

JANUARY 1979

EDITORIAL

I doubt there has ever been a time when I felt more like a long sea expedition than I do at present. Having just recovered from the Christmas holidays, and now doing my best to face up to the New Year with all its problems, I have the inclination to paddle away from strikes causing fuel and food shortages, from freezing weather which prevents the car starting in the mornings and from mounting bills which I cannot afford to pay! Thankfully there is no tax on dreams and so I can afford to dream about trips and meetings I have planned for this year.

Last year I organised (in my view successfully!) a week's sea canoeing in S.W. Scotland. I know that some of you were hoping for a repeat this year. Unfortunately this cannot be as I have been invited to South Australia by some of the sea canoeing fraternity out there. I am looking forward to this visit of course and will be reporting on it in full when I return.

One of the purposes of this Newsletter is to report on expeditions, courses, meets, etc, which involve not only members of the A.S.K.C. but any sea canoeists. To this end I hope you will take time out to keep me informed of your activities and adventures with, whenever possible, black and white photographs and maps. I look forward to hearing from you. When preparing your trips make a note at the end to "inform the A.S.K.C."

THIRD NATIONAL SEA CANOEING SYMPOSIUM

This was scheduled for last month but did not happen due to lack of support. This lack of support was due to both 'Canoeing' and 'Canoe Focus' advertising this function after it was meant to have taken place!! I informed both magazines in good time, or so I thought.

The Third National Sea Canoeing Symposium is **STILL ON**. It is now scheduled for the end of this year - look out for details in due course. It is going to be bigger and better!

COMING EVENTS

27 January 1979. The B.C.U. A.G.M. at Manchester. The A.G.M. of the Sea Touring Committee is scheduled for the same day at the same venue for 10.30 am. The venue is:
University of Manchester
Institute of Science and Technology
Renold Building
Off Sackville Street
Manchester M60

The B.C.U. A.G.M. is at 2.00 pm.

9 - 11 February 1979. Sea canoeing meet based at Pollseath, North Cornwall. Probably camping but B & B available. Not suitable for novices. Details from John Kryser, Kozee Kott, Menear Road, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 3DL.

Easter 1979. A National Sea Canoeing meet at East Mersea, Essex. The object of this Fourth Meet is to provide an opportunity for paddlers interested in sea canoeing to come together to share their experience and knowledge and to undertake group trips appropriate to their skills. Novices are equally welcome - as are experts. Knowing the organiser as I do, this should be an excellent meet. His name is Tom Baptie, Merton Adventure Centre, 226 London Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3HD (01-640-0572). Get in touch with him for details.

If you have any events that you wish me to mention in this Newsletter do let me know in good time.

FOR SALE

A.S.K.C. ties @ £2.00 each)
A.S.K.C. stickers @ 30p each) inclusive of P & P

MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO EXPEDITIONS

John Powell of 8 Henry's Avenue, Woodford Green Essex, has offered to fit out any 'bone-fide' expedition with medical and optical supplies at cost.

1979 SUBSCRIPTION

This is the last Newsletter going out to 1978 members who have not rejoined. If you still mean to get around to it it is £1.50 made out to the A.S.K.C. and sent to me.

AUSTRALIAN KAYAK EXPEDITION - TASMANIA CIRCUMNAVIGATION

In February, four Australians, Tony Jones, Nagle College Outdoor Education Centre, John Brewster, Noojee Outdoor Education Centre, Earle Bloomfield, Outdoor Pursuits Officer, Melbourne, and Mike Williams from Melbourne State College will leave Launceston to circumnavigate Tasmania, a journey of 1600 km, using sea kayaks. They will convey with them all their equipment and a supply of food, extra food being collected en route.

The pilot states that "Tasmania is probably the most thoroughly mountainous island in the world". Their journey around this island follows the route taken in 1798 by Bass and Flinders in their whaler. Their greatest concern will be the West Coast for which the pilot issues the following warning :- "The waters off the Western Coast of Tasmania have been little surveyed, and unknown dangers may exist". The inshore waters of the East Coast have not been surveyed at all.

These waters are still little travelled. The severity of the South and West coasts has posed considerable hazards to mariners since first sighted in 1642 by Abel Tasman. Huge swells rolling in from Antarctic storms and 'Southerly Busters', which can descend in 30 minutes, give the coasts (with only two possible harbours) a bad reputation.

This Australian Kayak Expedition hopes to continue the development started in Britain whilst maintaining the high standards of achievement set by Australian explorers in both Australia and Antarctica. We look forward to hearing more about this expedition and it will be reported on in a subsequent edition of this Newsletter.

COASTAL ADVISORY SERVICE

The Sea Touring Committee of the B.C.U., with much help from members of the A.S.K.C., have established a Coastal Advisory Service. A list of Regional Coastal Advisors has been published on page 17 of 'Canoe Focus'. If there are any of you prepared to become involved in this service please let me have your name, address and area of coast line you are able to advise on. Do not worry if that area is already covered. A request, accompanied by a S.A.E. will secure you a complete list of these advisors.

INFORMATION PLEASE

Simon Brewitt of 46 Springhill Avenue, Blackrock, Co Dublin, is asking whether any A.S.K.C. member knows anything about the Shetland Islands. He is intending a trip there this summer.

TOWING PROJECT

Jane English of Paignton, Devon, has asked me to thank all A.S.K.C. members who assisted her with her project on towing. For those of you who have not viewed this work it is available from Jane at Little Paddocks, Luscombe Road, Paignton, Devon, for 30 pence in stamps.

ALEUTIAN ISLANDS LECTURE

Derek Hutchinson has prepared an illustrated lecture on his expedition to the Aleutian Islands.

In June 1978, Derek led a team of five sea canoeists on a kayak expedition around 250 miles of coastline in the Aleutian Islands, from Dutch Harbour on Unalaska to the tiny Aleut village of Nikolski on Umnak. In spite of being two years in the planning, the expedition had its tone set when food and equipment was destroyed and tents were blown down before it even got under way. This tone was sustained throughout the adventure since June and July 1978 turned out to be one of the worst Aleutian summers in living memory.

For further details contact Derek at 18 Marina Drive, South Shields, Tyne and Wear NE33 2NH.

CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF IRELAND

John Bouteloup, Franco Ferrero and Derek Hairon successfully circumnavigated Ireland during the summer of last year using Nordkapp Kayaks.

They departed from Kinsale on July 11th to travel in a clockwise direction around the coast. They returned to Kinsale on 6 September, 58 days later, having travelled 904 nautical miles in what was reported as one of the worst summers in Ireland for ten years.

On the West Coast, which was one of the toughest sections, they averaged 18 NM per day, while on the East they averaged 27 NM a day.

The West Coast was often pretty bleak and they frequently arrived at small fishing villages where the locals had not been out for three days. All along the coast they received excellent hospitality.

A few nasty moments were experienced. Once off Loop Head when they were in a 15 - 20 foot swell they had a lot of trouble spotting their landing spot and again, whilst off Inishturk Derek's spraydeck gave way.

Derek Hairon has prepared a slide talk on this expedition. His address is Ackaless, Pontac, St Clement, Jersey, Channel Isles.

ST ANNES by VAL BAKER

As part of one of the recent sea courses run by Sandy Buttle in Pembroke Dock, Sandy arranged for us to pay a visit to the St Anne's Coastguard Station.

We were met by a cheery Mr Miller, who led us up some narrow winding steps, rather like those of a lighthouse, up to the Observation Room situated right at the top of the building. As we clambered through a hatchway type entrance in the floor, a loud buzz of telephones and radio noises met our ears, and this commotion, or so it seemed to untrained ears, proved to be continuous during the time that we stayed.

For my part, I had always imagined a coastguard station to be a restful place, one or two men with a pair of binoculars, and just a telephone in a corner ready for an emergency. Granted St Anne's, we were told, is the major coastguard station in West Wales, being responsible for the whole coast between the Lucker Estuary at Milford Haven, right up to Barmouth in North Wales, but even so, the hive of activity which greeted us was incredible. Three walls were covered in maps and charts, themselves covered with a series of mobile colour coded symbols used to plot progress made during an emergency operation - blue represented the coastguard, green the military, brown the ambulance service, and orange the lifeboat. We spotted large wall clocks showing G.M.T., (not an hour slow as someone suggested!), and not one but two telephones, one coloured red for emergency use only. There were also two radios, one VHF for normal use, and the other for contacting ships which used other frequencies.

On that particular morning St Anne's was liaising between the St David's Lifeboat and the helicopter, which were on a rescue exercise, voices from the radio were inaudible to our ears. Mr Miller explained that St Anne's was linked not only with all stations on the West coast, but also internationally with the Mediterranean, via Lloyds Yachts. The reason for this is the more ambitious nature of the modern boating enthusiast and also of the present day pilot. Recent years have seen quite an increase in attempts by single engined aircraft to cross the Atlantic, some of whom, unable to find a filling station on any of the clouds, have been forced to 'ditch'. Fortunately any such casualty has a fair chance of being found within half an hour by one of the Nimrod aircraft.

Nimrods, we were told, cost £2,000 per hour to man. The cost of launching the helicopter is £100, to get it off the ground, plus £150 for every hour it is in operation. However expense is never thought of at the time of an emergency - no-one would dare to complain about the amount of money spent to protect human life, but nevertheless the Coastguard Station is expected to try and keep to a budget. The last few years had averaged out at about £7000.

It was interesting to learn of the tremendous power invested in the Coastguard on duty in an emergency situation. Be he only one of the voluntary aids, if he happens to be on duty when an emergency takes place, he has the authority to get all the rescue equipment moving immediately, landrovers, lifeboat, helicopter, without reference to higher authority. No other service delegates such tremendous responsibility and power. His only rebuke might be if he hasn't done enough.

During the summer months in particular, calls for help come in fast and furious. They are of a surprising variety in nature. While we were

at the station a report came in of a glider which had disappeared over a cliff. We heard later when the incident had been investigated that it had in fact been a motorised glider, meaning that the call was a false alarm. Mr Miller consoled us that the Coastguard never rejects one call, all are followed up even though some are passed on to a more appropriate rescue service. Calls are received reporting broken limbs on cliff paths, hang-gliders in trouble and lost persons. The light summer evenings also bring in innumerable calls and reportings about the sighting of flares - all are investigated, even though the vast majority turn out to be distant car lights, no questions are asked when some of the reports are given by young couples at 3 o'clock in the morning! However many genuine flares are spotted by the public, which is just as well, because, as we could well have after our visit, the Coastguard, even when visibility allows, has little time to sit and observe his panoramic view. Very often the station has to cope with two and even three emergencies simultaneously, and the officers we met had many tales to recount. Changes in rescue approach had also taken place over the last years. Gone are the days when fishermen didn't learn to swim because they knew that if they fell overboard the boat could never turn about in time to save them.

Three or four years ago a diver had been reported missing off Hollyhead. After an appropriate time the services had given up the search, and only the Coastguard continued. Thirty hours later the diver was found alive, owing his survival to his wet suit. Very often we were told, searches were continued long after the Air/Sea Temperature and Time Graph indicated that survival was impossible, merely to console relatives that everything possible was being done.

Another incident recounted was that of a certain Police Cadet Unit from Wales, which three years ago was advised not to go around Ramsey because of an immediate gale warning. However the group insisted, despite similar advice from the lifeboat crew, that they were experienced enough to cope. Four hours later there was no sign of them, and when worried relatives rang up a search was begun and a helicopter sent up. As it happened the group had managed to get to a beach in safety, and still insisted that they had been in no danger. This was the type of circumstance that the Coastguard sometimes found himself in. On another occasion a group of students, from an English University, had been advised against launching into a heavy swell in bad weather. Regardless of advice the launch was made, resulting in a capsizing by the first two paddlers, one of whom had his crash hat split open and a 'nasty mess' was made to his head.

However there were humorous incidents to relate as well, like the epic of two chaps who set sail in or on a wardrobe, and ended up 15 miles from home on a sand bank in the River Severn - their objective had been Southampton! And then there were the two fourteen year old boys who had floated in a single kayak, the one doing a piggyback, all the way from Ireland! They arrived none the worse for their experience. Irish luck!

Mr Miller even recounted one call received from an old lady right in the centre of Birmingham, who wanted them to send their helicopter so that she could visit her son. The Coastguard was able to keep her talking and affirm her location, and at the same time inform the police who went to her aid. After all, as Mr Miller said, she was in need of help from somebody.

We had of course to ask the obvious question - what did the Coastguard think of us canoeists?? We were told that generally the recognised clubs who reported in were no trouble - it was the lone rangers who were the nuisance - like the two who were found by the helicopter fast asleep on

the beach, having been reported missing for three days by anxious relatives. The lone yachtsman also proved to be a cause for concern, a typical example being when, having waited for a few days for a change in the weather, with his holiday nearing its end and he says to himself "I'll go tomorrow weather regardless!"

Diving, as well as canoeing, is a rapidly expanding sport, tremendous numbers now taking to the sea, and it was their duty, we were told by the Senior Coastguard, Mr John, to conceive of ways of looking to themselves for help first, especially when in remote spots which the Coastguard couldn't hope to cover. What hope have canoeists got when every year 15 - 20 ships or vessels, some 40,000 tonners, some up to 120,000 tonners, just disappear off the surface of the world without trace. A canoe from the bridge would be a mere speck, and very often, with modern navigational 'aids' and automatic pilots, no-one would be looking anyway! After all tankers have been known to collide with each other because of insufficient lookout. In an emergency the Coastguard can alert shipping to look out for canoeists in trouble, but very often not even the shipping companies know where their ships are and even if they are in the appropriate place again they are very often not listening to the radio or are listening to a different frequency.

Mr John gave up an hour of his valuable time to talk to us. Further to the information we had received from Mr Miller, he further informed us about other concerns of the Coastguard. At the present time he was concerned with a very big operation which was to take place on the 9th June, running for possibly three days. The plan was to be something along the lines of a mock incident to tackle an accident with an oil tanker - with 200 people in the water to cope with. The exercise was a very serious attempt to consider how such an incident would be coped with should it happen for real, and involved 4 M.P's and the Welsh Office. Oil pollution was in fact one of the major concerns of the coastguard, but less publicised, Mr John pointed out, was their concern for other more dangerous types of pollution, such as the possible leakage of cyanide and other toxic acids which pass up and down that part of the coast in vast quantities.

Finally, Mr John very kindly offered to demonstrate the letting off of a flare, for as we said, none of us present had seen exactly what happened, leave alone practised firing one. He talked for a while on the different types, and added that it was the Schermuly make of flare that was used by all Coastguard Stations. He explained how things could go wrong when setting off a flare, for example it would do little good if it travelled along the trough of a wave, or floated in the wind too far from the canoeist's position. For this reason he advised that small hand flares should also be carried to give precise location when it was known that help was at hand. He also concluded by revising the type of information which we would be asked for if ever we called for help - ie number of people missing, single/double canoes, colour, survival equipment carried, planned route.

In conclusion I know that those who were present at the visit to St Anne's would like me to say 'thankyou' to the staff who made our visit so enjoyable and informative. We appreciated the time that was given up in order to make the visit such a success.