

# TRASNA NA DTONNTA

Newsletter of the  
irish sea kayaking association

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Edited by : David Walsh,

## **The 6<sup>th</sup> Irish Sea Kayaking Symposium - 1998 - Co. Clare**

Yeahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, Ahhhhhh . What was that? Yelps from a sea creature or shrieks for help?. It was the end of a beautiful day's sea paddling. We had just had a most dramatic paddle beneath the Cliffs of Moher and were paddling across Doonnagore Bay toward Doolin and the end of our trip.

Yeahhh, ahhhhhh. We stared ahead toward Doolin. There in the distance we could see huge moving walls of water pitching up beside Crab Island and crashing in on the rocks around Doolin Pier. As each wave folded over and crashed, a hollow thud would echo back towards our group of ten sea paddlers. We paddled on.

As we neared Doolin we could make out little dots perched high on these watery mountains. As these waves pitched upright and began to curl, these dots would drop off the curling lip of the waves.....then came the screams of delight. Surfers. The cries of pleasure and fear came from the surfers of huge hollow scary waves which were wrapping themselves around Crab Island. We paddled around the outside (well outside) Crab Island and watched in awe before landing at Doolin Pier.

There, sitting on the pier, nattering away and eating lunch, were some forty other sea kayakers. Everywhere brightly coloured paddling gear was hanging in the sun, and sea kayaks lay in piles beside folded ropes. Our group joined this raggle taggle bunch of paddlers. Soon after, the numbers were further swollen by another group who had paddled around Inis Oirr in the Aran Islands.

*"I saw a whale", "One of our group capsized beside O'Brien's Sea Stack" "A seal followed my boat for ages" "This fisherman on Inis Mean wanted us to lift his currach out of the water so he wouldn't get his feet wet"* Soon the pier was like a busy market place, stories being exchanged, new gear admired and lifts being arranged back to the Centre. It was the afternoon of Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1977, the first day of The 6<sup>th</sup> Irish Sea Kayaking Symposium.

This year the Symposium was hosted by The Burren Outdoor Education Centre and organised by the centre manager, Joanna McInerney. There was a large group in attendance and they arrived from all over. There were paddlers there from Donegal, Cork, Southampton, Santa Cruz and County Down. All the ingredients were there for a good weekend. Good weather, good group, and good location. The event was kindly sponsored by Cascade Designs who ensured there were fabulous dry bags available to all who registered for the weekend. River Deep Mountain High kindly supplied prizes for the raffle. The Great Outdoors in Dublin supplied the author with a big Mitsubishi four Wheel Drive Jeepy thing when his little Ford Escort tried but refused to pull a trailer full of sea kayaks. The Irish Canoe Union supplied 10 sea kayaks for the event and Mike McClure brought along the Valley demo kayaks. Thanks are due to all for this support.

The assembled group were taken aback to hear that David Walsh who has done so much to promote sea kayaking in Ireland had been taken ill and wouldn't be present. David, who single-handedly runs the Irish Sea Kayaking Association was going to give a workshop over the weekend and hold the AGM of the SKA . However all were delighted to hear the latest news from his paddling partner, Fred Cooney, that he was recovering remarkably quickly from his quadruple (triples are for wimps, apparently) bypass.

The first day's programme involved a choice of sea trips. These were a trip to the Aran Islands, an exploration of the coast in Liscannor Bay, and a trip along the spectacular Cliffs of Moher. During Saturday night there was an excellent slide show by Oisín Hallisey who had just returned from paddling in Alaska with Peter Cork. There were some excellent shots of whales, bears, and icebergs. To be honest I was so staggered by the quality of the pictures, I thought Oisín was going to announce that he had robbed them from National Geographic. There were pictures of whales breaching, pods of whales fishing together and bears strolling along the shore tossing boulders aside in their search for food. It wasn't until I saw the front of Oisín's sea kayak in the pictures that I could believe he had been there and taken the shots. Stunning stuff !!!

Sunday morning began with some confusion at breakfast. Some of the groups had put their clocks back an hour because of daylight saving time, others had put their clocks forward, while the cooks had simply ignored this clock changing nonsense. The second day's programme consisted of a series of sea trips which included The Cliffs of Moher, and trips from Doolin and Fanore up towards Black Head. The unseasonably good weather had paddlers of all levels revelling in the conditions. The Cliffs of Moher group had the good fortune to have conditions which allowed them paddle right in under the cliffs. They also reported a second sighting of a whale similar to the type which had been seen the previous day. Mike McClure identified it as a Bottlenose Whale. Later that

evening a second day of paddling in beautiful conditions was complemented by a slide show set to music put together by Joanna McInerney. The slides of sea kayaking around Ireland underlined what a great coastline for sea paddling we have and had a few people making lists of places they must get to in '98. The group retired to the pub eventually where there was a session of joke telling which continued long into the night, followed by some songs and toast in the kitchen of the Burren Centre.

Monday morning arrived with unfavourable winds forecast for later in the day. The options were limited to more sheltered trips. Some took to the hills to explore the Burren, others were taken on a coastal exploration walk by Joanna McInerney, and two groups went paddling. One group went to explore the sheltered waters of Kinvara Bay while others went further South to visit Mutton Island, off Quilty. This Bank Holiday Monday was overcast but the shorter trips and Burren Walks seemed to suit the mood.

So the 6<sup>th</sup> Irish Sea Kayaking Symposium drew to a close with paddlers leaving for home after three days of good crack and good sea kayaking. Next year's Symposium is already at the planning stage with Bushmills Centre on the Causeway Coast identified as a location and ideas abounding as to what events to include on the programme. Having myself organised the early symposiums it is heartening to see this event develop and grow as the major annual fixture of the Irish sea kayaking calendar.

Finally much credit is due to the organiser Joanna McInerney, the instructors who led trips and the sponsors whose efforts have enabled sea kayaking to grow and reach out to a wider audience.

**Stephen Hannon**

## **The Waves of Tory**

The seed was planted by Des Keaney : "Going to Donegal next weekend? - Meet you at the pier at CO437, 10.00am, Saturday, July 5th." "Are you sure?" "Yes. I'll be there. Port Na Blagh, 2 miles from Dunfanaghy." "Yeah, yeah, I'll find it!" "Look, check out Dave's "Oileain", the details are there." "See you then....."

Satisfied I had got the arrangements 100% correct, I loaded the car with absolutely everything for a weekend. No plan had been decided, so knowing how things can develop I departed equipped for a major expedition, if necessary.

I arrived at Dunfanaghy late Friday evening rather undecided as to where to stay. The evening was perfect but the "Southern" forecast had been warning of NW gales, wind, rain, the lot. "Nonsense!" I was told in the bar...(£2.00 a pint of Guinness -another row about that.) "The BBC gave a grand wee evening, it will be good for the weekend." I was troubled ; the lads in Glasnevin couldn't be that far out...could they?

The issue of a bed became dominant as the evening grew late. I wimped out and tried the local B&B: "Sorry, all full up." There were northern car registrations everywhere. My

"slight" southern blas turned me into a bit of a curiosity. "What's that yoke on top of the car?", etc.

I got fed up of the "No Vacancies" signs, so I decided: Come on, you are supposed to be a roughy toughy outdoor type - cop yourself on and pitch the tent. I located "real" outdoor types already camped out at the Horn Head bridge (C0037). It was a lovely location at the head of the bay, a little public, but nice and close for a quick walk back into town should the "craving" come upon me.

The "craving" did come upon me and a fairly daft evening resulted. I discovered a "cartel" of pubs all charging £2.00 a pint, attended a "stag" party and rolled back to the tent about 2.00am vaguely aware that the NW gale still hadn't occurred and that I was camping amongst some of Ireland's last, very vocal, Corncrakes!

I was at the right pier...(wasn't I?). It was now 11.00am. I had brewed five cups of tea, highly agitated that there wasn't another "paddler" in sight. The mind began to recall the conversation...it switched to Dave Walsh's throwaway remark "They were talking about Tory, when I talked to Des and Brian last...". That was it! Stupid! It had to be the explanation, the lads are never late.

Leaving word on the pier, I rattled across to Magherarourty Pier. They weren't there either...OK, I realised I had bugged it up. What to do? The question was answered within minutes of arrival at the Pier. As I sat there pondering and trying to make sense of that telephone conversation, a familiar face knocked on the window. "Jaysus! What are you doing here?"

Four or five cars arrived within minutes. The red hot "twitchers" from Dublin had arrived, serious birdwatchers all. All had come to see a rare bird on Tory Island.

Now the old competitive juices started to flow. A plan formulated rapidly. I'd pack the boat, lash out to Tory, see this bird and combine all my interests in one fell swoop! Beautiful, nicely packaged, good sales pitch, but the old warning sounded, so I read "Oileain" again buddy, "a challenging trip! 9 miles of open water! The innermost islands present psychological support mate, nothing more..."

Ah! but Sean, the weather is perfect, as flat a sea as you could get for Tory Sound. The argument raged back and forth, the reasons for and against. I was aware I was dithering. It was 12.00 noon. Make a bloody decision, you've wasted enough of a very good day. OK, I reasoned that it was double the distance, double the time, at least, of a trip to Rockabill. The sea conditions were excellent. The ferry could bring me back tomorrow if the weather does change. I could see my second Black-Headed Bunting in a month and visit an island I had long wished to visit. "What's the problem...don't give me that one again about going solo!" OK, I'm gone.

It was the right decision. The crossing to Tory was a trip that I really enjoyed. I struck out towards Camusmore Bay after leaving the shelter of Inishbofin, tidal pull helping me all

the way. The heave of the Atlantic beats the hell out of that awful short chop of the Irish Sea. The seabirds came in to "buzz" the kayak every so often: Gannet, Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel, and Puffins.

Made Tory Island about 2.15pm. The beach was full of kids swimming. They had my name, rank and serial number in seconds and were offering advice as to where I should camp. Liam took charge, directed me to the nearest patch of grass and insisted there would be "nay bother" with me camping there. A little warning bell sounded about it being a little public. I had ignored all warning bells already today, so why would I take note now.

What a place! I took in the views back toward the mainland and the mountains of Donegal, pitched the tent, had a bite to eat and set off exploring the island. The layout of West Town reminded me of Inishkea South and put into perspective what life must have been like there when it was populated. I think I had four conversations in as many minutes. I thought I had come into the bay relatively unnoticed except for the kids...I felt very welcome as I continued on my way exploring the island.

I met with the birdwatchers and found that they had been lucky. The bird was still around. Maybe it was going to be that perfect day!

I went into "twitcher" mode for a few hours, was successful and continued to walk the island. I headed out west toward the Lighthouse and fell in with a local chap also heading west! I was intrigued ; he was carrying a half loaf of bread or some thing like that. "You paddled out?" "Yes." "Do you know Susanne? Karen? Joanna?" "Sure I know all the paddlers." "How long would it take to get to South Wexford from Dublin?" "What, by car?" "No, by train or bus? Some class of a sport place she works?" I was unsure as to what I should say next!

We arrived at the hen house. Extraordinary ; we had walked half a mile to feed the hens. I was flummoxed. I was sure he was one of the lightkeepers. I had loads of questions as to why hens

should be kept so far away from the house. He muttered something about "bloody dogs" and as I felt him getting busy with the job in hand I continued on my travels.

My circuit of Tory Island remains unfinished as, having got only as far as Derek Hill's cottage, the hunger and thirst gripped me. I found a bit of music going on at the hotel, lingered over an early evening aperitif, and then it was time to cook. I was just relaxing after eating, when every child on Tory under 10 struck me like a whirlwind. Ah ha! That "little warning" about being too public was valid and then a mad, mad half hour followed. Every nook and cranny was explored. All equipment was fingered, examined, passed around for scrutiny. Non-stop, rapid-fire questioning of a highly accurate sort was thrown at me. The game of "how many can we get into the tent?" developed.

A walk was needed so I played the "Pied Piper", gradually losing my assailants to parents and the dark. The evening was spent at the Ceili and we danced the "Waves of Tory" early into the morning. The Corncrakes rasped until the dawn and I registered that the wind was getting up. That nagging doubt about paddling back remained.

An old islander had instructed me to leave 2 hours before high water to catch the flood tide for the inshore islands. So, reluctantly, I left Tory early the following bright, clear morning in a fresh SW wind. The sea was right on the beam and bumpy enough off the point at East Town, but quite manageable further out in the sound. I crossed to Kerlasbeg Sound and landed on Inishdoeey for a "mosey" around. The landing on Inishdoeey was interesting, a long narrow slash in the rocks - shown as Corry Cave on the 1-50000 map. I got pelted by irate Shags as they jettisoned ballast in their attempts to avoid human contact. I explored the island, an attractive place. A ruined early-Christian church and some nice sea-arches, caves along eastern side, breeding Eider, Black Guillemots. I crossed Kerlasmore Sound to have lunch on Inishbofin, on the lovely beach at Toberglassan Bay. I lingered on Inishbofin enjoying the scenery, the views back to Tory and along the Donegal coast to Horn Head...another day perhaps!

On the windscreen at Magherarourty, the true story began to emerge - right pier at the wrong time and wrong pier at the time! The phone calls would follow. For the moment I was very content with what had been an incident-packed, highly sociable and memorable weekend.

**Sean Pierce**

## **Folding Kayaks**

Ainsworth are UK manufacturers best known, surely, for their black and blue river paddles, but they have entered the sea kayaking world with a wondrous gadget, a take-apart and bolt-together kayak called the Horizon 3. It is plastic, 16 feet long, and a beamy 24 inches, so it should be a reliably stable job. It possesses some seriously nice features such as a foot controlled rudder, two hatches forward and one humongous one aft. The entire upper deck aft lifts off! The whole thing breaks into three parts and bolts together again in 15 minutes (according to the blurb). Carry it about in your car, or on a plane or train? Say what you will, this has to be the answer to some peoples prayers?

## **Pool Sessions**

Cormac Daly has risen to the occasion yet again, for Dublin area paddlers. This year he has organised two pool sessions in, again, the Clondalkin Leisure Centre pool, on February 21st and (subject to interest) March 21st, (the dates are fixed certainties) in either case at 6.30 P.M. (the time probably, but better check closer to the day). I imagine he will, as usual, have a briefing session before the off, so as to waste no time actually in the pool. Contact

Cormac Daly at 087 2370078 or H. 8460398.

Needless to say, the SKA policy of supporting these pool sessions, which the entire committee support wholeheartedly, extends to the provinces. Anyone willing to run such a session will be underwritten, which is to say we will cover your losses, within reason. Normally, instructor types instruct for free, and at £3.00 per head, realistically, twelve paddlers breaks even. Any reasonable effort will be rewarded by having the shortfall made up from central funds. Whatever problems the SKA may have, pennies aren't one of them.

## **Irish Sea Kayaking 1997**

1997 was a mixed / good year for the Irish Sea Kayaking Association, as an organisation, but a mixed / bad year for the sport. This was the second year in a row where the summer season (say, April through September) weather was characterised by fair amounts of rain and lots of wind. Typically, active amateur enthusiasts (i.e. mad keen weekend warriors, but with a day job to go back to on Mondays) scored a couple of excellent trips, but many disappointments in between, perhaps including washed out holidays.

The need for flexibility in trip planning was underscored time and again. These days a sea paddler needs to belong to a bigger clique, and be prepared to go when the weatherman says, with whoever is available, alone if necessary. As is immediately apparent from reading the articles published in *Trasna na dTonnta* this year, it was in this way that the efforts of, for instance, members Brian Ormond and Sean Pierce were well rewarded, while the more conservatively minded suffered a bit, proving I suppose that you don't have to be mad, but it sure helps .....

This year the April meet to Achill was a huge success, dozens of paddlers attending, and many classic trips were scored, in perfect calm and sunny conditions, including the Round of Clare Island, the Inishkeas, Achill Head. The September trip to Donegal was more or less blown out, but was a huge social success, and some new (inshore, obviously) islands were explored, and two Golden Eagles were identified, as were two Skuas and a Porpoise. Then, incredibly, despite the absence of the Chairman of the Association, the October Symposium was a huge success, again proving that absolutely no one is indispensable. [ \*!=£~+%!\$^& ]. The Cliffs of Moher, Aran Islands, and Black Head were all visited by virtually all the five or six dozen attenders, in flat calm conditions. So good was the paddling that the lectures, normally "bread and butter" mainstays of such gatherings, would have paled by comparison, but for their incredible standard.

A major nine week expedition to British Columbia and Alaska was undertaken by Peter Cork of Ballyjamesduff this summer, mostly accompanied by Oisín Hallissey. Irish contingents attended and participated in and competed (yes, competed) in major international gatherings of sea-kayaks and small boats, during the summer, in France and Spain, and they did us proud, perhaps especially the women, who excelled themselves, above and below the high tide mark, by all accounts. Irish participation was marshalled by Joanna McInerney and Suzanne Kennedy.

## A Cautionary Tale - The facts.

We take what is an unusual step for a national sporting representative organisation in issuing a press release in the matter of the physical health of the entire of the committee of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association (hereinafter called "he"). The facts are simple. "He" placed Trasna na dTonnta 11 in the post on Thursday 2nd October at 5.30 P.M., and was hauled into the Casualty Department of the Meath Hospital in Dublin one hour and twenty minutes later. "His" motorbike had broken down on Dublin's M50 motorway a week before, and "being downhill all the way" ("his" explanation at the time), "he" pushed the BMW 750 in question all the (4 miles of the) way to Ranelagh, suffering a heart attack on Palmerston Road, less than half a mile from home. He managed to explain away the relevant symptoms to the relevant authorities (wife, family, job, friends) by the simple stratagem of saying nothing to nobody. As the symptoms (chest area pain on exercise, with or without breathlessness and/or sweating, which goes away immediately the exercise stops) increased in intensity and frequency, his subconscious started copping on, to the point that when, a week later, he finally obtained a firm grasp of the obvious, he found he had, in the interim, given up cigarettes, and twice asked total strangers on different occasions were they doctors (neither were).

Finally, being totally unable to continue a game of tennis, he surrendered to the rollercoaster of ambulances, white coats, and concerned faces all healthy people dread. At first, the medics could not find anything wrong even with stress ECG tests, proving that fitness and health are different concepts. Only a process performed after all other tests had failed, whereby ink is squirted into a chap's very innards, showed that "he" was "significantly" f#%\$ed. He received a reconditioned engine, in the form of a quadruple bypass, on October 13th, and made a fraught partial return to the day job on 15th December.

The purpose of this message is to say that it is as yet uncertain can "he" run the SKA as well as complete a return to ordinary and normal family and work commitments. He would like to continue running this organisation because if he is to have any input at all into Irish canoeing, this is where he would like to do it. This is what he likes doing.

Realistically though, were others out there ready to volunteer to take over, or even help, they would truly be gratefully welcomed. At least initially, help is needed getting the newsletters out. The text of this offering is in place, more or less, for a month, but the effort required in bulking it so that articles start and finish at top and bottom of pages, or otherwise logically, Photostatting, printing the envelopes, matching the form letters, folding, putting in the envelopes, then tucking them in, licking the stamps, and going to the post box, this time just all seemed too much. Anyone out there with computer skills and energy, who can receive a disk (or better still, an email) of a Microsoft Word 6 text file (in a raw form), and run with it, would save me a lot of angst. Realistically, notwithstanding the modern global village, the person concerned would want to be physically located in the Republic of Ireland.

In any event, I am interviewing for the job effective immediately.

## **The Committee**