

TRASNA NA DTONNTA

Newsletter of the
IRISH SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Number : 13

8th March 1998

The Skerries Coast

Winter Paddling

Getting Started

Understanding Weather Forecasts

Island Hoppin' Down Under

Edited by Des Keaney

Secretary: David Walsh,

Dublin Pool Sessions

There was a good attendance at Cormac Daly's pool session in Clondalkin Leisure Centre on 21st February last, so much so that it almost broke even. Some paddled polo boats, and some their sea-kayaks. Significant successes were that Clare Crinion rolled her Skerray, and Richie Dalton a Nordkapp, repeatedly. There will therefore be another session, on 21st March, again at 6.30 and again in Clondalkin. Contact Cormac Daly at 087 2370078 or H. 8460398.

Kayak Training

G.O., our very own Kevin O'Callaghan, will run a training / refresher / assessment course specially for members of the SKA, virtually at cost. He will, subject to demand, this summer, based in south County Galway at Kinvara Bay, north side, run an advanced or basic course, and assess the participants. The area is particularly suited to either task, there being mighty tidal races, as well as navigation that demands concentration. Islands abound for camping, and the remote feeling can conveniently be had.

The SKA has always encouraged the whole business of personal / leadership development and training. This is not a sport where complacency in the matter of ability is encouraged. In all adventure sports, the business of training in and assessment of proficiency (there are three types, personal, leadership and instructorship), encourage people to work at improving their weaknesses within the activity, rather than (as would otherwise be reasonable and normal) practising strengths. For example, did you ever notice that paddlers good at holding standing waves seek out standing waves, those good at breaking out break out behind every rock, good laybackers in climbing seek out steep rock, and so on. Its like a dog chasing its tail forever in a circle. The "system" of training and development forces everyone to face up to their personal weakpoints, rounding off the skill level, and its never a bad thing not to have to invent the wheel every time you meet a new experience.

Contact GO at Killeenaran, Ballindereen, County Galway . W. 094 25700 x 2604 or Mobile 088 2782480

Cleggan 28th/29th March

GO has advanced our information supply. We meet at the pier on Saturday morning 28th March at 10.00 AM or the previous evening in the Pier Bar. The hostel in Cleggan is on the approach road, just before the pier Tel : 095 44746. Best book. Given any sort of break with the weather, we will "push the boat out" a bit, so no raw recruits please, as the herd will do its own thing. Ideally we will make Inishturk, rather than the fleshpots of Inishbofin. Closer to the time, I will sort out ferry information (for camp followers, who will be perfectly welcome so long as they do not wish to paddle their own canoes) and hostel / B&B information for the islands, so I would appreciate being given some idea of how many may be expected. Close to the time leave a message as to how many people will need a bed on Friday night in the hostel. Best be prepared for camping Saturday night, just in case. A word of warning though for the mavericks : - camping anywhere near the East beach on Inishbofin is not allowed anymore, because of erosion. If Bofin comes into the equation, camp opposite the pier near the monastery, or use the hostel.

Subscriptions

Fees are still due by many for 1998. They remain at £10.00, adding £2.00 for optional I.C.U. registration, and £5.00 for each additional name (usually a related family member, but clubs can function this way too) at same address, sharing one newsletter. Those who haven't paid before the next newsletter will not receive Tn D14, or any further warning

that they have been struck off and are out of benefit. A big nasty separate "Pay up or else" note is being enclosed to all defaulters, so if you get just this newsletter, you are a good person, officially.

Oiled Seabirds

The following snippet appeared in Canoeist magazine recently. "The RSPB spend £20,000 to £30,000 per year rescuing some 2,000 oiled seabirds. Research has shown that only 17% of Guillemots rescued after the Sea Empress oil spill survived the first month and less than 1% lived for a year, a much lower figure than for birds left to fend for themselves, in the wild."

Shipping from Valley Canoes

McGuinness Forwarding is an Irish Trucking company who have a base in Dublin and Northampton. They regularly transport equipment to Ireland, from the same industrial complex as Valley Canoes. Brian Ormond has used them twice and is happy with their service and rates. Contact Frank on (01)2962281, fax (01)2962282, mobile 087 572112 or in the UK on +44 1604 890 644, fax +44 1604 890 054.

Solar Radio

The following snippet appeared in Canoeist magazine recently. "Morphy Richards' Green Machine is a solar powered radio which also has a dynamo, charged by cranking. If you don't fancy the chances of either of those, it also takes 2 AA batteries. It measures 150 x 80 x 50 mm and costs about £30."

Mobile Phone Hoax Rescue

7th January 1998. Some sicko in Preston in England launched a rescue off the North coast of Ireland by reporting a catamaran he said he was delivering from the West of Ireland to the UK had gone down, and that all his emergency gear was kaput. He got through, he said, by mobile phone. This was precisely while a tornado was destroying Patrick Moore's astral observatory in southern England, a time of severe storms and floods with the rescue services stretched. Thankfully it would appear that technology has moved on to the point where the authorities can trace mobile phone abuse of this kind.

Alaska - The Easy Way

I receive unsolicited advertising from time to time, the price for having a WWW page. One struck my fancy, boasting that Oona River Getaways at email bproctor@mail.kaien.com or WWW at <http://www.marlintravel.com/oona.htm> caters to different types of adventures such as kayaking trips, hiking, ecotouring, and sportfishing,

for high end and budget travellers, located on the North Coast of British Columbia just south of Alaska. As they say, a big wallet sure makes for a small rucsac.

Wrist Weather Station

The following snippet appeared in Canoeist magazine recently. "The Casio multi - function watch at £197 has a digital compass with 5 bearing memory, barometer with 26 hour trend and a thermometer as well as the usual watch, stopwatch, alarm, illumination s and water resistance."

Seal Sightings

Brian Ormond, in an earlier issue of this wonderful mag (his words!), asked fellow kayakers if they would be interested in keeping a record of seal sightings around Ireland. If you have any statistics, he would be delighted to compile them and send them to the Sanctuary. You can fax him on 028 20588.

For Sale

Skerray

One amazingly fast and beautiful plastic Valley Skerray sea kayak ship. Complete with extras like "a go fast but soft cushioned seat", ultra light design er fitted guiding ropes, superior black hatch covers, an obedient skeg contraption and an anti nuclear sticker. The best offer could indeed secure this very unique item. Phone Brian Ormond on 028 20577 or 087 278 9955.

Nordkapp

Nordkapp HS, 3 years old, excellent condition, yellow deck, white hull. Fully expedition equipped - Silva P70 compass, Compac 50 foredeck pump, retractable skeg, footrests, backrest, kneetube, large rear hatch, ocean cockpit, towing eye and cleat, extra deck fittings on back deck for waterbottle/tow bag. Phone Des Keaney on 01 2762063.

Irish Nautical Almanac 1998

For those of you who have used this excellent publication for almost a decade, sorry, it's not being published this year. According to Windmill Marine, a suitable replacement is the Smallboat Almanac, available for around £11. I haven't seen this yet but will have more in the next issue. Any suggestions/ideas on cheap and easy sources of tide tables to the editor.

The Skerries Coast

Cormac Daly

Over the course of the last two years, I have often paddled out from Loughshinny or Skerries to the small islands off the coast. The more I paddle, the more it appears to me that merely moving from A to B in a sea kayak is one of the lesser pleasures offered by the pursuit.

Little had I thought of the wealth of local history vested in the unassuming rocks of Colt, Shenick and St.Patricks. One day last week however, I casually remarked to a friend who works in Skerries that I'd been around the islands that day.

Skerries, he informed me, is Norse for 'reef' or 'rocky place'. The Viking influence perhaps stems from their raid on St.Patricks Island monastery in the 8th century. The influence lives on to this day in the Protestant church and graveyard in Holmpatrick on the mainland. 'Holm' is the Norse word for 'island'. The community had moved here after a synod convened on the island site by St.Malachy in the 12th century. This shows the importance of the monastery supposedly founded after St.Patrick received a less than warm welcome in Wicklow. His relations with the locals weren't always harmonious either. He returned to the island one day to find that his goat had been eaten. Furious, he bounded ashore in two great strides and his footprints are burned in the rocks near the town. When the locals were confronted, they tried to deny their involvement but all they could do was bleat pitifully.

Shenick was originally 'Oileán an tSionnaigh', perhaps due to some wily foxes who availed of the low tide land bridge to dine on the plentiful birdlife.

On a more sombre note, one of the events deeply imprinted in local history is Oiche na Gaoithe Móire the 6th of January 1839. Nine fishing boats, each with crews of 9 to 10 men, went down off the coast here. It's hard to imagine the devastating effect on a small local community of an event like this but a similar event led to the evacuation of the Inishkeas.

I hope this will add to any future trips in this area. Perhaps some others out there have other nuggets of local lore?

Winter Paddling - I will for I-WEBS.

Sean Pierce

There seemed a certain logic in the idea, I told myself! You have been doing things like this for years. The skill would be if I could convince any one else that counting birds on offshore islands would be interesting, enjoyable and contributing to the conservation effort. I-Webs is the Irish Wetland Bird Survey, organised jointly by Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust(UK). It began in the winter of 1994-95 and is on going.

The task was to count the range and number of species on a monthly basis on the Skerries islands andshould the weather be kind to sea paddlers, take in Rockabill or Lambay or maybe even the lot! Our efforts began on the 20th September 1997 and amazingly we have not missed a count day. Our circuit can be summarised as a buzzing of Colt Island, a tramp around Shenick Island, lunch on St Patrick's after a little surfing in the sound en - route. Landings on St. Patrick's Island have involved running the gauntlet of the "meaty" resident Grey Seals who linger to stare at you while lunch is consumed. A certain tension builds during "eats" as one awaits the "keen" one to suggest that "The sea looks good", meaning of course that he is fit for the Rock! Grumblings all round but sure everyone knows it is too early to go home and science must be satisfied with a complete survey.

The journeys to the islands have been memorable in many ways this winter. Rockabill in the fog was a good day made all the more interesting by 5000 Kittiwakes resting up there but what a racket! Maeve Sheridan's scaling of the Martello Tower on Shenick Island showed that these "Cavan women" are both ambidextrous and double jointed.....Des Keaney successfully directed a marine rescue of two young maidens from a flooding tide in Loughshinney and didn't even get his feet wet.. while Declan Donnelly, after a maiden voyage bought a sea-kayak before he got home....

Significant lessons were agreed. That the Cab' Sauvignon mixed with a short choppy sea and brooding grey sky can leave a body a "tad" queasy. The differences between a Shag and a Cormorant were firmly emphasised and are now known to all... Short-eared Owls on Shenick Island definitely eat big rats!... Fulmars like to buzz sea -kayakers and the smell from the sewerage outlet off the SE side of Shenick Island is to be avoided. The numbers and details of birds seen over the winter will appear during 1998 when records from over 600 sites and 250 individuals are compiled at IWC HQ and published.

My thanks to my paddling I-WEBS team for their enthusiasm, support and some good laughs, Des Keaney, Maeve Sheridan, Declan Donnelly and Cormac Daly.

Editors Note: The next outing is on Saturday the 14th of March. Skerries Harbour 10:00 a.m..

Getting Started

Declan Donnelly

"If you want to know what it's all about, come to Burtonport in September", was the advice of Des Keaney when I phoned to ask him about sea kayaking last August. An organised sea kayaking weekend in Donegal, a trailer load of ICU boats towed all the way from Dublin and experienced paddlers to lead the group - I couldn't resist.

Unfortunately, the weather couldn't be so well organised. Saturday dawned very windy so I took the ferry to Aranmore with most of the group and enjoyed a walk across the island to the lighthouse. When the wind hadn't eased by Sunday, it was disappointing for everyone. There was nothing I could do but look forward to another day. That day came

at the symposium in Clare in October. A chance to try demonstration sea kayaks, other peoples gear, to see slides and hear talk of interesting trips that others have undertaken and the highlight, a paddle along the cliffs of Moher - an orgy of sea kayaking.

I wanted more. An advertisement in 'Buy and Sell' resulted in my purchase of a second hand Islander in December following a trial run with Messrs. Keaney and Pierce to Rockabill. 'So, what's next?' asked Seán. My silence revealed that I hadn't thought beyond getting a boat. A basic proficiency course, the Messrs. explained.

Fortunately, there is such a course early in the season with Stephen Hannon which should set me up for some interesting paddling for the rest of the year..

In the meantime, the Cleggan trip at the end of March looked like a weekend not to be missed. Then I read the caution in the tail of the notice 'not suitable for beginners'. Ah well, I can look forward to another day. My thanks to SKA and to the many individuals who make all this possible.

Getting started has cost me about £900.

Kayak	£550
Paddle	£159
Spraydeck	£55
Dry bags	£34
Basic Proficiency Course	£99

Editors note:

Sea kayaking course information will be published in the next edition of *Trasna na dTonnta*. If there's anything in particular you want included, tell Des Keaney or David Walsh.

Understanding Weather Forecasts

Des Keaney

A group of paddlers rushing to get gear off the car and onto the water (aren't they always?!). Someone remembers the forecast. The time is right, the radio is switched on and there is a scramble for pencil and paper.

Met.E: "And now the sea area forecast for the next 24 hours."

Paddler: Nervous tension, pencil poised....."Gotta get this, gotta get this gotta ge...."

Met.E "There is a gale warning in operation."

Paddler: Alarm! "Holy Jeez..... Where?"

Met.E "Meteorological situation.... a mild southerly airflow covers the area. Frontal trough....."

Paddler: Scribble, scribble "Hey, wait up, let me write that down."

Met.E ".....westerly airflow will develop overnight."

Paddler: Scribble, scribble "Damn, missed the middle bit"

Met.E "Forecast for coastal waters from Rossan Point to How.....Roches P..... andsea.."

Paddler: Confusion, bewilderment. "Is that us?"

Met.E "...wind, southerly, force 7 or galeforceuth to southwest a.....creasing for...6 to..."

Paddler: Frantic scribbling

Met.E: ".....coastal waters from Roches Point to Loopossan Po...."

Paddler: !"£\$"!#\$\$% **!

End result? Nobody knows what's happening. You could end up paddling with a pleasant force 3 or into a raging 8. So, how do you avoid the confusion?

Only one essential question has to be answered. **"What is the wind doing in the immediate future?"**

To answer this, you need to know three things.

- 1) The relevant part of the bulletin
- 2) Where you are
- 3) How to take down the info.

1) Parts of the bulletin.

There are four sections in a bulletin.

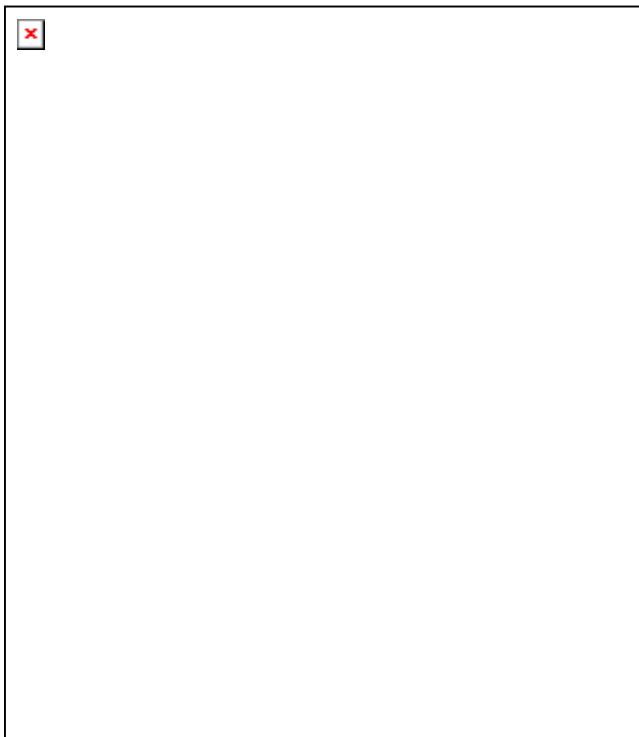
- a) Meteorological situation, starting with a gale warning, if applicable
- b) Detailed area forecast, which is further broken down by wind, weather and visibility
- c) Outlook for a further 24 hours.

d) Weather Station Reports

The important section is the 'detailed area forecast'. This starts when the guy says "Forecast for coastal waters from Rossan Point to....." or whatever. For this you have to know the headlands.

2) Where you are

The normal headlands used are shown on the map below. There's no easy way, you gotta learn them!



3) How to take down the info

If the bulletin says "Forecast for coastal waters from Rossan Point to Howth Head to Roches Point and the Irish Sea... wind, southerly, force 7 or galeforce 8, veering south to southwest and decreasing force 4 to 6 tonight." My shorthand looks like "RP HH RP S 7-8 S SW 4-6 TN" That's it. Finished.

You can then any other details that you've picked up e.g. weather, visibility etc.. You should also distinguish between the two 'RP's so that you don't get confused later.

Other shorthand I use is as follows:
G = gust, TD = today, TM =

tomorrow, L = later

On longer trips, the "outlook" is also important. If the bulletin says "And the outlook for sea areas for the following 24 hours. Fresh to strong gusty westerly winds, blustery showers, some wintry but dying out later." This goes down as F -S G W BLSH. The definitions of "fresh" and "strong" come later in the article.

Summary

Only write down the essential stuff - just **listen** to the rest. Know where you are. Enjoy the paddle!

Other useful weather information, terms and definitions .

Sea Area Forecast Times

RTE1 VHF Times

0602 0103 1303

1253 0403 1603

1902 0703 1903

2353 1003 2203

Met Eireann Weatherdial

1550-123-836

Timescale

Imminent within 6 hours

Soon 6 - 12 hours

Later 12 - 24 hours

Wind Strengths

Force Description Wind Comments

Speed

0 Calm <1 Sea like mirror

1 Light 1-3 Ripples

2 Light 4-6 Small wavelets

3 Light 7-10 Scattered white

horses

4 Moderate 11-16 Frequent white

horses.

5 Fresh 17-21 Many white horses,
moderate waves

6 Strong 22-27 Large waves,
extensive foam crests

7 Near Gale 28-32 Nice from the shore

8 Gale 33-40 You're cracked!

9 Strong Gale 41-47 Glug glug.....

I use a "rule of thumb" which is as follows:

Wind Speed Decision

< 10 kn (f 1-3) No problem

10 - 20 kn (f 4-5) Hmmmm, depends on where
I'm going

20 - 30 kn (f 6 - 7) Usually stay at home

> 30 knots Easy decision. Pub time!

Visibility

Good: more than 5nm (9km)

Moderate: 2-5nm (4-9km)

Poor 1100 yds (1km) - nm (4km)

Fog < 1100 yds (1km)

Breakdown of coastal reports

The reporting stations are Malin Head, Rosslare, Roches Point, Valentia, Belmullet and Dublin Airport, in that order.

1) wind direction on the 16 point compass and speed in knots

2) weather

3) visibility, in miles and yards

4) pressure, in hectopascals (= millibars)

5) pressure tendency, which describes the change in pressure in the last 3 hours, according to this scale:

0.0 - 0.4 = Steady

0.5-1.9 = Rising/falling slowly

2.0 - 3.4 = Rising/falling

3.5 - 5.9 = Rising/falling rapidly

>= 6.0 = Rising/falling very rapidly

Sample Forecast

This is the text from the 12:53 forecast on 20/02/98. I've split it into parts (underlined) as discussed earlier.

"And now the sea area forecast for the next 24 hours."

Meteorological situation

"There is a gale warning in operation. Meteorological situation.... a mild southerly airflow covers the area. Frontal troughs will cross eastwards during the afternoon and evening and a much colder unstable southwesterly airflow will develop overnight."

Detailed area forecast

"Forecast for coastal waters from Rossan Point to Howth Head to Roches Point and the Irish Sea... wind, southerly, force 7 or galeforce 8, veering south to southwest and decreasing force 4 to 6 tonight. Weather, rain drizzle and fog, clearing to showers. Visibility, poor to moderate, becoming moderate to good.

And for coastal waters from Roche s Point to Loop Head to Rossan Point. Wind, southerly force 7 or gale force 8. veering southwesterly force 5 to 7 today. Backing southerly again overnight. Veering westerly 5 to 7 by this time tomorrow. Weather, heavy rain, clearing to showers, some heavy or prolonged and turning wintry later. Visibility, moderate to poor becoming moderate to good."

Outlook

"And the outlook for sea areas for the following 24 hours. Fresh to strong gusty westerly winds, blustery showers, some wintry but dying out later."

Weather Station reports

"Reports from weather stations at noon.

Malin Head, south 31, gust 44 knots, recent rain, 18 miles, 995 falling. Rosslare, south 17, gust 36 knots, rain, 2 miles, 1004, falling slowly. Roches Point automatic. South 30 knots, gust 40, 2 miles, 1001, falling. Valentia, south southwest 21, gust 40 knots, rain shower, 10 miles 997, falling slowly. Belmullet. south 27, gust 44 knots, recent rain, 11 miles, 992 falling. Dublin Airport south 11 knots, gust 23, recent rain, 7 miles, 1002 falling.

And that's all from Met Eireann for the moment. Good afternoon. "

(rather large) Island Hoppin'

Brian Ormond

Travellin' the world with a rock band, I don't talk much about it. I find it always sounds kind of big headed, but this time I'm kinda talking a round it (and there's no stoppin' now). You see, we're in Japan, country possessing the fastest trains, even when a tree falls down in front the gig is nearly pulled. The country that gets lots of snow, more so than most and they are always prepared for it - shovelling, pushing and removing. Nagano is beginning to warm up, the snow is beginning to freeze. But nobody, including the Japanese can be prepared for the many catastrophes that hit this country. We do not need to be reminded of the horrific pictures of the uncontrollable earthquakes. Japan gets up to 1000 earthquakes a year, most of them too small to notice. But we will not forget the horrific pictures of Kobe. Five years later, there are still up to five hundred families living in temporary accommodation in Kobe, with very little chances of getting their lives back together. And Those skyscrapers at 40 floors high do sway from side to side when the tremors hit. In your hotel room you will always find a torch next to your bed... and the there's hurricanes, typhoons and volcanoes, and yes, seemingly it has been circumnavigated by a bloke in a kayak. Beautiful landscape, a lot of wattage for those rather large neons. Beautiful people, so helpful and generous in their ways.

And then you fly to Auckland, the City of Sails. At the airport you talk to a German lad who has just imported his fibreglass kayak. Funny, you think, what's the cost to freight an 18' machine so far and especially with such an abundance of kayaks readily available here? And then you sense the tension in this guys face and you look closer - so far from home, so far to come and you look at the boat and it's cracked right across the beam, just behind the cockpit. So bad, that the thing is a write off. And you confirm your very thoughts about hiring locally when so far. Nevertheless, the German guy did bring his surf board. This was not cracked.

You track down an Englishman who runs eight record stores but more importantly, he has a 39' yacht. I hassle him (a lot) to take us out... with his daughter. You see, Sean has just bought this ex charter vessel, today every boat is out as it is a public holiday, he's reluctant, me, I'm bleedin' pushy (Cork attitude, similar to Mr. Pierce's). Who would stay in their hotel room with so much on the sea? Anyway, I take my novice crew of tattooed, hairy landlubbers and rock'n'roll technicians and Sean takes us out in the afternoon breeze, against all the returning yachts. We reach up and down the harbour leaving the sounds of stage building and fax machines many miles away. We pass a group of about twenty kayakers heading out island hopping for the night. Dave, what do you call a large group of kayakers? It's something we do not always see... The Whitbread are in town preparing for their 6670 mile crossing of the Southern Ocean via Cape Horn to Brazil. The nine W60s (actually 64' long) are out testing and on publicity calls during the day. It is well known that £5m to £10m has been spent on each of these sponsored syndicates. Some entries have had identical second boats to match race against to experiment with rigging, hulls, crew and especially sails to obtain the best performances. Most unassuming - these fairly innocent looking yachts are basically highly specialised racing machines each with the same overall measurements, but with different layouts. They have an elaborate water ballast system which is capable of holding up to 2500kgs of water, equivalent to an extra 30 crew members! The water is pumped in under 30 seconds from one side of the hull to the other as the boat tacks or gybes. Under sail, they resemble high performance planing dinghies and are capable of speeds up to 24 knots. At night, they are all neatly tied up in a line, their crew in hotels not rolling around in pipecot bunks shared with wet sails.

There are also America's Cup yachts on trial off the harbour again tuning up for next years races. These guys do not live on board as they are completely bare boats, neither do they stay in hotels - their owners purchase local property, including small hotels which they sell after the event.

In the docks, with security, locked gates and under darkness, I sneak (don't ask a visit to a 43m "yacht" being fitted out at a total cost of £30 million sterling. Fitted out, me arse.... the ship has two masts, 54725,882 winches, gold fittings, jetski platforms and an army of about twenty people working at midnight. It's the successful businessman's third version of this yacht.... hope he gets it right this time.

It's sad to think, at the same pier, behind these locked gates, a voyage of a completely different direction was being prepared, but simultaneously being destroyed.

It was in 1985 that French Government secret service agents blew up and sunk 'Rainbow Warrior'. Greenpeace were preparing to lead a flotilla to French Polynesia to protest against French nuclear testing. A peaceful, idyllic harbour, the scene of such awful destruction. It makes me very, very sad to think that man can continue to treat others and our tremendous landscapes with such disrespect.

Also on a sad note, I read in the paper that, in Auckland the previous week, a fisherman died when his boat was trashed in half by a jetski. Just before that a kayaker died when

another similar incident with a jetski happened. They are now talking about introducing a playing area just these water bikes and all owners having to register. The harbour is highly populated by people ripping around on jetskis in front of yachts, dinghies and underneath large, horn hooting container ships. Let's hope things never get this bad at home.

The next day off is Wellington, just outside the venue is a wharf. Just above the wharf on the wall is half a kayak? Just below is a door, just inside one can hire rollerblades, climb an amazing climbing wall (which does not say "Fred was 'ere") and rent sea kayaks. There is a large choice, most of them are plastic and of New Zealand design. We launch from the floating pontoon next to the wharf. It's blowin' a force five - always does here, the last time I was here, the pilot tried to land the airplane twice, gave up, aborted and we had to land on a single strip, 150 miles away.

We're not allowed outside the docks, well I had to see how big the harbour was, didn't I? It's big.... Plastic red kayaks bobbin' in Wellington Harbour, ferries, pilots, naval things. Later I watched as my mates climbed the wall... and I daydream about kayaking along the shores of wonderful New Zealand.

Day off in Sydney. Seen Bondi before so no need to revisit. Record company organise a boat trip to Shark Island. Small protected island in the centre of the largest natural harbour in the world. Photographs, veggie bar -b-que, swim (not many clothes), frisbee throwing exercises and views of a certain well known building and a fine Harbour bridge. No kayaking, sailing or surfing today.

And then, no sooner that it starts, the five week tour comes to an end on the west coast in Perth. So I'm cyclin' along the Swan River on the way to Fremantle, where good old Australia took the Americas Cup from Mr.Conners. It's 38 degrees. Sunny and oh, so hot, the sea is so blue and you got four days off. Pedal on, pedal on and then just ahead at Pelican Point, complete with real live floating pelicans, is a large white trailer, full with windsurfers. And without being too much of a Scotland Yard chappie, I investigate the situation.... Yes, one fine trailer, several flash boards, clean beach, inviting warm water and most importantly, yes, very important, - one young gentleman from the county of Corcaigh. Concert tickets in exchange for lessons and boards? Deal done - rock entertainment for water entertainment. Covered from head to toe with facta 30+ and I'm ready for lesson one. Four days later, I've stopped falling in except for the harness catapulting tricks that must look pretty funny.... I've got grazes on my semi white legs to prove it! I learn that one person has indeed kayaked around Japan, New Zealand and Australia. Each one done separately(!), hard to believe, words fail me.... Australia has 36,735 km of coastline.

I leave Perth unable to put on jeans or even a shirt as the beads of sweat roll down me back. Air conditioned airport terminals soon change that. Four hour flight, stop off in Singapore. Fourteen hour flight, four hour stop off in Heathrow, plane delayed for an hour and then fly to Cork. From the constant heat of Western Australia to the fog and misty air of West Cork, can this world be so different?

As always, I question why don't I stay in countries as appealing as Australia? The next day, I'm paddling the ole Valley around Roaringwater Bay. It's February, the waters are clear, the reflections and sunset are different but the peacefulness is splendid. There are rabbits in the garden, field mice in the house, herons and oystercatchers on the shoreline, two swans on a tiny rocky island in front of the house and today, two sea otters trot passed me. The nearest traffic light is 65km away and every day as I stroll down to the kayak, a car passes me with a trailer loaded with a large golf buggy. Interesting.....this is why I live here.