

# TREASNA NA DTONNTA

Newsletter of the  
irish sea kayaking association

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Edited by : David Walsh,

## **Editorial**

For those paddling in home waters, 1997 was another bad year for the Irish sea paddler. There were opportunities, but few enough and far enough between. To grab what came needed more than naming the week and going regardless. To see how one of us prospered, do no better than read the two articles below. Adaptability and/or neck seems to have been the key.

It wasn't all doom and gloom though. The Celtic Festivals did well, our only (to my knowledge) major expeditionaries thrived as well, and wasn't the Spring Meet to Achill a moment everyone savoured !

Who fears to speak of '98 ?

## **Come and Try It SKA Meet**

**13/14 September 1997**

Twenty three paddlers met for a windy weekend in Burtonport in Donegal for a frustrating but successful weekend (at least in terms of sociability and island exploration), though short on paddling. Only half a dozen or so got on the water on the Saturday, most of them making it out to Aranmore, just, while the rest took the ferry and either tramped the island or behaved in a more civilised manner altogether.

On the Sunday we (almost all) made it to the nearer Rutland Island, and enjoyed beach and dune walks, as the wind had softened to a five / six, and there was no rain. It was

frustrating for the more mileage / adrenaline motivated, but sea kayaking is a bit like that. Aspirations for circumnavigations and ferryglides (the local tides are very strong indeed, even though it was neaps) to nearby Inisfree had to be foregone, and the disappointment bottled. There were only a couple of swimmers. "Oileain" profited from four new additions, two of them (Aranmore and Rutland), particularly worthwhile. We stayed in the hostel in Dunglow both nights.

## **Inishturk Ferry**

Inishturk got a new ferry on September 16th 1997. This is probably the most significant "Irish Offshore Island Development" for many years, and we hope that it means that the needs of islands and islanders are at last to be taken seriously. Operating out of Cleggan and Roonagh Quay, this ferry also has to have real significance for kayakers, as the homeward trip becomes possible even if the weather kicks up overnight. It is an ancient adage that those who sail small boats off the West Coast of Ireland must occasionally expect to fail to be behind their desks on a Monday morning, but Inishturk is now a marginally more dependable objective. We wish the islanders well and hope that all this won't change things for them, other than as they would wish.

## **Signals**

The irrepressible Udo Beier has shortened his list of what he hopes will become recognised international signals for sea kayakers. I circulated the list to all those who had responded to his original "Six" suggestions, now down to four, now as follows :

1. Something to attract attention.
2. Paddle vertical, for "Come Hither".
3. Paddle horizontal, for not to.
4. Paddle horizontal, moved up and down, for emergency or even "Mayday".

I feel the most thought out response was from G.O., Kevin O'Callaghan, who mirrored my own thoughts, namely that he "Don't like 4". He feels that at 3/4 miles you can't see anything of a paddler, certainly not in a swell, that hand waving is better, that the international distress signal is hands waving "together and away" above the head, but that the whole idea is worth following, and whatever the reservations, he would follow, and would teach these signals, if they became internationally recognised. He remains sceptical of 4 though. Anyone who wants a copy of the new signals should ask me.

# **Alaska Expedition**

## **Preliminary Report**

Oisin Hallissey and I left Juneau, Alaska on June 28 in our Romany Explorer kayaks. We were headed in a north-westerly direction towards Glacier Bay National Park. We were in what is known as South East Alaska, a huge archipelago offering fairly protected waters in a wilderness area.

After five days we arrived in the Park where we were joined by Galwayman, Mick Byrne, who now lives in North Carolina. It took us about three days paddling north into the Park to come across the first of the glaciers. The sharp-peaked mountains were superb and the glaciers spectacular. We met our first humpback whales there and went on to have daily encounters with them. In fact there were so many I felt the natives must have been getting headage payments for them.

After two weeks in the Park, Mick Byrne went home (his holidays were over). We started the long haul to Prince Rupert in British Columbia. We experienced some strong tides and occasional force four to five winds, but nothing too intimidating.

Most days we had crossings of seven to 10 miles and these became the worst chore. We started the trip with 10 days of mostly sunshine. Then we had 17 days of mostly continuous heavy rain.

Apart from some close encounters with whales, we met grizzly and black bears, otters by the bucketful, sea lions, seals, bald eagles by the truckload, a moose, deer, salmon, Orcas and mosquitoes. Oisin says he saw a tiger, but I don't believe him.

Nearly 40 days paddling and 700 miles later we arrived in Prince Rupert. Think of Granard on a rainy day in March and you have an idea of the best of Prince Rupert.

Oisin went home and I took a ferry to the Queen Charlotte Islands to paddle on my own for a few days. I was still determined to get the hang of that forward paddling stroke.

It was a wonderful trip, but get there before the next new Sunday newspaper comes out and they remove all the forest.

**Peter Cork**

## **Doggerel**

### **To a Night Paddle**

Half past eight

Is really quite late,  
Of an evening, the end of September.  
For a band of three  
To put out to sea,  
For a paddle we all would remember.  
A mechanical fault,  
To my gallop put halt,  
After Bullock Harbour we'd left,  
Though I struggled along,  
And we knew it was wrong,  
I was rudderless, helpless, bereft.  
To Sandycove Strand,  
I heard the command,  
So the rudder might soonest be mended,  
And in five minutes flat,  
We once again sat,  
On the water, in darkness, 'twas splendid.  
At Dunlaoire Pier,  
We said, without fear,  
As we sat in the harbour mouth,  
That no matter how pretty,  
'Twas really a pity,  
We hadn't just plain headed South..

So back out to sea,  
Our route had to be,  
And South to a light that was flashing,  
And though surfing at night,  
Gives all paddlers a fright,  
To the Muglins, at speed, we went dashing.  
Round that outcrop we swerved,  
And were truly un-nerved,  
At the tide bouncing darkly beneath us,  
The boats jumped about,  
And I heard someone shout,  
That conditions might yet defeat us.  
When calm waters came,  
We agreed, without shame,  
We'd been frightened, admitted it, fearfully,  
But the boats, how they'd shook,  
And the risks that we'd took,  
Were afterwards looked on quite cheerfully.

**David Walsh**

## The Circuit of SW Donega

At 1 A.M., on a dark Donegal roadway, the Garda asked me just four questions - "What was my name ?", "Where was I from ?", "Did I have a licence ?" and finally "Did I own the car ?" Extremely tempted to give certain not very polite answers, I hesitated, and then when he was satisfied with my answers, he allowed me to proceed forward in a manner which I had been doing long before I was stopped. My motto of the week (that

week) was "seek your freedom". I badly needed a break from work and city life..... I was heading North.

In the Northeast corner of Donegal Bay there is a wee steep town called Mountcharles, and just below it lies Salthill Quay, where in the dark I pitched my tent.

Next morning, having packed, eaten and parked the car in the local church car park and walked the 2km back, I impressed myself by being on the water at high tide at 10 A.M. This was essential as the inlet dries out, and it is so much more pleasant to float on water ! I paddled South, spotting shore based Curlews, Guillemots and later low flying young Gannets, keeping into the west side to avoid "The Long Ridge" sandbank until Doorin Point, where it is advisable to keep out to avoid all the rocks, even on a full tide.

It was an excellent day, blue skies, a light onshore sea breeze and warm sun rays. I traversed across Inver Bay and again South along the shore of St. John's Point. Reaching the beach on the east side of the tip in under three hours, I leapt out and stretched my legs, ate lunch and then wandered around.

From the highest point of this small peninsula I could see as far South as Inismurray and Ben Bulbin. A featherclad biker approached on a noisy chopper, walked the length of the beach in the extreme afternoon heat, wore an "Irish Catholic Girls" tee -shirt and then lay down on the side of the path, where large cows came over and licked him while he slept. There were some swimsuits visible which could fetch a good price in an antique shop. The seas were still calm and as always, on that first day, so inviting.....

The tip of the St. John's is rather low and easy to pass in a slight swell, the smell of a hidden cooking barbecue kept the rabbits busy and motivated me to get across McSwyne's and Fintragh Bays. I avoided Killybegs, but wondered how anyone, who could spend twenty four million pounds on a trawler, would expect to get all their money back and still leave some fish in the sea.

The wind speed had dropped yet again and a yacht appeared a few kilometres ahead. Within a half an hour I had made good progress. She was tacking close to the shore, and I stayed outside the rocks and small islands. Later she tacked behind me, a beautiful sloop with a "Y" rig and a Dutch flag. At Muckros Head the wind picked up to a force three, the waves got larger and she powered past, father at the helm, mother and son sitting on the bow with their legs hanging over. We charged through the swell and I enjoyed their company.

By the time I reached the sheltered natural harbour of Teelin, (hidden behind Dundavoon Pt.) she was anchored in the harbour. I had to pay a visit. Some questions were asked - "Did I carry an anchor", "What, you are not wearing a wetsuit", "Can I roll "? Do I have to answer these ?

After 33 kms of paddling it was time to locate a home. The north side beach looked busy, but on the west side lay the ruins of a fine coast guard house which was built in 1813,

large enough for five families, destroyed by the IRA in 1920 and camped under by me in the rain. I need a tent with windows so I can look outside when there is rain, - is there such an item ? My second cooking pot decided to create a hole. Down to one pot, and the rain kept falling.

The morning came with yet more rain and a fisherman who spent the night in his leaking car was full of advice. A German lad and his Belgian gentleman friend, who said that "I was so welcomed to his country", helped me down to the slip as the dinghy trolley I had used last evening, was now tied to the boat and to the ground.

What can you say about Slieve League, on a windless day, even in the rain, with a blanket of cloud suffocating its peaks, - it still looks spectacular. Lots of beaches are accessible only by small boat, for emergency or break reasons. At regular intervals there are thundering waterfalls, cascading vertically off the cliffs. I know that it is only August, but did we really have that much water or what is it like in February ? And how do the sheep get back up, from the lowest, most awkward perches? I'd say that many are lost by gales and high seas.

I renamed this headland "Fulmar Head". The Fulmars were everywhere, plummeting off the top of the cliffs in controlled drops, sweeping upward just before the waves below. I am sure that Fulmars must have been studied by aeronautical engineers, such a graceful, smooth flier, straitjacketed, controlled and exhilarating to watch. Trabane, a fine sandy beach lies just before Malinbeg, which has a small harbour with a steep slip, and both are sheltered from all but southerly winds.

From Malinbeg its just a short 2.5 km crossing to the reasonably flat Rathlin O'Birne. The weak tide flows south for three hours and north for nine and a half. There are landing steps on the south tip, and on the east there is a rocky beach, not practical to land on in a swell by yourself. I was happy to see a large grey seal sleeping underneath the lighthouse. Large breaking rollers kept me paddling inside the rocks for that added protection. The lighthouse (built 1856) was installed with an Isotare generator in 1974 and Ireland had its first nuclear powered light !

The heavy sea mist filled in from the south, and visibility was down to 2 kms as I recrossed Malin Bay to the mainland and along the north coast. Two yachts under motor, flying lots of colourful bunting, passed keeping well out from the foul shoreline. I skirted around Rossan Point and the steep cliffs of Malin More, gradually turning east towards Glen Bay. Glencolmcille was my only available choice of a much needed stop, even for twenty minutes. The dumping beach on the West side was a life saver as all the others were being trashed with surf, not the most inviting !

Day two notched up 32.5 kms and into Port I went, marked on the O.S. as a sandy beach. In fact it is very rocky but has steps and a pier (not marked). I pulled the kayak onto the practical fishing boat timber rack. I approached the Belfast trio sitting on rocks drinking red wine, out of wine glasses, in the rain, in this remote place. "Could you give me a lift, please" ? The looks I got were of "what a bleeding question !". I thought for a moment.

"No, no just a lift above the tide mark" - not a lift to the nearest town with my kayak on your roof. I think they were somewhat relieved, and then willingly helped me !

The tent was again pitched in the rain, but this time on a level plot, above the rocky beach with a superb view over the ocean. Sheep with red right horns gathered around and photographs were taken by tourists of the white Irish boy (that's me) swimming contentedly in the continuous downpour. The rain stopped, mosquitoes emerged and I crashed out.

Next day the German family, who have camped here for five nights, offered me help to get going. It was 9 A.M. Two of the three local fishing boats were already out and the tide was still coming in. To be honest, I found the coastline of this north side more interesting than Slieve League had been. There were plenty of interesting large stacks, endless sea arches, shallow caves and numerous small safe beaches to investigate. I observed eight seals, sleeping and swimming.

The yachtie had also asked if I'd seen any whales or dolphins - unfortunately I had not. I'd love to, but I had found it difficult to pay attention to such superb cliffs and still watch out to sea.

Passing Loughros Beg Bay I noticed there was a rock with 3m above the high waterline at the mouth of the bay not marked on the OS map. A note was made in case I needed a bearing in the future.

Pulling into the small picturesque beach south of Rossbeg I struggled against small breakers at the mouth, where a man and six children (with lifejackets) were heading out. Inside this bay there are three beaches which all dry out into one large beach and an island in the centre. A boy chased a crocodile along the beach, though I admit it was an inflatable. I dried out practically all my belongings in the sun and wind.

Later, after lunch, I gently surfed towards Dawros Head, the wind getting slightly stronger, the sun ever so hot, and then north around Dunmore Head.

Across Gweebarra Bay, the flocks of bay Manx Shearwaters gliding from side to side almost cutting the waves, I passed the unmistakable white patches and red webbed feet of the Black Guillemot and the always gleaming white Kittiwakes. Ahead lay Aranmore to port and Croaghegely Mountain at 245m on the nose. I passed low but spectacular Crohy Head with its double sea arches and prominent 18th century tower (again not O.S. marked), an excellent navigational point if you were travelling south (grid ref. B 707 086). A short paddle to Maghery and a quiet beach before the one shop, one pub town.

Later I climbed Croaghegely, initially via an old cattle path on the south side, then onto bog. On this clear evening the summit offered great views ranging from Inishfree Bay and Bloody Foreland to Dunglow (no sign of Mary) and Erigal Mountain inland. I was still in shorts and tee-shirt when I ordered a hot whiskey. The landlady was amused. The elderly local gent, who continuously poked both his ears with matchsticks, told me he

was the previous owner, he was also a baker who still baked breads at home, with less teeth than my one year old nephew. I wondered, "did he eat all as well ?" He told me about his two journeys to New Jersey and the few times he had been "all the way down to Dublin".

The stars were stronger that night, and it was peaceful to gaze and dream, but not for long. I was awoken to loud rolling thunder, as the lightning struck and the wind collapsed the tent. Dreams turned into living nightmares and I had to pack sand against the tent walls with my splits. Headlamp beaming, severe lack of clothing, wind howling, rain pelting down, - I do hope nobody was watching!

Next morning calm seas and I was again on the water early. Rockhopping and coasthugging and I was heading south and homeward bound. The wind picked up to an offshore force three, I loved it. I had hoped to visit Inishroan but the wind got stronger again and in these conditions it would be crazy to venture out to it. Little did I know that in a few minutes, I would be having problems keeping the bow into the wind. There were heavy offshore squalls. I limped across the bay taking every vital moment to make some progress towards the beaches. Each time I got the kayak in the correct direction we would be shoved sideways. Sked up or down did not make a difference. Maybe I should have a rudder, I thought. No, I did not ! I did not have time to think. Camera, compass, map and water supply hopped around the deck. I could not spare my hand to fix them, and when I did, they were stashed only to reappear again. The little vessel slammed over and down the breaking waves. To be honest, for nearly 45 minutes it was a struggle. I did not have time to ache or give in. With nothing downwind but a distant headland, I found it safer to battle ahead. It was a survival situation. I fought to keep above the houses at Portnoo. I definitely did not want to end up near Dunmore Head. Eventually I got minimum shelter, even on the leeward side of Inishkeel just for a moment. All I had left was to the single kilometre across to the small delightful windward sandy beach at Portnoo.

Michael, a local fisherman with a 12' clinker boat drives quickly to see am I OK. He invited me to his house for a shower and a hot meal. I assured him that I was fine. We agreed that I was lucky. I went into the beautiful clean water for a long swim, glad to be near the shore again. The wind drove the sand up the beach so that within minutes my paddles were half buried and sand lodged in every gap of the kayak. Back for another swim. Every day I had at least two swims, the water always so pleasant after a trip of pelting sea. Yes it was good to be ashore.

I asked myself, if maybe Port Noo or Port Nua is twinned with Newport, Rhode Island, or maybe even Newport, South Wales ? Then I wished for it not to be ; such a picturesque location, hopefully never discovered by authorities, investors and developers.

A short row of quaint white washed cottages, with paintings for sale and others displaying their famous virgin statues on the windows, overlook the small beach. Residents relax and go about their everyday tasks. Tourists, in rented automobiles, drive to the small pier. A sign tells us not to be caught with possession of lobsters measuring under 85mm from eye socket to base of tail or with a 'V' cut out of its tail (female). If so,

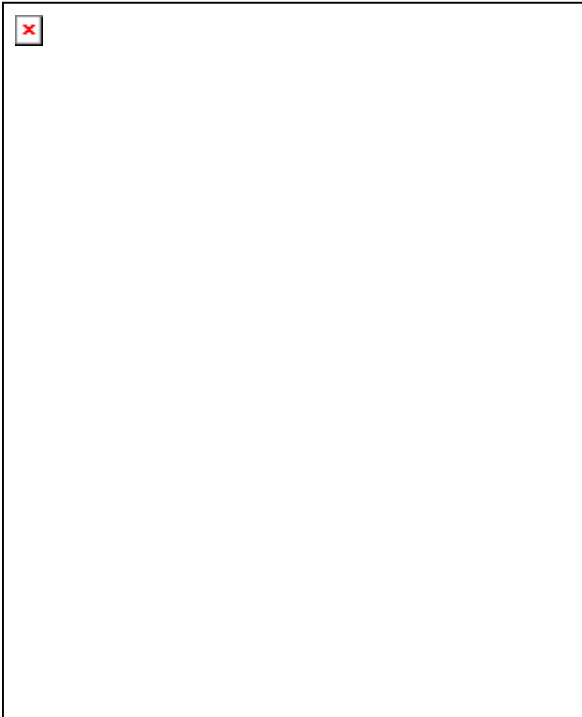
one could be fined up to £20,000.00, so better leave those guys alone ? A boy jumps from the pier steps into the water, and then within minutes he is leaping off the 32' high wall. Encouraged by his dad, he shows no fear - and reminds me of me ! When the wind drops I take a gentle final paddle out to Iniskeel Island. Approx. 1km off the beach, it has a sandy beach on the east side, ideal for landing, plenty of grass for camping and an interesting old church.

Thanks to the drivers who gave me the 35km lifts back to the car - the doctor who drove so quick that I thought we were in an ambulance, the ex fishing youth (with a possible formula one career ahead) who drove even faster. He was on a 32km round trip to get diesel that was more economically priced than in his own town and then there was Margie who came back to Portnoo for me.

Later, when I was packing my belongings away, her friend Sally took out the kayak and before I knew it I was screeching across the bay on Margie's laser, which she had rigged for me. This is a special place ! Visit it soon.

## **Brian Ormond**

**August 1997.**



### **Pushin' on Thru' Mulroy Bay**

So you are stuck on the North West corner and its blowing a gale and the seas are too lumpy. Don't give up. You do have options. My choice was to explore Mulroy Bay. We chose the Woodquarter beyond Millford as the start, surrounded by trees, complete with a slip, pier, and a picnic table. We had found the perfect prep space, the essential secure area to abandon the "gluaistean".

Heading north, we passed the numerous tiny islands, all with individual names, Gull, Cranberry, Juniper, Stick and the aptly named Green Island. Eleven Herons flew from one to the other only to take off

as we approached. The bay became wider, new buildings appeared and mussel farms governed the open spaces, the beds being 8m below sea level but their inflated blue containers are stretched in lines across the bay.

Onward North passing the town of Carrowkeel on the eastern Shore and Cranford Bay on the Western Shore. Then we had decisions - whether to continue out or go into the large inlet of Broadwater on the North east. If you have time, at high water that area also has numerous bays and islands, but the tide had been ebbing for us for approximately two hours, so we opted for a visit to the sea.

Highly recommended - the water in the whole basin was being flushed out. Through the narrows we were shoved, the waters gaining momentum at every corner. Soon we were river canoeing with definite falling slopes. It was best to stay in the centre of the current, which switched from one side to another, wherever the landscape directed it would go .

Downhill (!) we did wind our way past Tully Bay and Seamount Bay, sheltered bays where you could rest, then through wind over tide with 3' high waves. I enjoy these the most. A great battle had begun. Now it seemed we were back at sea! A short change in direction to the West and through a quarter km. gap we were pushed into Crooban Bay.

It took us only an hour and a half to travel 13 kms. The undercurrent eased off and we were able to set our own pace. Seaweed became plentiful. Fishermen in small boats passed giving friendly salutes. We had reached Murvan Head, north of Carrickart, which has a tasty little pastry cafe. Alas now the tide was out and mud flats surrounded the town.

Onward again, the sea air becoming stronger. Long sandy beaches appeared on both sides and then terraces of ugly mobile homes dominated the dunes. Why are these items called mobile or homes when many are unkept, abandoned to rot, and so out of place on these picturesque headlands ? I felt that at least they are temporary structures and maybe some day they will be banished to a caravan park in a less prominent place ! So many mobile home sites along these shores do not allow the public to gain access to the beaches. The best way is to visit them by kayak !

We pitched our humble tent near Tranafaighaboy. We enjoyed a rather quick swim and then a good hike around Melmore Hill, getting good views of the unique L shaped lake and the sun dropping behind Tory, 26kms away.

An interesting excursion which could then be followed on along the coast, or one could wait for the return tide to push one back uphill.

**Brian Ormond.**

**Dublin - July 1997**