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## EDITOR'S CORNER

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*Jaz and Mike, currently in the Falklands, have asked me to forward their greetings from the lands of the Penguins.*

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### UPPER DART ACCESS.

*I thought I was crazy when I applied for access to the River Dart (for January 1999) on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1998!!!*

*However, it seems as though there are a lot of crazy paddlers out there, Solent and Pool clubs left it until August and it proved too late - all weekend places on the upper Dart were fully booked.*

*Consequently, places are very limited - If you want to try the upper Dart this season, please secure your place early - there are only eight places for each of the two trips, and 6 on each have already gone!!*

**You have been warned!!**

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### RIVERCALL

A telephone service has been set up by the Environment Agency to provide information on river levels. It's one of these systems where you follow instructions, push loads of digits, get exasperated and finally come up with "at such and such a time and place the river was 10cm below the average for the month" However, this is updated regularly and, providing you have a rough idea of the average monthly levels!, is perhaps the best information source available.

- SW Region: 0930 107705
  - Wales: 0930 107704
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### CAR THIEVES ON THE DART

Yes, they're back!

The River Dart Access Team have been informed by the police that the car break-in gang are again operating in the area.

There have been thefts at Stitchwick, Bench Tor and in the Totnes area. The area around Holne Bridge is particularly vulnerable because of its isolation. Please be careful about what you leave in your cars.

The police gave details of one vehicle known to be involved: a red Peugeot 309  
Registration: D443 LRL

If you see it in any of the parking areas contact the police (0990 700400) and/or the National Parks information kiosk at Newbridge immediately.



*November 1998*

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## RIGHT TO REPLY: THE RACE TIMEKEEPING

It seems along time ago now - but I promised I would put this in, Ed

### Canews July 98

.....*"Any disputes regarding timing should be referred to Mike Scott who was busy supervising the novice group but gamely tried to get back to the finish line when I came into view, or to our Chairman to whom he had transferred responsibility. Nick did not race because he was nursing an arm injury, and was seen strolling to the finish line, beer in hand, while half of the field were already recovering on the slipway. Fortunately Mike memorised the first few times while Nick found a suitable platform for his beer and took over with the pencil and paper."*... Barry

### The Hengistbury Head Race - an alternative view

Here's the true version of events

So there I was. Acting as stand-in for the Official Race Time-Keeper, who blithely went off for a paddle after starting the race. "It'll be at least forty-five minutes before anyone arrives back", he called cheerfully over his shoulder as he joined a few other non-entrants mulling around in the harbour. So obviously, when 'one-arm Mike' turned up ten minutes later and offered to lend me his monocular AND buy me a pint, I accepted. I was glad of the company, the beer and the improved long-range vision.

Standing on a table outside the Haven, we took turns to peer myopically through the optics, scanning the entrance to the Race where the winner would undoubtedly appear in the fullness of time. All was right with the world. We discussed broken arms, and the quality of Stella Artois.

Suddenly, the Official Race Time-Keeper came galloping across the car park. "Barry's back", he yelled, which fitted in nicely with the orthopaedic theme we'd been developing. Of course, we both felt sorry for Barry, but then he is getting on in years and he had started off in a completely different direction to everyone else. He'd probably paddled against a strong headwind to the centre of Christchurch Harbour, grown tired, and limped back to the start point with severe backache.

The Official Race Time Keeper grew more agitated. "No, no, you don't understand. I mean Barry has won the race" he said, hopping from one foot to another. Ridiculous. Mike and I knew full well no-one was back; we were prepared to put money on the fact that not a single kayak had come up the Race all the time we'd been watching.

Well, honestly. How were we supposed to know that Barry had paddled the full course of the race in near record time, then portaged round the inland end of the sandbar while we were gazing in an Isle of Wight direction?

It's just not cricket.

Nick

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## DART CAMPING 21<sup>ST</sup> SEPT. 98

This was my first weekend with the Ringwood Canoe Club and I travelled down with Paul Toynton and Jill. We arrived at Totnes in the dark, and after trying frantically to pack my kayak so everything would fit in (but didn't) we set off down the river in the dark, with Paul the leader. This was the second time I'd kayaked in the darkness and although Jupiter cast it's silvery glow on the glassy water, the banks and land beyond were black and invisible. It was, however, very peaceful and the stars shone out with the Orion constellation clearly visible spread out above us.

Whilst admiring the stars I managed to paddle straight into a branch that was poking out of the water but soon disentangled myself and caught up with the others.

After about an hour we heard voices amongst the blackness of the bank and glided towards the sound to be met by some of the crowd. Everyones tents were up and a warm bright fire was burning amongst the trees. Lots of beer and wine was floating about much to our delight and an exchange of exciting trips up river to the camp was the main topic of conversation. I set up my tent eventually after walking about in blindness wishing I had brought my glasses. Once cosy and tucked up in a sleeping bag I enjoyed the night sounds of owls and foxes, splitting the silence of the night.

Morning was a bit of a washout as we awoke to pouring and freezing rain and a dull sky. Luckily the trees made a good shelter and a couple of huge umbrellas helped keep the rain out of the tea.

After breakfast we all set off down river where eventually the sun came out and rewarded us with lovely views of hilly and wooded scenery. Getting nearer to Stoke

Gabriel, the wind really picked up and, all of a sudden, most of the sailing dinghies around us capsised. We paddled on through the bouncy water, the double kayak nearly did a roll but managed to stay up and all I could think of was - if I capsize surely I'll sink with all my clobber tucked in the back of the kayak. The waves surfed us from behind but we finally managed to make it to the beach to set up camp.

Here the sun came out and it became very hot. Lunch was set out in the corner of the field whilst we decided what the agenda would be for the afternoon.

Barry, Paul and Elliott decided to paddle down to Dartmouth and the rest of us chose to paddle around to Dittisham for a drink in the pub as the weather was still rather gusty.

We arrived at the Ferry Pub Inn and had a relaxing drink by the window overlooking the river. Lisa and I then decided to wander into the village for a look around and came upon a little Norman Church with beautiful stain-glass windows and wooden architecture. A trip to the café opposite the pub followed, where we had some coffee and chocolate admiring the views.

Paddling back to camp proved a bit tiring as we were against the wind and current, but the choppy swells and bouncy water was quite exhilarating.

Apparently a seal followed us back but I missed it. Back at camp dinner was cooking in a large pot hanging over the fire from a tree. The little cove was the perfect shelter for a dinner of vegetable curry and cake - with lots of wine, although the girls drank most of it. A great evening watching the sun set, the stars rise and looking out for the phosphorescence in the deep, dark, and now calm water.

After breakfast the following morning we paddled off towards Totnes again passing by Tuckenhay and stopped at the pub, The Maltsters, there for a drink. Here there was an amazing giant goldfish bowl that almost resembled a hologram being so clear to look into - the kids loved it. Then after a quick picnic stop on the bank we headed back to Totnes. The wind was quite strong and the Canoeists (Canadian) were seen using their huge umbrellas as sails. I paddled on enjoying the wildlife and saw many Egrets perched in the trees along the way, as well as a couple of Herons. Some even saw a Kingfisher flash by.

For my first weekend away with the club, I really enjoyed it and am looking forward to doing some more adventures and photo-taking.

Helen Kirby

## **DART / BARLE FATALITIES**

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October saw the worst floods in Wales and the South West for 20 Years.

Sadly there were two canoeing fatalities on massive water - both at locations regularly paddled by RCC:-

### **River Dart**

About 80 metres below Holne Weir. The river was HUGE, the water being up to the second step at Newbridge, and over the egress point fence at Holne Bridge.

I have read reports that James Bilson, 18, a member of the Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club died when his kayak became trapped against a submerged fence. Rescue attempts by divers, firemen and other canoeists failed because of the force of the rising water.

The National Park, Police and BCU agreed to stop any further canoeing on the day. The BCU said an investigation

would be launched into the accident but it appeared to be "pure bad luck".

### **The Barle**

The second canoeist to have died was identified as Dean Brittain, 47, of Aldershot, Hants. Who was canoeing with a group of fellow-members of the Surrey-based Blackwater Valley club when his craft overturned on the River Barle somewhere above Marsh Bridge (Dulverton). He was swept against a tree and a colleague was unable to free him due to the force of the water. The victim was swept under the tree and was held underwater for a period of time, believed to be at least 45 seconds, before he was swept downstream. His colleagues eventually got him onto dry land where they bravely attempted to resuscitate him, before the fire brigade arrived and took over.

Sadly they were unsuccessful and he was declared dead at the scene by a doctor.

While 'hair boaters' will have found it very tempting to paddle that weekend, the hazards of fencing, overhanging trees, strainers etc. in flood conditions have been brought home to everyone.

## **DART ACCESS**

You must all be aware of the considerable difficulty in securing access to the Dart this season - we have been lucky, but I thought some of you might be interested in the following comments made by Adam Box, and posted on a bulletin board in response to some email grumbles he has received:-

"OK, you asked for my views, so they follow after a few facts

*Fact 1: Although none of us likes or agrees with it, the law as it stands quite clearly does not give us the right to canoe on rivers in England and Wales. Most of these rivers are considered to be privately owned, and where no right of navigation exists the owners can legally prevent the use of their property.*

*Fact 2: Given that the above is true, the only way that we are going to get to use rivers is to negotiate with the owners and seek permission to paddle on them.*

*Fact 3: Given that Fact 1 is true, the restrictions imposed by riparian owners are what dictates the conditions of a canoe access agreement, not what canoeists may or may not feel desirable. I would love to issue permits to every person who wants to be on the Dart but the agreement which allows us to use and enjoy the river specifies a number limit for any one day. Without this agreement the owners could legally prevent the use of the river by canoeists. Anyway, would anyone really want to share the river with 400 people on a Sunday, doesn't the number limit actually improve the conditions for those using it?*

*Fact 4: We may get a change in the law over time to redress this ridiculous situation. The Government's proposed 'Access to the Open Countryside' legislation could lead to changes which would eventually make rivers more accessible, but most of us will be too old to benefit so we need to do everything possible to safeguard our access now whilst also making plans for the future.*

*Fact 5: There are many fabulous rivers in the South West which do not have any access agreements and which are rarely paddled; the Tavy from Tavistock downstream, the Walkham and the Teign around Fingle Bridge are rivers which have very similar characteristics to the Dart but no access. Rather than everyone ranting on about the terrible access on the Dart shouldn't we be grateful that we do have that access and instead be directing our venom at these rivers. No need to apply to LAO for permission, no numbers limit, but a pretty good chance of prosecution.*

*I have already started discussions with the National Park to see if it would be possible to site a river height gauge at Newbridge and to have their mobile office there fitted with a BCU answerphone. This would be updated daily with information about the water level. This could reduce the number of paddlers who get on at low flows having travelled long distances.*



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## **NORTH WALES ACCESS**

Please take note of the following regarding access agreements for North Wales rivers in the 98-99 season.

**Tryweryn:** shutdown from 17<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup>. All river down to Bala is open from Dec 1st to Feb 28th

**Conwy:** From Oct 1st to Feb 28<sup>th</sup> Sign in at Cotwolds in Betws y Coed.

**Glaslyn:** From 1<sup>st</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> April

**Llugwy:** Open year round to ugly house.

**Dee:** Tour dates. November 21/22, December 5/6, January 9/10

### **Rivers with no agreements.**

**Ogwen:** No agreement, but should be ok in close fishing season ( October to February). only access at ogwen bank and egress under A55 Bridge.

### **Mawddach, Gain, Eden.**

Should be ok in close fishing season, give consideration to locals.

**Winion:** May experience some problems.

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## **THE DART LOOP (I THINK!)**

As I crawled out of bed at approximately 5.30a.m., I tried to convince myself that this really was what I had been looking forward to for the last week. At last I was going to paddle 'The Dart Loop'. Graham Bland arrived to pick me up at about 6.00a.m. and as we quickly loaded gear into the boot and kayak onto the roof-rack, I tentatively asked, "Will I need my splits?".

"Don't worry" said Graham, "I've got a pair." So I left mine at home.

We were not sure who we might be meeting, if anybody, at the start, but still managed to make good time for the 8.30a.m. deadline. As we passed over

Holne Bridge, Graham looked out of the window and commented, "There's a lot of water down there!" As we pulled into the car park, Elliotts smiling face greeted us and he confirmed the earlier statement, "There's a lot of water today!"

Quickly we donned wetsuits, dry tops, packed kayaks etc. and a little surprise was shown as I casually commented that it would be an interesting first paddle of the Loop with this amount of water in it. Both Graham and Elliot thought that I had paddled it before.

The shuttle completed and access tags firmly on helmets, we made our way down the steps towards the river. "Normally we get in on that ledge down there" said Elliot.

"What ledge?" I replied.

"The one that you can't see under a foot of water." was the comforting response.

We got into our boats under the bridge and paddled around there for a few minutes to warm up, looking for eddies to break out into and have a rest before starting off down the river.

"There won't be much time to 'play' today," said Graham, "we will just have to go with the current." I wasn't sure whether to be happy or sad!!

We paddled on and I remember thinking that this really was great fun and more along the lines of what I thought white water paddling should be like. Graham and Elliot kept commenting that they thought I was very brave coming out on a day like this for my first real white water paddle.

If you asked me what features we passed, I couldn't tell you, but I made sure that I followed one if not both of the others. We carried on, tackling faster water and slower water, as I got used keeping my

balance and trying to read the river as well as looking out for eddies.

As we came round one corner, there seemed to be a reasonable drop ahead, so Graham went first, followed by Elliot, with me bringing up the rear, having left a reasonable gap for them to get clear of the bottom. As I arrived at the drop and paddled over it, my immediate thought was, "What is the bottom of Elliotts boat sitting there for?"

A split second later, I ran into to him and tried to impale myself on the end of his boat, which fortunately being a 'spud' was quite blunt, and then capsized immediately.

A moment later, I found myself upright again and thought, "This looks like a stopper, I'd better try and scull to stay upright!!" Too late I was over again and this time decided not to wait and see if I was stuck in a stopper so I bailed out.

I came straight up to the surface and managed to regain hold of my kayak almost immediately and just in time to see Graham rescuing Elliotts boat and taking it to the side. Unfortunately, I had also let go of my paddle and saw it sail past Graham as he fought to save Elliotts boat. "Catch my paddle" I yelled at him. But I obviously was not paying him as much as Elliot was because he ignored that and continued to tackle Elliotts boat.

Eventually, after being bumped over numerous rocks, I finally managed to find an eddy and empty the boat and begin to look around and see where Graham and Elliot had ended up. When we finally met up, we found out that everybody was physically OK and that we were only short of my paddle. Wasn't I glad that we had those splits!!

Graham then informed us that we had just been through the 'Washing Machine', which normally has some nice waves to

play in at the bottom. I think I went through those under water! Hopefully next time I will be able to see what the 'Washing Machine' is really like as this trip kept my mind occupied in other ways rather than seeing what features there were.

Graham's lasting impression of this episode will be Elliotts and my impression of the Dance of the Swans from Swan Lake. He said that all he could see were kayaks, paddles and limbs moving sort of gracefully around in this wave before being thrown out. What a shame he didn't have a camcorder - we might have been stars on You've Been Framed.

After this the rest of the trip seemed quite uneventful. We did take the easy way out and walk round one piece of rough water but paddled the 'Triple Falls', which were barely recognisable as 3 separate drops, with someone standing guard with a throw line at the bottom. As I came down this, I got bored and hit a rock which spun me 180 degrees so I finished the last third of the rapid backwards - just to make it more interesting of course!!

Before long we arrived at Holne Bridge and joined up with the rest of the weekend party to paddle the lower Dart. But that is another story...

Hopefully next time, there will be a little less water so that I can actually see what the river is really like. The 'Washing Machine' will be a new experience as I have no idea what it really looks like beyond the view from the top. A very big thank you to Graham and Elliot for getting me down there in one piece and giving me an appetite for more.

*Nigel Cox*

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## **DART : 10/11 OCTOBER**

I'm not sure why I'm writing this trip up!

Andrew and I ventured down to meet the gang at Holne Bridge on the Saturday morning. Arriving early but having been snapped speeding on the way!

This was to be Andrew's first whitewater kayak trip and he grew progressively quieter as we got closer to Holne - perhaps he had just fallen asleep, but I remember my own quiet reflection prior to my first trip - too many moons ago.

A small party had got up at a ridiculous hour that morning to paddle the Loop (Elliott, Ros, Nick and Albert) while the remaining motley crew (Paul, Stuart, Pete M, Alex, Karl and Jason) met us at Holne by 9:30. This was totally uncharacteristic for RCC. I had reckoned on having time for a second breakfast and a few Zzzz's before anyone showed!

Having given the shuttle bunnies (Debbie, Marion and Trish) a few additional items for their shopping list, we were on the water warming up and going through the normal training routines in the shallows under the bridge.

The last time Andrew had come along with me we went down the Usk in one of the clubs new Scouts - I had almost drowned him within the first few minutes and so was determined to keep him upright until lunch time at least - I reckon my adrenaline was pumping harder than his, grade 2 trickles looked like grade 5 falls when I considered that it was my little lad negotiating them! As it panned out I needn't of worried - the wobbles soon stopped.

We were only just beginning to negotiate the first weir when the Loop crowd caught us up - reporting great fun but low levels.

They had to slow down to our pace - we were really ambling.

The weather was dry, the conversation inspired, as we floated down towards coffee break and then Lunch. There were enough small waves to keep us content. Indeed the river level was higher than it's been for the last few Dart barn trips - which didn't make a lot of sense to me. How can a river be in low conditions in one section but higher conditions further down?! (Colin Buttler did, however, confirm that this is often the case, although I never got the reason)

Anyway, the conditions were confirmed when we arrived at Abbey weir - the boil on the first drop looked uglier than normal. The descent of this weir was also hampered by a b\_\_\_ great tree lying longitudinally across 3 or 4 of the steps). Only a couple of us felt like running this. Karl took Ros's new Corsica through the boil and down the steps while I elected to run the slot - believing that I would avoid the tree by a good 10 metres - it panned out at 10 inches (my judgement, as well as my ticker, took a pounding again )

The best play spot of the day was in dispute, I still maintain it was just below Abbey weir where a little stopper could have kept me happy for hours, but Elliott missed this one so applauded the virtues of a minuscule wave further downstream!

We arrived at Buckfast at around 14:30, and, in view of the time, debated briefly the feasibility of paddling on to Staverton, or doing a second run down the section we had just finished. In the event we changed loaded up and drove the few hundred yards to the Cave Centre bunkhouse where we were staying.

*Dart: 10/11 Contd..*

The accommodation was adequate, with a number of small rooms full of bunks and there were good showers. It even boasted a small museum describing the geology of the region. The main seating area, however, lacked the cosiness of the camping barn - with more the character of a rural African departure lounge. This was, perhaps, fitting - we were about to journey to Kenya, courtesy of Albert and his collection of slides.

We waited in the 'departure lounge', drinking coffee and chatting - waiting for the return of the shoppers. Elliott, Karl and Nick were growing noticeably paler as the clock ticked by with no sign of the spendthrift trio. What damage could 8 hours at Totness and Dartmouth do to their respective bank accounts?! They returned, however, remarkably unladen - but bearing a toothbrush for Peter, who grabbed the small offering and charged off to the washroom beaming.

The Buttlers popped in for a brief chat (not to polish the silver) and Paul prepared a Sausage Bake for dinner. We elected to visit Kenya between the main course and the Apple Crumble pud - some retired to the pub after this, to continue the debate about the size of African spiders.

Sunday was equally well organised - While Pete, Alex and Albert elected to run the Loop with Colin, the rest of us were on the water early again for the run to Staverton. It was a beautiful sunny October day. Having inspected the condition of Buckfast weir (worse than ever) we elected to put in below the weir and save the plastic on our boats.

After the successful dry paddle of yesterday, Andrew was much more confident now, and was constantly practicing his ferries and eddy ins/outs. His confidence grew! further after his

swim - ferrying across a narrow constriction that had some very tippy currents (weren't they Elliott!). After his 'life experience' Andrew quickly latched on to the fact that the worst that could happen was a quick swim followed by hot chocolate. That wasn't at all bad - by the time we shot the chutes at Staverton he was whooping with the rest of us!

As always a great weekend - thanks to Paul for the dinner, Ros for lunches, Nick and Marion for breakfasts (and, particularly the latter, the fairness of the accounting), Barry for the pre-trip organisation and Albert for the education and entertainment.

I couldn't shift 'Speedy Nix' off my tail the whole journey home!

NB: The Dart the following week was unrecognisable - there was no sign of the ledge at Newbridge, the river was a brown torrent and, consequently, there were many swims, with lot's of rescue practice - If someone has done the honours, please read on....

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## **PADDLERS HITCHED IN SURPRISE BASH**

Congratulations to Colin and Karen who were married on 24<sup>th</sup> October - only announcing the purpose of their party after guests, some fearful of the Karaoke threat, had arrived.

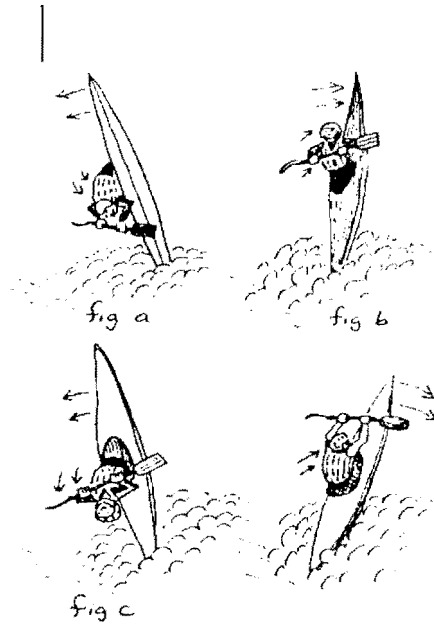
A big thank-you to Colin and Karen for an excellent party - and to Sarah for her entertainment Congratulations, also, to Victoria for a lovely 'Best man' speech!.

## THE WASHING MACHINE

(The Appliance of Science by Elliott and Nigel)

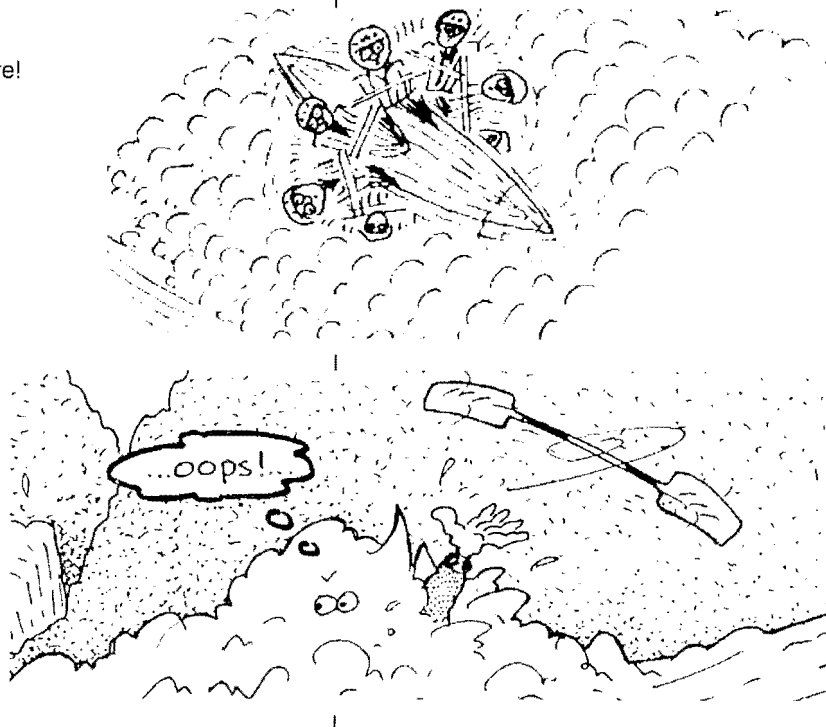
Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October saw some great river levels on the Loop - well over the ledge and running brown.

Elliott / Nigel's Game Plan: >>>>



The Outcome: >>>>>

Need I say more!



## NEW AIRBAGS

Barry has bought airbags for the club's open canoes to make them safer and easier to handle if they capsize, particularly on white water.

These are fitted into the ends of the canoes and may be used for all trips.

They cost us £130 and are worth looking after. In particular we must take care that sand and stones do not accumulate under the bags as they will abrade through the fabric. If the canoe gets dirty inside please deflate the bags enough to wash the grit out of the ends of the canoe.

In hot weather the bags will expand a lot and will be damaged if they are blown up too hard. This applies when in use or stored in the open so please let a little air out if they are hard.

## DIGITAL RAPIDS

Might be of interest to those who are trapped working in front of a computer screen wishing they were on the river.

Digital Rapids is a whitewater screen saver and wallpaper program featuring 32 kayak and rafting photographs from around the world. It has the facility to add you own photo's etc. and has kept me amused during the summer (when I should have been doing other things).

This is the way Auralis Inc. describes it ...

*"For Digital Rapids, we assembled a spectacular collection of kayak and rafting photographs, creating a screen saver that has been designed specifically for boaters by boaters. With the ever expanding role of computers in our home and office environments, Digital Rapids is the natural accessory for paddlers allowing them to visually travel the world in pursuit of their passion".*

That's stretching things, but you can get a free sample from:

<http://www.webshots.com>

## TRIP CANCELLATIONS &

### BOOKINGS

For those of you that don't read minutes to meetings -

Members who volunteer to organise club trips are becoming exasperated. The two principal problems are :

- The difficulty of getting members to commit to a trip - this is particularly difficult when the trip involves the booking of accommodation.
- Where a trip is cancelled (e.g. due to bad weather, etc) the organiser is often faced with the long task of phoning all that 'may come' to let them know.

In future, therefore:-

1. The calendar may include a last booking date - if, by that date, there are insufficient numbers to make the trip worth while it will be cancelled
2. The onus will now be on individual members to contact the organiser to check that the trip is still going ahead.

*Should this issue have been called "The Dart Times"!! - 90% of the contributions are owed to this one river*