

TRASNA NA DTONNTA 9

Newsletter of the

irish sea kayaking association

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Edited by : David Walsh,

Editorial

Look logically at what the Irish Sea Kayaking Association is supposed to be at. It is supposed to reflect Irish sea paddling, to be a conduit for communication between Irish paddlers, and also between Irish paddling and the outside world, and it has a fourth objective that no one can recall, probably to do with saving the whale.

Realistically, it is performing the third role well, but the others less so.

We have a web site through which there is unending communication with far flung places, so that the outside world is probably convinced that Irish sea paddling is well organised. But honestly, this does not benefit Irish sea paddling domestically very much in terms of tangible local growth of the activity or other real value to the current members.

We cannot reflect Irish sea paddling unless Irish sea paddlers are mostly members. We cannot be a conduit for communication between Irish paddlers unless Irish paddlers are mostly members. Yet year after the year the membership is not growing healthily, and certainly not in line with the growth of the sport as a whole in Ireland.

We tried having more meets Spring and Autumn, and now we are trying less. Of 20 people who paddled on the Achill meet, 16 were members, so that seems to be the way. We have public meets every Wednesday evening in the capital (Dublin) and we have had them in the NW area (Sligo). The point remains that there are a fearsome number of Irish sea paddlers out there who do not join up, and to whom we are presumably irrelevant.

To be irrelevant is to die, after a miserable life. I have therefore sent a copy of this newsletter to every address there ever was since GO's time for any sea paddler, hoping

that realistically, at least some members dropped away because they never got round to not dropping away.

Anyone with other or better or superior suggestions, please get them to me ASAP. Something does need to be done.

Signals

In the last edition, I reported that the idea was being floated abroad of international uniformity in sea kayaking signalling, just as there is with river paddlers. There was limited response to the six signals suggested, but from those who did write in, there was considerable agreement, (details on request) as follows :

1. Whistle blast, shout, anything, means "pay attention , I am about to signal". Fine, but of limited usability.
2. Raised arm or paddle means - "Follow, come, gather on me". This is considered the universal and only truly useful signal. The whole group is ordered to converge on the raised paddle, whatever the circumstances or wherever in the group is the paddle.
3. Horizontal raised paddle means - "Wait for me". Rejected as confusable with river signal meaning "Stop" and some doubt is expressed as to whether non -leaders should be signalling.
4. Horizontal raised paddle moved up and down from raised to shoulder level means - "Help". Out.
5. Horizontal raised paddle moved up and down from raised to spraydeck level means - "Mayday". Out.
6. Horizontal raised paddle moved diagonally up and down (i.e. at each end) means - "Danger, don't come, or caution when coming to me". Out.

Proficiency Assessment

Note the following date for a Dublin based (the Marine Activity Centre in Dun Laoghaire which is on the west Pier) assessment :- 7th / 8th of June. Application forms are available from the ICU office. Cost £35.

Symposium

I hear there is a small symposium up in Northern Ireland on the (Free State) June Bank Holiday 31st May / 2nd June). I am told Robert Walker at 0801 265 834 109 is organising it, but no details otherwise at all.

Ken And The Mare

Kenmare River, AN RIBHEAR is a kayakers dream. We chose this location because it seemed like a safe place to explore. Although it is a five hour drive from Dublin it is easily accessible from Cork , Limerick or the Midlands.

We set off from a stony beach in Kenmare Harbour and proceeded West with the gentle outgoing tide. Singular herons were to be seen standing to attention along the shoreline. We camped on Illaungowia Island where there was no need to inflate the mats as the grass was definitely the smoothest yet.

The next day, on a mirror surface, we travelled again west along the south side towards the mouth.

As the wind picked up, Gannets came in from the seacliffs to perform spectacular diving techniques in the centre of the river.

The river here is approximately five kilometres wide, giving the sense of being more a bay than a river. The stunning mountains of the Iveragh Peninsula with their bowl valleys border the North side and on the south, the rolling Cahal Mountains. If they were any closer it could be Ireland's third fjord.

Sandwich Terns govern the south coast, and they continuously fly out to dive to the surface for their catches. Having passed one of my ancestor's domains - Ormond's Island, we pulled up on Leaghillaun Island where we skinny-dipped and ate while being entertained by the constant movement of a pair of shrieking Oystercatchers.

The south banks gave way to larger rocks, and these slowly became low cliffs complete with caves. In these we found starfishes and sea urchins of all sizes. Oysterbeds became a frequent sighting.

After approx. 26kms we went ashore at Tranacappul which is in County Cork. After the essential feeding we went in search of water. The nearest house was owned by a Dutch Gentleman, next door there were Germans, and just below some more Dutch, and so it went on I felt really at home !

Next morning we took a 320 degree bearing and headed across the bay, through medium sized waves. We passed bobbing Puffins, and Gannets swooping overhead, to Castle Cove, and beached on its white strand for a short break.

We were now back in County Kerry, where the constant tour busses were to be seen on the busy ring road. We headed Eastwards along the North shore, inside Daniel Island and Illaunsillagh where the sea was calm. Suddenly we became surrounded by approximately 25 seals. We were delighted as, for the previous two days we had only seen two, and were quite worried they had all been "removed". After Illaundrane we went back onto the sea, passing Illaunleagh, and then out to Sherky Island where we ate lunch on the collapsed mammoth pier structure. Sheep were grazing around the recently deserted houses.

When the tide turned the calm sea quickly changed so we headed close to Rossdohan and Rossmore islands (both connected by road), paddling past groups of Razorbills and Guillemots. Our trip finally came to an end at Blackwater Bridge where the river Blackwater enters the bay, and a small safe harbour was ideal to sort out our belongings.

Kenmare river , which is basically a very long bay, is perfect for kayaking. Its safe waters and picturesque but ever changing landscape make it very interesting expedition waters. It surprises me that with the very clear / clean waters and the lack of industry, that in three days we only saw one yacht, no canoes , no other pleasure craft ,

.....no Kens

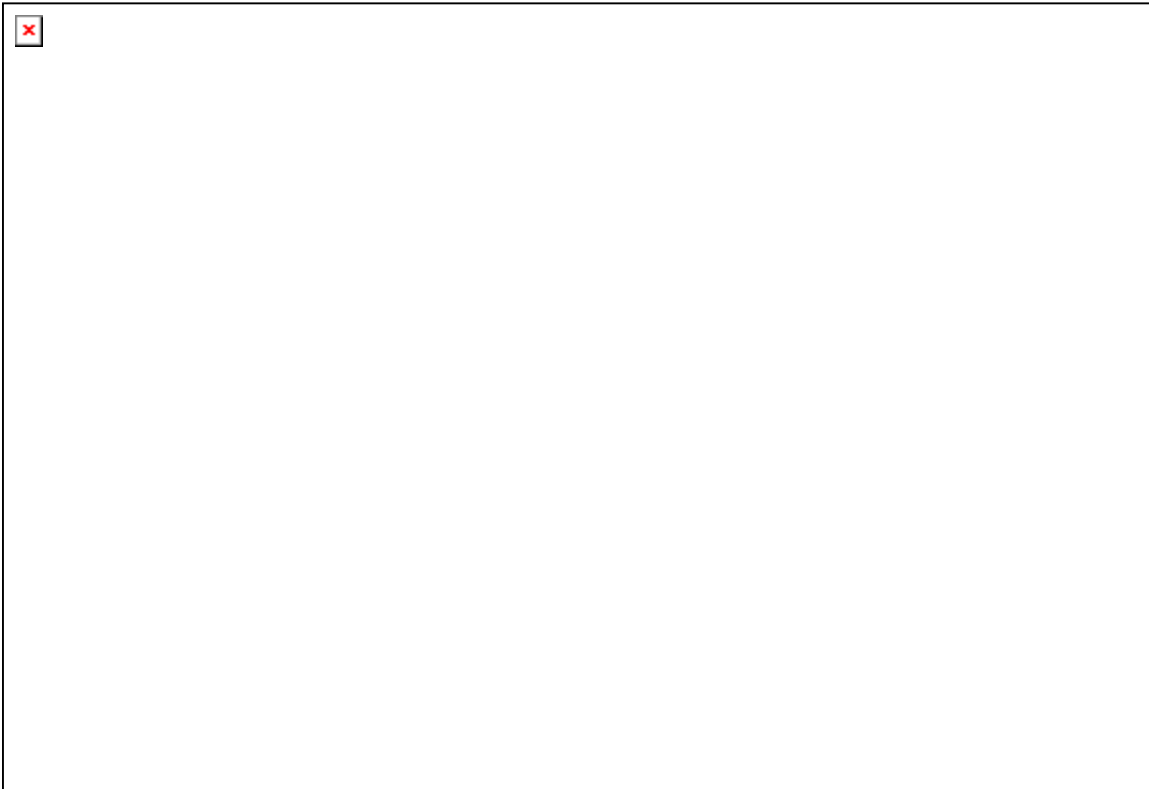
.....and no Mares

Brian Ormond

Brigitte Kuehni

20th May 1997

The Tide That Turned Too Soon



Since ever I first started calculating tidal streams from published books I have been getting things wrong, the odd time anyway. A moment's carelessness with figures,

working in the Almanac from the wrong day week or month (or once even the wrong year), plussing instead of minusing something, or my favourite - the Summertime hour, can easily set things on their head. I would have been the first to tell anyone that theory / technology has its place, but should know its place too. You might think then that by now, complacency would never be the key descriptive word best suited to describe the attitude with which I might set out to sea in a pea soup mist for an island miles offshore across a sound notorious for its currents, but then sure I never do stop amazing myself.

We know (thought we knew ?) the Saltee Islands, both of them. The smaller and nearest to land is two miles due South of Kilmore Quay, on the South coast of County Wexford, and the other lies a couple of miles further SW and out, separated by a sound about a mile wide. Certainly we knew their infamous "Bridges", shallow spits of land between the mainland and the nearer island, and another one (even worse) situated between the islands themselves, and we knew first hand that that is where tides surge and race and trap the unwary paddler. We knew that tidal movements hereabouts are very strong indeed, and we knew that they run from side to side across the outward path of the expeditioner at times entirely different from their rise and fall on the shoreline, mostly against the run of play (so to speak), West and out to sea on the rise and East and inwards on the fall.

And so we knew that you produce the books and you make the calculations and you believe. This we did, and it is necessary to know (should the doubters amongst you wish to check them) that these are the calculations we had with us, written on a piece of paper. The tidal stream between the mainland and Little Saltee Island is West making from Cobh +0535 to Cobh -0035, a 3.5kn. spring-rate current not to be messed with. HW Cobh on Mayday Bank Holiday Saturday 3rd May 1997 was at 0310 and 1540, not quite yet springs, but nearly. Calculating it was running West from 0845 to 1505, we felt when we set out from the harbour at 1300, it would be still pushing to our right, away from the dreaded St. Patrick's Bridge, but beginning to die off a bit. All we had to do was bear up a bit towards the Bridge, ferryglide up into the flow, and we would be "grand altogether", about 20 degrees we guessed would do nicely. No-one, we agreed, could possibly miss a target as big as we were aiming at.

But context is everything. The mist was as thick as any of us had ever put to sea in, visibility about 150 metres, and we were to make our first and biggest mistake of many before the harbour was even out of sight. Spotting a lobster pot to one side, someone mentioned diverting to see the flow with our own eyes, but the caravan somehow passed on, without much debate, as caravans will, and thereby saved the group the most expensive thirty seconds of effort I for one can ever recall. Ten minutes later someone thought the water had got so lumpy we must be at or near the Bridge, undoubtedly in the turbulent run off downstream (and West) of it. Doubting this, that we could even be near it, but suspicious anyway, we compromised by dropping our 20 degree bear-away for a while, until the surface settled again. Half an hour later, (when despite undisciplined looking around in every direction and not just confidently up ahead), and still with no land in sight, anywhere, we pow-wowed. It is an article of faith that no one in a slowmoving boat ever missed a target on the upstream side, and so we had to be

downstream, with the Saltees Great and Little now presenting a huge target to our Southeast. Into the tide we might have to paddle but now we truly couldn't miss. It would be like having to score between the corner flags from the penalty spot, and no goalie. When land still didn't appear, we didn't worry, for ages. We were after all struggling into the tide, and so in that manner we were a long time at sea before we once again addressed the situation.

Then we faced the reality that we were lost. This is an easier decision for mariners to come to than might be realised by landlubbers. Indeed there is an imperative peculiar to seafarers to quickly realise just this predicament as soon as ever it occurs. Unlike on land, seagoing solutions depend on dealing with a constant mobility, which is to say that the seagoer is constantly changing position, even as he takes time to calculate his position. On land if you stay put, you stay put, but not so at sea.

Ordinarily, we would have been forced to head North, towards the only truly unmissable target (Ireland), the certainmost to hit land the soonest, the guaranteed last resort of those who are not only lost but know it. We would not have been the first hereabouts, nor the last, to try this tactic, what with tides locally. This was though a most unattractive option because this was a bleak old spot. Realistically, a dozen miles East or West of Kilmore Quay, were we eventually to land there, in mist like this, would be equally unidentifiable, and dumping surf waves could be expected.

This time, there being no room at all for second best, we played our trump card. We switched on the GPS, our new toy, not yet used in combat, not yet quite the confidence inducer/builder it should be. Our destination had been fed into it (using Irish National Grid co-ordinates for ease of use by those oldies who love maps and hate charts), so theoretically at least, it could tell us not only where we were but which way to paddle. Slowly but surely it acquired its quota of satellites, and spelled it all out. I do not remember the precise co-ordinates, because it made little difference at the time, but it all began with the letter "T" [see map, which I hope can be seen on the Internet in HTML, but if not, suggestions please]. Depression is a modest word for what we felt about its brutal truth : we were well on the way to Carnsore Point. Not alone were we not yet as far South as we needed to be, but also, we were many miles to the East.

Minutes later we saw a lobster pot and this time, (the lesson learnt), we went to investigate. The stream was hammering Eastwards, when by our calculations it should have at least another while going West. How things had gone so badly wrong was clearly that the tide had been East-going when we had thought West, so that as it was pushing us 20 degrees off course to the left, we were pushing ourselves a further 20 the same way. Instead of cancelling each other out, these two 20 degree offsets were acting as one big 40 degree howler.

At least now we knew how and what was wrong, and even though the "why" of it would have to wait another day. This modern GPS technology presented us uncompromisingly with one solution only to our predicament. We had no real option but to turn due West,

and slowly but surely seek out Little Saltee, which the GPS said was over that way (I won't pretend calculations any finer than that).

And so we sweated and we cursed and we struggled Westwards, remorselessly into tide and wind both, trying to retrieve the situation with one last effort. Optionlessly we left handed, right handed, left again. Muscles groaned their protest, then to hoots of relief, eventually Little Saltee appeared out of the now thinning mist, and we could relax a little, so that the island ever so very gradually drew nearer.

Arriving at its Northernmost point, there was a mighty race pouring Eastwards over the Bridge, up which we had to "surf and sprint", trying to get into the lee of the land to effect a landing, but to our disappointment, we saw nowhere practical. So on and on we went, round and round this little landmass. Passing through the sound between the two islands, the other might not have been there, for the mist had thickened again, and yet the sea surged and boiled where the tide ran strongly in the gap, removing all temptation for a crossing. Down the whole East side of Little Saltee we were forced to return and again nothing. Through the Northernmost point race again, and this time, knowing better, we forced a scratchy landing on the flat bit of water just upstream of it, at last to sit in the warmth and shelter of its low cliffs. It was 1630.

Three and a half hours after setting out to sea we had covered half our journey, two miles. We produced the written calculations and we watched the tide flow over the bridge, trying to figure out what we had done wrong. As if to mock us, that which should now have been seriously winding up its East going cycle, sometime later showed signs, if anything, of starting the process of finishing. Clearly things were happening a couple of hours ahead of what our notes predicted. The very civil collective attitude was that whether the jockey or the horse was wrong would have to wait our return to civilisation. No need really to be fighting when we were all a bit wasted.

The lessons to be learned were twofold. First, technology generally and GPS particularly is wonderful as an additive to common sense, capable of overcoming the most difficult circumstances. Have it, learn how to use it, practise using it, and use it "early and often". I am convinced it has to be a serious bit of kit, in mist, for lone paddlers, for serious expeditioners, and those generally who operate or lead others in difficult conditions. It is equally valid as a hillwalking device, so the cost is well worth it to the all rounder. Second, "seat of pants" (i.e. common sense) navigation (and procedure generally) is and always will be the bread and butter means of getting about in and managing so simple a device as a canoe, and this factor should never be overlooked. GPS and Pilots and Almanacs (and even, let it be clearly said, Oileain) notwithstanding, look around you, keep thinking, and see that everything makes sense. Be observant. No more than you would go to sea in a gale because of a good weather forecast, whatever the Pilot and Almanac combine to say, check when you get there with your own eyes that the strength and direction of the tide is as predicted, and for instance, never ever (as we did) pass a handy buoy or pot or rock or wreck or anything without checking that the tide is running as it should be, and if you can't find one, find one.

There is really nothing to see on Little Saltee. It is uninhabited, bleak, and even more low lying than its larger neighbour, and is not grazed by animals, an island factor which always makes pedestrian progress cumbersome. So it was that after a bite and a snooze (ask any old soldier), we set out again at 1745. We might have stayed longer but it seemed to us that the tide was at last slackening. Up along the West side of Little Saltee was no bother, nor really either was the crossing, at least until we hit Sebbers Bridge, far worse than its puny counterpart St. Patrick's Bridge had been for us. Surfing up to it required determination. Slackening tide or not, the turbulent surf was awful. We stern-ruddered and braced and prayed, and broached and recovered and straightened up our boats again, and inched ever closer to the invitingly flat headwater that is always above such features, just like the flat water above a river weir. In the crystal clear water we could see the rocks of the bridge itself under us as things changed in an instant from one condition to another. Suddenly the water got flat, though rushing with omnipotent force, and only the occasional wimpish wave to give an y sort of forward push as exhausted human limbs strived for supremacy against these mindless natural occurrences. Sprint now, think later, but instinct drove us in towards the rocks at the side, out of the worst of it, victorious, again. How many times again will we be able to repeat that statement?

Landing (at 1900, the tide still somewhat Eastmaking, halfway along the sheltered Northfacing coast, just below where the only trees for miles grow) on the Great Saltee in the month of May is a wonderful experience. This magical place is inhabited by the most inoffensive of creatures ever invented (or so it is considered universally, except amongst golfers), the Twitcher Vulgaris, or Common Birdwatcher. Politely, these chaps helped haul our boats and made us welcome. They come to the island for days and weeks at a time in Spring and Autumn, scientifically catching migrant birds in fixed nets to ring (and thus monitor) them. They stay in the only building on the island, the holiday dwellinghouse of the absent owner, Prince Michael of the Saltees. They offered that we were welcome to stay in the bothy attached to it, and come the first apres -arrival shower (of rain), we accepted. We settled down for a traditional sea kayakers mushy spagbol, and whatever, then the sleep of the just.

Next day dawned fearsome. Lovely in shelter, the whitecaps out to sea were a constant source of discussion. Indeed, surely it is only in the very best of times that sea kayakers ever run out of mutually interesting things to say to each other. No wonder we stay friends for years, believing all our comrades wonderful conversationalists, what with their riveting talk of Force this and that, rain, wind, danger of clapotis and swell directions. We zoomed in on the VHF forecast every three hours, the day rhythmically punctuated, eternally putting off the moment of decision to the next one. The public ferry to the island managed to land (and extract) its daily quorum of birders, but there was ominous talk of those needing foreign planes having to go today, definitely not tomorrow, to be sure. Between forecasts we went for walks, and studied the tidal flow (not yet understood, but slowly getting a handle on it), the options open to us constantly changing. Our plan had been to head for Carnsore Point (today though, not yesterday), and this slowly diminished into when if ever we could just plain return to Kilmore Quay and home.

Throughout the day we dithered and kept putting off the decision for an hour or two at a time. This was a big mistake. Had we put it off early in the morning until the afternoon, we could have tramped the island meantime unharassed by happenstance, or slept, or ate, or read a book, or whatever. Lacking this variety of courage we festered all day, to our disadvantage. Frustratingly we were reminded that half the forecasts are mere repeats, or almost. The ferry came again mid-afternoon and couldn't land in the swells, promising to come back later in the evening. Finally the 1900 VHF forecast was specific, the lull before the true storm we all knew and even felt was coming would be in the very early morning, so we decided at last to settle in and be comfortable.

7.00 P.M. is a little late of an Irish springtime to start to enjoy a day, but we did. Great Saltee is a lovely environment. Grazed and even "slightly" inhabited, it is a charming place, despite being largely low-lying, though it does have its cliffs on the seaward side. It has been planted in the past with exotic avenues bordered with palm trees, statues, and even a throne. There are wide grassy areas ideal for fun camping. While we were there, a group of radio-hams were broadcasting world-wide with great success. Apparently the Saltees have a distinctive radio call sign or "address", and our men were much sought after, from Buenos Aires to Ultima Thule. We found a superb souvenir in a parachute flare that must have come from a wrecked yacht on Little Saltee. The twitchers were nicely courteous and showed us Flycatchers and Redstarts (female, definitely) and Chiffchaffs, and told us we might see Turtle Dove (we didn't). We tramped the length and breadth of the whole island, from the Gannetry in the SW to the Sound in the NE, and everywhere in between, even spotting for ourselves a Pied Flycatcher about which we had not been forewarned, before we finally lit our disposable BarBQ, wonderful gadgets, and were sociable. The lesson to be learnt is that when you wimp out, wimp out early, thoroughly, completely, and with no regrets at all. That after all gives you more time and freedom to enjoy the positive aspects of so doing.

The forecast being spot on, and to gloss over the return journey, we were mighty relieved paddlers to hit the beach the following morning, early. We know for certain (observation of a lobster pot) that the tide was well West making at earlier than 0900, probably 0830, which it shouldn't have been doing until 1035, making slack water at Cobh +0330, by our notes two hours earlier than the official position. On the pier at 0900 we met the harbourmaster, and he helped the others tie up the boats as I dived into the car for the Pilot. Mercifully, the notes on the paper had faithfully represented published data. The jockey was pardoned, the horse got convicted, and then to seal the weekend, before we even left Kilmore Quay village an hour later, the storm finally hit in all its fury, tying up all boats small and large, "for the duration".

David Walsh

Achill Meet - April 1997

20 paddlers in as many boats turned up to enjoy the prolific sunshine and calm conditions of the early taste of summer. 6 camped on Clare Island, enjoying the benefit of the (pub, ceili, dancing, crack ?) tide each way, though they needed an early start Sunday. 1

latecomer couldn't find them and camped all alone Saturday night on Achill Beg. 5 headed North (and have been nicknamed the "Provisional SKA") for the Inishkeas to overnight on the South island and watch Barnacle Geese (no Gyrfalcon this year). 7 went around Achill Head from Dugort to Keel, on Saturday, in two groups, one of which never stopped en route (to the consternation of the other, who couldn't imagine turning down a sandy beach for a rest-stop at 5 and again at 15 miles - the trip being 20 miles or so in all !). These two groups enjoyed mixed itineraries Sunday, some around Achill Beg and some (guess which group ?) who set out (after a bit of a drive) from Blacksod to the Inishkeas for a lightning visit (easily winning the "Greyhounds of the Weekend" award).

Jersey Paddling

Sunshine, English speaking, easily accessed pleasant, and surely the most challenging tides (up and down as well as side to side) invented for this part of the world, combine to make Jersey a well worth while kayaking holiday objective. remember though that no boat of any description can easily be brought into Jersey, and anyway the easiest way in is by aeroplane. So kayaking depends on local support. Anyone interested might write to

Kevin Mansell

177 Quennavais Park,

St. Brelade,

Jersey,

Channel Islands JE3 8GD

Tel. 0044 1534 45936

Fax. 0044 1534 45936

It must be stressed that beginners need not apply. Kevin will check any Irish application for the hire of a boat from "Authoritive Irish Sources", so better have at least one hard - chaw in the group.

Galicia

Celtic Watersports Festival

Those unkind persons who not only spotted the deliberate error in the last edition but pointed it out to me, clearly already know that Galicia is in Northwestern Spain, where this years festival will be held from August 19th to 25th. This annual event is always cheap and cheerful and of sunny disposition, and that isn't just the organisers

Suzanne Kennedy 051 389550

and

Joanna McInerney 065 78066

Go and check for yourself if Paddy Barry was right in his account of crossing the Atlantic in 1986 in a Galway Hooker when he said "Cape Finisterre is a scuthery headland, we have far better in Connemara". Accomodation and travel and and shuttles and everything done for you, sure where else would you do as good ?