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ADVANCED SEA KAYAK CLUB

NEWSLETTER NO. 20

EDITORIAL

If you're able to refer back to ASKC Newsletter No. 16 you will see that I made short mention of Tom Daly's sole circumnavigation of Ireland. Since writing this I have received a full and absorbing account of Tom's expedition. Space and finances won't allow me to publish the whole account but I am going to print the final instalment entitled 'THE HOMECOMING'. I'm sure you will enjoy it as much as I did.

I mentioned in my last letter that I was off to Australia and I have included my article on this adventure (Editor's privilege). I have called it simply JOHN RAMWELL IN AUSTRALIA.

I have received the account of John Aberdein's Isle of Wight Record Attempt and certainly it is worth including.

I am going to do a 'Navigation Special' in four parts. I suggest you save them as together they make a good summary on basic navigation.

On completion of the navigation I have an excellent article on TIDES, so there is plenty in the pipe line. None the less still contributions are needed so keep those expedition reports coming in together with your other news, views, opinions etc.

Finally I have a few letters to publish and then a few notices to round this letter off. So to summarise the contents of this letter

1. Final instalment of Tom Daly's circumnavigation of Ireland.
2. Me in Australia.
3. John Aberdein's Isle of Wight Record Attempt.
4. First of four part instalment on basic navigation.
5. Readers' letters.

Till Newsletter No. 21,
Good Canoeing,

John J. Ramwell

1. THE HOMECOMING

One hour ago I had left Oysterhaven having spent a delightful rest day there and was now on the last leg of my journey. Even though I was passing the sun-drenched Cork coast and was on a calm sea, I became very fed up towards evening. I resented everyone. I resented Ann whom I knew would be enjoying a folk concert in Pairc Ui Chaoinh. I resented my brother-in-law who was putting pressure on me to keep going by arranging my homecoming for a certain day and I resented all other sea canoeists who apparently enjoyed their sport.

A pleasant starry night under a cliff at Galley Head improved my mood, but the following day's pull to Cape Clear was even worse. Instead of the usual three or four page entry in my log, that day's account was brief and to the point: "Nothing special about today. Just another long exhausting day with head winds". The prospect of rounding the South West Corner of Ireland was adding to my gloom. I was faced with long crossings, few landing places and notorious seas. "This must be what its like in mid-ocean", I said to myself as I looked around and saw grey sea meet grey mist on all sides. I was very uncomfortable. The compass-bearing on which I was travelling had been made out the previous might in the Youth Hostel on Clear Island. Because of a power failure, I lit matches with one hand while I hastily did my calculations with the other, thinking that I'd only had occasion to use the compass a couple of times so far anyway.

Before I had reached Mizen Head, the fog came down and the Fastnet disappeared like a fading apparition. I chuckled to myself, thinking of a trip out there the previous Easter with a friend and an excited light-house keeper slightly worried about the appearance of two tiny vessels under his perch. Mizen Head brought no elation - just what might be another life or death decision. From my craft there was no possibility of taking bearings or writing them on the chart and any bearings I was likely to need had been marked the night before. The one I was looking at would, I hoped, bring me to Black Ball Harbour just east of Dursey Sound.

Apart from the doubt about the compass course, an accuracy of ten degrees was the best I could expect with the boat bucking in such a choppy sea and ten degrees, combined with drift and leeway caused by wind and tide could leave you well off course after fifteen miles. I couldn't look at the compass for more than half-a-dozen strokes at a time because of feelings of nausea. If anything went wrong, flares couldn't be seen. Away to the west, a sailing vessel came and went out of the mist - it looked like a Chinese junk!

Black Bull Head did eventually appear dead ahead and it had a dull grey appearance gradually turning more black as I came closer until eventually a fisherman guided me to a safe landing place. The evening continued dull and misty and as I camped on long wet grass everything got thoroughly damp. My sleeping bag couldn't be put into the watertight compartments and was therefore stored behind the seat where drops of salt water were continually trickling through the plastic bags in which it was stowed.

These were easy to dry out, but there was so much salt in the bag at this stage that it picked up moisture from the air and in any kind of damp weather the bag was wet. The fishermen woke me early next morning to get through Dursey Sound before the tide, and I headed west in the cold and windy dawn-light. A big American cruiser overtook me at the Sound and the family were on deck with film-star grins and whirring cameras.

As I watched it heading North under power, heaving and swaying in the swell from the fresh northerly wind, I was faced with a decision whether to turn back or to head out into the wind. My log continues the story: "Oh my God, what a day! A day I didn't think possible. I didn't think it possible that I could rise out of a wet sleeping bag at 5 o'clock in the morning and paddle for almost eleven hours into the teeth of strong winds and big Atlantic seas". That was the way it was and I must have been crazy or a fool to attempt it, but I got away with it.

I arrived at the mouth of St. Finan's Bay and a salmon boat came over to investigate. If I had been lost I would have known from the way that the fishermen folded their arms, stretched out on the boat and sized me up, that I was looking at Kerrymen! My problems weren't over however, as the seas were still rough and the men in the boat told me that I couldn't land through the surf on the beach and that the pier was impossible unless I knew the place. They advised me to go to Ballinskelligs, but what was a short journey for them with their engines would have been killing for me after an eleven hour exhausting day.

By this time, I had tended to ignore the advice of fishermen anyway. While they recognised the limitations of my craft they did not see its advantages, and on more than one occasion they warned me that something could not be done, when it turned out to be nothing out of the ordinary. The surf posed no problem and I was greeted by a couple of dozen people who had read in the "Cork Examiner" about my expected arrival.

Only one elderly lady took off her shoes and came into the water in her stockings to help me with the boat while everyone looked on, but when a photographer from the "Kerryman" invited them to join in a photograph, out they all trooped, shoes, stockings, trousers and skirts all getting wet! For a moment I forgot how cold and tired I was and felt amused at being surrounded by supposedly sane human beings smiling at a photographer while the waves lapped around their legs on a cold, wind-swept beach.

I was in Kerry again and had a great nine hour sleep that night. A short-cut through a rock strewn Sound caught my eye as I was leaving the bay next morning. The in-coming waves were breaking there but I had no intention of going around. I tried to judge the best place to go through and sprinted when the time was right. A surge took me to within feet of rocks on my left; a wave was steepening dangerously in front of me; I pulled with all my might and got through just before the wave began crashing behind me in a roar of boiling foam that would have taken me careering over tooth-like rocks had I been a second or two later.

The adrenalin was pounding through my system, my heart was rattling in my chest but as Bray Head was before me, the incident was forgotten in minutes as I had to make a decision whether to land at Valentia or cross Dingle Bay to Slea Head.

The gods had smiled on me again as the winds had moved to the West and I headed for Slea Head, my last long worrying hop. The swell was huge at first despite the moderate wind. A yacht was passing South about a mile away, her hull coming into view only twice and the top of her mast disappeared for long intervals. I enjoyed the crossing. The day was fine and I thought back on all the adventures and thrills I had found on the hills and seas that surrounded me. I also thought about the times I had stood on the sand-dunes at Inch or Rosbeigh, my blood turning cold as I looked out at the expanse of water between Bray and Slea Head, and thinking, frightened, that one day I would have to face that crossing and many other crossing besides.

Over the years I had grown accustomed to Kerry, but as I cooked my meal that evening I could not but be moved by the view across the Blasket Sound. The sea was a brilliant blue and across the narrow stretch of water that now looked so peaceful and harmless, the Great Blasket was a clear green, while the other islands became gradually more dull with distance from the mainland.

Once I had read of a funeral leaving the little pier on the Great Blasket for Dunquin and I thought what a lovely sight it would be to see sixteen curraghs in line astern stretched out across the Sound. I had landed on the tiny beach at Curreenole just under Slea Head, hoping that the wind wouldn't turn to the South West and throw up big dumping surf, which could easily prevent me from going out again.

went to Kruger Kavanagh's for a drink that night despite my uneasiness about leaving the oat alone on a tourist beach. The nearer I got to so-called civilisation, the more careful had to be about having gear stolen. I had become very attached to the boat now - I had ursed and minded it like a baby for seven weeks and was never at ease when away from it.

he end of my journey was only one day's paddle away, but as I wasn't expected until the ollowing day I was going to make two relatively short journeys, the first of which was to randon Creek. It was a pleasant morning as I rushed up the Blasket Sound with a strong tide, ut things changed dramatically when the tide ran into the North-Westerly wind and swell at he Northern end of the sound. It was the first time I had to make extensive use of support trokes and the boat moved involuntarily under me because I had lost so much weight that my ips didn't fit the seat tightly enough to give me full control.

ocals would have called the sea "lumply". The whole thing was like being on a switch-back ailway. It was a scene of interchanging gaping holes of water and conical peaks, capped with now-like breaking foam. You fall into a hole which suddenly becomes a peak and your stomach ets that jolt which occurs when you jump from a high diving board.

rom a distance, the entrance to Brandon Creek appeared to be plastered with breaking waves nd I was worried that I wouldn't get through, but it wasn't as bad as it appeared. The often sed imagery of the sailor finding peace in the shelter of a port after a journey through ough seas was never more true as I paddled up the fjord-like creek that evening.

I was only about ten miles from home but didn't allow myself the luxury of self-congratulations I couldn't.

I spent the last night in my favouritecompany - old fishermen in a quiet corner of an un-modernised pub and they went over every foot of the remaining few miles. I was glad that the last day was one of the roughest and the problem of staying upright precluded any emotion. I only allowed myself to be moved by elation when I saw the old look-out tower at the top of Brandon Point and knew that my crazy, impossible, fool's dream had come true. I soon rounded the point and was in calm water. Twenty minutes later I dragged the boat ashore for the last time.

I had travelled almost 1,000 miles in a tiny craft, along some of the most dangerous coast-line in the world. I did it alone and with the strength of my own hands. Yet, in comparison with other major achievements it was a puny effort and will be of no significance in the history of man's adventure or exploration.

I hope that it was significant however, in inspiring some of those people who like myself lived ordinary mundane lives and had dreams of doing something adventurous. I had a vision and turned it into reality. I achieved my ambition without having to spend an exorbitant amount of money or going to the ends of the Earth to carry it out. I had no big publicity machine and none of the high powered promotion and financing involved in many modern expeditions. Perhaps I have shown that in this world, where the glorification of the famous by the media makes the normal person feel irrelevant, the ordinary person can still do his own thing.

After having had a few drinks with some people who had come to welcome me home, I put the boat on the roof-rack and sat into the car with Ann to go home - but first we drove up to the top of Brandon Point and there I had one last look at the huge expanse of blue sea, dotted with breaking white-horses. There I gave thanks to whatever it was that controlled the forces of Nature for having allowed me to pass by safely.

I did not feel arrogant, I did not feel that I had conquered the sea. Rather, the sea had made me humble and now I realised more than ever, that man, despite the sense of his own importance and achievement, is completely at the mercy of the whims of Nature.

2. JOHN RAMWELL IN AUSTRALIA

Earle Bloomfield, a member of the Advanced Sea Kayak Club, circumnavigator of Tasmania (1979) native of Australia living in Melbourne with his beautiful wife, Kate and young son Thor (How's that for an introduction Earle!) wrote to me last year and told me about his plans to lay on a course for sea canoeists and suggested I tried to visit Australia for a holiday and at the same time help out with this course.

In actual fact Earle needs little introduction to canoeists in this country. He had instructed canoeing at Plas Y Brenin in Wales and at the Lakeside National Mountain Centre, England.

Having agreed to help out with Earle's sea canoeing course, which was being organised under the umbrella of the Australian Board of Canoe Education, (similar to our British Canoe Union) I started to make travel plans. I flew Quantas from London direct to Melbourne via Calcutta and Perth, and returned via Sydney, Darwin, Singapore, Kualalumper and Bahrain.

I arrived Melbourne on Tuesday 22 April at 6.00 p.m. local time (they are nine hours ahead of us) after 23 hours travelling. As I was experiencing jet lag I was pleased to see Kate Bloomfield there to meet me. It wasn't plain sailing through the customs as I was carrying

wooden paddles. One is not allowed to bring in plant life; plant life - wood - Lendal paddles!) And so we were off into Melbourne itself. Though it was early evening it was quite dark, (they were well into their Autumn) but as my 'biological time clock' was so confused it really did not seem to matter.

The next few days were spent in preparing for the sea canoeing course. Earle and I must have tramped the length of Melbourne to meet up with canoe manufacturers and retailers, chandlers, chart emporiums (if there is such a thing!) and fishing equipment shops in search of all the necessary paraphanalia. Difficulty in obtaining charts was a problem. The area we were to cover had not been charted for many years and they were not readily available.

Wednesday evening gave me a chance to meet up with the course participants. Half of them were local people and the others had travelled great distances (by our standards at least) from South Australia to attend. The gathering this evening was for a few mini lectures on meteorology, navigation, etc., and for a final briefing.

On Thursday we left Melbourne for Welshpool which is just beyond Wilsons Promontory. Wilsons Prom. was to be the venue for the three day course. It is a huge mountainous spit of land that juts out towards Tasmania in the Bass Strait. After a great night at the 'local' in Welshpool we found ourselves assembling on Friday morning on the beach. You know what it is like making final preparations and packing sea kayaks. There were sixteen of us preparing for the three days and two nights out. It seemed like disorganised chaos, but we got there in the end and by mid morning sixteen canoeists in sixteen Nordkaps set off for Wilsons Prom. We met some disturbed water once we were out of the lee of the mainland and it basically remained disturbed until Sunday morning when we had a very calm paddle back to Welshpool.

The first day was spent on completing various exercises and experiencing some interesting sea conditions. Our campsite for the night was ideallic, amid huge gum trees actually on the Promontory itself. The second day we divided into two groups of similar ability and my group travelled along the coast and spent time surfing, fishing and just canoeing. Though I was told there is usually an abundance of fish, they were not offering themselves up for capture, and so we had to rely on our own rations for sustenance. The two groups met up again in the evening and we had another excellent night's camp. Where all the bottles of port and whisky materialised from as we sat around the fire....I'll never know.

Sunday, a fine calm day. We paddled our way back to base, Welshpool, where we had a demonstration of marine flares followed by a course de-brief. Without exception everyone felt they had enjoyed a great course, which though set out to be a beginners/improvers course, because of the sea and weather conditions prevailing had developed into an advanced sea type course. The weather around the Wilsons Promontory area is worthy of special mention. It changes so rapidly it is unbelievable. From a calm sea and sunshine to an overcast squally disturbed sea in a matter of a few moments. There is a saying used round these parts of the country; if you don't like the weather - wait five minutes!

Sea canoeing in Australia is as advanced as anywhere else in the world. The reasons for this are several, but two come to mind, first the excellent coast line, outlying islands and natural wild life, in other words the obvious opportunities for sea canoeing, and secondly the lack of fast wild rivers for most of the year.

Australia is basically a dry State and water has to be conserved, hence there is a danger of young rivers disappearing as dams and reservoirs are built. This is particularly the case in Tasmania where there is a move to stop the River Franklin from suffering this fate. It may be a case of thirst versus canoeing and the outcome may be inevitable, but it does go much further than this as the heritage and the environment of the Australians is in danger.

Before visiting Adelaide I spent a day with John Wilde, known to many British canoeists. A Brit. himself, he has made his home in Melbourne and works full time for the Australian Board of Canoe Education. John was taking a group of students down the upper reaches of the River Yarra. The mighty Yarra. The scenery was out of this world, huge gum trees lining the hills coming right down to the water side. And the Bell Birds making their distinctive bell like call.

The trip to Adelaide was impressive. We travelled the Great Ocean Road which was fantastic. Great cliffs and rock formations and all the way along the hundreds of miles of coast ... great rolling surf. Truly a surfers paradise (not to be confused with Surfers Paradise on the East Coast). Surprisingly we saw few surfers, and so there is plenty of room if you fancy Australian surf.

Whilst en route for Adelaide we visited a farm deep in the Australian Bush at a place called Chetwynd. We stayed overnight and were made very welcome by Enid and Les Humphries. A great place to be, the Australian bush. Again the abundance of gum trees.. and sheep. I was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of wild Kangaroo and Emu. Then on to Adelaide. We made several stops to explore such attractions as the old maritime port at Warrnambool, the Blue Lake at Mt. Gambier which at a certain time of the year changes colour overnight,

and the huge cave which is remarkable for its stalactites and stalagnites. There is not the space here to describe these places, nor to enthuse about so much more I saw, like for example the endless Pine forests, the Adelaide Hills and the Coorong, a road running along a vast peninsula.

No sooner were we in Adelaide when I was making plans to cross Backstairs Passage by canoe, a stretch of water between Cape Jervis on the mainland and Kangaroo Island. This turned out to be a great trip. Weather was perfect and so was the company. We even had a press reception on our return to Cape Jervis.

I must mention the hospitality and friendliness of the Adelaidians. Their enthusiasm for everything, including of course sea canoeing was tremendous. It must be the climate and the local wines. I was introduced to several of the wines produced locally. I think that at one particular meal at Adelaide University we consumed well over two bottles each, I don't really remember now!

So much happened during our short stay in Adelaide. Radio interviews, more sea canoeing, and parties. We set off back for Melbourne at 4.30 in the morning having been to an all night party at the Adelaide Arts Centre...what a party that was!

The long haul back to Melbourne, stopping only to eat, re-gas or change drivers. We broke our journey at Ballarat to view the historical gold mine, where it is still possible to pan for gold, not that I saw anyone find any the day we were there!!

One more dinner party in Melbourne before catching my flight back to London put the final touch to what was for me a remarkable experience.

I have mentioned one or two names only in this account. If I mentioned all those whom I met, who extended friendship and hospitality I should have a lengthy list indeed. Save to say that if every you have any doubts about human nature, go visit Australia. I found such genuine and unaffected hospitality that another visit has to be inevitable.

3. JOHN ABERDEIN'S ISLE OF WIGHT RECORD ATTEMPT

I enjoy canoeing solo on the sea. It's not a thing to recommend; after all, one of the cornerstones of the Coaching Scheme is "less than three there should never be". I think it is fair to say that in order to Solo Canoe, you have to be in a state of harmony with yourself, your abilities and with the sea. If and when you judge that to be the case, then you should be quite clear. There is no need to be apologetic about it to Coastguards or Pilots or Fishermen or Rescue Specialists. The solo sea canoeist is safer than the solo dinghy-sailor, and no one particularly criticises the latter. Yet it is the sea-canoeist who is less susceptible to gear failure and less vulnerable to extremes of weather. Calms, foggy calms, force nines, not to mention tide-races and approaches to lee shores should all be handled better by the sea-canoeist than by the dinghy sailor. (I hope I am not leaking any secrets when I mention that one of the few areas in which we lag behind is that of toilet facilities).

Anyway, lots of people are doing it nowadays (solo sea-canoeing), and probably always have been. One of them, who seared a white wake round the Isle of Wight last year, is John Lee who worked at Calshot for a Season and now works at Poole & Dorset Activities Centre. He'd just come out of the Paratroops "with muscles like ripcord" and he set a record of 10 hours 52 minutes. For 60 miles (start and finish at Calshot Slip) that seemed pretty good going. He used a B.S.C.A. Cadet, whose design owed a lot to the W.W. racer. It's fast but it doesn't look like a sea-boat to me. (Mind you, neither do some "sea-boats"). As soon as I heard of John's time, I felt I had to have a crack at it, for the honour of Scottish Sea-Canoeists, and of the Anas Acuta (designed by Geoff Blackford, ex Head of Canoeing at Calshot).

I didn't really think John's record was beatable - I just hoped it was. I didn't train very much - one 30 miles and a couple of lesser stints in the ten days before the attempt. I over-ate the day before, drank pints of salty water, and made up a route on the chart with target distances for each hour's paddling.

At 4 a.m. on Sunday, September 9th, my old Anas slid away from Calshot Slip. My 17 month old son, Finn, was intrigued by this nocturnal parting. Penny, my wife told the Coastguards in their Tower. As far as she could tell over the intercom. they didn't bat an eyelid. In the first few strokes I knew it was on. The paddle was slicing clearly under a fairly clear sky - the invisible ebb was sliding down the line of red flashing buoys. Hurst light red sector came into view from as far away as Lepe. In the first dozen miles I didn't see another vessel. I held to the Shipping Channel to get the best of the big spring tide. A contrary breeze freshened before dawn and kicked up a jabble off Yarmouth and again through Hurst Race. It was still dark as one or two yachts ballooned through across my path.

Then came the red and green lights of a cruiser, presumably heading up to Yarmouth and aiming close in on the Island side to keep out of the tide. I altered to starboard. Red and Green. I altered to Port. Red and Green again. Starboard and sprint. Either the

helmsman's drunk or he's picked me up on the radar and is nosey. The engine note rises, a shape looms and then a searchlight. I wave to acknowledge.

"Get off the sea before you get yourself bloody killed". A Trinity House Pilot vessel. "I've told that ship you're here and I've told the Coastguard".

"Thanks very much, the Coastguard already know" (And I'm in Totland Bay, well out of the Shipping lane.)

"And my advice to you is to go ashore right now, before you get yourself bloody well killed".

"Yes, that's alright, I have canoed solo around the whole coastline of Scotland and I do know what I'm doing...."

"I don't care what you've....."

"Alright, thanks very much, goodbye".

It is unsettling however. The man is an expert at his job but knows as much about sea kayaking as the average air-bedder knows about off-shore winds. Dawn comes in very abruptly, I count my paddling rate - 66 strokes per minute, and we are at the Needles in 2 hours 17 minutes, with 8 minutes to spare on the target and 45 minutes before the tide turns. All very factual. The taste has momentarily gone. This is my first time at the Needles - a strange amalgamation of sharp outline and soft white texture. No seabirds on the limestone. I really miss my auks and shags, kittiwakes and fulmars. Whitened rock would mean their presence but not this all-white stuff.

I have my first stop of the trip just after Scratchell's Bay - a couple of minutes to drink half a litre of orange juice heavily fortified with glucose powder. All paddling comes from the abdomen and the tight muscles there wouldn't allow solid food now. I make a navigational mistake, greedily edging to get on to the direct line between Needles and St. Catherine's, even when I know that the tide is in my favour only close inshore. Using the S.W. swell I surf into Freshwater Bay and then turn and slog on. Most sea-boats are at their worst in a quartering sea.

I reach St. Catherine's without incident at 8.50, five minutes down on schedule and swing out wide to avoid the tidal eddy. Another half litre of this glucose elixir. The next half hour is the worst. You know in advance that there will come a time when giving-in seems the best answer to fatigue, discomfort and lapsed schedules. The crux on so-called physical marathons is always a mental one.

Anyway, I plough up to Ventnor through black treacle. Ventnor is a typical Southern resort, all pastel pinks and greens perched on each other like a birthday cake. I have to laugh - and then it's all easier. The trip up to Culver Cliff is simple with hardly any tidal inset to the bay, and the light air is dead astern. By Bembridge it is flat calm and I am 15 minutes up on schedule. I thread through the weedy ledges then stop luxuriously for four minutes to sponge the boat dry.

On the way back to Calshot it is practically calm, the tide is slack then, picks up and I enjoy passing the Sunday yachtsmen. I hold to North Channel and sprint the last half hour to make sure of breaking the ten hour barrier. A few twinges in the left shoulder and my first ever case of teno-sinovitis. The conditions have been pretty kind really. I land at 13.49 and the record is mine by over an hour. But for how long?.....

John H. Aberdein Instructor - Canoe Department
Calshot Activities Centre.

4. FIRST OF FOUR PART INSTALMENT ON BASIC NAVIGATION

The right course - Plotting your course, allowing for tide and leeway, dead reckoning and position fixing - the first of four articles on basic navigation techniques discusses chart-work.

Few would admit it but there must be a number of otherwise fine canoeists who have never actually picked a compass course off a chart and steered it. Probably they feel there is no need and for that reason they have never learned how. They regularly canoe on a familiar stretch of water with their next port always in sight and in consequence feel perfectly safe just canoeing by eye. But it cannot bring much comfort, this awareness that they perhaps lack the knowledge to venture further. Nor can it bring much reassurance to know that if an emergency were to occur they may not have the reserves to meet it. If circumstances forced them outside their home patch, or if a fog clamped down and blotted out their familiar land-marks, they could be in serious trouble. It may be all very well for them to carry a chart and refer to it now and then like a road map but this is not chartwork, nor is it a very reliable procedure.

Chartwork is planning, being ready for the unexpected. It is the application of all the facts you possess plus a consideration for those which you don't. Chartwork is the infallible guide prepared at all times to take you safely wherever you want to go. Learn it, practise it, and then canoe by eye if it's prudent - but only a knowledge of chartwork will let you decide.

Assuming that you have had some canoeing experience it is a good idea to choose a familiar passage for your first chart experience. You will be able to compare the workings with your own practical knowledge and thus gain more confidence in your figures. Coastal navigation is fun, challenging fun, something which people who invest in highly sophisticated equipment sadly don't seem to realise.

Departure and landfall - The most important requirement before drawing any lines on the chart is to pick a departure position. This will be the starting point and reference for the voyage. Usually it is a navigation mark off the port which you aim to pass close by; the fiarway bouy, an offshore rock, the pier head, some last feature clearly marked on the chart from which you can get a good position fix by eye. Later the exact position and time of passing will be marked on the chart.

The logic of navigation is to take the vessel from one prominent mark to another. So following the departure point the next thing to look for is a landfall, that is to say some well-defined feature which lies close to your destination. Apply some thought to this because you will need to pick something which is, as far as possible, unique to your destination and which can be seen a long way out at sea. It may be a fairground lit by coloured lights or a block of flats or multi-storey car park, something which you know. Sadly, most Admiralty charts haven't kept abreast of the building boom.

With the departure and landfall marks chosen the next consideration is whether to canoe directly from one to the other (if such is physically possible) or whether to deliberately dog-leg the course to take you within sight or sound of prominent marks on the way. If the total distance is short then there may be no need for these midway position checks. And another point: these prominent features do not necessarily have to be on land. Buoys, lightships, etc. may be more convenient.

Once the salient points have been established carefully connect them with the rulers and pencil. These are the course lines. Now study them for a moment or two. Are they safe? Do they carry you across any rocks, rip tides, wrecks or sandbanks? (If they pass near it is a good idea to ring the danger with a pencil.) Are they reasonably direct? Do they cross shipping lanes? Do they make the most of favourable tides? Do they provide ready access to shelter?

Plotting courses - The provisions all satisfied, the next job is to discover the magnetic headings for each course and label them accordingly. Lay the parallel rulers (of whatever pattern you choose) alongside the first course and step them very carefully across the chart to the nearest compass rose. Check with a pencil that the rules are lying exactly through the centre of the grid and run the pencil through the numbers of the compass rose. Pick out this number on the magnetic rose and write it down on the course line marking it 'M' for magnetic. Repeat the procedure for all the courses and you will then have the sequence ready for immediate use instead of having to fuss around with ruler and pencil on passage. You will notice, or be already aware, that there is also an outside compass rose which gives true (geographical) bearings. Except as a reference this is best ignored and it is safer to base all coastal navigation on magnetic headings. A great number of mistakes are made by people reading off, and then steering, the reciprocal course line (or bearing). It seems inconceivable that anyone could ever be 180° out, but it happens and there are planty of shipwrecks to prove it. To avoid making this mistake it is always a help to say to yourself, "Now what is the approximate compass direction I'm after?". North, east, south-east or whatever? Then see how this accords with your three-figure answer. For most of us words are more meaningful than figures.

It would be a simple thing if we could pick off the courses direct from the chart and then steer them. Unfortunately this is unwise because of the many outside influences which push the boat in some other direction and which have to be compensated for: influences such as tidal effect and the unhappy trait most canoeists have of occasionally wandering off their course lines. It is up to the navigator to try and guage the probable effect of these and adjust his courses accordingly, but however the text books make it sound this results in far more guesswork than science. (Perhaps we should substitute 'art' instead of guesswork.)

Allowing for leeway - Compensation for leeway is correctly the first thing to apply. Leeway is the amount the boat is blown downwind and although usually thought of as a sideways movement it can just as easily be a forwards or backwards movement, in which case it is her speed and not her direction which is affected. Varying boat speeds, varying wind strengths and directions and varying construction of boats all add up to varying amounts of leeway. In fact, it is a wise owner who knows the amount of leeway produced in a given set of circumstances. Some idea can be gleaned by throwing sheets of paper at intervals over the stern and trying to express the angle between the 'wake course' and the boat's head in degrees. If this can be established then the correction is applied to the course and the boat is made to steer closer into the weather by that same amount.

Tidal set and drift - The effect of a tidal stream running parallel, or roughly parallel, with your course is obvious, it either slows you down or hurries you along. Only when it sets directly or obliquely across your track is the course angle affected and some correctio

required to nullify its effect. To find out what the tidal streams will be throughout the journey you will need a tidal atlas. This is a collection of simple maps of the area covered with arrows, which by their direction indicate the movement and set of the tide hour by hour. (An alternative to the atlas is the tidal stream inset on the chart; more troublesome to use but probably more accurate.)

The tidal information in the atlas is based on a "Standard Port", Dover, Portsmouth, Falmouth or some place like that. So you also need a set of tide tables for the appropriate Standard Port.

Now having established the date and time of leaving, together with some rough idea of how long the journey will take, you can look up the state of tide at the Standard Port commensurate with the hour of your departure and, with the help of the atlas, see what the tide is going to do during each subsequent hour of the passage.

The next job involves a little geometry, for we have to construct a 'parallelogram of forces' using the values of the tidal set and drift and the course we hope to 'make good'. The resultant figure of this construction will be the course to steer to counteract the tide. The figure is usually plotted directly onto the course line, which allows you to use such facilities as the parallel rules, compass rose and latitude scale of distance. However, if the chart is small and crowded this may not be convenient and the drawing has to be plotted in a larger scale in some spare corner of the chart. Think big! The larger the scale the more accurate the plot.

It can become a little tedious having to construct a 'tide vector' drawing every hour - and correctly, they have to be redrawn every hour because the tide's strength and direction constantly changing. Then, there are other occasions when their use is quite superfluous. Supposing you were making a cross-Channel trip in which the tide was expected to turn midway. In other words there might be three hours of flood carrying you up-Channel, and three hours of ebb sweeping you back. Obviously an hourly tide diagram is not essential since the effect of one tide will nullify the other.

In practice then, one tries to make an overall assessment. Look at the tides throughout the entire length of the passage (and with particular respect to each leg you run) and try to make a once-and-for-all adjustment. It isn't so accurate of course, but on the other hand how much value can one really place on a tide vector diagram when tide table information is sometimes so unreliable? A strong prevailing wind, which heaps up the water, a high barometer which presses it down, these features can upset predictions enormously, and this quite apart from the practical problems of interpolating between springs and neaps or the directions of the arrows on the tidal chart.

To summarize then, use a tide vector diagram whenever it is suitable to do so. That would especially apply when making a landfall where the course is at right angles to the land and the inshore tide is customarily strong, but do not become hidebound by convention. Tide and its counteraction is often a matter of horse sense.

To be continued

5. READERS' LETTERS

Michael O'Connell, now living in MILLOM in CUMBRIA has passed on the following letter received from Peter Hope Jones regarding Access to BARDSEY.

Dear Michael,

I gather that you've been enquiring about access to Bardsey for members of the Advanced Sea Kayak Club.

Basically, anyone is welcome to land on the island, on payment of a fee of 50p, but camping is not permitted. It is possible to stay at the Bird & Field Observatory by prior arrangement - which can be made through the Booking Secretary Mrs Helen Bond, 21A Gestridge Road, Kingsteignton, Newton Abbot, Devon - she could give you details. The Bardsey warden has been worried by canoeists who had arrived at the island exhausted (one group to such an extent that they had to stay there three days), and since no camping is allowed there, he hoped it could be brought to the notice of intending canoeist visitors that they should arrive in time (and condition!) to enable them to leave the same day. Obviously this is not a grave matter at present, and one hopes it never will be, but a few gentle words from yourself in the right quarters could help canoeists and island wardens alike, and could doubtless save a lot of unnecessary hassle at a later stage.

On a less formal note, I wonder whether you or any of your Sea Kayak Club occasionally notice porpoises and dolphins on your sea travels. The British Sub-Aqua Club have produced the enclosed poster - your help in recording any such sea mammals would be much appreciated.

With best wishes,

Peter Hope Jones

Mick Box has sent me the following letter

"Congratulation to Coach Mike Fennessy and Senior Coach Jeff Choat for the Three-Day South Devon coast Brixham to Plymouth Advanced Training and Assessment Course held 24th-26th May. Quite the best way, I am sure, to assess Advanced Sea Canoeists is surely a Three-Day Camping and Canoeing Expedition, placing the canoeist in the environment and conditions in which all the elements and advanced canoeing skills can and were met. The evening camps and discussions and individual talks were a welcome change from the normal classroom and blackboard set-up of previous courses. The old "Hole in the bottom of the boat" and "What are you going to do about hypothermia" chestnuts were not pulled out.

Although at de-briefing I stated that I felt undertested, I was, in fact, assessed in depth. This is surely the Assessment for Sea Canoeists. I recommend that you watch out for Mike Fennessy's next course."

And from Ken Snape in Watford, the following request for information:

"I have organised a sea trip this summer to travel out to visit all three Goodwin light ships within one day.

Local press wants to know, and to be honest so do I, if it's ever been done before.

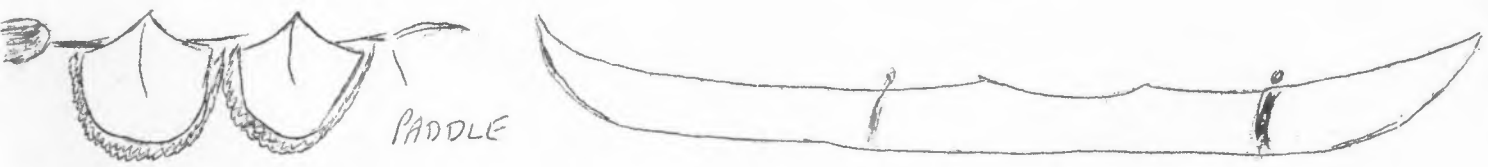
Would you please ask through our magazine if any members have done this trip or if they know of anyone and would they be kind enough to drop me a line. A full report on this trip will, in due course, wing its way to you!!" (45 Derby Road, Watford, Herts)

Joe Lamb from Australia has told me of a rafting method which he explains as follows:

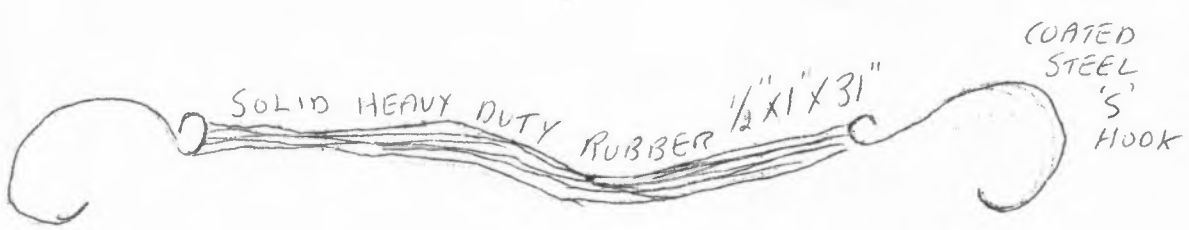
"I might have mentioned a rafting method to you (or was it Pete Salisbury) and in any case I am reminded about it by the report of the Dutch A.S.K.C. members' self rescue (Newsletter No. 17). John Hicks who is intending to go to Queensland with me, hopes to do some diving for sea foods and we were experimenting by rafting our boats as a platform for the purpose. The diagram below shows the simple solution.

Flexi-straps of 31" length with 5 hooks

a) end view b) side view



(a) (b)



It's possible that if the Dutch guys used this technique to regain entry easier and faster then naturally you can pump the boat dry quicker.

And finally from Guy Ogey in France, the following notice:

"Some news of interest for readers of ASKC newsletter: A trip along the South coast of Brittany from August 2nd to 10th, from Vannes to Morgat. British Kayakists are most welcome. For more information write to JEAN LUTZ, 67 rue de la Croix de la Gaulle, 53.000 Laval, France. Phone: 43.53.1584."

FOR SALE
ASKC ties at £2.00 each including p & p
ASKC stickers at 30p each including p&p
ASKC letter headed paper @ 5p per sheet (orders in multiples of 10 only)
SEA CANOEING SYMPOSIUM REPORTS - still a few left at 75p including p&p