



# CANEWS

January 2010

## EDITOR'S CORNER

THE WEB SITE – [www.ringwoodcanoe.co.uk](http://www.ringwoodcanoe.co.uk)

### CANEWS IS AVAILABLE ON-LINE

This (and the last few) Issue of Canews is available in Acrobat pdf format for download direct from the web site (right hand click and select save as). The photos are in colour – by the time this has been through the photo-copier it loses so much!!

If you don't need a hard-copy posted in the future (and you feel like saving some forests and my time and costs on copying, envelopes, etc). let me know

### RCC HISTORY

Old issues of Canews are available to download and savour. See some real old school paddling!, find out what happened a decade or so ago, and for those RCC long-timers, relive some memories and cringe at what you, or others, said at the time.

### THE RIVER AVON 'BLOG'



If you have any photos, information etc. on the river Avon that might be appropriate for the 'Blog' – please let me know

See: <http://theriveravon.blogspot.com/>

### CAPTION COMPETITION

Visit the web site for the Caption Competition. We all know what the image will be for the next one ☺



"... and up. Who says you can't roll an open canoe." (Adrian B)

"Jumping into his Canadian half way down the rapid was surprisingly successful". (Cathy R)

"The colonic irrigation effect surprised Michael at first" (Cathy R)

"No, it's an easy move really. Just a question of balance. You sit on the gunwale with your thumb up your bum, turn the paddle round and support on the T-grip. I'll do it with a tray of glasses on my head next time" Barry D

"Dozing comfortably on his blue recliner, Mike suddenly remembered he had left the bath running"..... Mike F.

"They're all the same, these back seat drivers".. Nick L

And, finally, "if it's OK for Barry ....." Mike Worth

### RCC FORUM



Is there any interest in a club 'forum'? Anyway setting one up didn't take long and it doesn't cost anything - so, nothing ventured, nothing gained

You have to register to post (this is to stop spam and abuse), but if there is an interest I can take it further.

Take a look (click the button on the clubs main web site) and let me know what you think?

NB. At the time of writing, it appears that the Forum providers are struggling with a successful move to a new server. Let us hope they can resolve this soon!

### RCC PHOTO GALLERY



Don't forget – you can share your photos with all members

## RIVER DART – INTRODUCTION TO WHITE WATER, OCTOBER 2009

This was a weekend of high numbers. We had the biggest turnout ever for the trip, with a total of 25 paddlers, six of them under 18, although not all of them paddled both days. The group contained a good proportion of novice white water paddlers too, which is always the intention of this trip, traditionally the first of the season, but not always the case. Another satisfying aspect was the number of open boaters; some of them seem to be converting from kayaking, or at least experimenting with the bigger boats. The number of swims was relatively high too and, although this reflected the level of experience, it included several by the more experienced paddlers. At least the weather was great for a swim!

Friday night and Saturday morning saw a lot of rain fall on Dartmoor and my fears of a dry river were put to rest when I saw its brown colouring on Saturday morning. The colour deepened throughout the day and I think the river level rose about half a metre while we paddled it from Buckfast to Totnes. It surprised everyone at lunch time, floating off most of the boats that had been slipped out of the water onto a small beach. At Staverton weir was the level was the highest we've run it, with water pouring over the full length of it.



Guy shows the way down Staverton weir.



Adrian takes Cathy down an alternative route; a surprisingly successful one this time.

Totnes weir was a fantastic slide ride, with a wave at the bottom that caught out a couple of people who chose a line somewhere off the optimum. Some of them should have known better shouldn't they Nick?



Mike Worth couldn't resist a second run on Totnes weir.

Some seemed intent on taking the suicide line down most of the features, and while others thought it was Adrian's wish to dunk his partner as often as possible, I think people who wear a lot of kit just need to cool off at intervals. It was great to watch anyway, as they crashed through the wave, then rolled slowly from side to side, taking on another load of water each time until they sank, still upright and looking hopeful, to take a swim in company with a seal that was fishing in the tidal weir pool.



Toby, oblivious to the drama behind.

The youngest, and one of the newest members, 10 year old Harris, put in a great first day of white water paddling, without a capsize and looking very confident in his own boat. His dad, Guy was one of those who took a swim at Totnes weir, but he was testing his skills in the race, after a successful run down it perhaps had boosted his confidence. Toby and Laura James also put in great performances and showed their parents that you don't have to swim to have fun. Lee did well too, having shown a distinct lack of interest in white water until now, and found a safe line down everything, as both his brothers have done at his age.

The overnight rains stopped just as we launched and I managed to paddle all weekend without a waterproof top, much to Mike Worth's annoyance because he feels I'm long overdue for a swim, and should show more respect for the sport by wearing a lot more (and more expensive) kit. Sorry Mike, perhaps the Usk will get me. The sun shone and the autumn colours were amazing. Apart from the seal, it wasn't a great wildlife trip, but I did spot three kingfishers among dozens of dippers and grey wagtails.





The "Washing Machine", not a hazard in low levels.

On Sunday we paddled from Newbridge to Buckfast so, unusually, we covered the full stretch of river from Newbridge to Totnes over the weekend. The river had dropped overnight, but the steeper gradient made up for the lower water level so we still had plenty of swims. Poor Nicky took more than her share, one of them not entirely her fault, and lost confidence as a result. What a pity you didn't paddle on Saturday Nicky. The lower sections of the river are easier to handle and perfect for those who need to keep their confidence growing slowly with their skills, rather than plunge headlong down anything for a thrill.

Bev and Lee, being of the former type, chose to join us after the trickier "Loop" section. We met them for lunch at the Country Park, right beside the copper beach tree that we planted a few years ago in memory of one of our founders, Steve Sambell. It looked great. Unfortunately I got in the way of a kayak that escaped James's clutches and fell from the vertical onto my knee. It hurt! Mikes Farnden and Worth displayed wonderful sympathy, concern and first aid, while Bev looked for the best place for lunch, assured them that I was always a wimp when hurt, often fainted, but would be fine once the blood got back to full circulation.

Simon Burke demonstrated good control of his open boat on Saturday, well, apart from a surprise swim on spectacularly flat water early in the day. He took to his kayak on Sunday and proved he was in command of that too, with a great roll half way down "Corner rapid" in some very turbulent water. Elliott tried open boating on white water on Saturday too, and confessed to enjoying it, but, like Simon, he was in his kayak on Sunday. Perhaps the prospect of the Loop was too much. I can sympathise with that because I hadn't paddled it in an open boat before, so was a little apprehensive until I saw the river level. It was a very easy open boat run, although Holne weir and Abbey weir still need respect and are ready to catch out the unwary, those on the suicide line, or those who partners chose to abandon ship. Sorry Cathy, if my partner shouted at me that much I'd jump out too.

Swimmer of the weekend award must go to new member Glyn, with several dunks each day. Full marks for perseverance and keeping the smile going Glyn. Disappointment of the weekend was Richard Jennings whose relentless hours of practice, striving for the perfect roll, let him down and he took a couple of swims to prove that it might need more than just practice. One of them, like Simon's open boat capsize, was in flat water, but it gave a host of spectators something to watch from Totnes bridge. I think the best performance was by another new novice member, James

Collins, who found good lines and improved really well over the weekend, despite a good taste of the Dart on Saturday.

As it was half-term my family was able to stay in Devon for a few days and, after two, Jake and I were missing the river so on Wednesday we went again from Newbridge to Buckfast, having the river completely to ourselves. It was a little lower than on Sunday, but a really nice, relaxing and peaceful paddle; well, for me it was. I did take on a bucketful of water at Holne weir when my hand slipped off the paddle in mid support, but Mike wasn't there to see it and I only got my knees damp so it wasn't serious. Jake spent some time standing his boat on end and splashing about. He didn't disturb all the wildlife though, and we added three Goosanders to the bird list.



Jake enjoys the luxury of being the only play boater on the Loop.

Article and Images by Barry Deakin

## TEES HOOK UP

Isn't the internet a wonderful thing! – The girls and I were in Yorkshire for a week in October. I had my boat, but no paddling buddies. Thanks to the Durham Uni CC web forum I was able to find a few lads to go paddling with. (Rory, above, and Paul)

A Mild day, adequate water and the Upper Tees proved very Photogenic.







Above, Salmon Leap

Below – mucking about at Low Force



It's a little far for a club outing, but, if your 'up North' and enjoy a bit of grade 4, not to be missed. Bedrock, rather than the boulder garden rapids that we are used to on Dartmoor, makes a refreshing change

Graham B

---

### USK 2009 THE WEEKEND BARRY SWAM

Lucy and I met at Martins house, loaded up and were on the road by four o'clock . It was the beginning of Lucy's first white water trip and my first for four years - the last being this very trip four years ago. There were a few nervous intakes of breathe from Lucy as we related our experiences of the river especially the infamous Mill Falls. A text from Richie saying *the river was stonking* made Lucy a little twitchier. We arrived at the Black Bear Pub Crickhowell at 7.30pm having only had a temporary hold up at Malborough.

A crowd of RCC members appeared to have taken over one of the seating areas The Deakins, Paul K, Mike W, Richie, Simon, Dot, Mike, Trish, Annie and Jo. We sat down and tucked into some fine food, Elliot and Nick arrived, and much to Paul Ks amusement Elliot and tim (nick name for Elliots belly) had a couple of faggots, another main course and a starter.

Back at the farm house it was an evening of hilarity and some pretty tall stories. Tim and Ross arrived and some time later Paul and Vicky. Adrian and Catherine were due to arrive in the morning Kevin and Nicky popped in, so everybody was accounted for All through the weekend there was banter surrounding the clubs famous swims and at this stage only Bev and I could claim to have seen the clubs maestro Barry swim, myself was many years ago when he was honing his rolling skills in a stopper on the lower Dart, but Mike W and Elliot had a lot to cajole each other about.

Also there was a lot of shuffling of rooms and beds because of the much talked about wind and snoring episodes.

The next morning found me the first one up, even having shared a room with Nick I had got a fairly good nights sleep and my ear drums were intact. Barry did a great job of breakfast and, once that was clear, decisions were made about who was doing what. We ended up with three groups, hill walkers, canal paddlers and river runners.

Two of the groups met at the access point just above Sennybridge. Boats were made ready and kit donned. Jake was on the water like a flash soon to be joined by Mike W and Simon. I was trying to suppress memories of the time I swam in snowy conditions at the second drop on this run. Soon I was on the water and took time to acclimatize and after a few break-ins and break-outs felt a bit more at home. Lee joined



us, a smile on his face that stayed there all day, he was entertaining us by displaying a severed ducks head on his paddle when I spotted Laura was without a buoyancy aid, and unfortunately it was left in the car. Kevin also came off the water so we were two down. Soon everybody was on the water and we split into two groups open boaters and kayaks, Ross led the kayaks and Barry the open boaters. We had a little practice at break-ins and break-outs under Ross's supervision, there was a good mixture of experience in the group and Paul Deakin was nominated to lead.

About five minutes into the paddle I hit shallows and became stuck. It took about eight minutes of hip swinging, arm pushing and body shuffling to shift the boat. A cheer went up from the other group. I was pretty knackered before the real work began. Moving on we came to the first drop. I chose to walk it along with Lee and Lucy and others I think. The next drop had a few casualties mainly open boaters Mike and Paul who entertained us with their antics and had Elliot hooting with laughter. Soon after leaving the drop Lucy took her first swim blaming me, all I did was get stuck and she lent the wrong way to go round me it was the first of three ending up with a ride home in Paul's Canadian. Well done Lucy on your first white water!!

All was going well until I lined up to go over Horseshoe Falls. I was about to crash into Richie so moved into the faster flow and then ran into a rock which caused me to tip over, I thought I would roll, attempted it, then thought 'hell the drops coming up' and bailed out pretty sharpish. I came to the surface and heard Tim shouting "let go of the boat" as I grabbed his bow it was "grab the rope, put your feet out!!" I was about to go over the falls when I caught the rope and Mike F pulled me ashore. Then I saw Paul Ts boat in the stopper where it remained for about an hour going around and round. Everything was tried. Several attempts to reach it by Barry, Jake was placed in the bows of Barry's boat with orders to clip on a karabiner - he was unable to as the boat was thrashing around , ropes were thrown people stood on rocks but still the bugger wouldn't move until Ross walked to it and clipped somewhat heroically a karabiner to it. Finally it came out and I was back on the water, after a sterling effort by the lads I thought a bottle of salvage red was in order.



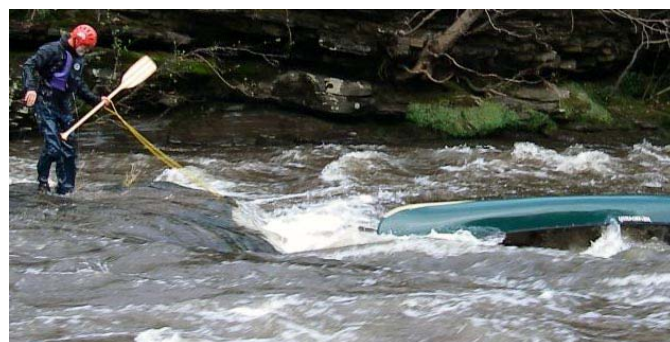
We continued down the river at times the rain blurred visibility and open boaters got mixed with kayakers the rest of the day was pretty uneventful some good play areas were found. We made it to Brecon at dusk, dried off and warmed up and back to the farm house for an incredible curry thanks to Nick. I only

paddled the one day and unfortunately missed the events of the Sunday but of course heard about Barry's swim long before he got back. A great weekend thanks Nick and every body who had a hand in the food etc.

Mike Scott

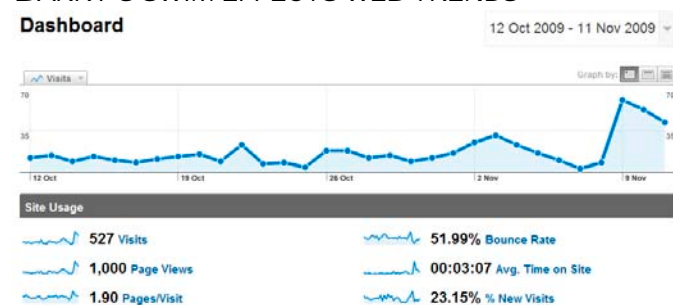
## Barry's Swim

By popular demand.....



Lots of images are given on the RCC Gallery

## BARRY'S SWIM EFFECTS WEB TRENDS



Interestingly enough visits to the clubs website increased exponentially following Barry's upset on the Usk. On 8<sup>th</sup> November. There are normally around 15 visits to the website each day – but this leapt to between 60 and 70 immediately following the incident ☺



## STRICTLY GONE DANCING

Barry provided the following account of the rescue sequence of Mikes Dancer:-



Retrieval of Mike's boat was an epic of faffing around that we shouldn't be too proud of. We were there for about 45 minutes and held up two other big groups because we had a line across the river. I took the photo when the boat first got there but it settled lower in the water and a little further to the right in the picture.

After an initial attempt by Ross it was clear that a kayaker wouldn't pull it out, but I thought I could get my boat close enough for someone in the bow to get a line on it.

I tried with Mike W but we were too heavy in the bow. I tried with Jake, against his protests of "You want me to go in THERE? NO WAY!", but I didn't have enough paddling power, I tried with Jake and Tim, and once we almost had it, but when the water in my boat was half way to my bum I pulled out. It was just too difficult for me to hold the boat close enough because to the left was a fast jet flowing from the drop and to the right was the stopper pulling the boat in. If my boat was decked it might have been ok but it filled up too fast when under the fall, and the bloody kayak wouldn't stay still long enough for Jake, with his head under water, to get the line on. It was very appropriate that it was a "Dancer" bouncing around in there.



I was knackered after several attempts at getting my boat into position, either by manoeuvring it through the strong eddy on river left, or paddling up the fast jet downstream of the fall, then trying to hold position on the boil. We tried using a second line attached to the one across the river to help pull my boat in, with Jake and Paul K as crew, but it kept pulling

me towards the stopper and I didn't have enough control. Obviously I wasn't too keen on putting two or three of us, an open boat and a few ropes into the mixer with the kayak.

During this time Mike F tried to reach it from above with various branches, but he couldn't see the toggle or reach it easily. Eventually Ross went in on a line from above and got a line on, without too much trouble at all it seemed, and Paul & I pulled it out easily from below. In hindsight we should have started there.

Early on I called out that this would be a good time for lunch, but the whole event was so entertaining that most of those not taking part were too absorbed to eat or portage the fall, so there was a further short delay to getting going, then a lunch stop for those spectators and the faffing party.

Barry D

## THE RIVER DARTCAM EXPLAINED



A web cam on the Dart can be viewed here:

<http://www.riverdart.co.uk/Kayakers/dartcam.html>

I thought it might be helpful to provide some notes on what it will mean in practice.

The web cam is situated on River Right just before the get out at the RDCP. There are 3 horizontal black lines. These have been associated with the slab at Newbridge (the get-in for the Loop and get-out for the Upper sections). This slab has long been used by paddlers as a level gauge.

1. The bottom black mark on the red board is level/just lapping on to the lowest part of the slab at Newbridge
2. The middle black mark is when the river is flowing through the 3rd arch of Newbridge
3. Top black mark is when the levels is up on perhaps the 3rd step at Newbridge

Do not be fooled by the scale, the red post is a lot bigger in reality than it looks in the image. The bottom line is 2 inch wide black tape and the distance to the middle line is, perhaps, 2 feet (the difference between a pleasant paddle and a right kicking!)

For those of you unfamiliar with what this all means

**6" below Newbridge Ledge:** represents the normal winter background level. The river is low and a bit rocky but certainly paddleable. The 'Upper' is mostly grade 3/4, some grade 4 rapids. The 'Loop' provides some shallow rapids and only small waves to surf, nothing really to kick you – although Lovers can be 'pinny'

**Just creeping onto the lower edge of the ledge (upstream end)** As far as I can judge, this is just creeping up to the bottom black line (i.e. as the image, above). This is ideal for most. The 'Upper' has 10 or so Class 4 drops, the rest is Class III and III+. The 'Loop' - you won't bottom out anywhere really, all the named rapids are good play spots. The Loop is a genuine Grade 3 at this level - you need the right line on several rapids – but it is all very friendly

**Lapping all ledge (On lowest black line)** Medium to high – The 'Upper' is probably the ideal level for most, forgiving grade 4 The Loop is quite full on and 'intermediates' may find it a challenging grade 3 run

**Covering the entire ledge (Lowest black line covered)** Medium/High - The 'Upper' is solid grade 4/4+ many boaters' idea of high On the 'Loop' Washing machine, Lovers and T3 are quite serious now if you are off-line, and Holne Weir is nasty although still runnable hard left

**Just going through 3rd Arch (Middle Black Line)** 1 to 2 ft on the ledge is very high – The 'Upper' is a kicking grade 4+/5- with consequences. Inspect at first ledge for sneak route right. Most boaters' idea of scary high and may be wise to start looking for alternatives. The 'Loop' is a fast and furious G3 run where intermediates will struggle

**3-4ft plus on the ledge/ 1ft+ going through the 3rd arch/ starting to go up the steps (Top black line)** flooding – The 'Upper' is full on, huge, possibly grade 5 from the ledges to 'Surprise, surprise'. Experts only. The Loop goes out of grade with the river into the trees on many rapids, and Zones of Funny Water abound. This is a wicked level if you're self sufficient, but it's time to get anyone who isn't bombproof off the river

Please don't forget that when you are looking at the Newbridge ledge when you are getting on the river you are enjoying rainfall that happened 4 to 6 hours ago. Levels can change very quickly. You should think about the amount of rain that's been falling since that time!! Is the river level on the up or dropping?

Graham B

---

## TEIGN DAY NOVEMBER 2009

After a day of high winds and extreme heavy rainfall the rivers of Dartmoor had dropped to a nice level by Sunday morning. Five of us met at Kilminster (Graham, Elliott, Ross, Mark and Rich) for breakfast and caffeine and discussed the day ahead deciding on the Teign for our days paddling.

As we arrived at the A382 Bridge we noticed a tree across the river just after the put in so launched a little further down expecting a day with many portages after the strong winds and high water levels of Saturday.

A bit of a warm up breaking in and out and we were on our way down the Teign until we reached the first weir where we all portaged except Graham who, as always, made things look easy - even after almost being put off line by all the calls that Ross's boat had somehow drifted off down stream without its pilot, I thought he was in for a good walk but miraculously it ended up finding its own way into an eddy.

Shortly after we were back on the water I managed to find myself the wrong way up after ducking a low branch and quickly ejected when I realised I was getting sucked under another branch. I lost nothing but my pride and was not long back on the river before I took my second swim in a boulder garden.

When sorted out again I decided to walk the rest of these rapids and check for any snags further down stream. Loud cheers were heard back up stream as Mark had followed my example but managed to roll back up saving himself a swim.

All was going to plan from there until Mark decided to have some fun on a wave while Ross set up for a photo, with edge snatched Mark was once again in with the fish and after three attempts unfortunately missed his roll.

Further on was all good, fast flowing water, small rapids and a couple more weirs to the get out at Steps Bridge.

The weather was good to us most of the day and fun was had on this lovely stretch of the Teign.

Many thanks to everyone for another great trip.

Rich Jennings

---

## Graham Bland adds:

It was a strange day. I had learnt the previous evening of the tragic loss of Chris Wheeler on the Upper Dart. We were all in a numb state, perhaps that's what tripped Rich up a few times. My thoughts were rarely away from Chris's family and friends all day – but the mellow paddle along a beautiful valley in good company proved a restorative tonic.

For those that didn't know Chris, he was an inspirational paddler and a real gent. Perhaps some consolation is that Chris was paddling his favourite 'home run', at levels he enjoyed, with some of his closest friends – he will be sorely missed by many. Rest in peace Chris

There were 18 people booked on to this trip. However, on Saturday afternoon Dartmoor was huge. While only a little more rain was forecast overnight, met check is often wrong and I made the decision to disappoint a large number of people with a round of phone calls – just retaining a small and balanced group. (It was just after this that I had a phone call from someone in Dartmoor giving me the sad news). I am sorry that I disappointed so many. The river had, in fact, fallen to a manageable level on Sunday (although we couldn't have coped with many more) but the risk of trees and fast flows following a week of high wind and rain was more than I was prepared to accept for a large group.

## And .. good on good Jeffe

With regard to Ross's AWO boat:-

Ross had recently attended an advanced WW Safety & Rescue course. He was proud to show us all the new rescue kit that he had, as a consequence, purchased - snap gate karabiners, coiled slings, vet bandages, etc. etc. Most of this was kept in his buoyancy aid pocket - which, of course, made his boat surplus to requirements anyway.

So, we were on the bank inspecting the weir - Ross, having walked his boat around the weir, commanded his boat to "STAY, Good Jeffe" (personally, I would have used said recently purchased tape and karabiner to secure 'Good Jeffe' to the bank, but what do I know). Left unattended below the weir, 'Good Jeffe' decided not to faff around while we all discussed, for most, entirely theoretical lines, and carried on downstream on it's own.

I was lining up at the top of the drop when I heard gasps of concern (read laughter) and Ross bellowing further commands at 'Good Jeffe' to the effect of "eddy out you stupid bu@@er"

Not giving due credit to 'Good Jeffe's' river running skills I



charged over the weir anticipating some entertaining boat chasing. But, Good Jeffe heeded Ross' commands and was safely waiting for its master in an eddy down stream.

We now all know why Ross manages to catch eddies from time to time - listen out for his 'Good Jeffe' Commands 😊

Good on Good Jeffe is all I can say

---

## MR FIX IT SAVE THE GENE17 WEEKEND

Thanks (and humble pie) are duly owed to Ross (Mr Fix It) who, for once, proved his worth on the river at the weekend. I know I have ribbed him about the fancy additions to his kit etc. but he was able to fix up my head (with Vet Wrap!) and my sons Car. The Nurses at Fordingbridge surgery (should have gone to the vets!) complimented his steri-strip skills - even though he couldn't preserve my good looks - and Andrew made it back to Swansea without breaking down.



Cheers Ross

Simon (Gene17) had organised the Evenings entertainment of lectures and videos.

Andy McMahon introduced a short slide show tribute to Chris Wheeler which proved a celebration of Chris' life. It was the only time during the evening when there was a complete hush from the 400 or so present. An equal number had attended Chris's funeral the day before - and many (myself included) were present at both. It was, therefore, particularly nice to hear so much good humour and cheer

The evening was sandwiched by an 'Upper Run' on the Saturday at nice 'ledge levels' and a middle Tavy run on the Sunday.

Good paddling, good food and good friends always make this a great weekend

Graham B

I believe that some other RCC members were out on the Sunday - paddling an estuary in creek boats! - But that's a story for someone else to share ☺ read on....

---

## A LONG WAY FOR A MAMMOTH

A brief account of the trip by the RCC *Creek and River Association of Paddlers* (CRAP day out)

Rich, Simon, Dot and I travelled to Devon and met Glyn and Mike W at Kilminster. The intention once we had eaten a modest breakfast (I had the mammoth much to Mikes amusement 😊) at Kilminster services was to paddle the Teign or Barle. The rain had bought up the levels considerably

and once we had inspected the bank filled Teign (in the trees 😊) the general opinion was to abort plans for a whitewater river paddle and so we headed off to the Avon for a gentle paddle from Aveton Gifford to Bantham. En route we stopped off at Buckfast weir which was stonking through, each of us deciding which imaginary line to take!!!! (Rich took some video which I expect he might upload to the gallery!)

On the River the wind was up and at times it felt like we would be blown over - force 8 I believe - and making very, very slow progress. We arrived at Bantham to find big, messy, blown out surf so no playing here. After a quick tyre change (my vehicle appeared to have a perished tyre so I thought it best to change it before the drive home), where I was ably watched and unaided by my fellow travellers we headed off for refreshments at Dartington Hall.

We tried to make the best of the day and had much banter which made up somewhat for the disappointment of the lack of appropriate whitewater for the group. We have plans to get down again as soon as we get day passes from the appropriate authorities 😊

Elliott

---

## THANK GOODNESS FOR THE FORUM

It keeps on giving me 'Canews' material - through the back door!

GB

---

## TRAINING STEP 09B COMPLETED

### SATISFACTORILY (GENE17 STEEP CREEKING 12-13 DEC)

As you will all know I like my training courses and have continued to go on a course or do some form of training each year. I completed the 5\* training last October with Leo Hoare <http://www.getafix.com/> with Tim B, Pete A and Rich H. This year I decided to do all the prerequisites for the BCU White Water Kayak 5\* assessment. These include 2 days Advanced WWSR, 2 days skills training and at least 16 hours First Aid.

I completed the Advanced WWSR course with Tom Parker <http://www.tomparkercoaching.co.uk/> in November which was a good fun weekend which actually included paddling a kayak as well as training in the river and spending some time in some woods working on rope work. This was a great course and a real step up from the previous course (old BCU WWSR course) I did a few years back where some members of the club joined me for a course in Devon.

For the skills element I signed up for the Gene17 <http://gene17.com/kayaking/index.html> Steep Creeking and FreeRide course in North Wales to improve my skills and run some different rivers, although 2 1/2 hours away from home, Dartmoor is my local WW area and I wanted to paddle some more rivers in the UK. An email was sent out by Simon Westgarth on the Wednesday informing us to meet at the Alpine Café Betws Y Coed. There I met the other two candidates and Matt Tidy, this was not the first course I have done with Matt and I knew he would ask each of us what we wanted to get out of the weekend.

It will come to no surprise to those that know me that I have already thought about this and had four things I wanted to work on. These were to improve my technique in paddling my new Jefe Grande, to sharpen up my turns, to make better use of rock and to improve my steep river paddling. The other both



had similar things they would like to work on. Matt had seen me paddle on the Upper Dart the weekend before at the Gene17 Adventure Paddler's Weekend and the other two had been paddling on the Tryweryn the day before.



With this info Matt decided that Swallow Falls would be our first destination. After paying our £1 to access the falls through the visitor turn-style Matt introduced some concepts by getting us to sit on the ground and jumping down the stairs. After all of this we were suitably warm and headed to the bottom of the falls and put on the water. Matt ably demonstrated the technique then we had multiple runs down. Alex had a camera and the video mode was used to great effect in giving immediate feedback. All of us had things to work on and mine was the timely application of Key Strokes at the top and bottom of the drop which I finally got the hang of on my fourth attempt as you can see from the video clip.

One of the main objectives was to get us used to the gradient which we certainly did as when we left, the falls certainly looked smaller! After a quick lunch we headed to Pont Cyfyng falls and ran a short section of the river. I had a clean line down both the drops which was very satisfying and helped re-enforce the concepts of Body Tension and Key Strokes in the steeper environment introduced at the beginning of the day.

Due to a noticeable drop in temperature the rivers in the area had dropped, despite this we still went to the Arddu to see if it had enough water. After a couple of test runs by Matt, it was decided that the best place for us to work on some skills was the Tryweryn. Initially I found this news a little disappointing for a Steep Creeking course, however, it did enable us to do some distinct skills in using rocks to create lines down the river and for tightening up on our turning and accuracy and was the right decision. We spent some time on a number of different skills, following Matt's imaginative lines down the river and setting challenges of hitting specific eddies by using rocks. I have spent many years developing a technique to

avoid rocks and it will take me a little time to get fully comfortable with this technique but at least now I know the concepts and will have to do some more practising every time I am on a river. After running the Graveyard section a couple of times and doing a run all the way down to the footbridge Matt enquired if we wanted to do another run down. The other two decided to call it a day and after arranging how we would all get a copy of the video

Matt and I headed to the top for one last run. I was given the option of what we did on this run and declined the suggestion of a race to the bottom in favour of following Matt down as he linked together his favourite moves on the river. This run was great fun and a fantastic way to finish off a great weekend.



During the long drive home I reflected on my objectives from the beginning of the weekend and realised that they had all been addressed and with so much more. I feel this is down to the skill of the instructor rather than me and I would like to thank Matt for all the great coaching that was delivered in a relaxed and fun way.

Ross Macildowie