

Treasna na dTonnta

“Across the Waves”

Newsletter of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association

No.28

Burren

May 2002

Roisín Mc Donnell & Paul Murphy

While they weren't responsible for the stunning weather conditions, Marc Jegou and his team put on an impressive range of trips, workshops, talks and catering over the three days of the ISKA Symposium 2002.

The well-chosen Turlough Adventure Centre offered the options of bunk-house accommodations or camping (for the purists). The latter were fortunate in their choice with the prevailing dry conditions and were lulled from their slumbers in the dewy dawn by the call of the cuckoo (and a neighbouring farmer's clanking Hymac). Joanna and her team at the Centre did a great job in providing the sustenance for the 60 odd paddlers days ahead on the high seas.

The options available for paddling spanned all levels and thanks to the ISKA core of "Capn's", there were four separate trips available on Saturday and Sunday. Having opted for the Cliffs of Moher trip on Saturday, we launched from Doolin onto a relatively benign sea in comparison with the previous weekends gales. The sun shone with sufficient intensity to leave a tide-mark on the paddlers arms and necks. Passing between the cliffs and sea-stack under O'Briens Tower, squadrons of guillemots launched their regimented nest lines whirring frantically as they pulled out over the fleet of kayaks. Ants on the cliff-top peered enviously down on the scene. The sea-arch at Hags Head proved amenable to passage (apparently a rare event), though no-one hung around under it too long.

And so, a hungry hoard of reddened paddlers descended on the Whitethorn Restaurant to feast while watching the proverbial sun go down on Galway Bay. Post-dinner, the assembled, unwittingly mimicking the hauled-out harbour seals on the neighbouring skerries, were subjected to demanding mental activity as the table quiz begun. A taxing 80 questions later saw the DB2 Team victorious, but there were more winners overall than losers as spot-prizes were in plentiful supply.

A wonderful selection of items were generously donated for the purpose by Patagonia (Dublin), Rough Stuff (Dublin), Peter Hennessen, Aillwee Cave (Ballyvaughan), The Rock Shop (Liscannor), River Deep Mountain High (Galway), Valley C anoe Products, various Ballyvaughan shops, the Whitethorn Restaurant and Cascade Design (Cork) who donated a great range of great gear.

Sunday was just that, - a sunny day. It started as it was set to continue, somewhat relaxed. Again a range of options were lined up with trips of varying commitment, surfing, rescue clinics and a rescue demonstration at Bishops Quarter in conjunction with the Doolin Coast Guard. Opting for the trip round Blackhead, we launched through breaking surf at Fanore and first paddled south to seek out the Doolin dolphin at Poulmagrahaun. With wonderful memories of our close encounters during the ISKA trip to the Aran Islands last August, we were hoping for another chance to meet with this curious cetacean. However, it's a big ocean out there and she wasn't to be seen.

Turning to run north with the gentle swell, we rounded Black Head into progressively calmer seas. A chance meeting with the group supposedly having an easy days paddle (Bishops Quarter to Black Head return) provided a rare spectacle of close to 40 kayaks on the water together. Shortly after, we stopped off at Coolsiva Quay for lunch, and were treated to a demonstration of raw survival skill blended with culinary panache, as Pat Diamond first blithely pulled three police simultaneously on his hand line, and then proceeded to cook them in his MFSU (mobile fish-smoking unit). This of course attracted the predatory attention of the paddling-pod and poor Pat did well to get a taste of his lunch.

Coming ashore at Monks in Ballyvaughan was a strategic manoeuvre given the considerable dehydration that all were subjected to over the not insignificant paddle. Another fine feast was had that evening at the Whitethorn, which was followed by a slide show of a seriously committing, "deliverance-style" adventure by Peter Cork. The trip was inspirational and a testimony to the adage that "A ship is safe in harbour, but that is not what ships were built for".

Monday started with a post-brekkie ISKA AGM. This was followed by opportunities to practice rolling, surfing or a short trip in the bay. It also offered the chance to hear Willie Stedmond explain how one goes about making a cedar-strip kayak. His skill in

this regard is quite stunning and the fruit of his labours was as enviously eye-balled by all. Ben Johnston's plans to establish a boat-building centre at Aillwee could see a lot of interest from folk who fancy not only paddling their own canoes, but building them too.

All in all, a great weekend! Thanks and congratulations to all who made it work.

Muglins Sound

Des Keaney

The radio had been issuing gale warnings all day. It was at the top of a 4, gusting 6 southerly when Ciaran Clissman and I headed down Dalkey Sound. There was a strange feel to the evening. A line of breakers was running north with the flooding tide for half a mile off the end of Muglins. I'd been paddling this area for years but had never seen anything like it before.

With a flooding tide and a strong southerly, I was expecting a big lump off the end of Dalkey. It was bumpy but not the usual maelstrom which happens in these conditions. Odd again.

We bounced around the back of the island and angled off across the rollers towards the Muglins. Half way across we decided to make the best of the conditions and head downwind. Then it got interesting. We were rocketing down the faces of steep waves, maybe about four feet in height with a good number of them breaking. After about 10 minutes, we were coming out of the big stuff so we edged over to Dalkey Island. "It's big, but not as big as Anglesey" said Ciaran. We'd been on a rough water course in Wales recently. "Yeah, let's go around for another skite" says I. Talk about tempting fate.

Ciaran was running a couple of boat lengths ahead of me. My stern started to lift... and lift. I glanced behind. A really big one was rearing up above my head. My bow started digging in. The water was up to the hatch cover... then the cockpit. "Jesus! This thing is going vertical" I leaned back and stuck in the paddle blade in a desperate attempt to lift and turn the boat. It worked. I crashed backwards over the crest of the wave, just as it broke.

Ciaran disappeared behind the wall of water. I could only see the green back of the wave, turning to white at the top, maybe six to seven feet tall. "If he survives that, he's good," I thought, not at all fancying a rescue in the conditions.

It seemed to take an age before he reappeared, still upright, bouncing off to the left. I grinned in relief. "Well done!" I yelled. Most of his response was lost in the roar of the water but I definitely heard something about 'brown underpants'.

Such evenings are memories made of.

West Clare March 2002

Pat Diamond

Soldiers in the First World War must have had a similar feeling when they looked out over no-man's land and realised they had to go out into it. The small group of kayakers huddled together in a F4/F6 breeze at the top of the cliffs outside Kilkee and peered over the edge. It was pretty wild down below as waves exploded against the cliff base or burst 40 to 50 feet up collapsed slabs of rock. The trip was judged marginal but the four silver-tongued locals, Matt, Martin, Peter and Chris convinced us that it would be better further along the coast and the convoy headed off to the Bridges of Ross near Loop Head for a sheltered put in.

The wind was less strong when we got there, which had been forecast, and the sea was calmer. After briefing and arranging shuttles the group headed off, missing the Bridges (only one arch remains) in our haste.

The coastal scenery was spectacular as we moved along. The cliffs got higher and the sea got bigger. Mostly it was a large following swell but complicated by constant reflecting waves. Off the headlands it was quite messy with full exposure to the wind, reflecting waves and the swell. I began to regret fitting new hip pads as my left leg began to go dead. It makes it very difficult to brace and lean into the waves and I found parts heavy going. But motivated by a determination not to roll (this was not the place) and encouragement from Matt and Mary I made steady headway. I realised that the hip pads were the source of my main problem and they were swiftly removed after rafting up with Matt. Very slowly some life returned to my leg and I got some flexibility in my hips making things more comfortable. Even Sean suffered a bit but this was more due to the combined effects of late night Guinness and copious red wine. Close into the cliffs the noise and energy was unbelievable, moving in close at one point allowed us to look back along the coast to view a large sea arch.

Soon our "half-way" stop at Goleen got clearer through the haze but only from the top of the massive swell. The size of the swell was hard to judge but it looked like at least the length of a kayak - 20 feet+ and the perception was of several times that as some of the group descended into the troughs. Radio messages indicated that it might not be possible to land due to conditions and it looked like it was going to be a matter of persevering and carrying on to Kilkee.

Coming close to the cove, the reason for the concern was clear. The swell was bursting over an adjoining reef on the near side and reflecting off a rock on the far side. The cove itself was narrow which amplified and concentrated the effects but inside was terra firma and food.

With good guidance from Matt, slow deliberate steady strokes and a lot of bouncing I made it into the cove and safety or so I thought. An important sea-kayaking lesson is that it is difficult to see surf from the seaward side but you soon find out about it. As if from nowhere what looked like a tidal wave was bearing down on me with an extremely happy looking Matt surfing on top. Paddling fast I soon had successfully surfed into the cove and the beach.

Shouts of "swimmer" got my attention and in the middle of the surf was the group leader Mary and in the best of tradition she had gone down with her boat in what can only have been a pre-planned rescue. As several others moved in for a complicated and trying rescue in the heavy surf I thought it would be better for me to provide shore cover. After a lot of work, Mary and her boat - but not her watch - were towed to shore.

Relaxing in the sun eating and sheltering from the wind has one effect - a desire to do nothing. Looking out at the surf and sea outside convinced the majority that it would be better to carry the boats out of the cove and go for dinner. Saturday night was quieter than Friday. An excellent Chinese meal in Yeungs (highly recommended), a couple of glasses of wine and it was straight to bed. I don't think anyone made it to the bars and it was an early night for everyone.

Sunday morning brought decision time. The Atlantic, with swells breaking outside Kilkee, and an "adventurous" sea off Mutton Island, or, a calm scenic trip to the islands in the Shannon estuary - guess which won?

The day was idyllic and a total contrast to the day before. A flat sea, little wind and sun most of the time. The group paddled to Carrickfoyle in Kerry with some sea mist being the only complication. On the way we were able to see in the distance dolphins on the bow wave of a tanker leaving the estuary but they ignored us. I guess a kayak just doesn't compare.

Carrickfoyle Castle is still a magnificent structure, five stories high and had at one time two surrounding walls. Most of the castle and one wall is still complete and includes a dovecote (for breeding pigeons for food).

The site guide told of the castle's destruction and execution of its Spanish and Irish defenders on Palm Sunday 1580. After a surprisingly long deliberation the more religious paddlers agreed that it was Palm Sunday and the anniversary of the castle's sacking.

The next stop-off was on Carrig Island and an inspection of the Napoleonic gun battery and emplacements. Strategically placed, it provided cover across to the battery on Scatterry Island on the opposite side of the estuary. Apparently they were not completed until after the Battle of the Trafalgar and the elimination of the threat of a French invasion. However, this one seems to make a good barn and loft for a local farmer and is sadly neglected.

The paddle back across the estuary was with sunshine and no wind. Scatterry Island has some splendid ruins including the highest round tower in Ireland. In what appears to be a catastrophic oversight the entrance door is at ground level, which must have been appreciated by any marauding Vikings. The church ruins are impressive with lots of good stonework still in place which led to an impromptu lecture from Peter, our resident stonemason, on how they would have cut and shaped the stone.

Time was getting on and most of us faced a long drive home and so after taking a stone from the island (this carries a guarantee that you will never drown) it was back into the boats and on to Kilrush. The paddle back was interesting as the tide was in full flow but concentrated in two narrow channels either side of Hog Island (one close to the island the other close to the shore at Kilrush). A good transit meant this could be crossed easily with a drift down to the exit point. The first three paddlers didn't seem to see this and appeared to have a lot of work to do against the stream. Maybe they were beginners!

Overall a great first weekend for 2002 with something for everyone. Thanks to all for organising the weekend, especially the local paddlers whose knowledge and experience of the area were invaluable.

Natural History File

Risso's Dolphin

Grampus griseus

(G. Curvier, 1812)

Derivation: From the Latin *grandis* for "great" and *piscis* for "fish" giving rise to the New Latin *grampus* for a "kind of whale" from the Middle Latin *griseus* for "grey".

Description:

Adult Risso's Dolphins are 3.6 to 4 m long. They are white or light grey in colour usually interrupted by dark dorsal fin, flippers and flukes. They have a tall falcate dorsal fin and extensive scarring is often visible. The appendages are very prominent: long, pointed flippers and a tall, slender, falcate dorsal fin, placed approximately at midback. They have a blunt snout which lacks a noticeable beak.

The species' most conspicuous external features are the colouration and markings of the adults. By adulthood much of the grey pigment has been lost. The head becomes almost completely white, with a dark area around each eye. Scarring is extensive; in fact, adults usually have a battered appearance., looking like bucket of white paint has been spilled on them.

Natural History:

Risso's Dolphins are occasionally seen as individuals or pairs, but they usually are more gregarious. Sometimes they swim in "echelon" formation, lined up abreast at evenly spaced intervals, a tactic that is probably effective in the search for prey. They are a deep water species but it is not unusual to find them with other oceanic cetaceans, particularly pilot whales.

Their principal prey is squid, and they probably eat fish at least occasionally.

Risso's Dolphins are active but not as acrobatic as many other dolphins. They flipper and fluke slap, skyhop and make breaching body slams during periods of intense activity, but at other times they simply roll at the surface. They very rarely bowride.

Risso's Dolphins are recorded regularly in Irish waters.

An Unseasonable Swim

Mary Butler

It was the end of a trip on Day 1 of the Kilkee Meet, and my anchor man, feeling a little worse for wear after a night on the town, had made a break for it as we approached Goleen Bay. This small inlet was a designated escape point on a trip from the Bridges of Ross to Kilkee. Continuous clapotis and weary paddlers meant we needed this escape.

The local pilots amongst the group had us prewarned that this landing was prone to surf but the swell being small that day, we decided that we would see what it would be like. We had the added advantage with our deliberations, of the three wise men (landlubbers for the day) perched on the cliff above the entrance to the bay. I radioed the concerns of the Clare paddlers to them, but they had monitored conditions and indicated the site as approachable...with Caution!

I was at the rear, watching out for any ominous waves that might follow us in, while Matt lead the charge.".....and let's see your reentry and roll Mary " was the end of the message over the VHF from the eagles above the bay. I did not reply, thinking 'Ha! I'm not getting wet.' Famous last words.

I looked over my shoulder for a final check and there it was - the fifty-year wave - a big, dirty dumper standing upright behind me. I paddled backwards, lay back on the deck and hoped for the best. The wave had another agenda - the boat looped and I was capsized the paddles were whipped from my hands and the boat pulled off me.

Sean was first on the scene - my "knight in shining armour". But this image was totally dashed as he shouted, " You will have to swim for it" Great! But I did - well, attempted to. I reached my boat but could not hold on to it -the surf kept lifting it out of the water. I felt quite vulnerable in the surf as I wear a lifejacket rather than a buoyancy aid and I thought about pulling the ripcord.

The Knight in shining armour Mark 11 to the rescue - Matt Corbett arrived but I could not hold on to his kayak either but luckily for me, he had released his towline and I had grabbed it. As I was being towed to safety, I thought my boat was gone, and wondered what I would paddle on Sunday. But Sean, redeeming his knighthood (armor slightly tarnished) had rescued it. Meanwhile Martin and Chris had fastened more lines and tows and I finally put my feet on terra firma.

It all turned out fine in the end. Lost one wrist watch and a cap to Davy Jones's locker, gained a few bruises and hmmmnn, I did get wet!

All Black Kayak

Des Keaney

New Zealand in February. Blue skies, shorts, sandals, and 23 degrees. Ahhhh, it's a tough station. My wife Marie and I were lucky enough to spend a month there this year. We had a wonderful time - friendly people, great scenery, lovely food, good roads and we even did a bit of sea kayaking.

We flew into Auckland and then to Great Barrier Island, about 90km away. Qantas were nice enough to upgrade us to Business Class on the 747 from LA. It was quite a culture shock to step from that into a rattling 8 seater Islander with duct tape around the windows.

As we strolled down to the village, I spotted a long black shape on the nearby beach, half hidden under some trees. "Holy Jesus, is that a currach?" Sure enough, it was a beautifully kept four man currach. We looked at each other... we'd just come 12000 miles and the first boat we see it was a currach? It belonged to "The Currach" pub (New Zealand is black with Irish Pubs), the Bean an Tí being from Caherciveen. They'd imported a builder from North Kerry who had done the job in a couple of weeks.

A week later we were at the KASK (Kiwi Association of Sea Kayakers) symposium, just outside Wellington at the bottom of the North Island.

KASK is the NZ equivalent to the ISKA. However, as New Zealand has no governing body like the ICU, KASK's job is a bit tougher than ours. Like the ISKA, KASK began when a fairly independent group of sea paddlers came together in a loose association. It's a huge psychological and administrative leap to a structured awards system. The other important organisation is the Sea Kayak Operators Association of New Zealand (SKOANZ), which represents commercial operators. They subscribe to a

voluntary code of practice. Membership is optional for operators. They run training courses which all their guides must go through.

The culture in NZ is much less litigious than in Ireland. However, given time, it's inevitable that it will reach levels comparable to the rest of the world. The challenge for KASK and SKOANZ is to get the right standard of training and awards in place before they're pushed into it.

About 70 paddlers attended the forum, from beginners to some of the best paddlers on the planet. The programme started on the Friday evening with a super presentation on Shackleton's Endurance expedition by someone lucky enough to get paid to work in the Antarctic, Richard Reaney. Richard is an expert on his subject and has done the crossing of South Georgia in the footsteps of Shackleton, Crean and Worsley. Saturday night's entertainment included the KASK AGM, dinner and entertainment which nearly destroyed the stage when a lazy tug-of-war team attached their end of the rope to it.

Things went a bit downhill after that. First of all, the wind had risen to about a F7 on the Saturday morning. All paddlers were split into pods of 6 plus a leader. This is an excellent idea assuming you have enough leaders, which they did. It's much better than some of the large groups we have to deal with.

However, there was no attempt to stream the pods. Therefore each pod had beginners and advanced and was reduced to the speed of the slowest or least confident. Also, the pods were all sent to the same destination, which was within the shelter of the bay. The crossing of the bay was terrifying for some and boring for others. There were problems with pod control, partly because some allowed their frustration to get the better of them and partly because the pods were so close together. Different trips for different standards would have been much better. Still, it was nice to get out on the water.

The short trip gave some time to look around at the different boats. Without exception, they use rudders. I got some funny looks when I said I wasn't used to one. I think they're great but I can't understand why they don't swop the rudder cables.

I watched a rescue session with a lot of interest. The big difference was they sent the person in the water to push down on the back of the capsized boat to help lift the bow out of the water and get the water out. A great idea in calm seas but when it's moving up and down?

I also got talking to Max Grant who owns Q-Kayaks (qualitykayaks.co.nz). If I tell you that they sell 10 kayaks a week through one shop alone, you'll get some idea of the size of kayaking in NZ. Their total production is around 100 a week, with around half of this being exported. The whole commercial scene is completely different in NZ. 10 minutes drive from the centre of Auckland, we'd visited Fergs Kayaks (fergskayaks.co.nz), on the shores of Mission Bay. I'd never been in a sea kayaking shop before! It was wonderful. Sea kayaks on wall racks, from racing boats to plastics. Drinking systems, roof racks, cags, spraydecks, you name it, they had it. They have a second shop on the harbour in Wellington, right in the city centre. They run short trips around the harbour from a floating pontoon, just outside the shop. Owen Whelan from Naas manages the shop. Small world.

Immediately after the forum, we caught the ferry across the Cook Strait to the South Island and went looking for a commercial kayaking trip. All the locals in Wellington had said, "don't go to Able Tasman". Able Tasman is a national park in the Northern corner of the island where there are lots of sea kayak operators.

We went to Able Tasman. It wasn't that I didn't trust their advice – I did. They really know their stuff. However, I did want to see and experience commercial sea kayaking at its peak. We found an operator near our B&B and booked in for the next day. We were to be brought 12 miles north by water taxi and then paddle back.

The next morning, we arrived at the beach aboard a minibus with a trailer load of doubles. I stared out the window in disbelief. I'd been expecting a harbour or pier where we'd catch the water taxi. No harbour, just mudflats that stretched out at least half a mile before meeting the water. "Jesus, we're not carrying doubles over that..... are we?" As rebellious thoughts passed through my head, a rusty old tractor appeared around the corner, pulling a 20' launch. Our boats were laid across the launch; we donned lifejackets and piled in after them. We trundled down to the water, the tractor reversed us in and we floated off. By this time, the air reverberated with three or four similar tractors, some with sea kayaks, some without, but all full of people. Ahhhh, this is my kind of sea kayaking – I didn't even get my feet wet!

Our guide was a New Zealander of Scottish descent called Bob McLachlin. We tend to forget that most people in New Zealand are relatively recent arrivals. The place was only 'discovered' by Europeans a little over 200 years ago and many people have arrived within the last couple of generations. Lots of them have either been to Ireland or have Irish ancestors. Bob spends the Southern Hemisphere summers guiding kayaking and rafting trips and moves north for the rest of the year. He had a wealth of knowledge on the local flora and fauna, history and customs. We saw a couple of dozen other kayaks but the place was far from overrun.

In peak season, the operators in Able Tasman can put 600 people on the water at any one time. I seriously doubt that there are 600 kayak seats in the whole of Ireland. A big advantage in NZ is that their summer temperatures are a couple of degrees above ours which makes a day on the water a lot more attractive than here. Their off season is only about 3 months long. Our 'on' season only lasts about 3 months. On the other hand, Jim Kennedy tells me that a friend of his in San Francisco employs 75 instructors. Yet the water temperature is only 8°. Why is the business so small in Ireland?

Anyway, the day was beautiful. Plenty of sun, blue water and sandy beaches. Bob planned the trip so that we'd be paddling with the wind all day long and even cooked lunch for us. Such service!

After Able Tasman, we drove down the West Coast to try to meet up with one of the legends of NZ kayaking., Paul Caffyn. Paul lives on a spectacular cliff overlooking the Tasman Sea, with surf pounding the rocks beneath his porch. In fact, it's probably pounding them a bit too much as he's lost some of his garden. He also has the best sea kayaking library in the world.

How does one describe this guy? He's done more sea kayaking trips than anyone I've ever heard of. Our flight home dramatically illustrated it for me. We took off from Christchurch in the South Island. Paul has paddled around it. We flew into Auckland on the North Island. Paul has paddled around it. Our next flight was to Sydney. Paul has paddled that coastline too. From Sydney, we headed NW to Hong Kong. 4 hours flying at 1000 kph took us overland to the Gulf of Carpentaria in Northern Australia. Paul paddled that too on his circumnavigation of Oz, which included a 36 -hour solo passage along the Nullabor cliffs. A couple of hours later, the coast of Malaysia was off to our left. Paul's latest trip was a short one – a mere 1000 kilometres up the west coast. Somewhere off to the right was Japan. He's paddled that too. Much later, we approached Heathrow over the Norfolk Broads. He paddled around Britain with Nigel Dennis. I didn't get near Alaska unfortunately but, and you've guessed it, he's paddled most of that too!

Quiet spoken and level headed, I was told later that his greatest skill is knowing when not to go to sea. Yeah, right.

I'd really wanted to get down to the Fjordland area in the SW. This is an area battered by the Southern Ocean into deep fjords and inlets. Kayakers on passage need to get food supplies dropped off by trawler as the whole place is inaccessible by road. Unfortunately, strained neck muscles, a bad cold and long hours behind the wheel stopped us in our tracks in Wanaka, about two thirds of the way down. Maybe next time.

I did get a few hours on the water with another hard man of New Zealand kayaking, John Kirk -Andersen. John had just completed the Coast to Coast marathon, where competitors run, cycle and paddle across the South Island (including the Southern Alps).

John's house is perched on a cliff edge overlooking Lyttleton Harbour, embarkation point of most of the polar expeditions of a century ago. Having read so much about Tom Crean of Annascaul, I was fascinated to see where he'd started his polar career when he joined Scott's ill-fated Discovery expedition. We had a very interesting trip out the harbour as far as one of the forts which guard the entrance. These were built around the 1870s when they expected the Russians to invade. An interesting feature was a revolving gun turret built into the island. They would aim the gun underground, pop it up on a lift, fire and drop it back down again.

After that, it was back to the airport and the start of the long journey home.

The trip was over much too soon. I was left with memories of wonderful people and a strong desire to return and paddle some of that wonderful coastline.

KASK www.kask.co.nz SKOANZ www.seakayak.org.nz

Sea Kayakers Help Needed.

Sea kayakers needed as support boats for swimmers for various swims during the Inishbofin -Killary Fjord Charity Challenge.

This festival starts on Saturday 24th August on Inishbofin, Co. Galway. The festival includes events like swims, triathlons, arm wrestling and various running and walking events.

Kayakers are needed at some of the swimming events as support for individual swimmers-to carry water and food and to act as guides on the open sea crossings.

- **Sunday 25th August** 1000hrs **Cleggan to Inishbofin Swim**
- **Monday 26th August** 1600hrs **Inishbofin Triathlon (Harbour Swim)**
- **Thursday 29th August** **not confirmed** **Inishshark to Inishbofin**
- **Friday 30th August** 1000hrs **Inishbofin to Killary –Kayak Race**
- **Saturday 31st August** 1030hrs(TBC) **Killary Fjord Swim-Killary to Leenane 10 miles**

To date 20 swimmers and 4 relay teams will do the Cleggan – Inishbofin Swim while 15 swimmers and 2 relay teams will do the Killary Fjord Challenge.

Killary OEC assist and the Navy, Air Corps, Coast Guard and Fishery Protection people all support the event.

Martin Cullen, the event organiser, makes sure that all safety personnel are well fed and lodgings provided.

If you can help please send your name to Martin telling him which event you can assist with martincullen@eircom.net or contact Mary Butler at marybutler@hotmail.com

Anglesey Angst

April 2002

Ciaran Clissman

Four of us piled into Stan's car at the ferry port – paddles and bags tucked around shoulders, kayaks on roof, off to Holyhead. 'Do you believe your hair can turn white in a weekend?' asked Declan. Tales of huge tides, rushing races, overfalls, clapotis and big hungry waves were bandied about, as we stoked one another towards panic. Just how long could you survive in the sea in early April?

What were we doing here? This was a question that came to mind a few times over the weekend, usually approaching some big ugly line of chaotic water. We were on a 'Rough Water Weekend' course, organized by Stephen Hannon, with the avowed intention of getting comfortable with (or would that be 'in') big water.

Sleeping in the Anglesey Sea and Surf Centre just outside Holyhead, we were perfectly positioned for getting the best out of Penrhyn Mawr, the South Stack and the North Stack, three headlands that jut into the Irish sea, irritating the tide into bad-tempered lumps as it sweeps past. We shared with seven scaffolders from Manchester, who knocked lumps off one another in the pub, before settling down to serious head shaving...

The good news was that we had a cadre of hard-core sea lords with us – Stephen (he makes it look so easy) Hannon, Des (nothing bothers him) Keaney, Fergal (what difficulties?) Trant, Dave (de boss) Walsh and John (big smile) Molloy. It was our mission to get experience, and theirs to pull us out afterwards. The other news was that there was a big tide forecast...

Saturday dawned bright and warm. Launching just south of Penrhyn Mawr, we paddled up in search of terror. We were somewhat let down by the waves, however. They were breaking, but they were small, and getting smaller. After few minutes messing about, we headed on past the South Stack to the North Stack. The tide ran down against us, giving a long hard grind across the mouth of Gogarth Bay.

On Ellen's Castle cliff, hordes of rock climbers dispossessed the seabirds, trying hard to avoid flight. Dave Walsh had a few tips for them. Around the headland, and we all admired the classic Dream of White Horses, a long, steep slab climb with two groups of climbers on it. Stan told tales of terror – I looked at the rock and thought about Cadbury's Flake.

From here on, it's a blur. Off the North Stack, the tide was running. The first I saw was Stephen Hannon, boat upside down, racing right to left in a raging river of meringue-spiky waves. A quick roll and he's still shooting out to sea.

I sought the solace of my buddyguard, Mr. Keaney. Break into the flow, waves going in all directions. There's little sense of being swept along, and no time for taking a nice little lateral transit to see that I'm doing a couple of knots towards Wexford. Big chop, dancing this way and that, all round. It's like being on a road – you can see the wave heads dancing out to sea for what seems miles, while just to one side is the smooth water you were enjoying a few minutes ago.

We play in this rumble strip for a while, trying turning the boat in the big water, taking the paddle out of the water, even a quick snatched roll. Being able to escape off the strip and into the calm water makes it easier to handle mentally – in, play, out, rest, paddle back up to the headland, in again. Time for lunch. Happy lounging in the sun, watching some poor soul crimp his way up Blue Peter (E4).

Back to business – back into the tidal flow, which has, however, calmed down for the afternoon. We have an enjoyable paddle back with the tide, wishing (now!) that it had been a bit harder. Strafed by razorbills and guillemots, I thought of Lambay and the coming summer.

Sunday was dull and grey. This wasn't just the result of the previous night's beer. A big greasy fry, and on the water early. As soon as we came around the corner, we could see the bumps on Penrhyn Mawr.

Stomach tightening around the lard brick, it was back into the waves. Break in across the eddy line, paddle like mad across the breaking waves of the tidal flow, and break out behind the next big rock. The line between the calm water and the big ugly man-eating waves was only a couple of feet wide. We sneak out from under our rock, cross the eddy line, leaning down-flow, and cross into smooth water. Then paddle like hell, just to stay in place, while trying to work up the courage to go back into the waves.

Alan takes a brief dip, rapidly rescued. Get the waves and Des properly lined up, look over the shoulder like a child taking a few tentative steps, and in we go. Bump, lurch, push, splash. Flap about, just keeping the boat up.

After a few minutes, things seem to settle down. The comfort level increases, as the waves do their dance and the kayak rides on top. Turning, paddling, crossing, breaking in and out – it's fine once you get used to it. Even a roll or two, so long as Des or Stephen is nearby.... Once Stephen could see we were comfortable, he took us up to South Stack....

The South Stack, is an island with a channel a couple of meters wide separating it from the mainland. Somehow, the river Nile has gotten lost, and is pouring down this gap, into our faces, at about four knots. Stephen paddles up the stream, dodging between the rocks. I get a couple of yards, and then hide in the lee of an outcrop. Fergal punches through, zigzagging from side to side, each zig a couple of yards of progress against the stream. I shadow him, paddling as hard as I possibly can. They tell me later I'm shouting and yelling. Any attempt to steer with the blades, or draw breath, is punished by being swept backwards, towards where

the rocks wait to pin you... breaking out into the wider part of the funnel, up -tide of the island, is a great relief. John and Des amble through- 'let's meet the lads around the back of the island'.

Huge waves are thumping off the end of the island, rebounding back onto themselves in a mass of spectacular white foam. Confused peaks and ridges of water gyrate chaotically in the clapotis. Come into my parlour.... I paddle through the mess, avoiding the worst of it on my left, hoping the tide won't sweep me in. With four lads to rescue me, how bad could it be? It's pretty awkward – there's a lot going on, with the water as confused as I am. But it's not malicious – the waves seem to have no agenda, they're just bouncing around. I've been more worried off Dalkey or Skerries, but this might also reflect the fact that I had Des, Stephen, Fergal and John behind me.

Lurking in the lee of the island, we take turns to make guided tours of the big water, shepherded by a couple of the hard men. Each return to the still water is another survival, and you start to look forward to going back in. All too soon, Stephen suggests we ride the tide race out and homeward.

Not exactly plain sailing...big following waves send me surfing, willy-nilly, until the kayak nose is buried up to the decklines. The next wave grabs the back of the boat, and suddenly I can see the way we've come. Slap, brace, grunt, curse, sweep, back on course. A rudder is great in a sea like this. To my right, Alan looks composed, relaxed. Behind, Des's broomstick paddle flashes signals of safety. John and Stephen surf past.... Getting past the headlands is interesting. We regroup just before one spit of rock, Stephen telling us calmly about Tide Waves, as opposed to Wind Swells. Someone's boat (Alan's?) is on a wave beside me, but it's as high as my head. These waves are big, and steep, and there is a lot of rock on my other hand. We break out around the headland, across the eddy. The waves are hungry, and Stan, experimenting with sweeping and bracing in big water, takes a swim. These really are big, but we're starting to feel comfortable in these conditions – I hope it lasts after we get home...

Conditions calm down after the next headland, and it's a long slog home, trying in vain to keep up with Stephen and Fergal, working on torso rotation and pushing with the feet. Carrying kayaks up the beach is a Byzantine torture for the exhausted. Beer and food make up for it later.

[the acolytes : Alan Horner, Declan Donnelly, Stan Pearson, Ciarán Clissman]

[the hard men : Stephen Hannon, Des Keaney, Fergal Trant, John Mollohan, Dave Walsh]

Wales

Rough Water April 2002

Stan Pearson

Thrills and spills in cold water/ foreign water - go east

Out with the bounds of Oileain there is a paddling venue for Irish canoeist just a short hop across the sea. Wales is no secret but sometimes we just forget about it.

Mid April found a group of us there on Stephen Hannon's rough water weekend. It was springs and there are plenty of tide races around to guarantee rough water regardless of the weather.

A number of us felt we lacked experience in big water so wanted to learn in a controlled environment. The idea was that with someone specifically looking after us we could concentrate on experimenting without being an imposition on more accomplished mates. The criteria for the weekend was to put fear on hold, try things you wouldn't normally and expect to get wet.

Stephen excepted, the crew split clearly into the A and B with most of A team last being here to start on their successful crossing of the Irish sea – Fergal, John, Des and Dave. The B team of Declan, Ciaran, Alan and myself

weren't sure whether this gulf of experience was a good thing or a bad thing. It was clearly good that there were a lot of experienced people around to fish us out of the drink but would it also mean that as a group we would be seeking out excitement to satisfy the insatiable?

Friday night offered a pleasant change from the usual drive out of Dublin. We had a relaxing ferry crossing followed by a ten minute drive to the ASSC and accommodation for the weekend.

Here we got our first introduction to English youth culture and a very individual view of team building that seemed to centre round ritual head shaving. Anyway Saturday dawned fine and windless.

The centre staff commiserated with the A team about the poor conditions for us while the B team silently relaxed a little and enjoyed the sunshine – in April the sea was still going to be cold enough. The centre is well placed for access allowing us to gear up before the five minute drive to the beach.

The first two races were fairly quite so we headed up to the daddy at North stack. This coast is graced with a fine crag that offers some of the best climbing in Wales and some of the scariest in the UK. Like most sea cliffs access is a problem so there was a fine scattering of colourful dots hanging from ropes and clinging to the rock. We watched them and they us both offering each other a degree of amusement before we respectfully returned to our chosen pleasures and fears. The cliffs here are spectacular and look all the better when graced with people performing.

I first saw the races on this coast from these cliffs and was very impressed by their magnitude and length. A roaring stream powers out of Holyhead at about 5 knots for a few miles and barrels west and south negotiating two headlands and a sandbar to generate extra spice. From the security of land the water had seemed big with plenty of white stuff so we were well hyped up for some man eating monsters.

In the past at unknown tides, from the safety of the bridge between the lighthouse and the mainland I had observed a narrow roaring torrent with lots of rocks that split the passage in two so just gripping the paddle a little we rounded the corner into this. It was lively but OK. With blue skies this set the tone of the day. For today anyway the monsters were asleep.

When we arrived at the North stack we spent the time just playing about building confidence, as we were encouraged to do unnatural things like through away the paddle. We each found our own limit at this game before the race shot us down the coast and we had to paddle back via the eddies to keep the group together. Even as the tide built the waves stayed friendly and fairly regular with the speed seeming to flatten rather than build the water. A few hours of this with practise rescues, rolls etc. had us tired enough to head home. The A team seemed a bit disappointed while the B's were happy to get a gentle confidence building introduction so early in the season.

The luxury of showers was followed by a brief visit to the coast guard station. This was interesting to get a refresher on their job and how they do it. We were all taken with some nifty software on show. They had charts on a pc that calculated everything you would want for trip planning but also showed very detailed information on tidal flows for any time. It must only be a matter of time till we can get this on the bulletin board – get to it Ciaran.

Sunday brought reality, rain, a light westerly and a prompter start to make the most of the tide. The morning was spent with rolls, rescues, breaking in and out of eddies, surfing towing and discovering all the things that worked in theory and in the pool but needed building on for the environment where we would have to use it in reality – like why don't they make the connections on paddle leashes strong enough. If you are going to tow someone make sure the line is really secured to your boat before you watch the rescuer and victim drift off into the distance. The A team of course were good enough not to go in the water, despite encouragement, or enjoyed the luxury of dry suits. The B team were assured that we relaxed more once wet.

After lunch the torrent of my memories next to the lighthouse on South stack was building to something much more as I had envisaged while to the west power in motion was being demonstrated. Two tidal streams seemed to converge at the headland travelling predominantly south and west. This stuff was fast, confused and lumpy. The wind blowing the tops off just added spice.

The A team took the narrow race and were clearly using hired boats, rocks no object. The B team let their owner of the plastic boat battle a little before showing some interesting reverse moves and after that never quite managed the commitment necessary to break through the passage with the near by eddy proving just too comforting a retreat.

We all then managed a few sorties into the confused stuff. Some of the A team managed a roll but although managing to avoid absolutely tensing every muscle in the body the B's were less inclined to attempt full 360 degree turns in this stuff and were happy just to paddle through it with some semblance of control. No one seemed inclined to practise a rescue here and for once we weren't getting any encouragement for that from the instructor.

Drenched drained and ready for home we took the following sea south. But all was not over. Ever wondered how everyone seems to be able to catch the waves better than you? This was an ideal opportunity to watch and learn, if you could keep up. The second but last headland was kicking up some breaking waves. Normally at the end of a tiring day you plan the tides so as not to get this and if you do a safety first attitude is adopted. However these is just what we had paid our money for rather than adopt survival mode I decide to commit to this stuff. I brace on the surf having checked that there were no other boats to bang in to and that the handy helpers were close by, behind me and had a clear line of sight. Plans can be dangerous.

A minute later waves seem to be breaking everywhere and the boat is slewing sideways as my stern rudder fails to do the business. Bracing seems to work as I lean onto the wave amid a welter of spray and churning grey water. Then it just seems to collapse. Whooops, tipping, tipping, and hip flip paddle out – but where's the water gone to brace on? Commit to a roll? – too much to think about and not enough instinctive action – splash.

I am bouncing up and down under water. Its hard to get the paddle round for a roll, which way is up? I grab air rather than water with the blade and decide to bail out. Don't let go the boat, turn it over, hold the paddle eyeball the rescuer and get to the bow. In between the grey wash there seems to be massive chopper slicing towards me it's up, up in the air, it slaps down with a vengeance then it rears up again. I am not having that land on me head no matter how much faith I have in the person manoeuvring it. I am keeping my boat between him and me until I can get me legs round that chopper and me head above it. It's easy to focus on the task. No thoughts here of what's for tea, when's the ferry etc. and I sure it gives more faith in the team-mates than shaving his head. The theory works and two boats wedged together although bouncy are remarkably secure. I'm offered a tow or my own steam in what I confirm to be a real choice and opt for the benefits of the course, why not? I am certainly wet if not totally relaxed. I suppose relaxed like poverty is one of these relative concepts. This leads to a wet repeat and an eventual tow – getting the moneys worth now. Flat water back to the beach has its attractions as the B team struggles home all the better for the experience.

Tonight's shower seemed well earned and no big drive is an added bonus.

Value for money just across the water.

Facts

Anglesey can be reached by ferry from Dublin port or Dun Laoghaire in just under two hours – day trips are quite practical.

Large car with four people E 290

Foot passenger E65, plus £3 taxi to ASSC boat hire £15/day.

S Hannon course E88 web site: www.seakayakingireland.com

Dry suit from E240 to lots and lots

ASSC £15 B&B bunkhouse accommodation plus boat hire and trail of potential purchases. Regular host for Welsh symposiums
0044 1407 762525

Tides around Anglesey generally run at around 4-6kn. As well as the Gorthargh coast line there are lots of other attractive venues within easy drive.

Climbing guides: Rock Climbing in Snowdonia, Constable

Birds: canoeists are requested to keep 200Metres from the cliffs between May and July so as not to disturb the birds.

Oileain

Definitive Irish Excursions

David Walsh

The following article is a draft chapter from Oileain. It is included here with the clear intention of promoting comment and discussion on the ISKA Bulletin Board about a subject close to every seakayakers heart. Where are the best of Irish seakayaking trips, experiences and locations? (Ed)

Visitors to Ireland often access the web page of the Irish Sea Kayaking Association beforehand, and commonly ask two questions.

- Where to hire equipment and/or guides for excursions?
- Where best to go to sea around our coast?

Their experience and ability varies, and though usually they are flexible about location, they always know exactly how me they have. I had built up a standard response to the question of kayak and guide hiring equipment. That is a straight forward matter of handing out known fact, which readers of this publication will spot immediately is my strong suit.

That information has always been available on the web page and the current version is published here in the chapter on hiring equipment. For up to date information at a particular time, look at the website or search for “Irish Sea Kayaking Association”.

Recommending excursions, on the other hand, is entirely a matter of personal preference, a concept outside the scope of this book. Nevertheless, so many of these enquiries have been received and dealt with on an individual basis that we can't ignore that this is a hot issue. So here goes. I have given a personal choice of the 50 best excursions Ireland has to offer.

Firstly, the best kayaking in Ireland is in the remoter areas, which broadly means the west side of the country. This guide works clockwise, starting in the far north at Lough Foyle, which divides not only Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, but also Counties Donegal and Derry. Few kayakers come to visit Ireland for the east coast. While there is attractive kayaking east of a line between Malin Head in the far north and Kinsale Head in the south, the west is best.

Secondly, good kayaking exists in clumps. On a good day there is good kayaking anywhere there is deep water, but on a bad day you need somewhere to hide. Areas most recommended therefore tend to be fragmented, the coastline indented, perhaps with islands lying off, to provide shelter. Where excellent kayaking exists along a committing or exposed stretch of cliffs, the recommendation needs to be qualified.

Recommendations therefore need to come with a graded warning as to the skill levels required of the party going to sea, and all its members. The quality of what you get needs to be set off against the difficulty attaining it. This has to be done assuming locally normal wind, rain and swell conditions.

Thirdly, this book contains information which, in the nature of things, emphasises one day trips. There is no passage of coastline so long, nor any island so far out, that you can't do it in one day, though in some cases you would be exercised. To embark from and return to anywhere on the coast, all the information you will need is hopefully here in the text.

Camping and water availability is a common need whether the boatman is on a two, three, or more than three day excursion. Thus the information is provided in terms of location, a quality grading, the difficulty level which may be expected under reasonable conditions, how many overnights are recommended, and a section for general comment.

Please read on





ISKA NEWS

Scottish Symposium

Des Keaney

I was talking to Gordon Brown in Scotland recently. He's organising the next Scottish Symposium on the Isle of Skye at the end of May 2003.

The symposium will be Fri 23rd May till Mon. 26th then paddling trips all the following week for those interested. The venue will be North Skye based at Staffin in a centre there (Columba 1400) there will be camping available together with the usual bunkhouse accommodation and all the B&B's at the north end of the island. Previously there have been around two hundred people attending.

Speakers will include Kevin Mansell from Jersey, Brian Wilson, author of Blazing Paddles and Dances with Waves, Ray O'Brien (Greenland rolling championships), Duncan Winning and more.

Anyone interested in going? We could organise a bus and trailer. Email to deskeaney@hotmail.com or call 086 8205627 to express interest.

Do you wannabee a FECKER ?

Federation of East Coast KayakERS

There has always been a need for a federation of east coast kayakers. Dublin and its hinterland, very loosely interpreted, has half our population. We have always needed some sort of local club structure. Local paddling should not be too dependent on who you know.

Skerries in winter is well enough served but what about the rest of us the rest of the year ? ICU is organised around the Strawberry Beds in west Dublin. It is utterly impractical to drive a car of an evening for paddling across the city, south to north or east to west, certainly not regularly. The ICU has nothing in north Dublin or south Dublin on the coast. Yet a million people live close to this coastal strip. Only the scouts are organised coastally, which doesn't help us much. The formation of some local mainstream kayaking structure was always going to happen. Better it happens constructively, from within ISKA, and there is a reason why it should happen NOW.

At Seapoint in south County Dublin, a container has recently been acquired for secure kayak storage in the grounds of the Espoir Canoe Club, a beautiful site next to the Martello Tower there. ICU part funded the acquisition as a development grant to ISKA. Espoir would welcome the kayaking activity. We are invited by Espoir to propose how sea kayakers and Espoir might maximise the facility for the benefit of kayaking in Ireland.

Seapoint is between Dunlaoire Harbour and Dublin city, and is therefore in sheltered waters. ISKA, in so far as it is a training organisation at all, occupies a niche between proficiency levels 3+ and 5. Sheltered water is best utilised to train between levels 1 and 3, though it is equally valid for distance work. How ISKA or FECKERS might utilise this site to advantage is therefore a bit of a challenge. The answer, whatever it is, lies in strategic alliances, with Espoir, ICU, ISKA, Tiglin, whoever. Regardless, this development has made the inauguration of FECKERS an urgent imperative.

So we need a meeting.

That meeting will take place on Tuesday 18th June 2002 at 8.00 PM in the Espoir Canoe Club, Seapoint, County Dublin .

Agenda

Aims, constitution

Club Name (Feckers, BASK, DUSK, Alaska etc.)

Relationship with Espoir, ICU, ISKA etc.

Training (its importance to us)

Meets policy, schedule, etc.

Our first great leader (note DW is not available)

Money, timber for shelving, subs

AOB

David Walsh

Chairman, ISKA

INISHKEA 'DUL SIAR 'DUL SIAR

CIARA DRAPER

JOHN MARK DICK

Saturday 18th May – 9.30 am Portmore on the south west tip of the Belmullet peninsula – not the most blessed conditions – blustery, Force 3ish, and scattered showers 'promised' as they say. Camper vans and cars pulled up to deliver 16 kayakers. It hadn't been easy for those who had travelled already that morning from the east coast. This was my first trip with a group – I wished that I were fitter. I had done a couple of weekends with Jim Kennedy and Stephen Hannon last year and most of the Sligo coast since.

We chatted in Willie's camper about the stunning wooden kayak he had built and how easy or tricky it might be to get your timing right between breakers on entering the water. So I wasn't the only one who might reverse rapidly onto the shingle! We observed them breaking and did the 'Go! Go! Go!' bit at least twice from the comfort of the van and although this kind of talk

wasn't good for the nerves we were all agreed that the west end of the beach would be far more sheltered and suitable - for people like me anyhow.

The plan to camp overnight on Inishkea had to go, as the forecast for the following day was for winds to rise to force 7. This might have left me eating muesli and oystercatcher eggs for days. So we happily took Paul's proposal to paddle first for about 30 minutes to Duvillaun Beg before heading to Inishkea South. This would give him as leader a chance to assess the skills of those he didn't know.

As John-Mark said - he and I didn't need to wear L-plates - you could tell by looking at us. A good dry start to our days' paddle and nothing yet to challenge me on my first trip of the season, having got over my 'what to wear?' thing on the slipway.

It must have been at least 11.00 am before we hit the water so time didn't allow us to explore Duvillaun Beg but that goes on the 'must come back soon' list. Grey seals on the rocky shore sang their ghostly ghostly tunes at us as we headed north west for Inis Ge Theas.

What a privilege! - to be in the company of such pleasant experienced kayakers. Someone always had to keep an eye on me - mysteriously my boat just didn't move as fast as the others - I checked the skeg thing - perhaps I'd got the button sequence in reverse after all those months hauled up? No. I could have blamed my big uncool paddles but the old adage about poor workmen and their tools mocked me.

Some of the team were using wooden Inuit-type paddles that Des had made and they were just zipping along. It didn't take more than an hour to land on the sand and within minutes everyone was tucking into their food and talking about the island's history.

'The Inishkeas' by Dr Brian Dornan is amply reviewed by Dave Walsh in T Na D issue no. 26. The island is now uninhabited since 1934. Being a famous wintering ground for Barnacle Geese the sod is well cropped and easy to walk on. There was an option of landing on the north island and exploring or paddling around the west side in a circle to meet up before returning to the Mullet. I had no choice really as I had to save my strength for the return journey into a stiff wind and flowing tide, also I didn't 'need' the lumpy bumpy conditions that the west side was serving. It's just a few minutes paddle between these islands and again, a sheltered beach to welcome you.

The Baily Mor is a 60 ft high stone-reinforced mound. There is an impressive crucifixion slab on it and remains of beehive huts and square houses. John-Mark spotted Shelduck and several nests of Oystercatchers and gulls but I would like to have seen the colony of Grey Seals wallowing in the sheltered sandy area, which I read about in David Cabot's book 'Ireland'. He writes that it is the largest hauling out area in the whole country for grey seal.

Time to be off again - this was going to be a hard slog for me as the crossing looked choppy and the tide and wind against us. We would have to return this haven when conditions were right. The rest of the party met us but we didn't get the chance to exchange notes and our gathering was like some horsy meet as we jostled about in the now grey whipping waves.

Paul chose his leaders and backers and did all the necessary communications with the coastguard as we made for Portmore. Gone was the warm sunshine and turquoise shallow waters of Inishkea South. Once again I found myself like the dopey weedy antelope at the back of the herd in a David Attenborough film but I had Des to ward off the Killer Whales.

It must have been foolish optimism that led me to believe that I would enjoy this leg of the journey - the same optimism that had me keeping an eye out for the odd walrus. Soon I didn't give a damn how many walruses I saw as long as that bit of mainland in the rain got nearer and sometimes it didn't seem to. I heard Des with his radio suggest to the others that a rest might be in order but I guessed it was really to give me a chance to catch up. I felt I was kayaking in an old washing machine.

By Deid It was a hard pull and just as we were nearly there the wind got really nasty and I thought ironically of the line in that bloody song 'Treasna na dTonnta 'dul siar, 'dul siar ' I think the last two words can mean going backwards as well as going west. This was sadly apt as I really felt I wasn't making any progress in passing the graveyard at Portmore.

What an awful ominous sign but Des assured me that we were moving and then yahoo! A very wide berth to steer clear of those breaking rollers brought me in, Paddy-last of course. Stephen was like a harbour pilot behind me as I avoided being dumped by the racing waves - a reasonably dignified landing and safe into the waving arms of Mary Butler.

I think the journey back might have been a little quicker without me! It was too wet and windy to socialize as we set up camp at Blacksod harbour. We certainly didn't exchange gourmet ideas. It didn't take long for most of us to pile into Josie's van for a trip to the pub. Watching ceilidh jiving was an interesting distraction from yelling into each other's ears as we competed with the wall-mounted speakers.

Next morning we woke to force 7 winds and cresting seas I personally felt very happy not to be launching my kayak. Farewells were brief as we headed for a deep soak at the seaweed baths in Ennischrone, which I strongly recommend for groany moany bodies. I was very grateful for all the support I had been given on this trip - it was exemplary so if I ever grow up I will try and help people too.

Fermanagh for Sea Kayakers!

Tony Viney

Before you say it I know Fermanagh is landlocked! However the good news is that it offers plenty of paddling opportunities.

For beginners Lough Erne is the place to start -with scenic trips around Enniskillen or up to Derenish Island with its famous Round Tower. Alternatively there's the myriad of islands (very confusing) around Castle Crom or try the Broad Lough seven miles wide with more sea like conditions. Why not try fishing from the kayak (ask Peter Hennessen how!)

For committed surf dudes head for Rosstownlough or Tullen Strand near Bundoran (less than an hour's drive) with some of the best surf on the West Coast but remember to be nice to the boardies!

If it's the sea you're after go for a classic paddle from Streadagh Strand or Mullaghmore to Inishmurray with its beehive monastic and early Christian settlement.

So...the beauty of Fermanagh is in its wide range of paddling possibilities from beginners to advanced.

And if all else fails you can still look up Tony and join his Huntsman Appreciation Society.