

TRASNA NA DTONNTA

Newsletter of the
irish sea kayaking association

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Edited by : David Walsh,

Editorial

Worry has been expressed as to the accuracy of the Sailing Directions / Admiralty Pilot published data as to tidal streams, especially inshore, which is where we sea kayakers all worry about.

Rumour persists that tides in the region of the Saltees turn at about two hours ahead of published data. See the "Tide That Turned Too Soon" article in Trasna na dTonnta 9 of May 1997.

There is a creeping awareness that inshore details are haphazardly and carelessly reported. Except in the region of a tidal diamond (which anyway will usually be well out to sea), info (particularly inshore info) is seen to be rarely reliable, and an increasingly sophisticated paddling community is getting very wary altogether.

The time has maybe come for a determined paddling effort to make a significant contribution to seagoers generally, in the form of accurate information available as to inshore tides. A campaign amongst paddlers along these lines to assimilate info on an organised basis would surely reflect well on the paddlers community as a whole.

It wouldn't be difficult. Anytime you are by the sea, note what is happening, look it up after, or just give me the details. Report mistakes, as seen. Consistent reports of tides going the "wrong way" will mean a correction being published, by canoeists, on behalf of all.

This is a worthy objective. Please support it.

Everyone will be by the sea this Summer. Even if not in a canoe, it is still possible to spot that slack water occurred on a given day at a given time. All you have to do is write it down, that the tide flowing into the bay or through the sound stopped and turned at that time. I can if you want do all the calculations. I will judge if the published info is right or wrong. Just give me the date, time and place. Tell me and I will collate the information. Information, gathered in a disciplined way, is the essential prelude to organised knowledge, which we can then all share.

Symposium

The 1997 Symposium in Ireland will be held in the Burren at Burren O.E.C., on 24th / 27th October 1997 run by

Joanna McInerney

Tel / Fax International + 353 65 78066.

This is excellent news because the Burren is reachable from every corner of Ireland and abounds in sheltered water (for bad weather / the masses), tide races (for convenient "struttin' your stuff"), and for the serious (good weather only) the best cliff paddle in Ireland in the Cliffs of Moher.

The centre itself is newly enlarged and well able to host a large crew, with excellent catering courtesy of the famous Maggie Daly and Marie Holloran.

Expect a serious effort to host an important event, with international and local talent leading paddles and showing slides, as well as the usual stuff done well.

Galicia

Celtic Watersports Festival

Galicia is in Northwestern Spain, where this years festival will be held from August 19th to 25th.

The organisers are

Suzanne Kennedy 051 389550

and

Joanna McInerney 065 78066

Whale I.D.

As a follow up to an item in a previous newsletter, the whale found in Connemara on Inishmuskerry Island last year could not be identified 100% because we only retrieved the upper mandible. Certainly it was a 20' to 30' (6 - 9 m.) beaked whale, either Cuvier or Bottlenosed. Thank you Anna Gibson.

Seals at risk.

We went west, back to reliable Connemara, coast hugging the landscape, exploring the bays and islands. Roundstone and Dog's Bay, the spectacular monastic MacDara's Island, CroaghnaKeela, the Carribean colours of the waters of Inishmuskerry, and back to Rossaveal by way of Golan Head. This time unusually the water was flat calm, a mirror sea, so calm (past experiences hereabouts were always of clapotis and large swells), so inviting.

A porpoise passed us heading west and then BANG ! BLAST !, the sound of gunfire off the Head. A few minutes later the silence was again broken by loud shots echoing from Eagle Rock.

Around the corner, fishermen confirmed our worst thoughts, they were doing their own culling, of seals, eating too many fish they said, but would the porpoise also be invited to the party ?

We had to get home to Dublin so all the rest of that day we had to carry the guilty feeling of not having gone to investigate in the first place. I had always hoped they were just testing something !

Back in Dublin I reported the shooting to the Irish Seal Sanctuary who got the local warden to go and investigate. We all have our own politics. Some agree with culling, what with fishermen's livelihoods at stake, over population and the like, but I for one would like to leave nature as it is, the way it is supposed to be. Recently on a five hour South Coast trip I failed to see even one seal. Where is the over population in that ?

In Ireland we have two types, the Common and the Grey Seal, or Atlantic Grey as it is sometimes called. The Common are the smaller, friendly, inquisitive seals you can get quite close up to, with the friendly round face with "Y" shape to nose and eyes. Commons usually hang around the same area, and tend not to travel far. The pups are born in July and August and stay around their parents for a year or so. They are suckled for six weeks while the

mother feeds them fattening milk to thicken their blubbery skin and nourish them with vital

anti-bodies for survival. Commons are speckled with different patterns of black on grey, and sometimes a little brown thrown in. They number about 2,000 in all nationwide.

Grey seals are much larger, growing up to 9 feet in length and are much more deserving of keeping distance away from. They bite if threatened. The bulls have very large heads with a prominent nose, much more canine altogether. The bull is black with white spots, the cow dirty white with grey spots. They whelp in October and November, the pups abandoned after three weeks, becoming independent fast. They also number about 2,000 in all nationwide.

Seals often become orphaned through storms, sea conditions, and interference from man. Pups may be found exhausted, alone, breathing badly, with pneumonia, emaciated or injured, washed up on the shore or stranded on a rock. In such cases it is essential that the pup finds comfort and food immediately before it deteriorates or becomes fatally undernourished. Nevertheless pups should not be approached immediately, as this may be an unnecessary disturbance of pup and mother seal. Wait observantly, at least a full tide, for the return of the mother, unless the pup is obviously in a bad way.

To rescue a pup, approach from behind. Lift it onto a blanket by its hind flippers. Bring it as quickly as possible to a clean well ventilated draught free accommodation. It is best for the pup to lie on a rubber mat, or timber, (which will anyway be easier to wash afterwards). Do not use straw because eating any will prove fatal.

Do not use a strong heater, but gently protect the body from cold with a blanket, and shower with TLC, gently stroking as with any animal. Oral antibiotics and / or force feeding will now be necessary, but do not however yourself, or let others, use baby's or cow's milk. Instead it is now time to call in the professionals

Ring the Seal Sanctuary, and ask for advice on what to do next. Brendan or Mary Price at 01 835 4370 set up the sanctuary in 1994. They have successfully reared and released back into the wild nearly 50 seals since then. They will know what needs to be done and will offer advice and assistance as necessary. For further information write to them at An Clochan, Toberregan, Garristown, County Dublin.

In three years sea kayaking, this was the first time I came across man attacking seals. It was a quiet Monday morning in a remote spot. I wouldn't expect such an activity to be so overt in Galway Bay or Dublin bay of a sunny Saturday or Sunday, but we all should be observant in the places we do get to, as maybe some day you will be the only link between the seal world and the authorities.

Brian Ormond,

Dublin.

June 1997

Editor's Note : Brian is compiling information on seals in Ireland. Any seals you see, tell him, or tell the Seal Sanctuary. Knowledge, properly collated, is an essential prerequisite to doing anything constructive in the conservation (or tide reading) or any line.

Tales from the Ulaid

Rathlin Days.

The meet was Ballycastle Saturday 12.30 prompt. The timing was crucial to the safe passage across to Rathlin on slack tide, and our proposed circumnavigation, once we got there. James skidded into the carpark at 13.45hrs and the final member of our party had arrived. David drew the short straw - The club Vyneck ! Not really the boat for a leisurely tour around a notoriously rough Island, and we pulled out of Ballycastle at 1400 hrs just in time to catch the fastest flow in the sound!

It was a beautiful sunny day and we had decided to bivvy out on the island that evening despite protests from Bart the Counsellor who was very keen for a Saturday night out in the bright lights of mainland Portstewart. We were ill prepared as usual with only a sleeping bag each and a box of matches but James had his dusty cheque book so we knew we could survive the night.

Our first waypoint was Bull Point and the West Light , known as the Bull. We ferry glided across the sound on the flood tide and crept up on the Bull on the eddy in Church Bay. The Bull is unusual as the light is at the bottom of the tower and it is the only red light (on a lighthouse) in Ireland. Bull Point is as spectacular a headland as you will find anywhere in Ireland. As well as the strong tides and frequent heavy swells there are great colonies of seabirds nesting on the cliffs and stacks. Puffin have a stronghold here and can be seen in great numbers. Just South and East of the point in Church Bay there is a limestone cave which would make a great camp. This is close to a Neolithic axe factory, Rathlin was once a source of porcellanite, used by stone -age man to make axes. The axes from Brockley on Rathlin have been found all over Britain.

The tides always run East on the North side of Rathlin and although there was a large swell, conditions seemed right for an easy passage along the North shore to Atacarry Head, East Light and the "meaty" MacDonald Race. A heavy swell was running and the occasional wave broke over shallow water but the consensus was that we should continue. It is difficult to paddle back along the North shore once committed, so this really is the point at which you make your decision to go or not to go !. James, ever on the lookout for grub and a bargain, negotiated a dozen Ling in exchange for a Mars bar from a Drascome Lugger fishing near Ruecallan and supper was assured!

In high spirits we set off aware that we would be arriving at the MacDonald Race at the worst state of the tide and expecting a furious maelstrom ! The sea around Rathlin is unpredictable, despite which, as we predicted, we drifted under the East Light in smooth conditions. There was too much of a swell to see if Bruce's spider was about in the cave so after another photograph showing a canoe with a cliff and lighthouse in the background we nosed around the corner! There was a bit of a disturbance in the sea about 0.5 mile offshore so perhaps we did choose the right time to go around? This is the crux of the paddle as landing is just about impossible here and it does get very, very rough! No escape if you get it wrong!

Just past Bruce's Castle we spotted an old fisherman's cottage and in near perfect conditions - blue skies, calm water, stepped ashore on the slipway in Portawillin. The team disembarked and attended to the ailments of the chronologically challenged! Prostate glands and haemorrhoids are a terrible thing but the least said the better !

Later on Phil (the Silver Fox) showed us a few tricks with his Cod piece, and by 1900 hrs it was time for James to cook up and the fish were gutted and thrown on the fire, no culinary niceties here ! What could be finer than burnt fish and cold coffee from a flask ? A hamburger and chips and a pint of plain ? Without further ado we sloped over to the pub in Church Bay and despatched the week's quota of pints, and some local brew - Bushmills - to finish off!

After dragging Chris away from the bar we burbled our way back to Portawillin and bedded down for the night under the stars. Nothing could be more fun than a bivvy out under the stars with a bursting bladder; well not much

0400 hrs arrived with gusting winds from the NE and we rolled down into a hollow for some shelter. By 0730 hrs, after a slice of bread and a Sardine each (no sign of a miracle here) we were afloat. The wind was surprisingly fresh, we passed Rue Point and the last of the three lighthouses at 0830 hrs (HW Dover) and after a nasty moment or two in some unexpectedly lumpy stuff were in the middle of Rathlin Channel and on our way home to Ballycastle. Apart from a group of transvestites rowing across to Scotland in a cowskin bathtub nothing remarkable occurred and A.C.K.C. put another trip in the log.

David Hughes

Insurance Cover

It is a while since I mentioned insurance cover. Never deny yourself the right to worry, about anything. Insurance covers the gap. Years after I first mentioned it, Sportscover Direct still seems the best all round adventure person's insurance. It got a member of this group back from a ski holiday last winter, because of a knocked out shoulder, for nothing,

even the taxi to the airport being covered. Call Int + 44 117 922 6222 and tell them Dave sent you, and not to forget his 10%. They take VISA etc.

13th / 14TH SEPTEMBER WEEKEND

This is the annual "Come and Try It" weekend, as usual immediately after the Liffey Descent. We are going to apply to hire (Mick Scanlon, reinstated, did you read this far ?) the ICU Skerrays for those who would like to try but haven't the equipment. The moral is to bring a friend. The trip will be based on Burtonport in west County Donegal. It has the advantage of endless sheltered water if there is a blow out, yet the round of Arranmore Island itself is a challenge that would please the greyhounds, even Ciaran Smith, who will be delighted with the knowledge that the island is not abandoned and boasts (several) pubs, which, though I haven't been there since the early seventies, were never known for "early" closing. In fact arrivers at midnight might find them closed, though they might open shortly after.

Nor is dancing absolutely forbidden.

Volunteers necessary to pull the trailer (petrol concession available).