

Treasna na dTonnta

Newsletter of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association

Issue No.18 Summer 1999

Around Ireland in 38 days

Three paddlers from the Annalong club in Co.Down did a phenomenally quick paddle around Ireland this summer. Mike Barton, Bobby Graham and Stephen Campbell left Annalong on the 1st of July and were back on the 7th of August having only had 3 days off the water. Good weather? Sure, but as every expedition paddler knows, the wind always blows in your face. Almost 30 miles a day, EVERY day is some going.

Their most difficult passage was in Kerry, from Bolus Head to Puffin Island where severe clapotis made things interesting. They still managed to get to the Blaskets in only two weeks. They had the good fortune to be weather-bound for two days in Doolin but this was their last time off the water. Doolin to Kilkeel (almost 500 miles) was done without a break. They raised £5000 for the RNLI.

We hope to hear more of their story in a future issue.

Well done lads!

Party Time in Strangford

By Clare Crinion

"You're late" said the ferryman as I boarded the ferry at Strangford for the ACKC Midsummer Meet, on June 19th. "The others arrived ages ago!" I was delighted to know I was in the right place and ready for a great weekend.

The location for the meet was Tim and Paddy McLearnon's holiday home at South Bay. This is a lovely remote beach not far from Portaferry, but has to go down in the annals of history as 'the most difficult place to find!' Of course Richie Dalton turned this to his advantage and spent Friday night in the sauna of the local hotel!

When I arrived at about 11.30am, most of the others were ready for off, so a quick change and onto the water. Most of the party started from South Bay and headed south for Ballyquintin Point, which is at the mouth of Strangford Lough. It was near here that the rest of the group met up with them and we all headed into the Lough.

The mouth of the Lough or the 'Narrows' as it is called, is a fascinating place. As I chatted to Declan Donnelly, we suddenly saw an area of very turbulent water ahead of us. The tide was flowing so fast that before we had time to think we were in the Ruten Wheel, a large circulating eddy that is caused by the tidal rip. While it was very manageable and good fun, this area can be the scene of thermal upsurges, which are like large standing waves. After that it was an easy paddle into Portaferry and over to Audleys Point for lunch, dodging the car ferry as we crossed over to the other side of the Lough.

A paddle to Rabbit Island followed lunch, spotting two otters en route. Then back to Strangford where some of the party decided to avail of light refreshments in the local pub as they waited for the tide to turn. This is the beauty of Strangford Lough. The day was planned to a large extent by the direction of the tide. The hardy bunch that paddled back to South Bay that evening got more than they reckoned for, with a very difficult paddle against the wind on the outer side of the Lough.

The sizzle of food on the barbecue greeted us as we returned to Tim and Paddy's cottage. This was the ACKC annual summer barbecue, so lots of people had arrived for the evening's entertainment. Music was provided by the 'Big Swiftie' and went on until the very early hours of the morning.

Sunday morning dawned and after a hearty breakfast, (and Holly, Phil Beatty's dog had stolen a few sausages) we packed up our tents and headed for Portaferry. The plan was to paddle to Angus Rock Lighthouse for lunch, while again we waited for the tide to turn. This is a lovely lighthouse at the mouth of the Lough. Lunch was spent listening to Ciaran Smith's tales about bears in Canada.

Just as we were about to leave the lighthouse, two Canadian canoes arrived. One of the paddlers was Norman, the founder of the ACKC club, and it was no mean feat to attempt the currents in the 'Narrows' in a Canadian canoe.

After a quick paddle back, most of us were on the 3pm ferry back to Strangford. Many thanks to ACKC for inviting us up for the weekend, especially to Phil Beatty and Mike Barton for organising it, and Tim and Paddy for making us feel so welcome. Well done to Mike and friends who completed their circumnavigation of Ireland recently.

First Timer Rollers, Stand Up

Des Keaney

Sunday morning, Bushmills symposium 1998... it's blowing force 7... Oisín Hallissy briefs us with "first time rollers only on this trip". Did (or could) your hand go up?

Mine didn't.

"Never again" I thought. I finally faced up to the one huge weakness in my paddling skills – I didn't have a good roll. I knew all the excuses... "It's too cold", "It's too late", "I'm too tired", "Nobody else is doing it", "Next time..." and so on.

We all know good paddlers – people we respect and look up to on the water. What makes them stand out? Confidence. Confidence in their ability, their experience and their knowledge. A vital part of that confidence is being able to handle difficult conditions.

I could handle difficult conditions but... I probably wouldn't roll up if that big wave got me. That scared the crap out of me. Result? Stiff, nervous paddling in bumpy water.

Last winter, I did something about it. Three months of pool sessions in Bray worked wonders. I was tossing away my paddle and swimming after it in my boat, rolling on half a split from the back deck, re-entry and rolls and so on. It's a great environment in which to learn and now I'm looking forward to some really dirty water.

I made a wooden Inuit paddle which also made a big difference. Its extra length and long, unfeathered blades made rolling easy.

The most important lesson to learn from the Inuit is to stay in our boats in event of a capsize. They died if they came out. Given bad enough conditions, so could we.

A rescue is virtually impossible in a very bad sea. With a decent roll or a buddy nearby, coming out should be the LAST option.

C'mon people, get out there and PRACTICE.

"Come and Try It" Meet

11th / 12th September 1999

Every year the Irish Sea Kayaking Association runs a "Come and Try It" weekend, and this year we will be based in Clifden, in Leo's Hostel (N.B. self catering), which is just off the town square, Tel : 095 21429. Anyone attending should make their own booking direct with the hostel. Lest there be any panic, Clifden is jammed with eating houses of all descriptions.

The annual CATitWE is aimed at members who have friends who are river paddlers who would like to try the ocean waves. We hire the ICU sea kayaks at £10.00 per annum, complete with spraydecks, paddles, life vests, and cagoules, all the basics. To be specific, this is not for those who want to learn basic paddling. Those who have not previously paddled cannot be catered for, nor can those who are truly unsure of their paddling skills.

As usual, money talks. First ten tenners to **David Walsh** as non-refundable deposits secure the ten sea kayaks.

Never alone at sea

By Donal O'Dowd

This was different, different from the hundreds of other times when I had turned my back to Coumeenoole beach and headed west towards the Blasket islands. There was no heavy surf dumping down on the unforgiving beach or no Atlantic swell at its journey's end, funnelling up onto the tip of the Dingle Peninsula. I missed the usual unceremonious dunking, when no initial wave broke over my deck, leaving me drenched from the onset of my ocean journey. However it was a welcomed change starting off dry in my sea-kayak leaving this famous Kerry landmark.

The sea was flat – flat calm, with the sun glistening as it occasionally does in this southwestern corner of Europe. Yes it was different – out to the west, the vivid, dark outline of the famed islands stood starkly against the backdrop of a clean sky. But even stranger was the view down, ten, twenty or even thirty feet below to the seabed. It too was remarkably clear. Every ripple on the patterned sand was readily identifiable. I imagined reaching down writing my name in the sand, picking shells off the seabed or plucking the large leaves of kelp, which lay motionless with the flowing tide. In such conditions it wasn't long before I paddled out to reach the last remnants of the Ranga.

As I had skirted the three remaining sections of the hull of the Ranga, the ill fated cargo ship, I reminisced over the bleak December night back in 1982 when it was blown ashore, after its engines failed. I remember it was rough with giant waves breaking onto the stricken ship embedding it against crags at the foot of the sheer cliffs of Dunmore

Head. In gale force winds, miles of rope and Trojan efforts of manpower were frantically deployed, to physically haul the weary Spaniards off the deck and up a hundred feet to the safety of the cliff top. I vividly remember the roar of the mighty Sea King chopper impressively hoisting the remaining crew from the cockpit and the unforgettable stench of diesel filling the air and swirling heavily on the water below.

The nose of a bull seal bobbed slowly

However, on this day it was very different, once again it was peaceful with all traces of the oil slick well flushed away. I rounded the first corner of my trip and entered a massive cave. In the shadow of the rising sun, the darkness of the cave offers a haven to sleeping seals. Sure enough I did have company. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, there in the depths of the cave, the nose of a bull seal bobbed slowly. Without paddling I drifted to within arms reach of the huge mammal and slowly leaned. Before contact was made - he woke - bang - dived and was gone. My heart still hadn't settled when he again rose blocking my exit. After sizing me up he retreated off to once again seek his undisturbed slumber.

Dunmore Head and the Lure rocks beyond were the next landmark. On approaching I noticed a shoal of sprat, each only an inch long but collectively a sizeable distinctive black shadow below me. There were millions of them alternating between black and silver with every turn they made. It was fascinating studying their movements as I followed their course westwards. They rose, dived and turned in every which way. At times they even jumped clean out the water, before landing helplessly flapping on my deck. With a clean paddle stroke I'd wash them off only to be festooned with another batch.

A shoal of mackerel was energetically feeding

The cause of their anxiety was soon apparent. Clearly visible directly under the hull of my kayak, a shoal of mackerel was energetically feeding on the sprat for breakfast. Like the sprat, the mackerel too flickered between silver and black as they attacked the sprat in wave after wave. Following the attacks the sprat would regroup. Each individual sprat was attempting to seek the safety of the heart of the shoal, only to find themselves out on the peripherals, with the next change of direction. When the mackerel broke the surface there was a frenzy of splashing which contrasted dramatically with the tranquillity of the moment.

The south running tidal race beyond the Lure also broke the calmness of the water. The infamous Blasket Sound funnels the Atlantic tides through a narrow, two kilometre passage between the mainland and the Gob on the Great Blasket Island. During the spring tides on that particular day the constriction of such a volume of water manifested itself into a significant tidal race running at about five to six knots. The shallow waters in the vicinity of the Lure exaggerated the situation. Like breaking into a river, once my kayak hit the moving water it was instantaneously pulled southwards. Frantically I paddled to angle the Nordkapp at a manageable tangent into the tide, hoping to ferryglide to the

sheltered harbour below the poet, Peadar Dunlevy's house on the Great Blasket Island. I was losing the battle northwards, so I opted to run with the tidal race and quickly reverse my plans for the day, to a clockwise circuit of the archipelago. Little did I know how this decision would impact so significantly on my continued love of sea kayaking.

Although sizeable, the overfalls and standing waves were manageable. They were certainly a good deal more settled than the day when, three colleagues, and myself crossed the Sound from Duinquin to the islands. On that particular day nature's timing had blown a lively wind over tide, which in turn pushed up into a mountainous sea. Though tightly grouped we were unable to keep constant sight of each other throughout the three-mile crossing.

I had wished that my awkward capsizing had occurred alone in the depths of one of the troughs and that the subsequent first time roll was executed in full view on the crest of the following wave. Alas, the reverse was the case and I suffered an ongoing humiliation until that particular incident was outshone. It was the Air/Sea Rescue Service winchman dropping in on our island campsite that provided the new distraction. He was wondering if we had come across anyone in distress out in the Sound. We assured him that we hadn't spotted anyone answering the description he gave, but that we would keep a vigilant eye out. A similar message was later relayed to our friends on the Valentia lifeboat, who had responded to the same 999 emergency call and had sped at eighteen knots across Dingle Bay to a false alarm.

It was now the third hour of the flooding tide and the full force of the race had turned the sea to an oily complexion. Sixty minutes out from Coumeenoole I was already half way along the southern side of the Great Blasket. I was about five hundred meters off shore, when I noticed the gulls circling overhead as they customarily do around the local fishing boats. However there were no boats present in the immediate vicinity, only the speck of a distant cargo ship on the horizon, yet the birds continued to circle. There was something else – the mackerel maybe, attracting the birds. I studied them as I approached and it wasn't long before the first of the unmistakable dorsal fins appeared.

The first of the unmistakable dorsal fins appeared

It was jet black, shaped like the rigging of a tall sloop. The first of the killer whales rose only meters from me. In a split second a thousand thoughts flashed through my mind. Another surfaced, then another and another - each one dwarfing me, as I sat with my head no more than three feet off the water. I counted eight, some ahead, some behind and one close – real close – far too close for comfort. The whole pod was within forty meters of me.

Like me, the whales were heading south west but at terrifying speed. Each one was capable of catching me in milli-seconds. I pondered – here I was alone over five miles from base; five hundred meters from shore, five hundred feet below the safety of the cliff tops and yet only five meters from the biggest living creature I had ever witnessed at sea or on land. Worse still only a mere five millimetres of fibreglass separated me from the

hostile environment where the killer whale is king - as I sat quivering in the cocoon of my cockpit.

I toyed with the notion of putting on my buoyancy aid, which was readily accessible on my front deck. I quickly dismissed the idea, when I weighed up the futile value of 70 newtons of lifting power against the immense diving capacity of the Orcas. If I was to be dragged down, there was only one way I wanted to come back up – and that was well and truly dead!!!. The thought of being half drowned; crushing pains, gasping breathlessness, half-devoured and still semi conscious did not bear consideration.

In the past I had seen video footage of seals - where the killer whales flicked them to and fro for hours, like rag dolls before devouring them in a couple of mouthfuls. I had read of a similar incident where a sea kayaker in the States suffered the same fate when his kayak was flicked into the air, all seventeen foot of it, before crashing down shredded into the sea. He lived to tell the story - was I going to be the sequel, the next few minutes would tell.

My first reactions was to take stock of my arsenal

One of my first reactions was to take stock of my arsenal – one 3" stainless steel penknife tied off to the pocket of my buoyancy aid. It was capable of scratching or nicking the blubber – but little more. My split paddles offered more opportunities, but these were shock corded onto the back deck – tucked deep under my helmet. They were useful as implements to prod off an attacker or jam open a gaping mouth, but despite my desperate circumstances, I was still rational enough to realise that they were no more than match sticks to these monsters. Anyway I hadn't counted on having to retrieve them under such duress.

The rocket flares offered the most defensive potential. Three highly charged explosives each sufficiently powered to fire the warhead over five hundred feet and burn for thirty seconds at an intensity of two thousand candlelights. I withdrew one from its' sheath; primed it's firing pin and clutched it close to hand along the line of my loom. Ever since I met my first shark in Roaring Water Bay many years before, I had always meant to test them, and now was no time to start wondering about their effectiveness under water and just how powerful a deterrent they would turn out to be.

I knew that the Orcas were fully aware of me...

Under the circumstances in which I found myself and not wanting to cause undue aggression, I adopted a "non first strike policy". This decision was copper fastened when the killer whale rose sufficiently out of the water, to reveal it's distinctive white band running from it's relatively small but deadly jaws, below it's dark brown eyes and down along it's back. I now knew for certain that the Orcas were fully aware of my presence. I tried to look bravely at him as he eyeballed me before diving alongside. I prayed that he wouldn't surface to the north leaving me trapped in the middle of the pod, with the gulls screeching overhead.

When he rose thirty meters ahead, I took the break and "B" lined it for the shore, promising the world and it's mother if I got out of this in one piece. There was no question of remaining in the "safe approach zone" – only go and paddle like fuck out of there. With each glance over my shoulder and every burst of paddling the danger subsided. Nevertheless, I wasn't assured of my safety until I reached to within jumping distance of the craggy cliff line of the island. In the security of the shoreline, I felt humbled to have been afforded this incredible experience and grateful to have been allowed to come through it unscathed. I acknowledged the fact that my salvation was purely due to the mercy of the killer whales and through no skill or cunning on my part.

Gradually my confidence once again grew and I sped vigorously westwards trying to keep in touch with the whales from a good safe distance. They were long gone by the time I reached An Ceann Dubh at the south western tip of the Great Blasket. Occasionally I thought I could make out their presence, away in the distance, but they were no longer a threat to my paddling. I didn't give the possibility of a further encounter with the whales a second thought, as I made the short hop across to Cathedral Rocks on Inis Na Bro. These impressive cliffs reach two hundred feet vertically from the sea and form the impenetrable Bastille on the northern flank of the island. While they afford a Mecca for the adventurous climbers they offer no landing potential for the stricken boatman. As a consequence unlike the other islands in the archipelago there has never been a settlement on Inis Na Bro. In fact there is no evidence of human activity on the island, other than a couple of wild sheep grazing on the hillside.

It's not often that such settled conditions prevail in the Atlantic Ocean, so I decided to take advantage and land on the southern craggy shore of Inis Na Bro. At the right tide and in settled conditions - if your lucky you can safely run with the swell onto one of the rock terraces and as the wave regresses quickly alight from the kayak and haul it above the water mark before the next wave washes in. I had only been on this island on three or four occasions in the past, so I enjoyed the opportunity to lunch, explore and climb up to the summits of it's twin peaks – one at either end of the island. While neither of them is too high, they both offer great vantage points in all directions.

On returning to my kayak I was taken aback, when I met a British soldier in a faded uniform lying perished on the ground. There he was with rifle in hand defending what he must have believed to be the last outcrop of a crumbling British Empire. I wondered if like Bere Island in West Cork – Inis Na Bro had remained in British hand long after Ireland had won it's own independence. Or had this soldier fallen victim to Pierce Ferriter's clever hideaway cave on the Great Blasket. Had he chased Pierce into his cave - only to be truncheoned in the dark abyss and thrown out the back door hundreds of feet down to the sea and then to get washed up onto this neighbouring island. Had the gannets; auks or greater black backs imprisoned him on this isolated island to make him pay for his sin against the Irish in the past? After surviving the close call myself earlier in the day, I took pity on the desolate plastic soldier and offered him partial freedom, when I throw him into the sea thus giving him an opportunity to swim for his next landing – where ever it may be.

I have pulled as many strokes as a corrupt politician

My next task was to round Inisvickillane, which again was only a short hop southwards. It looked quiet. There was no sign of the herd of the native red deer nor any trace of the sea eagles which were reintroduce a couple of years earlier. What was visible however was the massive wind generator perched high on the island hilltop supplying power to a luxury summer home, supposedly at the tax payers expense. As circumnavigated the island I wondered whether or not in my twenty years sea kayaking would I have pulled as many strokes as a corrupt politician. As the green helicopter circled above me once before landing on the private helipad, I dismissed the idea and turned north for the first time that day.

My original plan for the day was to include Foze Rocks in my canoeing itinerary. However my confidence hadn't risen sufficiently high enough to chance a second encounter with the killer whales, who may well be returning with the change to the ebbing tide. Twelve miles out to sea was no place to be, with a hungry pod of killer whales in the vicinity, no matter how good or lucky I thought I was. It didn't take much self-persuasion to alter my plans and paddle direct with the flow to Tearaght.

Tearaght with its gleaming white lighthouse has always been my favourite of the five main Blasket Islands even long before I had the confidence to paddle out to it. It's pyramidal shape, with its huge arch through the middle offers a mystical attraction. Regrettably like the rest of the lighthouses around our coast it too has turned automated and is unmanned for most of the year. It was always comforting to know that there was someone else out eight miles to see keeping a vigil. Not expecting anyone at home you can imagine how pleased I was when I turned into the small cove where the landing place is located and saw evidence of recent human habitation. Open doors, laundry drying and supplies on the quay wall gave the lighthouse a lived in appearance. After deciding to stop in for a chat I realised it was going to be more difficult to land than it initially seemed. The swell wasn't huge but it was unpredictable and gave me a good fright as it swept me against the wall and back out to sea again. Following a few more last second aborted attempts, I decided to exit my kayak at sea and swim ashore towing the vessel on a long pre attached leash. This landing technique had been rehearsed after many years of paddling to uninhabited, uninviting and unforgiving off shore islands, which had progressively taken their toll on the delicate fibreglass hull of my Nordkapp

A warm welcoming party descended

I had no sooner exited my kayak, without capsizing and lowered myself into the cold Atlantic Ocean when a warm welcoming party descended the two hundred and seventy two steps from the lighthouse. The three annual maintenance crew, were on a six week posting, up to their eyes in work - oiling, greasing, painting, building, fixing and enjoying the tranquillity of their situation.

They showed utter delight with their unexpected visitor. After helping me to carry the kayak safely above the water line they gave me a real Irish failte raith, with a grand tour

of the facilities, a warm cup of freshly brewed coffee and an hour of good conversation. We lamented the automation of the lighthouse service and the loss of the valuable human resource around the coastline. We talked passionately about the killer whales, which they too had seen in the area over the last couple of days. We looked out from the tower for any further evidence of the Orcas but saw nothing out of the ordinary other than the big cargo ship on the horizon steadily advancing.

I was off on my way through the mighty sea arch

Sadly we said our goodbyes and the lads escorted me down to the quay where I was manhandled with a semi-seal launch back into the water. Once again I was off on my way through the mighty sea arch with its submerged ring fort providing a treacherous obstacle at low tide. From here it was on out into the freedom of the open sea. The northeasterly race was rising and encouraging me across to Inistooskert, as the name implies the most northerly of the islands and more commonly known as – The Sleeping Giant or An Fear Marbh (The Dead Man). This is another spectacular oblong shaped island with huge clean vertical cliffs on the northern side and interesting overfalls at either end.

As the island has but one extremely narrow inlet and no beaches either of boulders; pebbles nor sand, it affords very few landing places particularly in heavy weather. Its inaccessibility gave rise to a harrowing story when a couple from the Great Blaskets moved onto the island with their herd of cattle for the summer grazing. They stayed in the dry-stoned semi - subterranean dwelling, which is still evident today. During a storm the overweight husband died of natural causes in the house. Due to the weather, the wife was unable to summon help and was incapable of removing his heavy corpse up from the floor of the house. As the storm and the troubled seas continued for many days the body began to decompose and the festering stench was unbearable for the wife to live with. In the end she was compelled to dismember the body and carry the rotting limbs and torso out section by sections.

As time was pushing on I was content to circumnavigate the island and passed up on the opportunity to land, but instead continue across the four kilometres against the tide to Beginish. It was a steady paddle over to the small low flat island, which is totally different in character from the other islands. On route, I made it my business to take a short detour to enable me to paddle through the fifteen meter gap between An Charraig Fada and An Oilean Bui. Scarcely the width of two boat lengths this narrow passage has given many a sea kayaker a good fright with its unpredictable steep crested waves. I have always been impressed with this spot, as it was here in the height of a storm that a number of galleons from the Spanish Armada sailed through, using only their sails for steering. After reaching the safety of the lee shore of the Great Blasket the following night with a shift in the wind, they dragged their anchors and were subsequently shipwrecked on the treacherous rocks in the Sound.

Landing on Beginish is easy with deep sandy inlets to the north and south. In fact the two inlets nearly meet midway and cut the island in half. I opted for the southern inlet, as it tends to be more interesting for beach combing.

A fire that would awaken Valhalla

I am always amazed at the volume and variety of treasures there. I have found skeletons, whale bones and fossils. Drift wood to beat the band, sufficient to light a fire that would awaken Valhalla. Barrels, drums, fish crates, weather balloons, soggy fore ign publications circumventing the censorship importing laws and of course buoys of every shape, size and colour. Everlasting plastic is the more recent scourge - bags, bottles, cartons and the dreaded nets with ever variety of marine life strangled in massive tangles of monofilament. However despite all my searching I have never found a message in a bottle – neither there or anywhere for that matter. I was with a friend once touring the Galway/Mayo islands when he found a note meticulously folded and wrapped in plastic and secured in a two-litre coke bottle. It was from a journalist, working for a national television station in one of the Eastern Block countries. Sadly no acknowledgement was ever received from the letter sent to him, following the fortuitous find.

As it was late in the season and many previous explorers had already called in on the island by this stage -there was nothing of significance found on the day. Nevertheless there was sufficient material to maintain my interest for the best part of an hour before I headed off to explore the island itself. Beginish is always interesting, as the grassy areas are the nesting grounds for the Great and Lesser Black Backs and Fulmars. The rare Arctic Terns and Oystercatchers nest on the pebbly shoreline. Each species have their own traditional nesting boundaries and they live in semi harmony along side each other.

If you venture into the nesting areas, the colonies rise and create an unmerciful commotion of squawks and screeches. The protective adults swoop and dive to within inches of the intruder as they defend their offspring. The young flightless fulmars are even more aggressive. They wait for the intruder to come within striking distance as they couch down in the long grass. Once within reach they project a vomit of regurgitated fish and bile - the smell and consistence of which is very effective in stopping any further encroachment.

After half an hour I had completed the walk around both half of the island, devoured what was left from my lunch and was already back in my kayak for the final island in the circuit - the Great Blasket itself.

A short ferryglide brought me across to An Tra Ban, the lovely beach on the main island, with its white sand and its dangerously steep sloping shore, where Pdraig Pearse's girlfriend - Maud Gonne drowned over seventy five years ago on a similar fine summer's day. During the depths of winter the same beach is black and festooned with seals. Hundreds of them like a massive blanket covering every grain of sand and the distinctive smell discernible from a mile downwind. Tra Ban is usually sheltered, but any wind with an easterly bias can produce a sizeable dump there. The flat conditions on this particular day made it ideal for landing, but instead I opted for the small harbour further south, where the currachs, the traditional canvas and tar skinned boats, landed in the days gone by.

Inevitably as any vessel lands people in the vicinity come down to the harbour out of curiosity or to glean the recent news from the mainland. Like a swarm many to the day tourists waiting for the last ferry home, were there nosing around my kayak asking a hundred and one questions, the answers to which they had no interest in one way or another. I stayed answering the queries long enough to be polite, but my mind was firmly set on the seasonal café at the top of the ruined village where wholesome cakes and freshly brewed coffee was the order of the day.

There's nothing better than sitting out on a makeshift stool, on a fine summer's evening with good food and good company - looking out from a height over the Blasket Sound knowing that the hustle and bustle of the mainland is effectively another world away. Once the day tourists depart, the island reverts into solemn tranquillity - making it virtually impossible to leave.

But leave I had to, for the fourth time that day I dressed and organised myself for the sea kayak. The final leg of the journey was to bring me back across the Sound to the Lure and back onto the beach of Coomeenole, where the day's voyage began. My plan was to ferryglide across to Dunmore Head, trying to lose as little ground as possible. When I was half way across the Sound, out from behind the island came the big cargo ship, the one that I had noticed on the horizon earlier in the morning. The ship was taking advantage of the settled conditions and had opted for the short cut through the narrow passage between the islands and the mainland, thus saving significant time on its journey north, possibly to the Shannon Estuary.

For the second time that day I felt my life threatened

As I was only half way across, this presented a huge dilemma. Should I speed up or retreat in an effort to avoid a certain collision. There was no doubt, whichever of us would come out worse. Maybe the captain hadn't even noticed me as a small speck dead ahead, paddling like the clappers to get out of the way. For the second time that day I felt my life threatened as surge of adrenaline pushed me to the limits of my capacity in terms of paddling speed. No matter how far and how fast I still seemed to be right in the path of the oncoming ship. I considered firing a flare to alert the bridge of my presence, but felt the time spent grabbing, priming and firing the rocket would be more productively spent paddling. Even if they did notice me at the last minute there was very little they could do. I would be well churned up somewhere around Kerry Head before a ship that size would eventually come to a stop.

I didn't relax until I saw one of the deck hands leaning out over the bow waving in a "how are you?" fashion, as opposed to a "keep paddling or get out of there" manner. I thought I noticed a smirk on his face and a knowing look that he had given me a good fright as he passed. It was only then that I appreciated the enormity of the ship and how dwarfed I was in comparison to it. My attention quickly focused on the bow waves, as I braced myself for a series of large rolling swells. I considered surfing these homewards, but quickly changed my mind as the first wave broke its crest and boned me towards the shore. The turbulence from the props didn't manifest itself into my worst thoughts and

merely created a couple of ripples and a few minor white horses as they fanned out in my direction.

Ten minutes from here saw me back on dry land and taking off my canoeing gear for the last time that day. It seemed as if a lifetime had passed since I took to the water that morning. The twenty five mile trip had given me treasured memories, which would long outlast the stiffened shoulders following a trying day's paddling.

I would recommend the circuit of the Blaskets to any energetic sea kayaker, but come armed – not with harpoons, guns or knives but with the history and lore of the islands. You may be solo paddling out around the islands - but you will never be alone at sea.

The Seamanship Pocketbook

By Franco Ferrero

Reviewed and tested

by Des Keaney

This is the latest publication from the author of "Sea Kayak Navigation". It's a combination of a small boat guide and notepad. In the guide section, there are 28 pages of text with useful sections on trip planning, weather, lights, signals. VHF and distress calls etc.

It is for all small boats, not just sea kayaks, so there are sections which aren't that applicable to us e.g. rules of the road – my understanding is that we always have to get out of the way. Also, some of the sections are UK orientated and thus of limited value to the Irish paddler. Nevertheless, there is a lot of good stuff.

The notebook is the most useful section for me. It's compact (155mm x 105mm, approx. A6) and IT'S WATERPROOF! I've tried it under decklines for a couple of trips and it really works. It's great for bringing all those trip notes with you. There are 16 blank pages to let you plan in comfort and bring the notes with you. Pencil is erasable without damaging the paper.

A really useful piece of kit.

Special ISKA Offer!

IR£7 or GB£6

Cheque to **Des Keaney** by **Friday 24th September**.

Make IR£ cheques payable to Irish Sea Kayaking Assoc. and GB£ cheques payable to Pesda Press.

*Published by Pesda Press, Elidir, Ffordd Llanllechid, Rachub, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57
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O'Dare

It's great to be able to support Irish industry and especially when the quality is excellent and the price reasonable. O'Dare have been providing top quality wetsuits and cags to Irish paddlers for years. In cags, they do dry, semi dry and breathable and prices start at £35. No sea cag yet but that may change in the future and they do make to special order.

They have recently introduced a new range of high performance outdoor clothing and gear – "O'Dare First Light". The Editor bought a fleece top from the range and is very happy with it.

The latest gear and end-of-range sale items can be viewed in their factory shop in Bray, Co.Wicklow. It's open Saturdays from 10 to 4 or by appointment Mon -Fri i.e. just call them.

O'Dare, Beechwood Close, Boghall Rd, Bray, Co.Wicklow Ph:(01) 2863558

A short series on

Knots

By

Des Keaney

Two Half Hitches, Taut Line Hitch & Bowline

The first two knots are similar and are very useful for tying a boat onto a roofrack.

Two Half Hitches

- Loop the free end of the rope around the bar and behind the 'standing' part of the rope
- Then pass it inside and pull tight. This is a half hitch.

- Repeat the process and pull tight.

Taut Line Hitch

This is similar to two half hitches except that it's easier to undo.

- Wrap the free end twice around the standing part of the rope. Pull it away from the anchor point to tighten.
- Tie a half hitch to finish off

Bowline

The bowline creates a loop which will not slip. It's useful for tying a waist loop in a rescue line, a rope to a roofrack or for attaching items to deck lines. It's easy to open, even after being under tension.

The Rabbit

From left to right,

- the rabbit comes out of the hole
- ...goes around the tree
- ...and goes back into the hole
- The finished bowline.
- To open, pull the loop at the top of the right hand drawing towards you.

Practice tying the knot both toward and away from you i.e. practice tying it around your own waist and then around someone else's waist.

A well tied knot is very safe and will give you peace of mind with that boat on the roof.

Transglobal Sea Kayak Expedition 1999-2002

Trys Morris and Bob Timms are currently paddling from the UK to Australia. They're using two Romany Explorers which can be joined together to give them stability on long open crossings.

And ye thought a 'Round Ireland was tough??!!

ISKA/Uisce

"The Skaaa", "Iskey"... the variations on how to pronounce ISKA go on. Suggestion from a member recently is "**Uisce**" (for the non Irish speakers, this means "water" and is pronounced "Ish-ka")

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Romany Explorer – almost new. 3 hatches, retractable skeg, backrest, red deck, white hull, black trim. £650

Romany Explorer – 3 hatches, retractable skeg, backrest, blue/green deck, white hull, yellow trim. £450

Contact Des Keaney (01-2760263)

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Boats for Life

By **Brian Ormond**

Well we have all heard about the Royal National Lifeboat Institution; its registered charity status, its volunteer crews, its fine fleet of blue and orange boats. Hopefully you haven't needed to call them out but do you know the full story ?

The RNLI have 219 lifeboat stations in the UK and Ireland. They provide a 24 hour lifeboat service necessary to cover search and rescue requirements to fifty miles out from our coasts. They are launched on average 16 times a day ! Since it was founded in 1824 the RNLI have saved over 129,000 lives, pretty astounding I say.

In Ireland we have 42 lifeboats stationed at 37 different harbours. Some stations have two boats - an inshore and an all weather craft. This is important as the inshore boat can sometimes be launched quicker with a smaller number of crew. Cost is also a factor, so much so that a lot of people hesitate to call out a lifeboat.

There are stories that it costs up to £5,000 to launch a lifeboat. This is true if the cost of running the organisation in the UK and Ireland is divided by the number of launches. But this figure would include vessel purchasing, maintenance and office running costs. An Irish launch costs an average of approximately £500. Lifeboats will always go out, in any condition. A force twelve is not an excuse when there are lives to be saved.

On a blustery force five Saturday in May I was invited to partake in a practice trip on my local lifeboat, Hilda Jarrett (47-024). The Baltimore vessel is a 47' Tyne Class lifeboat which is kept in a boathouse in a sheltered estuary, just east of the town. It is accessed by a small road.

Crews, mostly fishermen, divers, oil riggers and local business men abandoned their cars outside. Numerous of the crew are ex seamen, a most valuable professional qualification for the lifeboat. The first six crew to arrive get their waterproofs and life jackets on as quick as possible and climb the stairs up to the boat. Some of the others

stay on standby or man the station radio centre. There is a core of twenty crew all living within two miles of the station but it is common that only about eight can turn up due to work and social commitments.

Without delay the boathouse doors are opened, the boat is lowered on a winch outside and she is rigged - navigation masts, railings, engines started, etc.. When all is ready a standby crew member releases the cable bracket. The lifeboat hurls down the slip and on hitting the water the crew have it on its

way. Within minutes she can reach a speed of 17 knots. From the initial alarm it takes on average seven to eight minutes to launch the lifeboat.

The crew members set to work, communicating with Bantry radio station, checking navigation and the engines and discussing the details for the rescue ahead. On this sea trial when all had settled down I got a chance to speak to Kieran Cotter, the coxswain, who owns the local grocery shop and oil supplies business. I asked him how the call is

processed. "We can be called out at any time, day or night, someone raises the alarm and our pagers go off, we could be anywhere ! There are several ways that an alarm is raised, either from local radio contact from a distressed vessel, from MRCC, from one of the radio stations or from a member of the public.

Most calls come from Valentia Radio and go to our secretary who raises the alarm but Valentia have the authority to signal our pagers directly". Kieran explained that the first member to the boathouse fires two maroons so all crew know that the lifeboat is being launched. The secretary, Bernard O'Driscoll, follows up with phone calls to all the main crew to make sure

they have left their homes. Unfortunately there have been several hoax calls in recent years but they will always launch the boat. Distress calls can come at any time and in all kinds of weather from stormy

December nights to flat calm July afternoons. Kieran calls the summer months "the silly season", silly because of the number of call outs to leisure craft which have been put to sea without any or little preparation or skill. He recalls a call out to a family in an open boat a mile off shore without any life jackets, VHF or flares. They were spotted when the father used his lighter!

Often there are joint rescues with Gardai and the IMES covering the shore and cliffs. In the south west there are many situations where the lifeboat will tow a troubled boat. Most injuries, especially those far from shore, will be airlifted by helicopter to an ambulance or directly to a hospital.

The Tyne has a steel hull with a shallow draught, a long straight keel and extended bilge keels to protect the propellers when launching and working in shallow waters (minimum 6'). The hull is built with a heavy ballast and is self righting. The aluminium wheelhouse is completely watertight to protect the crew and survivors.

She carries all the necessary electronic gadgetry including radar, echo sounders, VHF & MF radios (both now with DSC (digital select calling) facilities), Decca Navigator, GPS and the essential first aid equipment. There is space for two stretchers. Survivors are placed in the fore and aft cabins. The boat is equipped with a portable pump for emptying flooded boats. This would be essential because a small boat such as a kayak could not be towed and would have to be hauled aboard empty of sea water.

On board there is a stock of soup, chocolate and tinned foods in case she is at sea for a long period. All the crew complete RNLi first aid, navigation and crewing courses and the recognised Department of the Marine radio courses. Boat handling exercises and engine checks are carried out fortnightly. The inflatable dinghy is launched, anchors are shot and changes to local access points are researched.

The only full time employee is mechanic Cathal Cottrell, he is based at the station maintaining the boat to the high standards expected by the Institute. After any rescue or

practice trip the lifeboat is hauled out and before the crew go home they wash down the deck, polish all fittings and scrub the hull. Later Cathal will touch up paint, checking engines and all of the boat's equipment, you never know when the call will come. It has been known for a lifeboat to be called out soon after returning from a rescue.

Last January I spent three days in my kayak searching the coast for two missing people. I asked Kieran could kayaks help in any way in situations like this ? He said with a well equipped kayak and working in small numbers kayaks would be very beneficial in assisting the lifeboat search caves, shallow shores and coastlines, obviously only in good weather.

Is there any advice Kieran has for kayakers ? "Yes ! Besides the essential life jacket, carry a VHF, at least one red pin point and two parachute flares, travel in numbers and tell someone where you are going and your ETA". "If you do get into trouble raise the alarm immediately, maintain radio watch on channel 16, try to keep one flare back in case you need to clarify final position with the lifeboat and stay warm."

Jerry Smith, a local diving instructor told me about an inflatable balloon that is available in America. Its flying position can be controlled from the holder. Its bright colour is visible for a long distance and it improves your radar position ! Check it out ?

I had a great time with the lifeboat crew. There is tremendous comradeship and team spirit. They come from all walks of life but their sole aim is the saving of lives at sea. They discussed this week's local paper report about the sighting of Baltimore's former lifeboat "Charles Henry" by a local on holidays in a busy

Birmingham shopping centre car park. It was put there ten years ago as a display piece by the centre's owners, it certainly gets attention !

The Baltimore Lifeboat has saved many lives, a notable few are the 21 yachtsmen and two yachts over a 22 hour period in August 1979 during the famous Fas tnet Race; Mr. Charlie Haughey off the Mizen Head rocks in September 1985 and three lives from Dina a 160' coaster cargo ship that sunk 14 miles south when one of her cargoes shifted on board and she capsized.

Well done and thank you to all concerned !

Donations, contributions, fund raising events, membership subscriptions to :

RNLI 15 Windsor Tce, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin ph 01 2845050

By David Walsh

We were an hour out of Downings, heading for Melmore Head and round into Mulroy Bay, to a pier with a handy walk back to the car. It was a grand day, altogether. Then all of a sudden, a mile off Tranarossan, we were being trashed in a narrow channel between two rocks. The Atlantic swells were suddenly less than attractive playthings. This was hardly the best of starts for our paddling weekend. Just as we were to go through the narrowest section of our gap, just when we could see the safe water beyond, a big set spotted our moments hesitation, and we paid in full. We both survived the first wave, and it was the second one that did the real damage.

I tried backpaddling, but the wave won. The stern went so high in the air there was nothing there when I went to brace. As I lost my balance totally, I remember wondering should I high brace or let it all happen and just roll. That arrogance got me upside down. When my roll failed, it also got me swimming.

Further down the channel, the same wave turned Fred sideways, but he hung on. Out of control, and no time to think, he bongoed into the eye of the needle, every paddlers nightmare. Eighteen foot canoes just plain don't fit sideways through ten foot gaps. Both ends of his boat hit simultaneously, which should have been the end of him. But right then he got lucky. The sudden stop made the worst of the wave pass under him. It also turned his nose the right way round, because his rudder snapped, and though his front was holed, he survived.

Just as well, because more sets came in, relentlessly. Getting me back in my boat wasn't easy, but we got there, eventually managing the crisis well, which is an all important (but often forgotten) half of the coin. We even finished the paddle, much the wiser mariners, as can be imagined. We had learnt that the North Atlantic in springtime is neither the time nor the place to go rock-hopping, and certainly not in our own boats.

Marital News!

Cupid is active on the waves this year. Newly weds include Humphrey Murphy and Suzanne Kennedy, Cormac and Dearbhla Daly and Stephen Hannon and Jackie Hunt. Good luck to them all!

Winter Paddling

In Skerries

It's that time of year again! The monthly bird counts around the Skerries Islands start on Saturday, 9th of October. It's great for getting out in the off-season.

Call Seán Pierce (01-8490048) Friday evening/Saturday morning to check on weather. Meet at the lifeboat station at Skerries harbour at 10:00. The dates are as follows:

Saturday, October 9th

Saturday, November 6th

Saturday, December 11th

Courses

Paul Durnan

We are looking to fill a R.E.C.1 course specially aimed to the sea paddler. Anyone interested can contact Des Keaney or myself. It would be of particular use to do the course as opposed to those general R.E.C. courses. The emphasis on these courses is practical life-saving methodology. The details of venue/cost have yet to be decided pending on those interested.

On another note, anyone wishing to do their Level 5 Personal Proficiency, will need to have Sea Trips logged as well as their a R.E.C. 1.

Sea Proficiency Courses

<i>Date</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Centre</i>
8 th -10 th Oct.	GB£92	5 star Assessment – Sea	Tollymore
13 th -14 th Nov.	IR£75	Level 5 Sea Prof. Assessment	Saoirse na Mara, Achill

REC Courses

Note: REC 2 = REC Emergency is a prerequisite for Level 5 Sea Proficiency. REC 3 = REC Standard and is a prerequisite for Level 3 Sea Instructor. REC Emergency is a prerequisite for REC Standard. REC Accelerated combines REC Emergency and REC Standard into one 3 day weekend. Follow that if you can!

<i>Date</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Centre</i>
-------------	-------------	--------------------	---------------

9 th – 10 th Oct IR£99	REC Part2 Training	Tiglin
20 th -22 nd Nov. GB£87	REC Standard	Tollymore
23 rd –25 th Oct IR£165	REC Accelerated	Tiglin
10 th – 12 th Nov GB£140	REC Accelerated	Tollymore

CONTACT LIST

Jim Kennedy, Atlantic Sea Kayaking, 028 33002, atlanticseakayaking @tinet.ie

Richie Keating, Russagh Mill Adventure Centre, 028 23238

Stephen Hannon, Saoirse Na Mara, 087 2397245, stephenh @iol.ie

Tollymore Mountain Centre, 08013967 22158, admin @tollymore.com

Marc Jegou, River Ocean Kayak, 065 77043, riverocean@esatclear.ie

Irish Canoe Union, (01) 4509838, office@irishcanoeunion.ie

Short Courses

For those completely new to kayaking, **Jim Kennedy** is offering introductory courses each Saturday from his centre in West Cork. On Sundays he offers a short sea trip to cave/arches and wildlife. One of the unique trips is a 'Full Moon' paddle.

Jim is planning trips to Northern Spain and Baja, Mexico for the year 2000.

Also running short courses are **Marc Jegou** (see detailed info on p.23) and **Cape Clear Adventure Centre**, who also rent kayaks to competent people.

Web Paddling

Some more interesting maritime web sites.....

Seascapes:

<http://www.rte.ie/radio/seascapes.html>

Lighthouse pictures at the following two sites:

<http://www.irishmarine.com/eagle.html>

<http://zuma.lib.utk.edu/lights/eagle/eagle.html>

The Commissioners of Irish Lights

<http://www.cil.ie/home.html>

Great **photo-cd** featuring John Eagle's lighthouse photography now available from Ken Trethewey.

<http://www.btinternet.com/~k.trethewey>

The Marine Times, the best online maritime newspaper.

<http://indigo.ie/~marine>

Now that **synoptic weather charts** have disappeared from the Irish Independent web page, here's one from the US Navy.

<http://www.nemoc.navy.mil/LIBRARY/AOR/NEMOC/NATL+Regional/METEOROLOGICAL/METFCST/Atlantic+Horizontal+WX+Depiction/index.html>

Kayak manufacturers

ASSC <http://www.asc.org.uk>

P&H <http://www.phcompany.co.uk>

Valley/Knoydart <http://knoydart-kayaking.co.uk>

The **RNLI** in the UK and Ireland

<http://www.rnli.org.uk>

Roughstuff paddles

<http://www.roughstuff.ie>

Weather Ireland

<http://www.ireland.com/weather>

Pesda Press (paddling book publishers)

Scottish Symposium

By Mike McClure

Heathrow had run out of fuel! Which meant that one of the speakers for the symposium and all Kevin Mansell's clothes and slides hadn't arrived. This caused quite a lot of consternation - presumably due to the thought of Kevin not changing all weekend rather than the loss of his slides. Kevin seemed to be more concerned about the slides! Friday evening on the Isle of Cumbrae on the last weekend of May is the chance to catch up with old acquaintances, make new ones and have a bit of craic.

The symposium started with a vengeance on Saturday morning with a multitude of options for those wishing to get on the water and those who preferred to stay inside and watch slide shows or attend theory workshops. One major criticism I would have of the Scottish Symposium is that it's just too good - there's loads arranged and happening for dozens of people and yet it all goes really smoothly - how do they manage it??

From the origins of our sport and learning Inuit paddling skills to getting to grips with the latest technology on the internet and navigational gizmos, from rescues and weather to health and whales and dolphins - almost everything you could think of was covered. Saturday afternoon turned quite windy and some of the practical sessions turned quite interesting - the advanced skills sessions almost had the conditions to test them and the forward paddling session turned into a rescue session!! However, everyone had had a great day and the place was buzzing at dinner time - which had to be run in 2 shifts due to the numbers.

On Saturday evening, we were transported to East Greenland via Graeme Bruce's slides - which were just stunning and along with Graeme's sense of humour and Glaswegian patter - this was an excellent keynote lecture on the land where our kayaks were born!

If you've never been to the Scottish Symposium before, the main attraction is not the eminent coaches spouting forth nor the variety of kayaks to try paddling nor the technical experts in almost every aspect of paddling that the symposium team manage to arrange as speakers.

No, it's the party! (the technical term for this party is 'Ceilidh', pronounced Cealee). A Ceilidh which as usual went on until the not so wee small hours, involves loads of sweaty people careering madly around a small room (technical term for this is dancing but having seen and participated in it, very few could really claim to have been truly dancing).

There is also a considerable bit of noise made by a few notable individuals and at periods everyone joins in this disturbing racket (technical term for this is singing but again, having seen and participated in it.....)

We seem to have developed a bit of a tradition of Irish vs. Scottish song singing and story telling from about 3:00 a.m. until well after dawn - I think we Irish won this year although it's hard to remember! (I guess this last bit will be edited out!) Anyway, if you haven't been, you really haven't lived. A huge thanks to Jaz for keeping us all lit erally on our toes and keeping the party in full swing virtually till breakfast.

Remarkably, everybody was fresh and raring to go again on the Sunday morning and there were just as bewildering an array of workshops, seminars and practicals to attend. Again, it all seems to go very smoothly and people filtered off to their respective sessions.

On Sunday evening, Robin Ruddock gave a talk on Irish Currachs which are the closest thing we have to an indigenous people's canoe. As many of you are aware, in 1997, Robin and a crowd of people from the North Coast had a huge Neamhog built to hold 13 people and they carried out a reenactment of the journey of St.Columba from Derry to Iona on the 1400th anniversary of his death. He concluded the lecture with a slide show and narrative on this journey and it's purpose of helping community relations in Northern Ireland.

Overall, this was a fantastic lecture which held everyone's imagination and interest captive. The level of applause at the end was a true gauge on how well the whole thing had been received.

A more subdued unofficial Ceilidh then took place late on Sunday night - actually Monday morning but no-one had the energy to carry it on until breakfast this time.

A final bout of sessions on Monday morning and then deb riefs, thank you's and arrangements for the paddling at Artuaine were said in the afternoon.

What can I say? - another excellent symposium - great fun, a great friendly and helpful atmosphere and altogether, mighty craic.

Long may the Scottish symposium li ve. Next year, we're back to Jersey - keep your eyes on the press and your ears to the ground for that one.

Thanks must go to the organising team of Gordon, Duncan, Matt, Graeme and their long suffering families. Such a big event does not go off so smoothl y without a massive amount of effort in the background and preceding the symposium. Also, thanks to all the contributors and manufacturers for their enthusiastic participation - who give the vent so much variety and knowledge.

First Landing on Black Rock

By Dave Kavanagh & Aengus Parsons

Black Rock is an isolated lighthouse rock, about seven miles off the southern tip of the Mullet peninsula, on which landing is very difficult in almost all conditions. In his book on Irish lighthouses, "Bright Light, White Water", Bill Long says that the rock is reputed to be the "most difficult of the lighthouse rocks on which to land; totally inaccessible at times, either by boat or by helicopter". So, why would anyone desert the peaceful and beautiful Inishkeas for two five mile open crossings, with the likely reward for four hours in a boat being merely a closer look at a lonely obscure rock? Ask those guys who "bagged" Inistrahall for Oileáin - *They* started it!

The low swell between the North and South Inishkeas was a good sign as we headed Southwest. This was very unlike a previous visit, when I chickened out of entering the same sound from the west. The swell had been 2m or so that time, much too high to see over, and steepening all the time as it got closer to the tiny gap. After doing an extra six miles around Inishkea North, I laughed later on when I saw a half-decker come steaming through without a care in the world! This time, however, all we had to contend with was a foot or two of clapotis.

Our trip down to the south-west went surprisingly quickly due to a strong southerly current. However, our paddling rate increased to desperation level in the last half mile as we struggled to make the eddy behind the rock...Achill did look nice, but it's on a hell of a shuttle!

The first few minutes at the rock were spent watching waves surging up and down at the landing ledges. The waves were very small, about 1m, but were still giving a lot of vertical motion. Will we.. won't we.. will the landing still be OK after the tide has risen a little more..? The debate was pre-empted by the quick landing of one optimist. Most of the rest followed in the (mistaken) belief that "if we don't go up, we'll have to listen to him for weeks"! One soul volunteered to remain on the water to "mind the boats".

Landing was the easy part; next the boats had to be hauled up the face of the rock (sorry Geo!) and tied to iron stakes by the steps (which were probably chiselled into the rock by hardy Mayomen in the last century). An airy 70m ascent to the lighthouse followed.

It's hard to know who got more of a shock when we bumped into the Irish Lights renovation crew! Our legal representative quickly blurted out "we're not trespassing are we?"! Once it was established that we weren't up to anything untoward, we were given a very friendly welcome. It turned out that the ex-assistant keeper of the Eagle was out for

a week or two with two other men working on the renovation of the cut stone keeper's quarters. (It is hard to believe now that families survived on this rock for thirty years until 1893.)

We were even given a tour of the lighthouse tower itself. A dream come true for some! The light is the oldest/only acetylene gas light (1860) in Ireland and Britain and will be decommissioned to a museum in Wexford soon. The mechanism of the light and the automatic replacement of expired mantles were carefully explained to us. It was interesting to see that the light was not as bright as we would have thought since it is focused into two single rays in opposite directions. The light revolves once every 24 seconds to give a "flash" every twelve seconds. A stopwatch is kept nearby to check that the mechanism doesn't speed up or slow down. When the light was first installed, the revolving mechanism was powered by weights which had to be wound from the bottom to the top of the tower every hour and a quarter. *Every* hour and a quarter, through the night, summer and winter, or the keepers risked losing their jobs!

At this stage, we had begun to worry about our boats and the rising tide and couldn't accept the generous offer of tea. A quick descent to sea level was followed by an interesting time re-launching. During our re-launch, and on the passage home, the crew from Irish Lights monitored our progress and encouraged us over the radio, telling us of favourable changes in the tidal streams.

A fantastic day, one when everything went perfectly; more than enough to make up for a cold and windy winter. Back on Inishkea South, the campfire beers went down well.

Notes: See Oileáin for landing, tides and navigation details.

Paddlers were Brian Coll, John Hannan, David Kavanagh, and Aengus Parsons.

Thanks to John Eagle for his kind permission to scan his colour postcards - He has a full collection of the Irish Lighthouses, available at 90p each or 25 pounds for the entire set of 66, inc. p&p. Also available at Greene's Bookshop in Dublin.

*Contact details: John Eagle Photography, Eyeries, Beara, Co. Cork;
<http://zuma.lib.utk.edu/lights/eagle/eagle.html>; eaglejr@indigo.ie; (027) 74275.*

Inishbiggle

May 1999

How not to do it

by David Walsh

Afterwards, nobody disagreed that it had been a seven. At the time, we didn't think, at all. We were in Achill for the weekend and the conditions were appalling. There wasn't a boat to be seen on even the shelteredest piece of water, which normally sets alarm bells going, but it is a long drive from Dublin, which put our motivation levels askew.

We chose a simple trip, onto "sheltered" Achill North Sound, with the wind behind us, and the tide with us outward, the two nicely co-operating so that the surface should, and did, look, if not nicely flat, then, at least orderly.

As we progressed out, the wind started seeming worse, and worse. I didn't have to paddle. I found I could brace on one side so that the other blade caught the wind, and because I have a rudder, I managed well enough, at first. Behind me, the rudderless Des was sprinting to try to keep up, and Mary likewise.

Eventually it got huge, and when someone hinted mutiny, I had turned my boat for home before anyone else might restore order. Then the fun started. Des and Mary had swapped boats for the crack and each was unfamiliar with the floatation device they were sitting in. Mary couldn't get Des's big yoke turned into the wind, so a raft was needed to adjust the skeg. That didn't work either so a tow was needed just to provide directional stability.

We bounced around and lost ground to the wind with every minute of tangle sorting and trying to get the tow line attached. I found my end of the line wasn't in place and had to be retrieved. Then I brought her end of the towline round in front of me (which is much the easier way) as I attached it to Mary's boat, which meant I had to pass the line over my head. This is a difficult manoeuvre in a swimming pool, and out there in a bounce, I made a dog's dinner of it. Also, I hooked it under both decklines just behind the front rivet, meaning that if the rivet popped, the line was gone.

...inching into that wind for an eternity

Struggling back in convoy, the wind nearly whipped the paddles out of our hands several worrying times (not Des' though, he uses those Inuit yokes, short and thin like currach oars, which don't suffer in wind). Eventually we rested in the lee of a small island after inching into that wind for an eternity, and the other two swapped boats back again.

In due course, we stuck our noses out round the corner of our little bit of shelter and it was the same problem again. This time Des could take the tow the rest of the way home.

Again we lost ground setting it up, this time because Des' tow line wouldn't run out from its retaining sack. The reason, it turned out, was the small spring loaded device he uses for neatness to keep the bag closed when not in use. It had to be released, but numb fingers weren't up to the job, at least, not quickly and easily. (*Editors note: this has now been replaced by velcro*)

Eventually back safe on our beach I fell into three inches of water getting out of my cockpit, with half a dozen schoolchildren watching, with predictable result. You can tell a paddler is jaded when that happens. Just how tired he is can be guessed from how slowly he gets up. Then I lifted the front of the boat by the toggle and the cord snapped.

Who would have thought that experienced hands would have so much to learn, early in the season or not? We might have overlooked the small matter of messing up attaching a tow line in combat, but there was no escaping we had underestimated an offshore breeze just because we couldn't see the white stuff because we weren't looking upwind, a detail we all learned about as first year apprentices. We all agreed it had been "an instructional day".

COMMITMENT AND OPEN CROSSINGS

by **Bill Taylor**

Reviewed by Paul Durnan

The title of this book is particularly apt, as there are two serious open sea crossings in the expedition that was undertaken by Bill Taylor, Mick Wibrew and Richard Elliott in 1986. The task they set themselves was to complete the first circumnavigation of Britain and Ireland. They completed their journey between 19th April and 22nd September.

The book is well laid out even for those readers unfamiliar with sea kayaking. The author spends the first few chapters of the book setting the scene. One of the insights that the reader gets is the magnitude and sheer scale of the planning and preparation required in undertaking something of this nature.

There are some excellent photographs in both colour and black and white. These help greatly in the real appreciation of the beauty of nature showing the changing moods of the sea and the headlands, bays and varied coastline of England, Ireland and Scotland. Maps showing the groups progress help the reader to follow the expedition.

The fact that Taylor & Co. only took four and an half weeks to paddle around the south, west and north coast of Ireland meant that the time devoted to this section of coastline in the book is quite small.

They completed Ireland so quickly due to good weather and the fact that they would normally try to get the assistance of the tidal stream twice in each twenty four hour

period. This meant very early starts, late finishes and sitting in a tent for a few hours waiting for the tide to change to their preferred direction of travel.

The preparations they made for their trip are discussed in detail. Some interesting points to consider - were the team to work as a unit as far as equipment was concerned or should each team member be self-sufficient? By choosing to work as a single team meant that all three would finish together as they started. This single decision had a huge bearing on the overall outcome of the expedition. In particular the size of the team was critical from the point of view of logistics. Taylor decided that three was enough, as four would pose many extra problems the main one being an extra tent.

The equipment used and certain modifications they made are discussed in detail, for example the three paddlers had C-trim rudders fitted and this appears to have been relatively new edition to sea kayaks back in 1986. Taylor gives reasons for his choice of gear, equipment and shore/paddling clothes, which is quite interesting.

Much of the time the reading is light and interesting there are times when it gets a little repetitive particularly on their homeward bound journey down along the East coast of England.

Interestingly, the last few pages of the book are given over to the aftermath of the trip and the effects it had on each of the team. All had career changes one way or the other. Bill Taylor found it extremely difficult to settle in to ordinary life again.

This book was an interesting read and I would recommend to anyone interested in the sea, not just sea paddlers. The information that can be extracted from the experiences of these three paddlers is valuable to anyone thinking of an extended sea trip.

Printed by Diadem Books, ISBN 0 906371 732, GB£16.95 hardback.

ISKA Spring Meet, Bunbeg

Mayday Weekend 1999

By David Walsh

No-one I spoke to could even guess how many, never mind precisely who, were at Bunbeg in west Donegal that weekend. A safe bet would be about 25 or so. The problem in the counting wasn't only the laid back accommodation (based on the hostile on the pier), with some camping, some in B&Bs, and yet others in camper-vans. The real

problem was the weather. For three glorious days the sun shone, the wind did not blow, the tides went out in the morning and in the evening, and dreams were realised.

I heard someone say they didn't know whether they were more confused that Da ve Walsh didn't know the tides for the weekend or that Des Keaney didn't care. It was the weekend of the Atlantic without the Adrenaline.

Anyone with ambition was made. Tory and camp the night - easy. Tory and back in the day - no problem. Round Tory and back the same day - just get up early. Grasshopper Warbler was the main avian interest, and we all heard our first Cuckoo of the year.

That the crowd attending was both huge and varied became apparent soon enough. The early risers on Saturday were on their way round Aran or Tory even before others who had been dancing night before away in Heudi Beags had begun to face their cereals and coffee.

We lost some early risers to Tory right away, where the big story was a paddler seen heading for Rockall at one stage, but actually, it was only Richie Dalton. His skeg is banjaxed and without it, he cannot steer, even in a gentle cross-wind. Some circumnavigated, some camped, some returned, all enjoyed. We are reliably informed that the King of Tory officially changed his attitude to sea kayakers since their visit, though I never reliably learned just who Ciaran Smith was dancing with at the salient moment.

The most popular big paddle Saturday was the round of Aranmore, which Clare Crinion pronounced "Hell". Others with damaged boats or egos chose softer options, and half a dozen islands were bagged for Oileáin, besides lots of exploration and sunbathing. The group that reassembled that night for a posh meal out looked like assorted strawberries, lobsters, and glow worms.

Sunday was much the same. The early risers, who all seemed to have northern accents, went for much the same expedition as the throng, just earlier. The main bunch set off at the crack of noon, and met them coming back. Round Owey was the *tour de jour*, and sea cave after sea arch kept us all awe struck. Truly that is some piece of granite. Walking the village, we met two former islanders working cleaning drains, and both were related to Daniel, and one of them to Packie as well, on his mother's side.

Monday, no-one wanted to shuttle, so some went for Errigal, some for the beach, and the rest set out from Bunbeg on the falling tide, and caught it back in that evening. First we went round Gola and that almost exhausted our enthusiasm as the sun, which had been kind all weekend, really wound itself up and gave us a rare treat. We met rock-climbers out the west side and traded photography. We enjoyed a couple of hours ashore on this lovely island, swimming every hour or so to cool down.

Afloat again, we went round Umfin and explored just about every crack and crevice in it to identify the supposed through cave, and found it eventually. It is, though, not to be

recommended, and only the mankiest patchedest unlovedest boat went through, with new boy Enda Cummins on board. Then it was homeward bound in tee shirts, effortlessly tearing up the bay to Bunbeg on a glorious evening, tired but happy.

A Crappy Subject

By

Peter Cork

Real wilderness areas do not exist in Ireland. Almost every square metre of the country is interfered with by humans or their livestock. Our offshore islands are often, but not always, among the least interfered with environments. It is important that we look after them. Sea kayaking trips can involve overnight camping and it is essential that we do not degrade our camping sites, particularly on the islands.

Everyone is aware of the need to take away all their rubbish and leave their campsite no worse than they found it. It would be exemplary to take away even that little bit 'extra', since there are so few places we go to that have not already been littered. Some of us forget that objects thrown into a campfire which have not been consumed by the flames also constitute litter. If we build a campfire, we should do so at the site of a previous fire if one exists.

We should be particularly careful with our body wastes. Where is the environmentally correct place to have a bowel movement when one is camping out? It is definitely not in a location where it will be 'discovered' by an unsuspecting walker or by another camper who also chooses that same secluded spot because it is one of the few secluded spots.

The answer to this question is: faeces should be deposited between the high water and low water marks. This is quite convenient since it is often easy to find a discreet spot along our rocky shores. The incoming tide removes the waste. It is rapidly broken down, diluted and, hey presto, it is gone, never to rear its ugly stool again!

Toilet paper should not be used. One should clean oneself with seawater. It is far more hygienic and does not add further waste matter. I know this requires a cultural shift to the east, which some of you may find a little awkward, but it's the way to go. This outdoor practice is what is recommended by coastal park authorities in the US in even their most remote lands. Generally, they have the right ideas when it comes to looking after those places.

Some people who would never think of throwing an empty packet over a hedge see nothing wrong with placing human waste there. It may be organic but it isn't friendly stuff. So, make that hike down among the seaweed and the clear, refreshing water.

A Near Miss

A note from Dave Kavanagh to the Editor

Hi Des,

Just back from a nice weekend on 'Bofin - Brian Coll and I went around 'Bofin and 'Shark, but a lot of time was spent in the pub too!

Two friends of mine had a serious scare on the way out on Saturday night when they got caught in fog - they had no deck compasses and they couldn't find their hand compass. Luckily for them, it cleared after a few minutes.

They had turned back (on the basis of the swell direction) before it cleared up again. It's the last time they're going to rush onto the water at night without doing the basic checks. They had lights, strobe, flares, VHF, light winds, low swell, etc. and know the area very well but it goes to show how easy it is to f*up. Needless to say, they are very embarrassed.

Dave

P.S. On the subject of near misses, I think it would be a very good idea for TnD to include a regular section on incidents like the one I described. All of us have had scares on the water, and by letting people see what has happened to others, awareness of the continual need for safety (and, also, awareness of how subtle the dangers can be) could be raised.

I have a few editions of a book that the Americans publish every three years on white water incidents, but I think a collection of similar sea kayaking incidents could be very valuable.

Editors note: I absolutely agree – see the articles by David Walsh on Inishbiggle and elsewhere in this issue. You will be interested in "Sea Kayaker's Deep Trouble" which is available from Sea Kayaker magazine in the States and relates 20 true stories of sea kayaking accidents (some fatal) and their lessons. It's available at \$17.95 + \$7 p&p (airmail) from Sea Kayaker, PO Box 17170, Seattle WA 98107 -870, USA (e-mail mail @seakayaker.com or see the web site at www.seakayakermag.com

Weather Forecast Times

RTE have made the times even more confusing since the last update. The Sea Area forecasts are at:

Mon-Fri 06:02 12:47 19:02 23:55

Sat/Sun 06:02 12:53 18:34 23:55

The early and late forecasts remain the same, the lunchtime and evening forecasts are closer together at the weekend. Simple!

BBC (LW 198 kHz, FM 92.4-96.1 mHz)

They're not much better....

05:35 LW & FM + Inshore waters forecast

12:01 LW only

17:54 LW only Mon-Fri

00:48 LW & FM + Inshore waters forecast

Buying or selling a boat?

Contact Des Keaney who may be able to put you in contact with a buyer or seller.

Dolphins in Irish Waters

By Paul Bracken

In this newsletter, we continue the profile of some of the dolphins that swim around our coasts. Also included is a briefing on the 51st meeting of the International Whaling Commission which took place in May.

White-Beaked Dolphin

The White-Beaked dolphin is a large and very robust dolphin. The body pattern of white, grey and black can vary greatly between individual dolphins. They are sometimes confused with the Atlantic White-sided dolphin; however they are slightly larger and do not have the yellow-streaked sides which are characteristic of the Atlantic Dolphin.

White-beaked Dolphins are very energetic and love to bow-ride, especially in front of large, fast-moving vessels. If spotted, make the most of it as they tend to lose interest quickly. They are fast, powerful swimmers and will breach, usually onto their back or side. They mix well with other species and group sizes can vary, usually up to around 50. Groups numbering as many as 1500 have been recorded.

Their population is unknown and the main threats to their lives are from drift nets and the whaler's harpoon. Their range covers a wide area but can be split into two distinct regions; the East Coast of America, around Cape Cod and an area covering Greenland, Iceland to the North and Northern Spain and Portugal to the south. This range covers all Irish coastal areas and they appear to be present all year round. The main concentration is over the continental shelf where there is an abundance of squid and small fish. An adult grows to a length of over 9 feet and can weigh up to 600 lbs.

Bottlenose Dolphin

Depending on the geographical region in which it lives, the Bottlenose Dolphin can vary greatly in size, shape and colour. There are however, two main varieties; a smaller inshore kind and a larger, more robust kind that lives mainly offshore. The Shannon Dolphins belong to the first variety. The most striking features of the Bottlenose Dolphin are its prominent, dark dorsal fin and its inquisitive and active behaviour. Its range is widespread and although its population is unknown, there is evidence to suggest that it is decreasing in numbers, especially in parts of Northern Europe, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The main causes for this reduction in numbers includes drift nets, pollution and habitat destruction.

The Bottlenose Dolphin is highly active at the surface. It lobs tails, bowrides, bodysurfs and breaches. It has been known when breaching to leap several metres high! The group size varies; up to 10 inshore and typically 25 offshore, although there have been recorded sightings of up to 500 offshore. They mix well with other cetaceans, as well as sharks and sea turtles. Wild, lone individuals (usually males) sometimes roam on their own until settling in one area where there is an ample food supply and regular human contact. Here they will stay for a number of years and, like Fungi in Dingle, they will bring joy to many people.

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

The Atlantic White-sided Dolphin is a fairly large and robust cetacean. A sociable animal, it is often found in the company of other whales and dolphins. One of its most

distinguishing features is a yellowish streak on either side of the tail stock. They are very fast swimmers, frequently breach and lobtail. They generally swim alongside slow boats and bowride in front of faster ones. The group size is usually under 50 inshore and up to 100 offshore, with recorded sightings of up to 1000 offshore. Individual and mass strandings are relatively common.

Its range is very similar to that of the White-beaked Dolphin and within these areas is easiest located along the edge of the continental shelf. Its population is unknown and like many other cetaceans, the main threats to its survival are drift nets and whaling. Because of its range, it falls prey to Norwegian factory whaling ships. Newborn, it can measure as little as 39 inches and can grow to a length of between 6' 3" and 8'3". An adult can grow to a weight of 440 lbs..

Striped Dolphin

The Striped Dolphin is easy to identify at sea. It has a dark, prominent fin, a dark stripe from eye to flipper and a prominent beak. It is sometimes confused with the Common Dolphin except that it does not have the yellow hourglass pattern which is a feature of the Common Dolphin. Although a common species, its population has declined in recent years, again due partially to whaling and drift nets.

The Striped Dolphin is highly active and frequently breaches, sometimes as high as 7 metres. It also tail-spins, back somersaults and when swimming at speed, up to one-third of the group may be above the surface of the water at any one time. Dives usually last between 5 and 10 minutes and when feeding can dive to a depth of at least 200 metres. Group size typically varies between 10 and 500, with sightings recorded of up to 3000 in a group. Its distribution is wide, mainly in tropical and subtropical, though also in warm temperate waters. Its range covers all Irish coasts but is usually to be found offshore and when near land, usually in very deep water. An adult can grow to a length of 8'3" and a weight of 300 lbs..

VOICE can be contacted at 14 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin 2, Ph. 01 -6618123, email avoice@iol.ie. The Campaign for Animals at Risk can be contacted at email pbracken@indigo.ie.

Ocean Paddler Magazine

Ocean Paddler magazine has gone into liquidation. When the previous European publication, *Sea Paddler*, went belly-up, its editor Kevin Mansell circulated everyone with details, apologies and offers of refunds. In the process he retained his personal credibility and the affection of English speaking sea-paddlers for his efforts.

Unfortunately, this is not the case with *Ocean Paddler*. Our efforts to find out what was happening were unsuccessful. We only discovered the fate of the magazine from third parties. Editor J.J.Blackburn returns neither phone calls nor e-mails.

Anyone who subscribes to the International Sea Kayak Association newsletter can get a more personal view from editor John Ramwell. John was the previously editor of *Ocean Paddler* but resigned after two issues.

Des Keaney and David Walsh

RULE BRETAGNE

Ernie Whalley & 'Beeswing' visit Brittany and The Charente Maritime

It wasn't meant as a kayaking holiday, but as 'Victoria', my faithful Land Rover 110 is permanently kitted out with Easy Loader and J -Bars, it only takes minutes to stow 'Beeswing' on top. I have a rooted aversion to lazing on beaches so it would be good to occupy myself practising bracing on waves and wet exits while Ann soaked up the sun and devoured the novels she'd not had time to read due to pressure of work. Besides, I reasoned, we would be able to stow clothes in the boat on the return leg, leaving more room in the back of the Lanny for cases of wine.

By setting out in Mid May we got an excellent deal with Irish Ferries. Rosslare/Cherbourg, Cherbourg/Portsmouth, to Mid Wales for a family reunion and then home via Pembroke/Rosslare for around £1R350, which included a penalty for the combined height of vehicle & kayak. Cherbourg isn't the ideal destination, it takes a long time to get off the peninsula and into the heart of Brittany, St.Malo or Roscoff would have been preferable.

Our new tent is a Khyam Super Vis -a-vis, a development of the dome concept, with sleeping compartments either side of a central 'corridor' and doorways front and rear. With standing headroom in the middle it offers palatial housing for two people on an extended holiday. The Khyam proved to be soundly constructed, with a flysheet of rip stop polyester and inner tents of breathable polycotton. The flap on the top was of generous proportions, they must have read Les Harrington's article in *Treasna*.

It remained impressively leak and draught proof and could be erected in under five minutes, thanks to a patented pole joint system, outer first so the inners didn't get wet even if it rained stair rods. Sleeping four in comfort and six at a pinch, the Super Vis -a-vis would make superb touring accommodation for a group of kayakers, with tent, inners, poles and pegs split for transportation between two or three kayaks.

First stop in France was Binic, a small resort on the Côte d'Armor. We found it by accident and loved it. Quiet and civilised in June, apparently it's chockers with French holidaymakers in July and August, people sleeping in their garage having let their house!. There are two fine beaches, where the tide whooshes in and out like an express train. The Centre Nautique in the bay next door has more convenient access to the sea and will allow you to launch from their slip if you ask politely, preferably in French.

A hut on the esplanade acts as HQ for the local Kayak de Mer club, posted on the outside is a full programme of rades and randonnees, not sure what the difference is as I didn't manage to contact the secretary despite phoning a few times. Brittany is awash with sea kayaking opportunities, the Côte d'Armor being proud enough of their facilities to publish a brochure. There are clubs at Lancieux, Lannion and Binic and Centres Nautiques at Perros-Guirec, St.Cast, St.Jacut, Ploubazlanec and the youth hostel at Paimpol is listed as having sea kayaks.

From Binic we went inland, to Lac de Guerledan, actually a widening of the river Blavet, a bit like Loch Derg's relationship with The Shannon. There's a Kayak Club at Mur -de-Bretagne at the head of the 'lake'. I launched from a stone jetty at the appropriately named Camping Nautic, into a quiet backwater.

Paddling into the main stream I encountered some English 'dogs on leashes', waterskiers who tore past too close, turning tranquil Guerledan into an imitation of Portrush in November. I capsized in the wash and hollered in vain for Mike McClure who always seems to be around when I fall over, but no luck. I kept my composure and tried a roll, why not, I'd read the chapter in Derek Hutchinson's book over and over again. Amazing, it seemed to be working but alas I didn't keep my knees hooked under the deck and slid out of the boat.

The banks on either side rose steeply, offering no comfort. I spotted the ski club jetty and swam for it, pulling the boat behind me with the paddle, which I looped on to the deck lines. The outboard sides of the jetty were too high to climb so I pushed the boat through a gap in the dock and duck-dived after it. One inversion had 'Beeswing' 95% empty, great things these sloping bulkheads, good job 'cos I'd left the pump handle in the Lanny. I paddled home, hugging the shore.

Next day we went to the coast, at the Golfe du Morbihan, a veritable sea kayakers paradise. Morbihan is a huge 'inland sea', speckled with islands, many of them privately owned. Bird life is abundant; they feed off the oyster beds. Kerners and St.Arvel on the less civilised south side would make excellent HQs, particularly the former, which boasts a beautifully kept campsite adjacent to the slip. Both have bases where sea kayaks may be hired and where half, whole day and overnight trips are organised. We also spent a few days at Camping du Lac near La Trinite sur Mer, an elegant small seaside resort on the other side. In addition to paddling the Golfe, I spent some time exploring the exceedingly pleasant River Crach (pronounced craic), usually in the hours after dawn – at last I've found a bonus in my insomnia!

The local oyster farmer gave me a trip on his boat, plus a dozen fines de clair and some dark strong Jenlan beer to wash them down with. Explaining the derivation of 'Beeswing' to a bevy of Bretons was a tricky business but I coped. Ruth Bracken would have been proud of me. 'C'est l'aile d' un insect qui fait du miel...' 'Une abeille?' 'Oui, une abeille. C'est aussi un village en Ecosse et aussi le nom d'une chanson favorite.' 'Par Elvis?' 'Non, par Richard Thompson'. 'Qui?' 'Un chansonnier Anglais....'

The Golfe du Morbihan is an area which I know will draw me back time and time again, particularly as the weather turned nasty when we were at Kerners, preventing me from exploring as much as I would have liked. Under pressure to find Ann some sun, we pushed on South to Saint Palais-sur-Mer, ten years ago a delightful village; now absorbed into the huge resort of Royan. No kayaking here, big seas and an inhospitable coastline saw to that.

Instead we sought the sanctuary of Les Trois Canards, an exceptional restaurant at Arvert. The proprietor turned out to be a sea kayak freak and clambered up on Victoria's roof to inspect the boat. He did most of his sea stuff in Brittany, surprise, surprise. He also recommended paddling the wide stretch of the Charente, between Rochefort and Saintes, worth it, he opined, to view the impressive chateaux flanking the river.

We drove north to La Rochelle and, miraculously the weather improved. We hung loose for a few days, savouring the history, the mellow stonework of the bastion and the old town, the stunning modern architecture in the environs, the chic shopping and the many fine restaurants and cafes.

On the homeward run we stopped off at Morgat, on the Croizon peninsula, commended to me by a French girl I'd met in Dublin. The town proved vile and building works on the main beach turned the sea to a brown lather. I launched from the public slip, a task made difficult by high winds and high walls, and paddled strenuously to put green water under my skeg. A small beach on the far end of the bay made for a rendezvous with other kayakers.

Giant caves beckoned but it proved too difficult to paddle in so I beached again and donned snorkel and flippers. My Q40 waterproof torch proved an asset when it came to exploring. They were indeed stunning, vaults of 30 to 40 feet high. Later, I washed 'Beeswing' at the Centre Nautique, a government sponsored 'club' for watersports activities. It was impressively equipped, with at least a dozen poly sea kayaks and an equal number of surfing 'ride-ons'.

Looking at the large scale map on the clubhouse wall, the locale, just south of the port of Brest, seemed interesting enough but didn't have the charm of the Golfe du Morbihan. Before we left France we couldn't resist a return to Binic, this time finding a splendid municipal campsite on the cliff tops overlooking the town. If we'd had another week I would have made for the Ile de Brehat on the Channel coast, spoken about with reverence by every Breton sea kayaker I met. Next time, eh? And preferably soon.

P.S. Bretons are nice people. Anyone lucky enough to get to the meet at Ile de Batz should have a seriously good time.

International Whaling Commission Update

By Paul Bracken

During the run-up to the IWC meetings in Grenada much lobbying was done by NGO's fearful that the Irish Commissioner might try and reintroduce for discussion in part or in full his controversial proposals. The Irish Proposals were first tabled for discussion in 1997 and many believed that if ratified would have resulted in a resumption of commercial whaling. If the commission had accepted these proposals it would also have legitimized Norway and Japan, who continue whaling despite the current moratorium.

we could be looking at large-scale commercial whaling In the lead up to this years meeting it appeared that there was a weakening of resolve among the Commissioners who had previously objected to the Irish Proposals. VOICE feared that a compromised set of proposals would have been placed on the agenda and if that happened we could be looking at large-scale commercial whaling and the possible down listing of certain whales at next years CITES meeting. CITES is an International Treaty, that amongst other things agrees quotas on the trade in endangered species. This Treaty has been signed by Ireland, but not yet ratified.

We could be looking at large-scale commercial whaling

VOICE joined forces with the Campaign for Animals at Risk and 50 other Irish Animal Welfare Groups in opposing any attempt to table these Proposals for discussion. In rejecting them we endorsed 'A Positive Strategy for the International Whaling Commission' as proposed by a number of NGO's, including the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the Environmental Investigation Agency.

Over 125 groups worldwide supported these initiatives. VOICE also called for an urgent meeting with Minister Sile deValera. As it happened the Proposals were not officially discussed and although Japan lobbied hard to gain concessions they did not achieve much. They did however advise that they intended to lobby for some downlisting at next years CITES meeting, and expected to get the support of other countries, including Norway.

VOICE and the Campaign for Animals at Risk will be working hard in the run-up to next years meetings to alert the public of the issues and to lobby the Irish Government to ratify the CITES Treaty. Minister deValera is currently examining a letter that I sent to her

prior to the IWC meeting and I remain hopeful of a meeting in the next few weeks. The text of this letter appears on our web site.

Trevor Sargent T.D. has tabled 2 questions in the Dail on our behalf, the first one requesting that the Minister meet me to discuss the Strategy for the IWC and the second one requesting clarification as to the Governments delay in ratifying CITES.



Paul Bracken represents VOICE and the Campaign for Animals at Risk, and can be contacted at pbracken@indigo.ie or visit the VOICE web site at www.voice.buz.org

River Ocean Kayak

Marc Jegou of River Ocean Kayak is now running courses in Co.Clare. Here's what they say...

"We run trips out of Ballyvaughan every day (dependant on weather). Phone beforehand to reserve and find out meeting time, usually around the time of high tide.

Price for 1/2 day - adults £18, under 16's £15. Group rates possible. Full day trips at £30 per person.

Courses Mon to Fri every week (2 1/2 hours per day) adults £65, under 16's £50

Ph. 065 77043, mobile 086 8567910, e-mail riverocean @esatclear.ie"

Horror Stories!

Will you share your near misses with us? It can be as long or as short, serious or funny as you like... We're particularly interested in the lessons learned and your anonymity will be maintained if requested.

What's On?

Symposium

Achill, 23rd – 25th October 1999

See enclosed promotional leaflet for details

"Come and Try It" Weekend

Clifden, 11th – 12th September 1999

While the weekend is aimed to introduce river kayakers to the sea, it is very much a meet for all in the Association. Full details on page 2.

"Everyone is welcome!"

Mini Meet

Carlingford

25th September 1999

An extra meet has been organised by the Annalong Club for the weekend of 25th – 26th September. The meeting point is the harbour in Carlingford at 11:00. It's essentially a Saturday Meet but with an option to stay on for Saturday night craic and more paddling on Sunday.

If you need any more information, contact David Hughes at home on 0801 8206 27618, e-mail

d.hughes @qub.ac.uk

Your Personal Details

Please be sure to keep us up to date on your personal details. Have we got your address right? Have we got you email address?

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are £10 per calendar year and can be paid to 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!

Additional names sharing *Treasna na dTonnta* at the one address may be added at £ 5.00 extra each

I.C.U. membership/registration is available at an additional £2 p.a.. This is only useful for those who are not registered with the I.C.U. either individually or through another club.

ISKA Contacts

Edited by: Des Keaney

Chairman: David Walsh

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Irish Sea Kayaking Association. Reference to waters does not imply that access is permitted or that they are safe in all conditions. The Editor and ISKA cannot be held responsible for any omissions of references to hazards from notes on these waters. They do not necessarily support advertising claims nor do they hold themselves responsible for inadequacies in items of equipment reviewed here.