

Treasna na dTonnta

Newsletter of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association

Issue No.16 January 1999 - Winter 1998/1999

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Upcoming Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Organiser</u>
Jan 16 th	Pool Session, Clondalkin	C.Daly
Feb 20 th	Pool Session, Clondalkin	C.Daly
Feb 27-28 th	Surf Weekend, Lahinch	D.Keaney
March 20-21 st	Dolphin Watch, Kilrush	D.Keaney
May 1 st -3 rd	West Donegal Meet	M.Butler

Contact Numbers

Cormac Daly (01)8460398 (Home)

Des Keaney (01)2760263 (Home)

Martina Butler (078)21885 (Home)

Balmy Weather Predicted For March 1999

An inside source in Irish Meteorological circles confidently predicts that the springtime weather is going to be the balmiest this century. Just in time for our first Spring meet on the 20th and 21st of March in Kilrush, Co. Clare.

Spring Meet - Dolphin Watch '99

We'll seek out the large school of bottlenose dolphins mentioned by Paul Bracken in an earlier issue. For the more adventurous, there is the possibility of Loop Head and the exposed coast of South Clare. On a good day, spectacular cliff scenery, caves and islands – on a bad day, Atlantic swells, tide races, clapotis and boomers.

Based in the Kilrush Creek Lodge and Adventure Centre, you can have excellent dormitory (4 bed) accommodation *and* breakfast for a special ISKA rate of only £10 per night. For couples, there are double rooms plus breakfast for £15-17 per night. The centre is on the waters edge with wet and dry rooms, restaurant and even a lift for the truly knackered paddler!

Non paddling partners, friends etc. are also very welcome. Weather and numbers permitting, dolphin watch boat tours can be organised. There are also forest walks, cliff walks, pubs and restaurants.

This coastline is very interesting all the way from Carrigaholt to Loop Head, Kilkee and beyond. There are few landings on the tip of the peninsula, from Kilbaha to Bridges of Ross. There are many sea arches, blowholes and caves, especially between Bridges of Ross and Goleen Bay, 7 miles north.

Make your accommodation bookings directly with Kilrush Creek Lodge (065) 52595. Many thanks to Paddy Fox in Kilrush for his extensive research.

Improve Yourself!

If you think a *Transit* is a Ford van, then you've got some work to do. Everyone should be either at or working towards the ICU Level 4 Proficiency or equivalent. You should have enough skill to be a competent member of a group on simple sea journeys.

It's not difficult – a weekend course with a good instructor will do the business. The trouble is that some people stop learning once they get the boat going approximately where they want it to go. It's not enough. If you don't know the basics of navigation, weather and tides, you're a danger to yourself and others. We have a responsibility not to endanger each other, either directly or indirectly.

To make it easy for you, I'm including a list of courses for the early part of '99 in this issue, plus some information on the people and centres that are offering them. I strongly encourage you to make use of at least one of these. Good instruction, good craic..... go for it!

Aims of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association

We decided that it's time we stated what we're about. Here it is.

To represent, promote, develop and advance the activity of sea kayaking in Ireland, by :

- The provision of a means of communication amongst Irish paddlers
- The provision of a means of communication between Irish paddlers and other paddlers
- The fostering of respect for and encouraging the protection of the flora and the fauna and the amenity of the Irish maritime environment

- The promotion of safe paddling by the encouragement of formal and informal training.

News and Views

Thanks

This New Year issue is a good time to say a big "Thank You" to all who contributed to *Treasna na dTonnta* in 1998. For the unconventional style of Richard Dalton, the consistency of Peter Cork, Paul Bracken and Brian Ormond, the advice of David Walsh and everybody else who contributed, I'm very grateful.

Pool Sessions

The next pool session in Clondalkin is around the date of this issue, Saturday, 16th January. It's a great opportunity to learn or improve your rolls and rescues. The latest oddity on view was Des Keaney's breathing tube. There'll be a full review in the next issue! The final session of the winter is on Saturday 20th February. Be there at 7 p.m. to be on the water at 7:30. Cormac Daly (01) 8460398 can provide directions and further information.

1999 Subs Now Due - David Walsh

For those who have not yet paid for 1999, subs are now due at £10 per person. Additional names sharing *Treasna na dTonnta* at the one address may be added at £5 extra each. It isn't Politically Correct to say family membership anymore, but it's inclusive of those who are married, just good friends, siblings, parents, children etc. Lastly, those who wish to register with the I.C.U. may do so as a SKA member at £2 extra per person.

This last offer caused considerable confusion in the recent circular. Many members went to considerable lengths to prove that they were members of I.C.U., as individuals or as members of another I.C.U. club. Clearly, this option is worth considering only by those who do not otherwise have I.C.U. membership, as it works out much cheaper. Also I.C.U. register people once a year only, so if you want it for 1999/2000, pay David Walsh now.

Millennium Meet

Mayday 2000

The May Bank Holiday weekend in the Year 2000 will bring together the largest gathering of sea kayakers ever seen in Ireland and we're depending on you to be there.

The venue will be somewhere in Connacht so as to combine wonderful kayaking with accessibility from all corners of the country. All credit to Robin Ruddock for the idea.

More details later.

Skerries Frostbite Series

By Des Keaney

The scowling face of David Walsh told the whole story. The wind was honking out of the north, straight down from the arctic icecap. It was the first Saturday in December and Skerries was lacking its normal Caribbean ambience. The usual thought arose - "What the hell am I doing here?"

Off we set off downwind towards Shenick, the largest island in the group. A dozen shivering fulmars, back on their cliffside nesting sites, watched our landing. They won't breed until the Spring but like to set up house early, only being absent in October. A quick gallop around, back into the boats and off for lunch in the shelter of the sea cabbage on St.Patricks Island,

The paddle through the tide race on the seaward side of Paddys was good. The ebb was pushing 4 knots and throwing up plenty of breaking waves. The high spot was a three boat collision between Seán Pierce, Declan Donnelly and myself. Seán had cracked a rib the previous weekend and he was a little more nervous than usual when he saw Declan bearing down on him!

This was the third month of the bird count. Conditions had been much more testing than last year. October was pleasant with a big swell being pushed up at low water. Clare Crinion was in her element!

In November, the wind got up to a F7. I was paddling Willie Stedmonds cedarstrip kayak which performed very well. The responsive rudder easily counteracted any tendency to turn into the wind. Bird numbers were down, probably due to the conditions. Our shorteared owl, a winter visitor to Paddys Island, was missing this month. I normally associate owls with trees but this fella lies low in the long grass. His camouflage is so good, he's impossible to see until disturbed.

Join us in February. The next outing is on the 20th - 10:00 a.m. at the lifeboat station in Skerries. Be sure to call either Seán Pierce or myself after the Friday 7 p.m. weather if the forecast is 'iffy'.

Peace Paddle

Jim Kennedy and Cormac Doran

Ireland is closer to a lasting peace settlement than ever before. We at Atlantic Sea Kayaking in West Cork and the Lough Allen Adventure Centre in Co. Leitrim, propose to organise a Peace Paddle from Enniskillen to Limerick.

We will be using the Shannon - Erne Water System, already a symbol of cross border co-operation.

We hope, through the medium of sport and involving the young people of Ireland North and South, to highlight the importance of peace in their future and a sense of respect between the fellow inhabitants of the Island of Ireland.

Full details in the next issue.....

Lahinch Weekend

Surf Training 27-28th February

Improve your surf skills with a training weekend in Lahinch in February. Stephen Hannon, 1997 Irish Open Surf Champion will be instructing and numbers will be strictly limited to 8. So, get your name to Des Keaney as soon as possible.

You'll need a decent wetsuit and cag so as to prolong time on the water. If possible, bring a river boat and a sea kayak. The river boat is best for learning techniques and you can practice survival in the sea boat!

The first eight to send a nonrefundable £10 to Des Keaney (contact details on the back page) will be accepted. Closing date is Friday 12th February 1999.

Voyagers Canoe Club from Dublin are also heading for Lahinch on that weekend so an active social scene is expected.!

Sailing Directions & Tides

The Irish Cruising Club have published a new edition of the Sailing Directons for the South and West Coast. Principal features are the addition of over a hundred colour aerial photos. These are by Kevin Dwyer (*Our Island Home*) but a printing problem led to a darker quality of photo.

Simpson - Lawrence do an almanac gettable in Windmill at £15.40. A4. All the Irish ports and Dover. Good stuff. The Irish one ain't coming out this year, again.

Training Section

Tollymore Mountain Centre

Newcastle, Co.Down

Tollymore Mountain Centre is located at the foot of the Mourne Mountains. The waters of Carlingford and Strangford Loughs and the Co.Down coast can be either tranquil or challenging and are only a short distance away.

The Centre is an attractive, purpose built facility of log construction with accommodation for 30 people in 2, 4 and 6 berth bedrooms.

The Senior BCU kayaking instructor in the Centre is Oisín Hallissy and the sea kayaking schedule is as follows:

4 Star Training	7-9th May	GB£82 Catered
4 Star Assessment	9 th May	GB£32 Self catered

5 Star Training 8-9th Oct GB£92 Catered
5 Star Assessment 5-7th Mar GB£64 Self catered

Intro. to sea kayak expeditioning

30th Apr-3rdMay GB£90 Self catered

Scottish Sea Kayak Symposium (including trip)

21-26th May GB£140 Self cater

Sea kayaking expedition - Skye

22-28th Aug GB£240 self cater

Learn to Roll 2nd Feb, 9th Feb, 16th Feb, 23rd Feb.

GB£55

Contact Information:

Tollymore Mountain Centre

Bryansford, Newcastle, Co.Down BT33 0PT

Ph: 0801 3967 22158

Fax: 0801 3967 26155

Email: admin@tollymoremc.com

Web address: www.tollymoremc.com

Atlantic Sea Kayaking

Union Hall, Co.Cork

Atlantic Sea Kayaking is run by Jim Kennedy who is available to travel anywhere in the country with his fleet of sea kayaks. He runs both Level 4 and Level 5 Sea Proficiency courses (Stephen Hannon helps out with level 5)

Jim has won both Irish and British kayaking championships, including the longest non -stop kayak race in the world (126mls)

These courses and assessments are also run at Jim and Maria's home base, Maria's Schoolhouse in Union Hall. The course cost is the same as above . Accommodation is available from £8 to £17.50 sharing. Food is also available and they have a self catering kitchen. Jim and his kayaks are available to any group or club anywhere in the country from beginners up to advanced level.

Prices:

Level 4 Proficiency Training Min Group of 6 - £70 p.p.

This includes 2 full days of tuition including night paddle, hand outs and kayak where necessary.

Level 4 Proficiency Assessment £35 This is for a one day assessment including kayak where necessary.

Contact Jim Kennedy for course dates at

Atlantic Sea Kayaking, Maria's Schoolhouse

Union Hall, Co.Cork.

Ph: 028 33002

Email: atlanticseakayaking@tinet.ie

Russagh Mill Adventure Centre

Skibbereen, West Cork

Russagh Mill Adventure Centre is based in a beautiful old corn mill adjacent to Roaring Water Bay and close to the West Cork coastline. We instruct in all activities, and this year we are running a number of river kayaking and sea-kayaking courses and assessments. The courses will be run by the owner Mick Murphy and Richie Keating. They also hope to run a level 5 proficiency training course in 1999.

The sea kayaking courses are as follows:

Sea-Kayaking level 3 proficiency training and assessment

Sunday 2nd and Monday 3rd May

Sea-Kayaking level 4 proficiency training and assessment

Sunday 2nd and Monday 3rd May

Sea week:

Monday June 28th to Thursday July 1st

Sea-Kayaking Trips. Levels 3 & 4 Proficiency Training and Assessments available. Sea -trips daily during the week

Sea-Kayaking level 3 proficiency training and assessment

Saturday 17th & Sunday 18th July

Sea-Kayaking level 4 proficiency training and assessment

Saturday 17th & Sunday 18th July

Contact Information

Russagh Mill Adventure Centre

Castletownsend Rd, Skibbereen, Co.Cork

Ph:028 23238 or Mick Murphy at 028 33298 or Richie Keating at 028 23238

Saoirse na Mara

Stephen Hannon

Stephen will be running courses during the first half of 1999 but no dates are available at the time of going to press.

Contact Information

Stephen Hannon

21 Sallynoggin Rd.Lr., Dunlaoghaire, Co.Dublin

Ph: 2855364

Email: stephenh@iol.ie

Shielbaggan OEC

Ramsgrange, Co.Wexford

Aran Jumpers My Arse!!

There is something mythical about the West coast of Ireland, this may have to do with the allure of the descending sun, the remoteness of its harsh landscape or perhaps even some post-modern yearning for the traditional. In the case of sea canoeists this Western section of our coast represents somewhat of a Holy Grail.

So why is it in a little corner of South East Ireland there exists a band of some of the most experienced sea canoeists in the country? They see the rise of the sun and are only two hours from the metropolis of Dublin, do they not realise what the West is about? Or are they on to something?

In 1999 Shielbaggan OEC will remain on the South East coast just where it has always been, close to the Hook Peninsula and its neighbours the Saltee Islands. Sure why would they move! The weather is more reliable, the wind more gentle and the choice of sheltered inlets and bays more plentiful. Shielbaggan people know their coast and what the effects of the weather do to it, they also know that they can hold courses and sea trips in all but a gale. What's more, they tend to be civil on the phone and willing with their advice about local conditions.

They may try to sell you a course or accommodation, but sure isn't that your choice?

Why not give Shielbaggan a call if you want to discover the real and take a break from the mythical?

Contact Information

Suzanne Kennedy

Shielbaggan OEC

Ramsgrange

Co. Wexford

Ph: 051 62108

Email: shielbaggan@tinet.ie

Spring Meet in Donegal

Mayday Bank Holiday

1st to 3rd May 1999

The second spring meet of 1999 will be in West Donegal. Weather permitting (Gawd, I hate those words!), we'll have Aran, Omey, Gola and Tory Islands to choose from. It's being organised by Martina and Mary Butler. The meeting point and accommodation arrangements will be in the Spring issue of *Treasna na dTonnta*.

Single Use Camera Offer

We're happy to avail of an *Ocean Paddler* offer for waterproof single use cameras. They float, are recyclable, durable, light and take 27 exposures.

1 camera for GB£7.50 or 3 cameras only GB£20 inc.P&P

Send Sterling cheque or money order to:

Ocean Paddler Readers' Offer

Ocean House, Parkbrook Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 8QH, UK

California,

Here We Come

Jim Kennedy

Atlantic Sea Kayaking

I hate flying. Every time I do it, I die a thousand deaths, before even getting off the ground. It was no different when I went to California last November. But I did it and what a flight! On the way I looked down on the snow covered Rockies waaay below and thought how many settlers must have died an horrific death trying to cross those incredible peaks. Now I am only 4 vertical minutes away from joining them.

"Welcome to America " drawled the emigrations officer. I wanted to hug him, I was so relieved to have landed. I'm sure I would have been on the next plane back to Ireland if I had.

We drove south along Highway 1 to Half Moon Bay, a beautiful town on the Pacific coast just 30 minutes from San Francisco.

We had a ranch to stay in on the beach front courtesy of Erin, a friend of my fiancé e Maria. This was a lovely beach about 8 miles in length and leading to Princeton harbour fishing port. We were there for 5 weeks and I hoped to get some kayaking done in the Bay Area.

I was surfing a nice wave behind the Golden Gate

One of my ambitions was to kayak under the Golden Gate Bridge. When I mentioned this to some of the American paddlers I met on the internet, I was inundated with offers of company and boat loans. What generous people! I phoned a friend of mine who ran a Kayak hire company in Sausalito just two miles from the bridge. We met up one evening at his place and within an hour I was surfing a nice wave behind the parapet of the famous Golden Gate. It was dark as we returned from the bridge and to see the lights of San Francisco and Alcatraz so close to me, well it was great. I felt like I was in the movies and any minute Sylvester or Arnie would pass chasing drug runners (steady on).

One of our reasons for being in California was to give some slide shows and talks about Sea Kayaking in West Cork.

We run a Sea Kayaking and accommodation centre in Union Hall. My first lecture was in a large lecture hall in the middle of San Francisco. I was a guest of the Bay Area Sea Kayakers (B.A.S.K) and there were about 150 people at this meeting. I was sharing the bill with a guy called Steph and his partner Heidi, who were talking about the Grey Whales migration. My lecture on Ireland went very well and, after 15 minutes of questions about Kayaking in Ireland, I sat down to enjoy the next lecture.

The couple giving the lecture were from Monterey. She was a tug boat captain and he had kayaked solo from Canada to Mexico, a great trip by any standards. They were researching the Grey Whales crossing Monterey Bay and they did this by firing tags at the whales from a kayak using a crossbow. This I had to investigate. They invited us down to Monterey.

A few nights later we were in Oakland at the home of Nancy Henderson, an accomplished kayaker herself. We first met Nancy in Union Hall when she came to do some kayaking with us. She kindly hosted a night for us and supplied snacks and beverages. She had advertised this locally and in some kayaking centres. A large crowd turned out it and it was a great night of chat and storie.

Our next lecture was in a beautiful hostel located at the old lighthouse, just a few miles from San Francisco. It had an outdoor hot tub overlooking a famous surfing beach. Before the show, I sat in the hot tub outside the Lighthouse and listened to the Pacific rolling in and enjoyed the different smells and sounds of the great ocean.

The place is run by Rich and his partner. Rich is an amazing guy - a real Californian surfer. It took me some time to tune into the language he used. As soon as I did I really enjoyed the stories ("Man") which rolled out of him ("dude") as smoothly as if he were running down the face of a great wave. I really enjoyed this lecture as there were some of my Kayaking heroes in the audience.

A few years ago I had read about this band of crazy kayakers in California called the Tsunami Rangers (Tsunami being a tidal wave) and after seeing some of their videos I was convinced of either their lunacy or their Californian eccentricity. I was looking forward to finding out which. A few days after the lecture we were down on the beach looking at their headquarters or clubhouse. This amazing building was created by one of their members, Eric Soares. Eric is an artist - the woodwork and sculptures in the building were incredible. What a work of art the entire building was. Every plank seemed to have some face or monster carved into it. The outside rooms all looked like long boats upended. It has to be seen to be believed.

I went Kayaking with some of these rangers. John Lull, a great Kayak surfer and sax player who has made some surfing tutorial videos. Tim Sullivan who later came to West Cork and went off solo for a few days kayaking. John Warren, who as well being a kayaker, took me off cross country skiing one day and reminded me how unfit I was.

What a day of kayaking! We went out around a famous area called Mavericks. Even the mention of this name sends sweat running down surfers nice waxed boards. About half a mile out to sea there is a reef and this is where the fearsome wave forms. It is possible to stay next to the break and not get into it as it is not too wide.

An example of a day that the Maverick is running would be like this. People begin to arrive as soon as the weather forecast is favourable and it is known that the swell is on the way. Local trawlers are even hired to bring photographers out to the reef. Scared boardies can be seen staring out to sea. Whatever is going on in their heads probably involves thoughts of death. One of the best surfers in the world was killed there some time ago, I think there is a film being made about him soon.

A surfer on The Mavericks

One day as I watched Mavericks, the breaking wave was estimated to be thirty feet. To me it looked like the Cliffs of Moher. When people fell down the face it was like falling off a two storey house. Have a look out your upstairs window sometime and try imagine it. That night in bed listening to the Pacific surf pounding on the beach, mister sand man battled with the monster surf for some time I fell asleep.

Our next slide show was down in Monterey where we were to meet up with Steph and Heidi and courtesy of the Monterey Bay Kayaking centre. We were to take a trip with them to try and locate some Grey Whales but first we visited the famous Monterey Aquarium. This Aquarium is a must for everybody. An exciting ramble through Steinbeck's cannery area brings you to it. It is an incredible place that requires hours to take it all in.

After a while there you have to remind yourself that you actually are a land animal as the marine world takes you over. Giant tanks the size of two double decker buses. Sharks and sea turtles gliding gracefully past your head. Magical Jellyfish looking like beings from another planet. Sea Otters playing amongst the kelp that seems to go on forever down to the bottom, way below. This kelp grows about a foot in length each day. Imagine if this growth could be applied to land plants. It would certainly solve the food shortages in poorer countries.

Steph told me about his trip from Canada to Mexico

The day we were to go out to the Grey Whales was perfect, not too much wind and more importantly for me, beautiful sun. I was fitted out with a sea kayak by the Monterey Kayaking Centre, a great place with every type of kayaking accessory you can imagine. Off went Steph and I in search of the whales. The bay itself was alive with marine animals. Unlike our sea life here they are not shy of humans. Along the shore, hundreds of Californian Seals basked in the sun with Pelicans gliding past, graceful flyers for such large birds.

On we went towards the horizon, watched by a group of about ten Sea Otters. Some of them opened Abalone shells with a rock while floating on their backs. After about an hour of paddling out to sea we just drifted for a while and listened, sniffing the air. Steph usually hears the Whales before he sees them as they blow fish smelling spouts of used air into the sky. There was a regular ten foot swell running, but no wind - such a treat.

Suddenly there were fins flashing by us on all sides. When my heart slowed and my vision returned to normal, I was surrounded by a school of dolphins. They checked us out for a few minutes and before deciding we were too slow to play with, got bored of us and moved on.

Then there was silence as the vastness of the Pacific began to dawn on me and my mind was picturing the vast canyon below. My feelings went from fear to elation as I again began to feel at one with my surroundings.

Steph and I were rafted up as he told me about his epic trip from Canada down to Mexico by Kayak. This he said was where he came up with the idea to study the Whales. If ever you have problems eating, I suggest you put an entire sandwich in your mouth, sit in a Kayak in the middle of the Pacific and have a forty foot whale blow water in the air less than fifty feet from you. A sandwich can be swallowed in one go. What a sight. Steph says they usually travel in groups

We raced to intercept the monster. I am very competitive in kayak but this time I was happy to be second as I followed Steph, who was beginning to take on a Jonah like appearance. We raced to where we thought it would surface next. One part of me wanted the whale to rise just next to us, whilst another yellow side of me pleaded silently with this great creature to please go somewhere else.

It was a compromise as it surfaced about thirty feet from us, heading away. Steph stopped. I stared at him awaiting his next instructions. "Lets leave it for today and head home. It will be dark soon". About an hour later we arrived back at the beach, taking a last look around as we rinsed our gear. I could still see the Seals and the Pelicans busily trying to feed themselves as the Pacific sun set on to the whales backs.

It is a beautiful sunny day in West Cork. I am sitting here at the computer writing this short account of a beautiful trip we had to America. Opposite me is an American kayaking friend writing to some American kayakers back home and telling them they have to experience Kayaking in Ireland. Amazing beauty, pristine air, an abundance of wild life and of course, the craic.

If anyone is interested in the Grey Whales or in what Steph and Heidi are doing re school programmes and conservation, just give me a shout and I will gladly forward the web site address to you.

Enjoy your next trip!



Ocean Paddler

There are only two magazines published in English for Northern hemisphere sea paddlers, and this is the relevant one. At £10.00 a throw for four publications, it's a steal. Don't be without. Any Irish paddler without a subscription is at a severe disadvantage. The address is Ocean House, 18 Parkbrook Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 8QH, UK

David Walsh

Little Killary Sea Kayaking Tours 98

By Jon Hynes

Despite the inhospitable weather this Summer (disguised as Winter), Little Killary Adventure Centre ran a number of very successful Sea Kayaking expeditions. We started the season by purchasing a new fleet of Pyranha Orca Sea kayaks replacing our well travelled Skerrays. This was complimented by new sea passage paddles, spraydecks and other associated clothing. Apparently the cockpit on the Orca is better suited to B.F.A.'s (I'll leave you work out the abbreviation).

Our first 7.,day venture was blessed with bad weather from the start. There were five of us in all. A British teacher (John) and three computer programmers from Dublin -Kieran, David and Damian, lead by myself. John was new to, seakayaking having paddled many rivers back home, the boys had been with us last year.

We set off on a blustery Sunday afternoon from Cleggan to Inishbofin where we set up camp for the following week. John, I think was a little intrigued by our toilet area, "where ever you want" was the reply! Not quite, the sheep had some premarked spots! Days bar provided refreshment in the form of Guinness that night. A pint and five straws was the order!

Now the sea kayaking..... we never ventured far from Bofin that week as the weather was a little above the abilities of the boys. Having said that we had interesting reconnaissance trips to Inishark and the local area. Yes the dead donkey is still in the house beside the church. That's three years he's been there now. They should offer a mummification service for corpses on Inishark.

It was the last week in August, and I had the pleasure of paddling with a very international team. Mark from Alaska was an avid sea kayaker. Jerome from France was a river boy new to seakayaking. Rohanni was from Central London and very enthusiastic. Hans lived on a house boat in Holland and needed his daily smoke! Marc from Essex had been paddling longer than me and finally Connie, a local girl had dreamed of visiting the Islands, as she had looked out on them for many years.

Our first day was a lively short paddle down from Killary to Lettergesh, a few swims persuaded us to call it a day. Connie's short (long) cut led us to the disco and Guinness drinking race at Tully that night. What a start, up bright and early the next morning, we packed up and headed for Bofin in clear, glassy, heavenly conditions. I don't think anyone wanted the day to end, it was that peaceful, porpoises welcomed us as we arrived at Bofin. Camp was quickly set and the 4 minute pasta was devoured refuelling hungry paddlers. Next day was the Inishark day. we paddled home via Inishgort. The seals were out to play and wondered at our strange craft. A heavy swell that day fuelled, a great reef just off the island. I have a memory that will stay with me for ever, Jerome caught a wave every bit of 15 or 16 foot as I paddled out and just as he passed

me by, he found out what a pop out was!! I prayed he'd make his roll, as every expletive in the book was shouted, as the Americans say "he got window shaded" I" Yes, up he came and back to Bofin we went before our luck ran out.

Ever heard a Frenchman shout "Yerra Christ"?

Jerome was also becoming fluent at Irish slang at this stage. Have you ever heard a Frenchman shout "Feck, arse, drink, girls"! Or "yerra Christ" ,well he had us in stitches. I had to educate him on how to drink Irish coffee that night, although we had to repeat the procedure many times. Let's just say, our night navigation was poor at closing time!

The next day we decided was the day to go around Bofin and what a day it was. Ship Sound gave us the buzz of a lifetime. Wind against tide provided big swells. Everyone was so focused, there was no time for conversation - just concentration. The Stags were so big that day, Jerome and I had to get a photo against them and we had a little competition to see how close we could go. Rubber underpants please! As we headed home and the late Summer sunshine rewarded us after an epic day

The sun just lit up everything like a Christmas tree as we rounded Bofin harbour.

Inishturk was the destination after that - glassy seas made the journey so peaceful. Just cruising along, wondering at the vastness and beauty of this heavenly place. Mweelrea towered over everything. Achill seemed so near, it was so nice to look at the land we spend so much time looking out from. Mary Joe greeted us at Inishturk and my friend Stephen's previous goodwill afforded us a very warm welcome.

The Community Centre barmaid was busy that night as we recounted the highpoints of the trip. I made a secret dash to Caher to relax in the solitude of its western shore as I had done a few years ago when I was first introduced to the joys of sea kayaking. Of course this was before I went to the community centre!

Our final day was the long paddle back to Little Killary. While joyful at the calm water and sun shine, an air of sadness was over us all as we didn't want to return to abnormal life. Dolphins lifted the mood as we rounded Inisdegil. There were about twenty excited friends, jumping and looping around our kayaks. I was pleased for the others as they, asked all week "when are we going to see Dolphins?" It seemed like they were rewarding us with an ac robotic display for our hard paddling that week.

This trip gave us all memories of a lifetime. Go on Jerome, say it once more - "yerra Christ"



Bivvy Tent

David Walsh

Advertised and reviewed very favourably in O.P. is the Quantock Wilderness Survival Tent, cost Stg£99.00, weight 1.5Kg. This is essentially an upmarket bivvy bag or a downmarket tent, with one peg only, at the windward back, and a couple of poles optional at the front, if time and tide allows, and even a Velcro-fastened door.

Quantock Wilderness Survival Tent

Cost GB£138 RRP

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Weight 1.5 kg

Use: 4 season

Dimensions: 240x106x60 cm

Pack Size: 125 x 375 cm

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The Causeway Coast Kayak Association

Robin Ruddock

Beginnings

The C.C.K.A. was formed about 20 years ago by a group of kayakers on the north coast. The group was based in the Portrush area and all its members were involved in the coaching scheme at different levels. Many had progressed through the courses organised at Bushmills Education Centre and were involved with local schools and youth clubs throughout Co.Antrim. There was little possibility for taking their canoeing further when responsible for others, so the formation of the C.C.K.A. seemed a natural way forward.

Overview

The year divides up naturally according to the seasons. Spring is when most of our activities take place with sea paddles and charity work. Summer is the time for holiday paddles and expedition work. Autumn is the surf season and night paddling time of year with winter being the season of pool sessions, maintenance and music. The activities of the group range from holding 'try canoeing' sessions for the general public, to working with disabled groups and open canoe trips on flat and white water. We also do kayak and ski surfing, provide safety cover at triathlons, long distance swims and the Portrush Raft Race which is held each year in aid of the R.N.L.I.

At the Raft Race, there could be over 1000 participants in the water with rafts. The mainstay of the safety cover is organised by our group. With the backup of 6 ribs, the 50 or so kayakers work amongst the rafts to help run the event as safely as possible. The work of the C.C.K.A. on the north coast has helped raise the profile of canoeing in general in the eyes of the public and also has helped win the respect of the fishing community and the rescue services.

Each season, the group also runs a sea kayak race, a surf competition and hosts a sea kayak rally, which is part of the Portandhu Traditional Boat Rally. Each Boxing Day, we hold a surf -in to help work off the turkey and find out what Santa brought. The New Year is celebrated with a white water paddle down the river Roe. It takes a lot of commitment to be up early on the morning after the night before but we usually have a good turn out. We are often joined by members of other clubs for these annual outings.

Sea trips

Sea kayaking is our first love. It has opened up so many opportunities to us to enjoy and explore our treasured coast. Our main group paddles take place on Tuesday evenings throughout the year. The most active season is the spring term. We paddle the whole of the north coast in 4 -5 mile sections, taking time to explore every nook and cranny, beach and cove. With the use of our fleet of double sea kayaks (2 calypsos and 2 Aleuts), we can involve beginners and paddlers with special needs in our activities. Even though we paddle the same sections each year, it always seems different in changing weather, light and tides.

The group is ever changing and developing. For the first 15 years, most of the paddles were led and organised by myself but in the last few years, we now run a more healthy programme with different senior instructors taking responsibility for group activities with the help of another group instructor.

There is a wide range of experience within the group with paddlers having explored the coastline of Ireland and further afield. CCKA expeditions have been taken to the Blaskets, Achill, Connemara, Mayo and Donegal. We have visited the Inishkeas, Tory and Rathlin Islands and a number of paddlers have made the crossing to Scotland from Ulster. (Torr Head to Islay and across to Portpatrick).

Some have expedition experience in other areas including Nunivak Island (Alaska), Cape Horn, Russia's Northlands, British Columbia, Sweden and Canada. One of our members, Norman Rowe, was a paddler on the first British and Irish descent of the Colorado River. Norman is still a capable and skilled paddler who contributes greatly to the group's activities.

Members

We are very fortunate to have a unique organisation, which has so many trained and qualified members. Within this year's membership of around 70, we have three BCU Sea Coaches (level 5), two lads working towards Coach Level 4/5, six Senior Instructors Sea (level 3) and at least 10 instructors (level 2). The group has developed over the years with a much wider membership and includes families and paddlers of all levels of ability. We do not run formal teaching sessions as such but encourage paddlers to tag along and learn as they go. If safety is a concern for the trip leader, then they are asked to stay ashore and join in a later trip when weather permits. This year, for the first time, we have pool sessions throughout the winter which have been very popular and have been used for fitness work as well as giving us a chance to develop snorkelling skills with our families.

Social

Many of our members enjoy meeting around the houses for a bit of music and craic. Some use this as a chance to learn an instrument among friends or try out a new song or two written in times of poetic madness. We have been called on to entertain local groups and organisations but to be honest a 'formal session' never seems to be as enjoyable as our times together in a house.

Other maritime activity

We have branched into many other disciplines related to the sea, which have developed from our roots in kayaking. Within the next month, we will have received our new 25' Drontheim (open clinker built fishing boat, crewed by 5) of the Ulster coast which can be rowed or sailed. We have been involved in the restoration of this type of boat and have close links with other interested groups from Galway, Donegal (Aran Island, Inishbofin and Moville) and Islay in Scotland. We hope to see a similar revival of these traditional crafts of the north Irish coast as happened with the hookers in Connemara.

We have also acquired two 4 man Antrim coast racing gigs to include in our fleet and there are seven currachs in use by members. A (2 man) currach from the Inishkeas, 3 naomhógs from Dingle (2 man), a 3 man currach from the Aran Islands and a 4 man naomhóg from Dingle.

In June of 1997, the currach Colmcille, a 38 foot, 12 man currach, journeyed from Derry to Iona to mark the 1400th anniversary of the death of St. Columba. Many of the crew of the Colmcille were gathered from the CCKA membership. This was our contribution to the events which were organised to mark the occasion. It was a big undertaking but was worth the effort as it helped develop links from the west coast of Ireland to the islands of Scotland and I am sure it has changed all of us that were involved in the project. You can imagine being involved in our group not only opens up a number of opportunities but can also be very demanding on your time!

Other interests include members being involved in the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group with a couple being trained to cope with stranded cetaceans. I missed this workshop so will have to be content with collecting skulls and skeletons and enjoying paddling with the creatures when they seek me out as I potter around our beautiful coastline.

We have also been involved in conservation work relating to the sea. We have been engaged in coastal clean ups of remote beaches and caves. We have cleaned the foreshore of the estuary of the river Bann on a couple of occasions which is not a pleasant job and have also acted as a watchdog relating to pollution incidents along our stretch of coast. The coastal zone is a fragile area and its conservation and preservation requires active management. We are fortunate to have amongst our membership some folk who are involved in the decisions that affect our area. "If you can't beat them, get them to join you!"

Future

The future of the group now lies in the hands of our younger members. It takes wisdom to realise that it is necessary for the old sea dogs to take a back seat and let new talent and ideas develop. As we near the end of the century, I look forward to seeing the CCKA develop without relying on a few old hands to keep it moving but see it becoming the property of the wider membership.

We have now our own premises in the form of the Old Lifeboat Station in Portandhu (Portrush) which we are currently renovating with some financial assistance from CANI and Leader funding. This will enable us to develop our facilities, look after equipment and provide a good service to visiting paddlers. The facility will include boat storage and workshop space along with clubrooms, teaching area and an exhibition area for artefacts relating to maritime heritage. If you want to get in touch or come and paddle on the north coast, give us a call.

Summary

I hope this article is of some interest to the wider membership of the ISKA. We can offer advice on the local coastline and will do all we can to accommodate visiting paddlers. It was great to see so many make the effort to travel up for the recent symposium in Bushmills. It would be great to see folk return to explore the Causeway Coast in better weather and to have the time to potter and appreciate the place.

Dingle to Liscannor.

Seán Pierce

Dingle to Smerick Harbour - 26th July 98.

A grey morning that suited my mood...I tried to hide my emotions over breakfast. Des Keaney, his wife Marie and I had had a good night out in Dingle marking the end of the trip for Des. But now that the time had arrived to part, I found myself emotionally all over the place. I was sad for Des - he had put so much into the trip. I found the last sorting out of gear on the beach difficult. It just seemed to reinforce all the negative points of breaking up a good partnership.

Pulling away towards the harbour entrance I forced myself not to look back. There would be time enough for deeper reflections. I felt a greater responsibility to succeed for the two of us and I had a big day ahead.

Whoosh, my thoughts were suddenly interrupted. Fungi had come to say Hello!! I enjoyed his company for a good ten minutes until we were spotted by the tourist boats and he had to attend to his duties. My mood lifted and I headed west towards the Blaskets.

I thought "This is bloody cheeky Pierce" as I cruised through Blasket Sound. At least I had got the tides right and I rattled along enjoying the thrill of a big tidal push. Midway through, one of the ferries hailed me and, much to the amusement of the tourists on board, a rapid fire conversation with a distinct southern bias resulted. After some good-natured banter I got the all clear and headed towards Sybil Point.

I got a timely reminder off Sybil Point that this was big boys stuff. A few big boomers saw me paddling rapidly out to sea. The trip along the Three Sisters proved to be psychologically testing and I was glad to enter Smerick and camp near Ballydavid. There seemed a certain appropriateness to the choice From Fionn Gall (Fingal) to Baile Na nGall ... I camped and rested and worried about another solo day tomorrow.

Smerick Harbour to Brandon - 27th July 98.

The morning call from Radio 1 at 6 a.m. gave me poor consolation. Wind, rain - the usual! But at least the direction (SW) was good. The little rider, "increasing to 5 to 6 later" was enough to rouse me from the sleeping bag. If I was going to make it around Brandon Point, "go early boy!" A plan began to formulate. If conditions were livelier than expected then opt out at Brandon Creek Otherwise go for it as there were no other options anyway! I wished all of life's decisions were as clear cut.

Suffice to say, conditions were lively. But the proximity of so many salmon boats and the friendly waves of the fishermen made me feel less alone. The scenery should have been dramatic but I only remember the sections where I could give it some attention. My main feeling was one of great relief when I rounded Brandon Head. I decided that lunch was in order. and paddled to An Trá Bán near Brandon village.

I was sitting there on a beautiful Kerry beach in the pouring rain when a wild looking character came out of the gloom, beachcombing and down on his luck. We fell into conversation, exchanging my lunch for his humour and good company. I felt rested after he moved on but I would take his advice and camp at Brandon for the night...after all it was Pattern night.

It proved a good decision. I repaired the skeg on the kayak which had been giving me trouble and met a college mate whom I had not seen in 10 years. Pattern night in Brandon was memorable....! I retired to a very wet tent in the wee hours.

Brandon to Ballyheigue - 28th July 98

Woke to the sound of wind and heavy rain hammering on the tent. It was only 10.00am!! Forecast had predicted W-SW 4-5 backing NW 6 ish.... Another day at the office. Scrambled around packing gear and had a minor disaster. The tent got caught in a strong gust, flipped over and crashed down breaking two vital tent poles at just the most awkward spot A lovely exhibition followed which I hope was not witnessed.!

My luck changed however as I crossed Brandon Bay towards the Maheree Islands. The sun came out to tease me along and I had a super paddle with a nearly following sea...Landed on Illauntannig and knocked in a lovely hour over lunch exploring the beehive huts and underground passages of an Early Christian site. A nice colony of breeding Arctic Terns also added interest to what was already a good day out.

The time was pushing on. I had left Brandon at 2.00pm and finally left Illauntannig at 4.00pm. I headed for the only landing I could find on the map inside Kerry Head. The trip across Tralee bay can best be described as a long diagonal surfing session. I lost ground to Kerry Head all the way across in a freshening W-NW. Storm Petrels and Manx Shearwaters continually buzzed the boat and the sun came out making it a quite enjoyable paddle.

Made Mooghaunnamarve Pier at 6.00pm and met a local fisherman Patrick James who had come in of the sea just before me. Patrick made my stay in Ballyheigue a whirlwind of hospitality and good humoured mischief.

Within minutes of landing I was riding shotgun astride the kayak its nose jutting out the rear of Patrick's van as we roared into the yard of The Breakers Hostel. Mrs O'Connor, although officially closed, allowed me the use of the place. Indeed both herself and Patrick's wife vied with one another to see how much a sea-paddler could eat! I don't think they were disappointed with me.

The weather kept me trapped in Ballyheigue for two days. Patrick did his best to lessen my frustration by dropping me out to Kerry Head to view the Shannon and encouraging me to do long walks! His insights into the local landscape and folklore were enormous and his knowledge into the sea conditions of Kerry Head meant I was only going to sea when he felt it was right. I met the man "that keeps every penny a prisoner" and the legend of "Church Shoals and its connection to the Cantillon family of Tralee".

On our last evening together, he had a great laugh with the weather men on Valentia. He telephoned with a request to find out if a paddler should cross the Shannon in the morning and a hilarious conversation resulted. I could not follow the half of what was said but it put Patrick into even better spirits if that was possible.

My mind was made up. The wind was still to be in the NW but moderating and I was getting anxious about my slow progress. The August Bank holiday was imminent and people were expecting me in Co. Clare.

Ballyheigue to Kilbaha, Co.Clare. 31st July 98

Departed Mooghaunnamarve Pier at 8.00am, Patrick, bright as a button, pushing me into a heavy sea in an absolute downpour. My mind was full of the problems ahead but the Shannon would have to fall today. Waving back to Patrick on the pier I felt distinctly privileged to have run across him. He had contributed so much to my stay in north Kerry. His only request being that I drop him a card from up the coast.

Kerry Head passed to starboard and a beautiful group of Bottle-nosed Dolphins heading up the estuary came to play and surf past me. I battled on into the NW reflecting on the fact that "The Kingdom" had taken a week. The weather might settle in September!

Somewhere mid way across the Shannon I knew that any thoughts of getting further up the Clare coast was for the birds and that I would be meeting my shore team in Kilbaha. The seabirds came to join me and I had the unusual experience of counting how many Manx Shearwaters would fit on the wave above the kayak. It was a great distraction and occupied my mind for a time. I topped out on 10 birds all stacked neatly above me and causing me to decide that the name Shearwater for a kayak was maybe a little ambitious! I have to admit to being a little tired on reaching Kilbaha as I beached the boat under Keatings pub. The weather had cleared again and I enjoyed the sunshine as I brewed up on the strand.

Kayaks tend to be a magnet for people in harbour areas and pretty soon I had been registered locally. A campsite was organised over a mid-afternoon pint and a fisherman stuck his head in the door to check if "that daft paddler had arrived yet"? Intrigued, I asked how he knew about me to which he responded with a question. "What goes flash-flash, flash-flash into a NW wind across the Shannon? Sure, it had to be a paddler" The flashes from the fluorescent tape on the paddles periodically caught the sunshine, he explained, but it had him baffled for a time. I never saw him on the water at all.

Spent the afternoon and early evening catching up on chores, eating (a constant problem) and making a few phone calls. My shore team began to arrive in the late evening. Josie Gibbons from Connemara who planned to paddle to Golam Head in Galway if the weather was kind and Maurice Mullins and Eric Quinn from Dublin. I was glad of the company. It seemed a long time since Des left. We had a few beers and good Irish music in Kilbaha and retired in the small hours, mentally noting the wind had eased.

Kilbaha to Kilkee, Co. Clare - 1st August 1998.

I surfaced first, threw on the billy and roused the occupants of tent city. A long leisurely brunch developed and we discussed our options for the day. Loop Head and the conditions north to Kilkee were not ideal but then neither was the rest of the summer.

Got away by 10.30am and had a beautiful run down to Loop Head. It was an attractive stretch of coast, nicely protected from the NW wind that awaited us as we came under the lighthouse at Loop. Rounded the head and ran into a lumpy, clapotis filled sea. We clawed our way north along the Clare coastline, the going was awful and we had little peace from the sea all day. Found welcome relief in Gowlane Bay where we rested and had some nosh. A distinct lack of enthusiasm for the remaining paddle prevailed but we knew we had very little option on this stretch of coast. So, to work!

The days paddle was instantly forgettable! We dragged our very tired bodies into Kilkee at 7.30pm. A tough 8 hour day. Hooked up with Maurice, our shore party, who had failed to sight us all day and was getting worried. The remainder of the evening was spent pitching tents and hurrying into Kilkee. We were lucky to find a restaurant still open. Eric was a casualty of the day. His right arm badly swollen from vigorous correction strokes. He was disappointed to have to miss a days paddling.

Our campsite at Kilkee, although attractive, was not to be recommended for a Bank holiday weekend. Our sleep was interrupted frequently during the small hours by various drunken ornaments!

Kilkee to Spanish Point - 2nd August 1998.

What a struggle! We slept late after our previous day's exertions. Joe and myself finally got on the water at 1.00pm. The heavy rain overnight had cleared and the wind had backed to the SW and eased considerably. We decided that Quilty or Spanish Point would be just grand...!

The paddle was one of the more enjoyable ones of late. Cruised up the coast with a following sea. Midway across Farihy bay, Josie left up a shout. I barrelled around not knowing what was up. I could see Josie pointing into the water ahead of him. Dolphins... Brilliant.

I caught sight of their dorsal fins slicing the water all around his kayak. I turned my kayak downwind, banging hard on the water as I tried to get their attention. As Josie closed, I could see them pulling ahead of him. I took off on a wave surfing as hard as I could go. They were around me in seconds... what a beautiful experience. They rolled alongside, dodged under the boat and surfed effortlessly alongside. They seemed to enjoy the chase. They were so close that the lovely, lemon-yellow flashes and hour-glass pattern of Common Dolphins was clearly visible.

They zipped to and fro under the boat and then away they went, out to sea, just as suddenly as they had arrived. I caught sight of two animals jumping clear out of the water as they gave chase to something else. The experience left both Josie and I on a high as we surfed along towards Mutton Island

Storm Petrels and a small Basking Shark were not nearly as exciting after our Dolphins but they give added interest to our day as we approached Mutton Island. We landed and had a late 4.00pm lunch. In a rising wind and the first drops of rain we covered behind a stone wall and considered our options. Spanish Point it was. The gloomy afternoon put paid to any other ambitions and we surfed on towards the beach at Spanish Point in a complete downpour.

The shore team arrived and opted for creature comforts for the night. They looked on sympathetically as Josie and I pitched tents in yet another public car park. After dinner and a rest, we were visited by some rather shifty looking characters whose eyes wandered all over the tents as we spoke. Josie stood guard as I visited Maurice and Eric in the local hotel for an hour. The singing started and I left the company with Maurice in full flow. Josie was already in Noddyland.

Spanish Point to Furrera Strand, Co. Clare. 3rd August 1998.

The Bank holiday Monday gave no great change in our weather prospects. We had another fight on our hands if we wanted to go to sea but a clearance was being talked about for the after noon. Yeah! Our shore team arrived looking a little tired... They only drew a few wise cracks from us real outdoor types! They had had a hell of a night and now had the journey to Dublin to look forward to. There was nothing else they could have done anyway; the weather would dictate the day. It was sad to wave them off; I had enjoyed the company very much over what had been a tough few days paddling. Josie was going to give it another day or so which was great.

In the afternoon the rain eased and the sun reappeared. We put to sea and had a helter skelter of a paddle across Liscannor Bay. A big swell was running and we had to pick our way through the boomers. We zigzagged through the offshore reefs and I had one classic moment when looking back for Josie. He appeared through an enormous trough, waves on both sides of him. What a classic photo! It was no day for taking your hands off the paddles. Maybe it was just as well as his wife Máire may not have been as pleased.

We landed on the storm beach at Furrera Strand, happy enough with our day. We had come a few more miles and were now in position to hit the Aran Islands if that long awaited break in the weather arrived.

I did not realise that evening that it would be another four days before I left Furrera Strand. I took an R&R in Connemara with the family. *To be continued.....*

A Duffer's Diary or Wilting in a Wexford Wonderland

A Jack Russell's view of the "Come & Try It" Weekend

Ernie Whalley

Friday 4-ish. Driving down to Wexford I surf my mind, ticking off all the reasons why I decided to take up sea kayaking at an age when most of my contemporaries who play that daft game with a small white ball

are starting to cut it down to a nine hole round. "You mad prat", I say and curse Daughter One who encouraged me.

Well, she would, wouldn't she, she's a canoe/kayak freak. Having failed to persuade me to buy an open for her personal use when she comes to visit – approx. twice a year - access to the old man's sea kayak is the next best thing. Or am I being too cynical?

At around 7pm, we arrive at Shielbaggin, as indicated on the Discovery Map. Unfortunately, it's moved. Pull up at a house to get directions and the nice lady says "I've just made up your beds and I'll see you for breakfast".

I buy round for round with Ciaran with the feeling that it could lead to tears.

Friday 7.15. Our first sighting of Ciaran...Smith. (David Walsh's pause, not mine). "Food?" he says, "Follow me" and, freed from the burden of his shoal of Skerrays, sets off at a high old lick. We follow at a more sedate pace, navigating by the tread marks and the smell of burning rubber and soon arrive at The Templars Inn where we consume a huge fish supper - the cod hereabouts must be the size of whales!

I buy round for round with Ciaran with the slightly uneasy feeling that it could lead to tears. Later, a solid session in the Hollow Bar. Ciaran clearly has Hollow legs, but I'm keeping up, like a good sea kayaker should.

Accept a lift back to Shiel B - thanks Des. Manage to nick a bedroom (always hated communal living). Nice one. Get my head down.

Saturday

Amazing, no hangover. Tired though, didn't really sleep. After a decent breakfast cooked by nice lady and friends we are briefed by David. We are divided into two groups, Greyhounds and Jack Russells. Ann finds she is the capo di tutti novice (I am next) so opts to found Labrador Division and go off biking on her own. Most of the others appear to have a couple of years white water under their belt.

At wide sandy beach called Grange, *Beeswing* is much admired. Martina Butler asks me if I've been kayaking long. Tempted to reply "Yeah, more years than I can remember" but decide to tell the truth. "A matter of some days", I say.

Greyhounds flit as if someone's shown them a seaborne hare. We have pleasant paddle and chat-along, great, I'm meeting some really nice people. Fine day, calm water. Very scenic, cliffs ahead and some birds I can't identify. Hardly surprising, this is a bluffer who once told his kids a heron was a kingfisher. Well it is the King of Fishers, innit?! I mean, have you ever seen one of them long necked rascals fishing, they're absolutely brilliant.... Unfortunately, they looked up the picture in Daughter Two's Picture Book of Birds and they haven't believed a word I said since.

Anyhow, I'm not in kayaking for the wildlife, I just love the feel of a boat under me, always have, and, as sensations go, this is one of the best. *Beeswing* burbles over the baby waves, agreeing with my sentiments. Oh, what's this? Nasty rough waves in the vicinity of Baginbun Head. Confused seas, banging back off the cliff and the Bracken Rocks. Clapotis?

Concentrate hard and amaze myself. Negotiate corner safely and David organises tidy landing on surf strewn beach. Welcome to Pett's Bay - right place for Jack Russells. Eat lunch and converse. One or two confess to being mildly knackered. Feel no pain, but haven't exactly bust a gut except for wavy bit.

Feel a bit stretched after wrestling waves on return journey but get second wind and hit home beach feeling I could maybe continue for a bit.

Majority vote against so rendezvous with Ann in Fethard village for home made jam and delicious scones.

Back to Shiel B for super big mammy-Sunday type dinner thence to Hollow. Hide from Ciaran. Take it easy, only two pints, hard day tomorrow...

Sunday

Drive to Kilmore Quay. The formidable Ciaran...Smith has hijacked the day, insisting on an expedition to The Saltees. David bows to the inevitable. No sign of famous "tenner to launch your boat" Jobsworth of lore & legend, but we decide to depart from beach anyway. Grace and I are asked/told to lead JR's, presumably a penance for our performance yesterday. I keep slipping sideways, seemingly *Beeswing* wants to go to Cork.

I get very depressed, seeing rest of flotilla uptide and ahead. In usual fashion, start to give myself a hard time. "Fool, you can't even pronounce *Treasna na dTonnta*, let alone translate it; you're a bloody grandpa, what the hell are you doing out here?" You get enough invites to crew floating gin palaces, why don't you stick to what you know, nice Saturday amble round the buoys off DL, bit of sail tweaking, few scoops in The Nash or The George. Who needs a challenge at your age, silly bugger!"

By this time it's more *Treasna na Tonto*, roughly translated as "Where have all them effing injuns gone?" Rest of the JR's are even further ahead. I'm utterly knackered. David cruises back alongside and tells me I'm unfit and it's made worse by inefficient technique. I know. Feel miserable.

He organises a tow. I feel sorry for Paul having to pull me so I paddle through the pain to keep the rope slack but we still arrive at the beach miles after the rest. I promptly fall over and bang my head and knee on the rocks. Most are sympathetic. A dissenting voice, a Corkman's shouts "it was a dive"!

Wonderful sunny day, though I don't notice cos I'm looking for a marker to write "no reasonable offer refused" on *Beeswing's* hull.

We eat lunch. Clare Crinion snorkels with mask and flippers loaned (or hired?) from Corkman. First one in, brave girl y'are.

I overhear David giving Des a resume of the morning's achievement - "Grace did great, Ernie was bolloxed". Fair comment.

We find throne of Prince Michael I. Several citizens hatch plot to depose him and install King Ciaran...Smith The First in his place.

Breda Clancy emerges from sea. Someone says "I thought it was a seal". Someone else, unkindly, says "Seals don't have freckles". Anyhow, the lass evidently has considerable charisma cos everyone else ('cept me) gets in the water and splashes about, even that man Smith, Neptune minus the trident.

'We'll beat them buggers to the beach!'

Go for walk and inspect gannet droppings. Take up birdwatching?

Des has borrowed *Beeswing* for a circumnavigation of Big Saltee and pronounces her fast 'n'fit to drive, so it's obviously not the boat. Tempted to ask friendly yotters for lift home, but pride forbids. David asks me

to lead - it's either a very sick joke or he's giving me an hour's start. No, Ciaran's overlapping and JR's and Greyhounds are going for it.

Bow gets knocked off again. Ciaran swoops alongside and stops me doing big reverse sweep to correct - "You're killing the boat, that stroke's no use at sea, just paddle harder with your right." "Take longer strokes". "Up the rate". "Lovely, she's really moving, that's a great boat you've got". "Keep up the rhythm". "Use your upper arm to power her". "Nice one, Ernie, we're leading."

I know there's a bit of kidology here and, besides, he's only dawdling, but never the less I lean forward and keep going. Kilmore Quay church pops up right on the bracket. A bit more of "paddle hard right" and we're on target for the beach. A few crafty bastards who've taken a cannier course emerge under our lee bow, pushed up by a fair tide.

"Pick it up` and we'll beat them buggers to the beach" whoops Ciaran, "Follow me!". I follow him. We don't quite make it, though I'm ahead of all but one of the JR's, a boost after my dismal morning. Breda, promoted to Greyhounds, is already there, the epitome of cool. She looks like she's been sat in the garden with a bottle of chilled Chablis and a bowl of strawberries. Me, I'm tomato -faced and dripping lard. But happy.

Des comes up and says "hey, you were travelling" and even David grunts "well done ". *Beeswing* looks beautiful and of course I'd never part with her and I notice the sun is shining for the first time this day and I inquire about courses to improve my technique. Clare theorises that the reason I was going so fast was the desire to escape from Ciaran's verbosity. Un true, I could have hugged him when I came ashore.

We go for pints at The Wooden House. Ann finds she was in Irish College *n* years ago with the barman, so we get freebies. It gets better and better...

Long drive home, mostly with stupid grin on face. Knee (and hamstring for some reason) are killing me, blisters on both thumbs but what the hell, no pain no gain.

Even traffic jam on outskirts of Rathnew fails to damp my spirits.

Monday

Late, late p.m. Phone Daughter One. Get her out of bed to tell her what a fantastic weekend I've had.



For the uninitiated "Beeswing", named after a small village near Dumfries in Scotland where I've spent happy hours fishing/also after one of my favourite Richard Thompson songs, is a C -Trek, a newish (late 1997) design by Rob Feloy of "Inuk" fame.

Built by Kirton Kayaks in Devon, she's a big ship, almost 18'8" long - that's a foot and a half longer than a plastic Skerray; grp, with 3 hatches, 2 oval, 1 round and a big keyhole cockpit, a real touring boat for "real - sized" people/fat sods.

Some nice features including a quick-remove Plastimo compass on the fore deck, a very positive skeg control and a sloping bulkhead behind the cockpit. She seems stable and sea -kindly and quick enough (except when I paddle her!). Anyone who'd like a go in her, give me a ring .

Escape to the Coast

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Book Review

"Alone At Sea"

By Dr.Hannes Lindemann

Reviewed by Declan Donnelly

Alone at Sea, first published in 1993 is a description of two voyages across the Atlantic undertaken by Dr. Hannes Lindemann (when he was 33 and 34) in 1955 and 1956. On his first voyage he used an African dugout canoe and on his second, a folding kayak. Without the benefits of modern materials and equipment Hannes endured severe conditions at sea over a prolonged period. Being a medical doctor he was keen to learn how his body and mind would react so that he could advise others how to survive at sea.

His knowledge of the sea had been gained through sailing and he had previously undertaken many single-handed voyages in small sailing craft and folding kayaks. For sea kayakers, the most significant differences between Hannes folding kayak and our sea kayaks are that he used sail to catch the trade winds which propelled him across the Atlantic and he used an outrigger for stability. Although he carried paddles he rarely used them.

During his first Atlantic crossing he experimented with fluids, diluting specific quantities of salt water to observe the effect of consuming controlled quantities of salt water. It was unsuccessful. He coped with intense sun and of course, storms. During his worst moments he sang songs from his childhood but he says that he never felt lonely. He made friends of the various fish and birds which he met along the way. Despite his obvious determination, he experienced fear and despair. After a bad storm and little sleep for many days he wanted to give up but the tanker he hailed did not see him and passed on. He found that wine relaxed him and sleep helped his spirit recover and he sailed on. At the end of his first voyage his greatest regret was that he had allowed fear to take hold and had, at that moment, given up.

Therefore in the six months Hannes spent preparing for his second voyage, he practised relaxation techniques, he prayed and he repeated phrases like "I'll make it" to himself in an effort to anchor auto-suggestions deep in his subconscious. These auto-suggestions were later to save his life. He documents his second voyage in diary form so the reader can follow the daily unfolding of Hannes experiences at sea.

For hygiene purposes he swims and dries his clothes on the mast, weather permitting. He supplements his food supplies with fish he catches, drinking their blood and spinal fluid. He drinks milk and beer to raise his energy levels. He doesn't dream of women (he says starving men don't) but of pastry topped with mountains of whipped cream. He collects rainwater from his sails and is never thirsty. He observes a small dolphin being hunted by larger of its kind. He marvels at Mediterranean Shearwaters and Madeira petrels which he says enjoyed bad weather while he had difficulty sleeping during storms.

Incredible though it is, he does manage to take short ten minute naps during storms, which he believes are crucial to his survival. Lack of sleep on his first voyage had caused him to hallucinate and throw vital

possessions overboard. His mental preparation helped to ensure that although he did hallucinate (he chatted to his spray deck which answered back), he did not throw possessions away. He did lose food and equipment when he capsized and clung to the hull of his upturned kayak for nine storm filled hours while he drifted in and out of consciousness awaiting daybreak to attempt to right his kayak.

He concluded that his body adapted to the hardships of the voyage more easily than his mind and the key to survival at sea is the confidence gained from the knowledge that the chances of survival are high if you stay with your boat. He says that the autogenic training programme he employed later inspired cosmonauts and astronauts and that the knowledge he gained was later utilised by the World Health Organisation.

I found this little book (192 pages) a fascinating read and I would recommend it to all who go to sea in small craft. While I hope that none of us are ever in great difficulty at sea, the knowledge gained from Hannes experience might make the difference between hanging on for help or giving up.

Published by Pollner Verlag and available from the *Ocean Paddler* Shop, Mobile Adventure Ltd, Bridge Works, Knighton Fields Rd. West, Leicester LE2 6LG, England for GB£10.95 + GB£2.50 p&p. Phone 0044 116 283 0659 ISBN 3-925660-27-5

Willie Stedmond

Wooden Kayak Builder

Des Keaney

A star of the 1998 Symposium was the cedar strip kayak built by Willie Stedmond. Willie has made canvas and plywood touring boats for years and is now building beautiful cedar strip seaboats.

The usual thought is "maintenance". No problem. The wood is enclosed inside and out between layers of fibreglass mat, four coats of epoxy and three coats of varnish. You'd need to knock a seriously large hole to penetrate to the wood. The fibreglass mat is transparent and in no way detracts from the beauty of the wood. When the boat was on display in Bushmills, NOBODY spotted the fibreglass mat.

I paddled the boat in a Force 7 around the Skerries Islands and it handled beautifully. The super responsive rudder kept it on track without any difficulty. The flush hatches (no spray in your face) use an interesting tensioning system and were completely watertight.

The beauty of a hand made boat is that it's so easy to customise. You can have hatches where you like and as big as you like. You can move bulkheads and deck fittings as you wish. You can choose different wood colours to create your own deck pattern. Look carefully at the Guillemot below.

The cost of all this? £1500-£2000, depending on spec. Talk to Willie Stedmond at 055 21503.

The Struggle goes on to save the Great Whale:

Whales in Irish Waters

By Paul Bracken

"From space, the planet is blue,

From space, the planet is the territory

Not of humans, but of the whale.

Blue seas cover seven-tenths of the earth's surface,

And are the domain of the largest brain ever created,

With a fifty-million-year-old smile."

Whale Nation, Heathcote Williams, Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1991.

These are the words of Heathcote Williams in his excellent book *Whale Nation*. I'm sure that these words will elicit the required positive response as most people would support and understand the need to protect one of the world's greatest creations. Yet, as I'm sure you can testify our waters are being used as sewers as we daily create new poisons to flow into what was once a crystal pure resource for all to enjoy. As we near a new millennium it's a sad and frightening example of the damage we have caused when we are afraid to drink the water that flows from our taps.

International Whaling Commission:

Ireland has a huge part to play in promoting the protection of all cetaceans. The Commissioner of the International Whaling Commission is Mr. Michael Canny. Voice urges the Commissioner and the Irish delegation to continue to apply pressure on those countries still engaged in so-called scientific whaling to accept international public opinion and stop this barbaric practice. "Two million whales have been killed in the last fifty years. The industry and the scientists connected with the industry have had an opportunity to examine the corpses of two million whales and yet maintain a need for still more to study." Joan McIntyre, 'Iceberg', in *Mind of the Waters*, New York, Scribner, 1974.

The 51st. Annual Meeting of the IWC takes place in Grenada, West Indies in May 1999.

The Importance of Ireland:

The importance of the South West and West Coast of Ireland for cetaceans is due to our proximity to the edge of the continental shelf. "The edge of the continental shelf is an area of upwelling where the rich deeper waters are driven to the surface and mix with the warmer surface waters. These areas are characterised by high densities of plankton and are rich feeding grounds for any fish species. This in turn provides good feeding grounds for cetaceans that feed on fish or plankton. The number of cetaceans sighted increases dramatically near the edge of the continental shelf. As the edge of the continental shelf is relatively close to the Irish coast, some 150-200 miles, pelagic species of cetaceans occur close to the Irish coast. As fish shoals move inshore then these species are likely to follow increasing the probability of them being sighted and stranded." *Cetaceans in Irish Waters: A Brief Review of Current Knowledge*, Simon Berrow, UCC, November 1990, report for Greenpeace Ireland.

Sightings and Identification:

Whales, dolphins and porpoises spend much of their lives underwater or swimming in remote areas of the seas. Our understanding of them is increasing all the time and new species are still being discovered. One thing is certain; there is no evidence to suggest that any of the species will react violently towards man. In fact some would say that kayaking is one method that is effective when whale watching, even one as large as a humpback whale. Although it can be dangerous, if treated with dignity and respect the whale is usually aware of its own size and strength. It is important not to startle them by approaching them too quietly.

The best vantage points for whale watching is around the south-west coast, in Counties Cork and Kerry. If you are lucky to see a whale it is important to approach it from a position slightly to the rear and to one side

Sudden movement or noise can cause the animals unnecessary stress. You should never form part of a circle around a whale, and if on a boat be vigilant as propellers can cause serious injury.

Trying to clearly identify a particular species is a major challenge, as you will rarely see enough of the animal to make a positive identification. Gather as much information as you can in relation to its size, dorsal fin position, shape and size, body and head shape, colour and markings, surface behaviour and diving sequence, and the geographical location.

If the sighting is around the west coast of Ireland it is probably one of the following species as this area represents their known range:

Whales:

Minke, Sei, Blue, Fin, Humpback, Pygmy Sperm, Northern Bottlenose, Sowerby's Beaked, True's Beaked, Cuvier's Beaked, Long-Finned Pilot, Killer, False Killer;

Dolphins:

Common, Striped, Bottlenose, Risso's, Atlantic White-Sided, White-Beaked;

Porpoise:

Harbour.

Regular Visitors:

Humpback Whales

There are no breeding grounds near Ireland. The nearest summer feeding grounds are in the north of Scotland and around Iceland. The west coast of Ireland is however a major migration route between the winter breeding grounds and summer feeding grounds.

It is one of the most energetic of the larger whales; it may breach, lobtail and flipper-slap several times in a row. No two humpbacks are exactly the same as the pigmentation on their flukes is unique to each whale. Over 100,000 have been killed to date by the whalers. It is highly inquisitive and shows little fear of boats. It is a slow swimmer, but can dive for up to 45 minutes (usually 3-9 minutes). An adult can grow up to 49 feet in length and can weigh between 25-30 tonnes.

Fin Whale

Fin whales are one of the most common offshore whales, the second largest animals on earth. An adult can grow to 72 feet in length, and can weigh up to 80 tonnes. Its population has been heavily exploited by the

whaling industry. It's a very fast swimmer, capable of reaching speeds of 19 mph. Usually forms part of a small group, but up to 100 can gather together at good feeding grounds.

Its known range covers most of the earth, but is more common in temperate waters and in the Southern Hemisphere. It will usually ignore boats and therefore obtaining a close-up view can be difficult.

Long-Finned Pilot Whale

Its occurrence around the Irish coast is increasing, and can often be found swimming with other small cetaceans, such as common and bottlenose dolphins. It too has been heavily hunted, but is still quiet common. Group size varies from between 10-50, but cases have been recorded where thousands have gathered together in good feeding grounds. An adult can grow up to 19 feet in length with a typical weight of between 1.8 to 3.5 tonnes.

A pod may rest motionless at the surface of the water and this allows boats to approach close to the pod. It is also known to bow-ride. It prefers deep water, especially near the edge of the continental shelf. It is one of the species most likely to mass-strand.

Threats to their Survival:

The main threats to conservation and survival are from whaling, habitat destruction, fishing nets (walls of death) and marine pollution (untreated sewage, toxic chemicals, industrial waste, agricultural run-off).

From the time the whalers' harpoon hits its target to the whale's death can take as long as thirty minutes; thirty minutes of agony during which time the whale's air valves collapse allowing a rush of sea water to flood the air valves. The lungs flood as she suffocates and eventually dies.

"She is left to drift,

Rimmed with oil-slick and blood.

With no enemies in the sea

The whale is loath to believe in the attack,

As were the Indians, as were the aborigines."

Whale Nation, Heathcote Williams., 1991.

A modern factory ship, some as large as aircraft carriers can complete the exercise in a further thirty minutes.

"Pilot whales are routinely victims of the notorious Icelandic ritual slaughter known as the grind, which exploits the tendency of the pod to follow a leader (or pilot). In the grind the leader is diverted into shallow waters; the pod follows and all are then hacked to death with ceremonial knives and the meat distributed according to ancient formulae."

The Times, London, 30th. October 1986. The people of the Faeroe Islands also carry out this practice.

"And those plastic bags! One of my relations mistook one for a jelly fish, swallowed it and a few weeks later it was dead. As for those things called balloons that nusham (humans) send into the sky when they're really happy, later they fall into the sea and dolphins, fish and birds eat them thinking they're some new

kind of food. They too end belly up after eating them." Saoirse, the Grey Seal, Don Conroy, Mentor Press 1997.

World Earth Day:

April 22nd. 1999 is World Earth Day. *Voice* is currently planning a series of events to celebrate what we have achieved and to draw attention to those practices that continue to damage the Earth. Whales and water will definitely feature in our program of events. If you would like to help or to be kept informed as our plans unfold please email me at pbracken@indigo.ie and I promise to keep you informed. *Voice* can also be contacted at 14 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2. Telephone 01-6618123, email avoice@iol.ie, or visit our web site at <http://www.iol.ie/~avoice/> (still under construction).

Have a great 1999 from all at Voice.

Bushmills 1998

Sea Kayak Symposium

By Des Keane

The warmth of Oisín Hallissy's welcome was only slightly moderated by the driving wind and rain. I knew what was in his mind - "Jesus, not again..." The weather at the 1995 Symposium had driven the sea in the front door of the hotel and he didn't want a repeat performance.

Colin Craig opened the programme with a slide show on his epic trip to the Russian Arctic. God, it looked cold. They were dogged by officialdom and bad weather. I'll stick to the sunny climes of Ireland!

Saturday morning and the wind had eased. However, dark rain clouds were disgorging their contents all over North Antrim and I had no problem opting for the morning lecture sessions. There was a great choice - the problem was what to miss.

Sean Pierce had a gleam in his eye at lunchtime and I knew there was no avoiding getting wet! We opted for the rough water session with Robin Ruddock. He started in the easy surf at the beach in Portrush, quietly evaluating his group as we moved along into the bigger stuff.

"There isn't much steering to be done in a sea kayak in surf". His advice was brought home with a bang as I found myself about to T-bone Tony Viney. The bow of my boat was heading straight for his left ear and my corrective strokes made not the slightest difference. I capsized to knock the speed off. I struggled up in a tangle of boats and paddles but without any damage. Ten seconds later, I was on the receiving end as Tony came rocketing across my deck. There was no way back this time. Try to roll with another boat on top of you! A quick pull on the spraydeck and I was out.

I wasn't the only one. Put fifteen kayakers on the same wave and you're guaranteed entertainment! The craic was mighty with a good dose of instruction from Robin and Aubrey Beggs. Capsize before the wave and roll up.... come in on the back of the wave.... kill the speed before the wave hits. We eventually regrouped and paddled around the headland to play in the tide race between Portandhu and the Skerries.

Brian Wilson (of *Blazing Paddles* and *Dances with Waves*) was the speaker to a packed hall on Saturday night. His talk was on his solo trip around the Irish Coast which he wrote about in *Dances with Waves*. A

great blend of music, photographs and stories related in a lilting Scottish accent. Brian was paddling a beautiful Feathercraft folding kayak. It packs down to about the size of a rucksack.

The wind was back up to gale force on Sunday morning. I went to the excellent presentation by Scotland's Gordon Brown on Inuit kayaks. This was followed by an on-the-water demonstration in Portrush harbour. The gentle swell of Saturday was replaced by foam covered rollers sweeping past the mouth of the harbour. Only the most competent ventured past the entrance. There was plenty of opportunity to get on the water in something different - Gordon Brown's Inuit boat, Mike McClure's tippy plywood job and Willie Stedmonds cedar strip kayak. The lads from Cork did their coaching assessment and there were rescue and rolling demos and instruction.

Many thanks to Oisín Hallissy, Tollymore Mountain Centre and the staff of Bushmills Outdoor Education Centre for a superbly organised and very enjoyable weekend.

Trip Report

From 'Buttock Point' to 'The Cock of Arran' and beyond

By David Hughes

Things were looking grim for the Annalong Canoe and Kayak Club (ACKC) annual sea trip. The forecast was for strong westerlies all week and we doubted the sanity of our intended jaunt, an exposed paddle from the Inishkea Islands around Erris Head and across Donegal Bay to Teelin.

Working on the principle that 'discretion is the better part of valour' we turned our thoughts towards the Clyde and found ourselves in Campbeltown on a wet and windy Sunday morning in August. We had travelled as foot passengers from Ballycastle on the ferry, sea-kayaks as hand luggage! We had a week to see the sights and were full of optimism despite an indifferent long-range weather forecast.

After a greasy chip in town cooked by the under-chef (the owner had phoned in with hangover!), we could procrastinate no longer. Stuffing the boats with our gear, already damp from the steady drizzle, we headed north along the coast to Carradale, 15 miles away. With a strong following wind and sea we were charging along enjoying the free ride.

Phil and I eased our way into rhythm of the week at the back and watched Chris disappearing down the rolling following waves in front. This was the life! A school of porpoises shot past and things were as they should be.

Unfortunately, he rolled up...

Suddenly Chris had a speed wobble and we saw his hull and paddle waving in the air. Phil and I reacted quickly and were ready for any salvage but unfortunately he rolled up and looked a little sheepishly around to see if he had been scooped! Of course we never breathed a word!

Bart had fond memories of Carradale, holidays as a kid (rummaging through the scrap yard!), and we camped a little north of the village so we could walk into the pub in the evening. As we cooked up on the shore two tweed clad women out for a walk stopped for a chat. Bart engaged them with the tales of his misspent youth in Carradale and before they left us they gave us a bag of tan coloured mushrooms they had

collected that evening. They promised no hallucinating side effects and we were grateful for the addition to the evening fare.

Day two dawned with strong westerly winds and we struck out along the coast to Grogport in the lee of the shore. This section of coast was rocky with mature indigenous wood and was indented with bays that would have been excellent for camping. We watched buzzards and herons saw more porpoises and spotted the semi-submersible eider ducks! (Do immature eider float very low in the water or were the ducks in the Clyde less buoyant than our local species?)

We made the short hop over to Arran and had lunch at Loch Ranza. The ferry skipper came over to speak to us. He had heard out amateur attempts to call the Coastguard in the morning and had noted that we had been unable to get through. He thought about relaying our message but decided against it, at least someone knew we were out there! More of the skipper later!

The next open crossing was from the 'Cock of Arran' to Ardlamont point, about 9 miles away, and we paddled out into a stiff NW breeze. Half way across it was a case of 'there she blows'; a whale had surfaced just behind Chris. He/she blew twice more, perhaps 10 feet in the air, and disappeared!

Our only dry starry night of the trip was in the secluded bay near Ardlamont Point. We had all the ingredients of a perfect camp, clear skies, a roaring driftwood fire, fresh mackerel and a bottle of best Complextown whisky! With the consummate ease of a well seasoned outdoors-man Chris leant over his Trangia to refill the burner with meths, in the ensuing explosion Bart was knocked on his back and Chris was a little scorched around the face! Chris once more looked a little sheepishly around to see if he had been scooped! (Always check that the flame has gone out in the burner before refilling it with meths!)

Day three saw us head North along West (or Kerry) Kyle around the top of the Island of Bute in sheltered 'fjord' paddling. The last paddle steamer 'The Waverley' sped past us as we lunched on Burnt Island and a large flock of herons took off from the next bay. We turned south down the East Kyle and landed in Rothesay.

Rothesay was in its heyday in Victorian times when paddle steamers disgorged day-trippers from Glasgow and the Clyde to this Island resort. It is having a revival now and for me one of the highlights of the trip were the restored Victorian toilets on the pier. Walking into the gents' lavatory is breathtaking! We were surrounded with heavy enamelled toilets, urinals and ornate tiling; showers have now been added for the modern cleaner man! One concession to the nineties is a ladies toilet as the Victorians made no provision for the needs of the dominant gender!

Back in the saddle we headed further South and camped near Montstuart on the West side of Bute having paddled 23 miles.

Common sense once more was cast aside

On day four we huddled in the shelter of a small bay at Garroch Head on the South tip of Bute. We were not a happy bunch at this stage; there were strong westerly winds and a whitecapped sea in Bute sound between Arran and us.

Common sense once more was cast aside and we struck out for Sannox on Arran. Two and a half hours of slog saw us into the nearest bar and changed into warm dry clothes. We couldn't even manage a pint between us and resorted to hot coffee in a bar, a first for ACKC! Apart from Phil's indestructible 'banjaxed' skeg we were still relatively intact.

We needed to push on, so in the lee of Arran we made it down to Whiting Bay beyond Holy Island now owned by a Buddhist group. We had covered 25 miles in fairly difficult conditions and as it continued to

rain we set up camp. Phil and I crawled into our tent licking our sores but James and Willy played pool with an exotic black dancer in Whiting Bay!

Thursday again was wet and windy and we spent the morning with Sue Macgregar (Radio 4) and a book, tucked into the tent with the rain beating down. The six of us met up for lunch in Whiting Bay and decided to try and make a push around the South of Arran to Blackwaterfoot in the evening. It was only 15 miles and we had noticed the wind generally decreased in strength in the evenings. This evening was an exception of course and we once again battled Force 6 along the south coast.

By 8pm the wind and rain had moderated and by 10pm we arrived at Blackwaterfoot in the dark. We made a very tentative landing near the hotel and stood outside the bar wondering what do next. Where could six weary, wet hungry paddlers' camp!

A house on the front with a well manicured lawn? Phil knocked the door and next thing we were pitching on the lawn and Jan, the patron of the house brought us hot coffee and biscuits! A bit of a moral booster and a very generous host.

Bart and I ventured into the bar in Blackwaterfoot and bumped into the ferry man from Loch Ranza who insisted on buying us drink all night! We were even invited into the late session in the kitchen having been introduced to most of the bar during the evening. Although Blackwaterfoot is not really on the tourist trail we certainly found the locals extremely friendly!

The last day should have been a quick hop from Arran back to Campbeltown, a distance of 13 miles. We got off to an excellent start when, at 7am, Jan's son produced six bacon butties and a pot of tea! The lighthouse at the entrance to Campbeltown was visible between the heavy showers and once again strong westerly winds and a choppy sea made this a strenuous couple of hours.

All in all our six days provided an excellent bad weather alternative to the West Coast of Ireland. There is easy access to the Clyde via the Ballycastle ferry and we had no cars to put in place. There is lots of good camping, lots of marine life and hospitable locals. We could never have paddled for 6 days with the wind strengths as they were at home. Well worth a visit with lots of options if you expect fair weather or foul.

On the trip were David Hughes, Phil Beattie, Chris McCann, Michael Barton, James Newell and Willie Gordon.

TENTS FOR SEA TOURING

By Les Harrington

Although I am a newcomer to sea kayaking, I have spent the past forty years buying, testing and modifying tents for extreme mountain use. I hope some of my experience and ideas will be of use to potential sea kayak campers.

The sea tourer needs lots of room for changing out of wet clothes, and may be forced into a long stay in bad weather. The packed size and weight of the tent is not as critical as for the mountaineer. I therefore recommend a medium to large dome or tunnel tent.

The great advantage of the dome is that it is free standing (stays up with no pegs). This is very useful on a sandy beach or rocky area.

Choosing the basic design is relatively simple, now the problems start, Strong domes are very expensive and are usually designed for snow and ice conditions. They are usually inner pitching first which means that in heavy rain, a non waterproof inner may be soaked before it can be covered by the outer flysheet.

Secondly, because low weight is of prime importance to the mountaineer, the groundsheet is not as strong and waterproof as we would like for coastal camping. So a £700 mountain dome may not be the answer even if we could afford it. Ironically the groundsheet in a £60 dome is usually more waterproof and tougher than that in a £600 one.

Luckily all is not lost because there are only four simple differences between an expensive tent and a lower priced one.

1. The inexpensive tent has fibreglass poles, which become brittle in cold weather and break, in even moderate winds, the expensive tents use high quality aircraft alloy poles which are strong, flexible, but very expensive.
2. The stitched seams of cheaper tents drip water in heavy rain, whereas the expensive tents have heat sealed taped seams to cover the stitch holes, a slow, expensive and not always successful process.
3. The cheaper tents do not usually have enough guy ropes, so their weaker poles are not well supported and usually break in strong winds.
4. Expensive tents tend to have either poor or no ventilation, in exchange for good snow and waterproofing, but the cheaper tents usually have a centre roof mesh vent, covered by an inadequate, square, loose fitting piece material which lets in side driven rain.

Basically, I see very little difference in the other tent materials and the quality of stitching. In my own experience, upgrading a low priced tent has provided a good alternative to an expensive tent.

SUGGESTIONS FOR UPGRADING

1) Poles

The best solution is to order a set of 11mm dia. aluminium alloy poles (grade 7075 TG) from the HAMPDEN WORKS (Tel.0044-121-458-2901 Fax.0044-121-433-3819) You must state the exact length, type of pole end to match your tent, and the number of sections in each pole.

The more sections, the shorter and more convenient the packed size, therefore the more expensive. This quality of pole costs approx. £15 for a 4m length, so for a 4 pole geodesic (4 crossover poles) you may have to pay up to £70 for the conversion.

These poles have much smoother joints and very strong elastic, they also thread through the pole sleeves much more easily. On a dark stormy night when your hands are frozen you will appreciate this!

If you require a bomb proof tent, two sets of poles can usually be threaded through each pole sleeve. Another essential tip is to PUSH the poles out of the sleeves when taking the tent down to avoid the joints being pulled apart.

2) Seams

The seams of a cheaper tent flysheet can be completely sealed simply by setting up the tent in your garden on a dry day, and brushing builders clear silicone sealer (Approx. £ 4 per Tube) into the stitch holes using an old tooth brush.

This is not a pleasant job, especially if you are forced to bring the tent back into the house due to an unexpected shower and annoy the rest of the family with unpleasant silicone fumes. However the system works, even though it doesn't look quite as neat as taped seams, your tent will be completely waterproof. This also applies to groundsheet seams.

3) Guy Ropes

Extra guy ropes can be added simply by buying a 3mm strong nylon rope and sliders from an outdoor shop and tying them to the extra loops provided or you may have to sew on your own. Each pole must be supported with two ropes, one third and two thirds down from the top of the tent. However, if one 5m length is tied to the two loops only one strong peg is needed. See Fig.1.

The longer the rope the better, it can be looped around rocks or tree stumps and the more horizontal the rope the more support it gives to the pole. Remember to tie the ropes up neatly before you set off on a trip, and when taking the tent down each day. If you don't the wind will tie the four ropes in a terrible knot and you will be forced to use foul language when untying them.

4) Ventilation

Ventilation is more important to kayakers than mountaineers, because we are usually a lot wetter, so the mesh vents at the top of cheaper domes may be useful if they can be covered properly.

I recommend making a larger square of material than the one supplied with the tent and tying it permanently to the top guy rope loops with elastic so that it is always under tension. The wind should then pass under this cover and suck the moist air, formed by your breath and damp clothes out of the tent

5) Snow/Rock Valance

Expensive mountain tents have a strip of material about 1 ft wide sewn around the outside of the flysheet to allow rocks or snow to be piled on it to hold the tent down when pegs cannot be driven into the ground. A strip of any strong material can be sewn around your tent for this purpose.

By using some or all of these simple ideas, you should be able to upgrade an economically priced dome or tunnel tent to a reliable touring tent for less than £100. An added bonus is that you don't have to worry about your very expensive tent when you are in the pub.

If, on the other hand you happen to be one of the few lucky lottery winners I would recommend the PHOENIX Forum Extreme or the HILLEBURG Saitaris if you prefer a dome, or the HILLEBURG Keron 3 or 4 if you prefer a tunnel (All at least £600). The dome is a better free standing tent but the tunnel has more room inside and is easier to put up in a storm because all the poles can be slipped into the pole sleeves while the tent is flat on the ground. However it always needs four strong well placed pegs to stand in a storm.

When choosing any design of tent, I strongly recommend outer pitching first but contrary to makers instructions, I always fix the Inner in place before I leave home so the two go up together and the inner is kept completely dry.

I also like a tent with two entrances so you don't have to climb over your companion for outside visits. It is also more comfortable when cooking if the door is along your side rather than at your head.

I hope some of my ideas may lead to some dry and comfortable camping when you are touring. If you would like any more detailed advice, please don't hesitate to give me a ring. (0801 693 -64785)

Alaska

Peter Cork

The Third and Final part of Peters Account

We started south on 16 July with a ten mile crossing to a headland on Chicagof Island. I hate crossings first thing in the morning. About two thirds of the way across, Oisín started to pull away from me. I upped my paddle rate and a while later I was sprinting. Oisín kept increasing the distance separating us and by the time he pitched his kayak on the island, a quarter of a mile ahead of me, I had become very disenchanted with his paddling style.

It was cool and damp. Despite this, he tore off his clothes and was examining them in his nakedness when I beached my craft. I was baffled. It turned out that our fuel container, stored behind his seat, had been leaking onto his back and had begun to burn his skin. He only discovered this when he reached the shore. Luckily his clothing wasn't damaged and we had some fun burning off the remaining fuel in explosive quantities.

I watched an otter swim the crystal clear waters under my kayak

That evening we reached the native settlement of Hoonah. This is a relatively sophisticated Tlingit settlement with many fishing boats tied up at the commercial marina and a more pristine marina for visiting yachts. We had been warned by palefaces in Juneau to watch our gear in the native settlements. So, we took turns at shopping and making phone calls.

The locals weren't particularly interested in us. Hoonah didn't seem to offer any attractions so we moved on. It was important to us to be as far from the town as possible because of the possibility of encountering bears who scavenge around settlements and might be more difficult to scare.

The rain and wind continued for the next two days. I had a lovely meeting with an otter whom I watched swim in crystal clear waters under my kayak. We began to consider magnificent, surfacing, humpback whales as not too unusual. As for schools of porpoises, ducks, seals and bald eagles – sure, you'd get sick of them!

On the west side of Admiralty Island, we paddled up to a whale research vessel and were brought in out of the misery for a coffee and some very useful information on whales. We continued on in better spirits.

The backs of a couple of my fingers were cracked and sore. Oisín's were even more so. Around this time I realised why I smelled even worse than Oisín. I had been using seaweed as a cleaning aid after my regular morning toilet. It seemed like a good idea, but it left an increasingly smelly residue. Sorry, Oisín.

Our next village was the Tlingit settlement of Angoon. It is approached by a narrow channel with a 10 -knot current. An hour before slack it still was quite a force. Angoon seems to be a fairly depressed place and the locals had a knack of making one feel unwelcome. It is perfectly understandable when one finds out how appallingly they have been treated.

In the early years of this century it appears that, for remonstrating with a local government agent, the natives were accused of being rebellious. A US ship subsequently sailed up to the village and raked the buildings with gunfire. The extent of the fatalities and injuries is still unclear.

We took on some basic supplies and then continued on down Chatham Strait. We met our whale research people again. This time they were watching a pod of twelve whales "bubble feed". They let us use their headphones to hear the weird range of whale sounds – from coarse grunting to high-pitched wailing. This stopped when the 12 gaping jaws rose out of the sea - an amazing sight.

On 22 July we crossed from Admiralty Island to Kupreanof Island and landed in the village of Kake. We left giant, old growth timber and grizzly territory and entered black bear country. That made for more relaxed camping.

Kake was a pleasant surprise. About 25% of the residents are non-native and the remainder are Tlingits. We spent nearly two days there and were sorry when we had to leave. We met many very nice, friendly people. There was a big salmon run in the creek running through the village while we were there and there were lots of well-fed black bears about.

The area immediately south of Kake, Rocky Narrows, is known for its beauty, but in a cold, wind-driven downpour with poor visibility we just passed it by on a truly awful day.

The weather improved for a few days. We dried out our gear. It was warm and life was easy. We ventured up a creek for a few hours looking for wildlife, but didn't see any. It was absolutely beautiful. We lost our direction in the islands of Clarence Strait and watched a 40 tonne whale jump clear of the water. Nervously, we edged closer to this performance trying to get some good photos. Then we got too close and the whale disappeared.

There was a great uniformity about the landscape. The islands rose steeply from the sea and they were swathed in spruce, hemlock and western cedar. The shores were rocky and covered in driftwood. It was very hard to find a good campsite.

When the sun came out, the view beneath the waters was spectacular with great numbers of colourful starfish, sea urchins and anemones. Salmon churned and jumped in the bays into which the rivers discharged. Flocks of murrelets, petrels and ducks bobbed on the water and kept getting in the way so that I couldn't take a decent photograph.

On July 28 we entered the tiny settlement of Meyers Chuck and, to our horror, there were no shops and no facilities. We were fed up with the freeze-dried food and had been looking forward to a trout. We got this when we arrived in Ketchikan two days later.

The tourist brochures describe Ketchikan in glossy terms calling its waterfront area quaint. I suppose I felt the same as a poor American arriving in Bundoran. The town is a staging post for south-eastern Alaska and its waterfront is hectic with boat and float plane traffic.

Crossing the main shipping route is like a game of Russian Roulette. Food prices were reasonable and we stocked up on calories. We camped on an island on the opposite side of the channel and the next morning experienced six hours of the heaviest rainfall I've been in since my last visit to Cherrapunji. After spending the morning wading between a restaurant and a supermarket, we packed up and began the last 70 miles to Prince Rupert.

We saw no more whales apart from a dead specimen on the shore. Its fluke was missing. It might have been attacked by Orcas. That night we made camp from where we could see the carcass with binoculars. It was strange that there were no scavengers about, neither eagles nor bears.

The following four days alternated between cold, non-stop rain and warm, non-stop sunshine. We crossed the Canadian border and, as we approached Prince Rupert, the blissful tranquillity was interrupted by increased boat traffic. Prince Rupert loomed out of the mist on a cold wet day and the trip was more or less

over. Oisín made his travel plans and was on a plane home the next day. I was on a ferry to the Queen Charlotte Islands where I paddled alone during five days of glorious sunshine.

The trip as far as Prince Rupert took five and a half weeks and was approximately 670 miles long. We were on the water every day and rarely did huge mileage. We were often caught out by confusing tides and this was mainly due to our faulty tidal atlas. The paddling conditions were relatively easy. There were no big seas and winds were fairly temperate.

This means that I have no heavy sea stories to boast about. The long period of rainfall brought morale down a little bit, but when the sun did shine, it made it all worthwhile. The scenery, particularly in Glacier Bay, and the whale and bear encounters made it a trip of a lifetime. The costs were less than one might imagine. So, all in all, it's well worth giving consideration to sea kayaking in South East Alaska.

Your Personal Details

Please be sure to keep us up to date on your personal details. Have we got your address right? We'd particularly like your Email address if you have one as it's much quicker, easier and cheaper to keep you informed of events which don't make the publication date of *Treasna na dTonnta*.

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Subscriptions are £10 per calendar year and can be paid to the Association through either David Walsh or Des Keaney at the addresses below.

Honorary memberships are available to people who make a significant contribution to the Association. This is currently interpreted to mean a couple of articles in *Treasna na dTonnta* or organising a Meet. The Association reserves the right to change these criteria at any time!

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Next Issue

The Spring 1999 issue will be out at the beginning of April and should (contributors willing!) include items on Inuit paddles, an article on the Summer Isles in Scotland by Brian Wilson, how not to lose your boat off the roof, an interview with the coxswain of the Baltimore lifeboat, a 'Ruff Stuff' paddle review, info on the 1999 Symposium and on the 2nd spring meet in West Donegal and the final instalment of the "Guide to the Co.Down Coast".

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