridge

Tide Tables on PC

I now have a program that will calculate the tides for locations throughout Europe.

If you need a tide table or graph for any day or month, for a particular area, let me know

Gratis!

Graham B: 01425 653890

Paddling the Peaks of Europe

As a 'Grade VI' birthday pressie from Frances and the children, I joined a group of paddlers for a 10-day kayaking adventure in the Picos de Europa (the *Peaks of Europe*). The trip was led by Phil Quill and John Smith of Woodmill - who proved excellent, professional and generous guides (and fair cooks) for the 7 'paying guests'.

The Region

The Picos lie in the centre of the Cantabrian mountains of Northern Spain, some 80 miles East of Santander. A "rough-cut and monumental" landscape characterised by rugged snow capped mountain peaks reaching up to 8,600', cut by deep limestone gorges - through which run some excellent canoeing rivers.



The area is a popular destination for Spanish hikers and climbers, but remains relatively unspoilt and undiscovered by international holiday makers.

The region has a long and healthy canoeing tradition - but almost entirely devoted to marathon racing - with an annual international race on the lower Rio Sella. There are a number of local rafting organisations running the white water, but very few 'plastic boaters' (indeed, we saw no

other kayakers using the rivers throughout our time in the region)

The Weather

Travelling out in late April, the trip proved to be a mixture of 'fun in the sun' and 'play in the rain'. The area is known as 'green Spain' - and certainly gets it's fair share of the wet stuff, but that is the price you have to pay to paddle I guess.

The Journey

Getting to and from the Picos is a long but comparatively painless journey (although, after the rough ferry crossing on our return, some of my companions wouldn't agree!). We travelled in the Woodmill bus, with a trailer laden with 16 boats (for 9 paddlers?!). 4 hours to Plymouth, 24 hours on the ferry to Santander, 2 hours to Cangas de Onis.

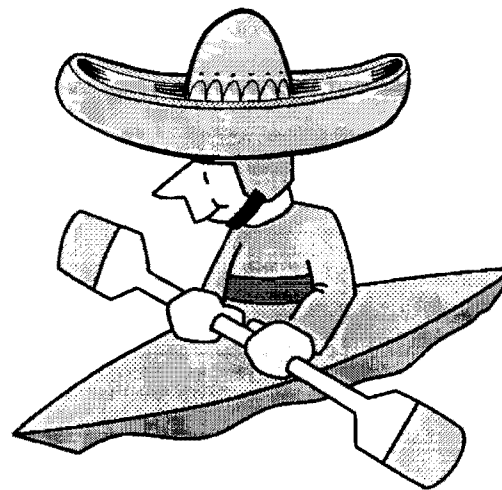
The Accommodation

We stayed in a traditional farmhouse a few miles outside Cangas. This proved very comfortable and, had it not been for the b----- bells hanging around the cows necks, we would all have slept soundly in the tranquil surroundings.

The food was best described as bountiful. We lunched on the banks of rivers (bread, rancid blue cheese, local pate', fruit and chocy biccies). Evening meals were sometimes taken at the farmhouse. However, having exhausted Woodmill's full repertoire of 2 menu's - BBQ'd spicy sausages and veg stew or BBQ'd chops and veg stew - most meals were taken in local restaurants. Typically 3 courses of local nosh (beans/goat/rice pud) washed down with copious quantities of Vino Tinto or San Miguel.

Cultural Activities

Our involvement in the local culture was principally limited to the Woodmill *Cider*



Experience. This transpired to be a pour-your-own-scrumpy affair, which doesn't sound much until you learn that the glass had to be held as far from the bottle as possible and the pourer had to adopt a 'matador' pose throughout. Apparently, this practice is designed to aerate the *Sidre* - I just managed to fill my shoes (rather than the glass) - Brits Abroad!!

The Paddling

Having taken 16 boats for 9 paddlers, I confess to an uneasy feeling - *what is the water going to be like if you anticipate the loss of almost half the boats?!*

With the exception of one day walking 22 km's through the Cares Gorge, and back (a must for any visitor to the region), we paddled excellent white water every day. We spent our time on four rivers, running the Rio Sella, Ponga, Cares and Deva. While each has it's particular identity, all share common characteristics, perhaps best described as 'gorge paddling' - the rivers were narrow, fast, often shallow and rocky.

with crystal clear water and breathtaking scenery

It being late April, we believe that the rivers were running at just below their medium height, although the flow varied significantly from day to day and responded quickly to snow melt and rainfall. This provided moderate volume water (not the high volume flows of the Alps), and demanded some fairly technical paddling through what generally proved to be grade 2 & 3 water - with a few grade 4 falls through boulder gardens and 'squeezes' in the gorges.

Access to the rivers was generally easy, with mountain passes running alongside the rivers. Our decision to go as high up the Sella as was navigable by kayak did, however, involve lowering the boats some 100' to the river, using throw lines - an exercise that I, personally, found more intimidating than the falls.

We found the Spanish anglers to be as gracious and polite as their British counterparts! - the few that we did encounter during the week scowled menacingly from the banks. The advantage of paddling abroad is that you can't understand the expletives hurled your way. Access agreements are described as 'anarchy'.

I was, perhaps, the least experienced paddler in the group - which gave me a lot of opportunity to observe how it should be done and learn from the masters. A few of the lessons I learnt:-

- Bell &/or ear muffs are prerequisite to a good nights sleep in the Picos
- Don't be tempted to adopt local customs in pouring drinks

- When following the bloke in front, through a complicated fall, assess the boat that he is paddling - and make allowances if it is a T-Canyon
- Don't eat all the bread before the 'pig-out' of the day is served
- Try to avoid sharing a cabin on a ferry with companions prone to sea sickness
- Mountain goats can prove a formidable foe when paddling gorges - watch the rocks overhead as well as below.
- Circling Vultures may forewarn that a complicated grade IV fall awaits the paddler around the next corner.
- Throw lines can be usefully deployed for river access and washing lines
- Don't hang around in stoppers with a *Super Sport*

It was a great trip, and highly recommended. **mega thanks** to Frances, Andrew, Sarah, Hannah & Finn.

Graham B.

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Rescue Exercise At Swanage

The rescue services continually come across examples of inexperience, poor planning and incompetence. In order to improve the level of awareness of those using the sea, and to transfer knowledge between them and other organisations, they welcome opportunities to engage in joint rescue exercises. One such exercise was held in March between the RNLI, the Coastguard, the Dorset Police, and the Dorset Coaching Panel of the BCU. At Peverill Point, Swanage, the RNLI have a fast slipway launched lifeboat, and a small inshore lifeboat like the one stationed at Mudeford, and just off the point is a notorious tidal race with extensive overfalls. It was hoped that this location would provide challenging conditions for all concerned at that time of the year.

A notice was circulated with requests for volunteers to take part and, not wishing to spend too much time swimming around in March, I offered to video the proceedings from the Lifeboat. At work I am currently involved in tests on a number of possible new designs for replacement slipway launched lifeboats, and so this also seemed an ideal opportunity to see one in action. There was to be a Coastguard shore station on the cliffs, where the exercise could be observed and the rescue services' radio transmissions could be monitored. Paul Toynton, Bev and the children came to watch from there.

We had been told to meet at the Swanage Coastguard headquarters, but apparently we had not been given the latest plan, since we were the only ones there. We rushed off to the lifeboat station to find that we had missed the briefing. The Coastguard were not to have a cliff top station after all. so

Paul and Bev could only look through their binoculars and try to guess what was happening. The exercise was to start early in the afternoon so we sat on the cliff top and ate our lunch. It was a wonderful day, with no wind, a flat calm sea and warm sunshine.

Things got under way after lunch, when half a dozen coaches and senior instructors paddled out to the overfalls in an assortment of plastic kayaks and one sea kayak. They were fully equipped with dry suits, helmets, flares, VHF radios and an EPIRB (Electronic Position Indicating Radio Beacon). I was aboard the RNLI lifeboat, and we were accompanied by the inshore lifeboat, the Police launch, and another rescue boat which I believe was part of the Coastguard service. Also in the area was the Coastguard rescue helicopter from Lee on Solent, which was due to carry out a lift from the lifeboat. Visibility was excellent and the sea was very calm except in the overfalls, where a tidal flow was increasing to about 3 knots with waves of about 1 to 2 feet.

Three of the canoeists demonstrated an all in rescue to the onlooking rescue services, that is they all capsized at once and recovered without outside assistance. Unfortunately they lost a paddle between them which was recovered by one of the rescue boats, and did not set a particularly good example in that respect. Although they capsized within the overfalls, the strong tide took them away into calmer water for the majority of the time.

Those in the plastic kayaks were unable to return to the overfalls against the tide, so they were carried or towed back by the rescue boats. Two kayakers were being towed at speed, one of them holding the tow rope which was led through the bow toggle, while the other was holding his kayak alongside.

They were unable to hold the bows together, and as they were forced apart one capsized. He had given his paddle to the other so was unable to roll, but the towed kayaker dropped the tow line and was able to offer an eskimo rescue.

The kayakers reassembled in the overfalls and simulated a capsized requiring assistance. Their hand flares were easily visible from the lifeboat and from the shore, but their EPIRB was on a different frequency to that being monitored by the rescue services. The lifeboat attended and two crew went over the side on a scrambling net to assist the swimming kayaker. They first got his boat on board, albeit with some difficulty as they lifted one end while the other was full of water. They arranged a strop around the kayaker's chest so he was supported at the surface alongside the lifeboat. This class of lifeboat tends to roll a lot in beam seas and, even on this calm day, the casualty was well aware of the danger of being hit on the head by the boat's side strakes. Next the crew disconnected the two lifelines which run around the sidedecks by unscrewing the tensioning bottle screws. There was no quick release mechanism. The casualty was turned to face away from the lifeboat and was hoisted aboard. The procedure took over three minutes from the time that physical contact was made, and the 'casualty' had plenty of time to take snaps of the lifeboat while held alongside.

Another capsized kayaker was attended by an inshore rescue boat, which recovered him and his boat more easily.

The next exercise was to recover an injured kayaker onto the lifeboat. One of the kayakers simulated a dislocated shoulder by not using that arm. The lifeboat crew

produced a rigid stretcher, normally used for helicopter lifts, and prepared it for use. I asked if it floated and, since the crew did not know, they threw it into the sea to find out. It did. The kayakers rafted up alongside the lifeboat and the stretcher was placed on top of the raft. Some of the inshore rescue boat crew went into the water to assist but it was hard to see what their contribution was. The 'injured' kayaker got out of his boat, lifting himself unaided on his good arm, and put himself in the stretcher! The stretcher lifting strops were then attached and those on the lifeboat prepared to lift. During this time the raft gradually broke up until the stretcher was in the water, from where it was hoisted manually on board. This procedure also took several minutes.

These exercises took longer than expected and the helicopter lift had to be called off because the helicopter was now low on fuel and had to return to base. It should be borne in mind that:

- These exercises were pre-planned and everyone knew roughly what was going to happen.
- The kayakers were all highly experienced sea paddlers, most of them I understand working professionally in the sport.
- The weather was good with a calm sea, warm air temperature, no wind, and good visibility.
- The kayakers were well equipped, with dry suits and thermals so that the periods of immersion in the sea in March did not reduce their ability to operate physically or mentally.
- The conditions were not nearly rough enough for such experienced paddlers to have got into serious difficulties.

- All the rescue craft were on the scene when the incidents took place. They did not have to receive an alert, scramble crews, or travel to the scene.

I think that the important lessons for canoeists are the importance of learning and practising rescue drills and, preferably, learning what precautions to take so that we are unlikely to get into difficulties that we cannot cope with. That way, hopefully, we shall not need to rely on the rescue services. Firing a flare is not a guarantee of instant rescue, and in rough weather it is very difficult to find and recover a person from the sea. Many people in the rescue services are unfamiliar with the canoeists abilities and difficulties, and a lot more such exercises will be required to improve our understanding of each other's operations.

I have a copy of the video that I took if anyone is interested in seeing it.

Barry



Mike, displaying press-ups on a Barge -the benefits of Navy training

Ilfracombe Weekend: 17-19 May

By 23:00 hours we had all finally arrived! Nick and I took the scenic route after a wrong turn at Dorchester, Bev got Pauls car stuck half way up the steep drive to the B&B, Ruth and Richard spent 3/4 hour lost in Ilfracombe, and Karl spent £17.00 on a meal for one (not realising we were in the pub next door). Things could only get better.

After a snoreless and cold night (may I again thank Nick for sleeping in the kitchen), followed by a feast of a breakfast - the search for surf began. We settled for Woolacombe, where I reluctantly changed and carried canoes a mile across the beach to the sea. What were they talking about "no surf", it was perfect surf! one foot high, absolutely brilliant. After learning what the big boys did, I was left to play on the small waves - now this was fun! Sadly, though, it was soon decided we would paddle around Baggy Point to Croyde due to the "lack of surf"

After being reassured by Paul that I wouldn't hold them up I decided to paddle with them. Nick and Karl were closely studying the rocks while I just concentrated paddling in a straight line through the swells of the sea. As we approached Baggy Point a strange man seemed to be risking not only his own life but also that of a small child. Descending down a steep cliff to a mass of boulders was Barry and Jake! Bev let it be known how she felt about this as we headed in to join them for lunch. We then followed the coastline taking in the beautiful sight of the flowering cliff face, rocky caves and hovering seabirds, until it was time to turn around and head back to the surf at Woolacombe. I can honestly say I had thoroughly enjoyed my days paddle!

The wind and rain let loose on Saturday night. Graham and Frances, with their many offspring, met us in a local pub in Ilfracombe where we all ate. Outside, the historical reenactment of an invasion by the French was being celebrated. Unfortunately, by the time we left the pub the festivities and fireworks had finished.

Sunday morning I ate enough breakfast to last me a week. The sea looked rough and confirmed the fact that today would be spent walking. We travelled to Watersmeet for a pleasant walk beside the river and a packed lunch sheltered from the rain.

The last stop on the way on the way home was Watchet. A quick cuppa, a look around the museum and a nose at the harbour. It was all very interesting, and very quiet - Bev had lost her voice!

It was a shame for those who went all the way to Ilfracombe on this weekend only to find "surf good enough for Debbie" but I was glad of the company - so thank you!

Debbie



.....and full recovery!!!