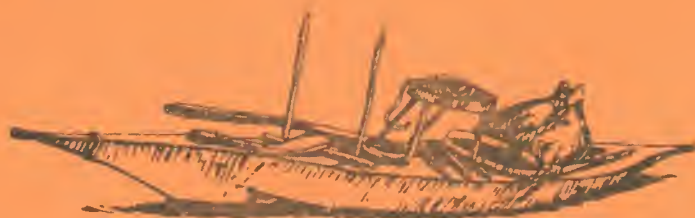


# NEWSLETTER

of the



## Advanced Sea Kayak Club

AN INTERNATIONAL SEA CANOEING CLUB  
OPEN TO ALL INTERESTED IN THIS ASPECT OF CANOEING



AIMS Promotion of sea canoeing · Communication · Organisation of events and conferences · Safety and coachin

ADVANCED SEA KAYAK CLUB

NEWSLETTER NO.84

MARCH 1991

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NEWPORT  
Isle of Wight  
PO30 5PS

EDITORIAL

The Canoe Exhibition at Crystal Palace marks the beginning of the paddling season for many sea kayakers. This edition will be going out at the Canoe Exhibition and the ASKC stand at Crystal Palace will be welcoming many old friends and meeting some new ones. If you are one of the latter then a special greeting as you join one of the oldest sea kayaking clubs - the ASKC. Remember your contribution is just as valuable as the longer in the tooth paddler so let us be hearing from you about your paddling experiences.

I have recently read Bill Taylor's book "COMMITMENT AND OPEN CROSSINGS", details of which appear in his Newsletter. I have thoroughly enjoyed every page. It is more than just a factual account in that I felt I was actually going round Britain and Ireland with the three of them, Bill, Richard Elliott and Mick Wibrew. This was obviously a great trip by any standard and Bill Taylor has managed to capture this in his writings. The graphic and honest account of their circumnavigation is inspirational, and makes for first class 'arm chair expeditioning'. The novice and the expert alike will gain much from reading this book and certainly it should grace the library of all committed sea paddlers.

As I write this Editorial, January 5th 1991, we are waiting for the storm with high winds to batter us again. 100mph winds were recorded last night down at Falmouth, and structural damage is forecast later on today. We seem to have had a series of severe winter storms over the last few years. There is still evidence around of the October 1987 storm that so badly shook the south of England. The weather men and women tell us that taking a longer term view of weather patterns, there is nothing unusual happening. I wonder!!

By the time this Newsletter reaches you the Gulf crisis will have resolved itself or blown up into a horrific war. I know of several Club members out in the Gulf and I, like many of you, have other friends and relatives out in Saudi Arabia. Today I hear that a group of ecologists and scientists are telling the Government of the environmental damage likely to ensue. I am not a political animal, I doubt few of us are, and I do not fully understand. Like the rest of you I can only wonder and worry about this crazy old world of ours. Crazy it may be - but it is the only one we've got.

Let us hope that when you actually read all this both storms will have blown over without causing damage.

I want to end on a more optimistic note and so I remind you, as if you needed reminding, that summer is just around the corner and with it all your kayaking plans will come alive.

For many of you, kayaking is not a seasonal activity in that many important competitions and serious training continues throughout the year. The D/W is a prime example and Good Luck and fairweather to all competitors (and support crews) this coming Easter.

Certainly, as I grow older, kayaking has become a seasonal activity, and I keep telling myself to get out on the water but then find

'good' reasons why I cannot. These reasons will evaporate as the warmer weather approaches and I am, in fact, planning my annual spring expedition to the west coast of Scotland.

We are all interested in your expeditions, particularly those that go to unusual places (no more MULL expedition reports!!) or have unusual twists to them, e.g., the occasional capsize and horrific landing on the cliffs with a F10 blowing!! We are also interested in allied sea kayaking subjects such as equipment, safety, literary reviews, wild life, ecology, history, applied science, etc., etc.

SO LET US BE HEARING FROM YOU.

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A.S.K.C. SHOP

Ties @ £6.00 each  
ASKC stickers @ 35 pence each  
ASKC letter headed notepaper @ 50 pence per ten sheets  
6th International Sea Kayaking Symposium Report @ £1.00 each  
T-shirts - small/medium/large/X large @ £5.50 each (in yellow or black)  
Sweat-shirts - small/medium/large/X large @ £11 50 each (in yellow or black)  
ASKC Ski Hats @ £3 50 each

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From: Rick Jones, Edale, Derbyshire

Dear John,

I like the Newsletter how it is. The main role of the Newsletter for me is to remind me that in years to come I will have to paddle on a regular basis again. The reasons are simple; family, the small community I live in, and work. They have top priority. My paddling is on the odd afternoon that I can get to the Whaley Bridge Canal! Surely I'm not alone, there must be others out there in a similar position?

I'm sorry I can't give you anything for your Newsletter. The Sea Tiger saga continues though I think there are definite advantages and disadvantages with pods and normal bulkhead systems.

I still think that much credit is due to Nick Padwick in that he has actually started on the drawing board and produced a "new" kayak. After all, so many of the available designs are the same, some are arrived at by sticking bits of a company's range together!

Much is based on how a sea kayak is supposed to look. I think my favourite sea kayak will always be Hutchinson's Umnak. It's comfortable, manoeuvrable, stable, fast (depending on who's paddling), carries plenty and can be used better than narrow, long designs. I used to have one. I replaced it with a Baidarka because I was doing much more on the sea; now, of course, I regret it! Please John, find me someone who'll do me a straight swap!

I'll tell you what I like most about the Newsletter. I enjoy the historical pieces about Eskimos, Watkins and also the historical development of sea canoeing in Britain, especially Duncan Winning's contributions

O.K. If it does become a glossy I'll still subscribe.

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From: Richard Gregory, Edinburgh. 3 January 1991

Dear John,

I would very much like to hear of or from anybody who has successfully used a kite to propel a sea canoe. I am particularly interested in how to launch and recover a kite at sea and how much directional control can be achieved. If you would be kind enough to put me in touch with anyone you know of or to let me have a copy of any articles you hold.

I enclose another article in answer to Mike Taylor's plea for more technical discussion. Please do not print it unless you think it is of sufficient interest.

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#### WAVES by Richard Gregory

Wind against tide makes for a rough sea but the mechanism by which this occurs is not well appreciated. I have not seen a scientific explanation and would greatly welcome readers comments and observations on the ideas which follow. In order to simplify things I refer to a set of waves having parallel crests and constant wavelength.

Waves do not start to be formed until the wind speed exceeds 4 knots. At between 4 and 10 knots regular waves will be formed but few will break, wave height and wave length will increase with time if fetch is sufficient. Tables are available to show the resulting sea and as an example, a 10 knot wind blowing across an open sea for five hours will generate 2ft high waves travelling at 7 knots with a wavelength of 30ft.

Waves tend to break when their height to length ratio exceeds 1:10. The waves described above are very stable and will remain so even if the wind increases up to 17 knots. As long as the relative speed of the wind over the waves is less than 10 knots few waves will break in deep water. This holds good when the wind changes direction provided you resolve the wind into cartesian vectars along and across the waves.

When the relative speed of the wind exceeds 10 knots waves are formed which almost immediately increase their steepness to the limiting value (between 1:6 and 1:10). This is noticeable as you approach a windward coast when wave height, length and speed reduce but the ratio of height to length increases so white horses become more common.

Wave energy is divided into two equal parts, kinetic energy which advances at wave speed and potential energy which is stationary. Where waves are generated instantly - as by a passing ship, the energy of the leading wave halves for each complete wave length covered from where it originated. The wave behind it will have  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as much energy, the extra half being left behind from the leading wave.

When you are surfing on a following sea it is worth knowing that "boxes" of bigger waves advance at half wave speed. This accounts for those marvellous long runs as you surf right through the "box".

The main reason why "wind against tide" creates rough water is that a swell encountering a current flowing in the opposite direction has its wave length shortened. The height:length ratio increases until it is critical and an enormous amount of energy has to be released. In the absence of eddies caused by shore or bottom irregularities, a current travelling in the same direction as a swell will flatten it.

These observations were developed in the Kyle of Tongue in Sutherland which enjoys quite remarkable surf conditions. If the swell off shore is anywhere between west and north-east it will run up the estuary and encounter a current of up to 3 knots at springs. A long spit of sand which just dries on exceptional springs runs down the east side of the Kyle from Coldbackie Beach. The surf is best about two hours before or after low water and better although more dangerous on the ebb than on the flood. It is possible to get a 60 second run if conditions are good and 45 seconds is commonplace. The waves are very stable and reasonably easy in any type of canoe.

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From: Robin Ruddock, 12 Glenvale Avenue, Portrush, Co Antrim BT56 8HL  
12 December 1990

Dear Editor,

#### CAUSEWAY COAST KAYAK ASSOCIATION

The Causeway Coast Kayak Association would be interested in having the group advertised in your publication under the section relating to Clubs or Associations.

Our group is essentially a sea canoeing club and we would reflect the interests locally of the Advance Sea Kayak Club with us having similar aims. Those are to promote seakayaking, communication, organisation of events and conferences and safety and coaching.

Our membership is composed wholly of B.C.U. Coaching Scheme members whose main area of operations is on the sea of coastal waters. There are over 30 committed members, including three Sea Coaches, 10 Senior Instructors and the remaining members are Instructors with sea proficiency.

We offer advice on local canoeing waters through the B.C.U. Coastal Advisory Service and can give reliable information on sea canoeing throughout Ireland. We have access to charts and tidal information, including pilots and sailing directions for the whole of Ireland. If anyone is interested in sea kayaking the coastline of Ulster in particular or Ireland in general we can be of assistance, and if we cannot help, can almost certainly put you in contact with someone else who can.

Some of the service the C.C.K.A. can offer beyond advice and information are, equipment for overseas paddlers, guidance or companionship for visitors who wish to explore our beautiful coastline and a typical Irish welcome.

If there is any charge for inclusion of the name and address of our Association in your publication please contact me and I will inform our Treasurer of expenses incurred.

Yours in sea kayaking,

Robin Ruddock

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The spirit of adventure took Mark Albutt, Dave Bowman and Mal Adams - all Physical Education Instructors at Hollesley Bay Colony, Suffolk - to Canada for a journey that a lot of people called "crazy". This is Mark's story about the trip of a lifetime . . .

#### EXPEDITION NOVA SCOTIA

How many times did we have to explain our apparent insanity to incredulous friends when, in 1989, we announced our plans to paddle the West Coast of Nova Scotia, and hopefully cross to Newfoundland. For some, it bordered on the suicidal; many thought we would never return. However, we actually had no intentions of leaving this earth prematurely, and after three weeks on expedition we returned to England tanned, fit and unscathed.

It had taken us the best part of 18 months to prepare and train for our once in a life-time trip. No dignitaries to see us off but, here we were, sitting in London Gatwick departure lounge pinching ourselves to check that it wasn't all just a dream.

The paddles belonged to 25 year old Dave Bowman - who was to become a father for the second time whilst on the expedition; Mal Adams, 29, known to his friends as "Grizzly", and myself, Mark Albutt, expedition leader and the old man of the team at 31 years, completing the trio,

The plans for the expedition were: to paddle approximately 320 miles along the east coast of Nova Scotia (Canada) from Halifax to Cape North (Cape Breton); from there to St Paul Island; and then on to Newfoundland - a combined open sea crossing of approximately 65 nautical miles.

I think it is important to point out at this stage that all the fancy working tools used for diamond hourly plots, tidal vectors were not necessary because the direction we travelled was dictated by the wind. This was predominantly S.W. during the summer months, changing to N.E. as we moved into September.

The only other factor affecting us was the tidal current around Cape Breton which moved in an anti-clockwise direction and can reach a maximum of two knots. This meant that there would be no ungodly hour starts, or late night paddling to catch the tides.

We had planned to take our own kayaks, courtesy of the RAF, but Saddam Hussein put paid to that. So we had to rent them from Scott Cunningham, a Canadian paddler we had previously met on a Nordkapp weekend. Scott also planned to join us for the two open sea crossings.

After an eight-and-a-half hour flight, Scott's wife, Gayle, and other local paddlers were there to greet us. They helped us to ferry our kit to where we would pick up our kayaks. Our first impressions of Canada were of beauty and vastness. Quaint wooden houses and churches were sparsely spread along roadsides, surrounded by ragged spruce forests and vast areas of water dotted with islands. Our first encounter with nature aroused great excitement, a bald eagle, osprey and a porcupine. We also had what was to be the first of many encounters with the blood-sucking mosquitoes, who wasted no time in reducing us into a mass of itching volcanoes.

Our first day began at 0500 hours (0900 hours in England). Obviously we hadn't quite adjusted to the time difference yet. The sun was up and I was again surprised by the immense area of unspoilt beauty.

My second surprise was to find Dave had prepared coffee and breakfast whilst I had been admiring the great outdoors!

The majority of the day was spent loading the kayaks, final endorsing of charts, and on the water for 15<sup>30</sup> hours. En route to Tangire Island, our destination, we saw an osprey's nest, and many cormorant colonies. It was interesting to see how the guano from the colonies had decimated and stripped the foliage from the trees, often reducing them to just stumps. This appeared to be an on-going process with the cormorants moving to fresher areas leaving the ravaged area to recover.

We spent the evening collecting mussels, clams, periwinkles and redcurrants to feed and nourish us with our evening meal. Lobsters were also plentiful, but we had received a stern warning about these monsters. To catch one is a jailable offence - that is if the fishermen don't decide to deal with you themselves. Remembering this, we thought it best to leave them alone. It soon became apparent that this was one of the few remaining areas of the world where you are able to sustain yourself from the land and survive, because native food along the coast is abundant. During the days to come on our journey along the jagged shoreline and numerous islands - far too many to mention all in detail - we found there were plenty of places of interest. On many of the exposed islands such as Bald, Laney and Pumpkin islands, we came across a wide variety of sea birds: black backed and herring gulls, double breasted cormorants, terns and the common eider. Pumpkin Island is a grass covered and home to one of the largest beaches petrel colonies on the eastern shore.

This tiny sea bird nests in burrows and travels by night. It feeds on plankton far out to sea. Their eerie calls and erratic flight close to the ground during a misty night can be disquieting to the uninitiated. On the less exposed islands we found numerous remnants of previous habitation, some fairly recent, with stone walls, root cellars, degenerating fields and hidden roads; all told tales of yesteryear. On Liscomb Island we came across a gravestone and a money pit, supposedly belonging to the notorious pirate who went by the name of Kidd but whether they are really associated with the infamous pirate is unknown.

At Canso, a once thriving fishing port, but now, sadly, in the latter stages of decline, a local told of the geological diversity of this coastline. Geologists world wide travel to study the granite outcrops at the eastern extremity which once formed part of Africa. Also here is Grassy Island where excavations are underway to examine one of the earliest permanent European settlements of North America. Another place of geological interest is Long Island, a narrow island which depicted the eroded relics of ancient crustal folding which occurred as the plates of the great continents collided centuries ago.

On many other islands and headlands, wild life consisted of moose, deer, harbour and grey seals, osprey, bald eagles, porcupine, mink, pine martyn and snakes. On one occasion, whilst camping close to Sonora we awoke to find a long, limbless reptile taking advantage of the heat generated by our sleeping bags. Three of the quickest exits from a tent soon followed! Hearts pounding we watched as the grass snake slithered away into the undergrowth.

At Byne Head we came across a large rusting Liberty Ship which was firmly secured atop a sharp reef. We spent some time paddling through the gaping holes in the hull - a sure sign that she was slowly succumbing to the sea. Saladin Point was the end of one of the bloodiest

mutinies in Nova Scotia. It is said a ship crashed upon the rocks of this harbour island point, with only six sailors remaining. The rest had been butchered and thrown overboard. Some believe that the silver bars she carried remain buried under the breakers.

During those three weeks we had paddled over 230 miles along a winding route of inlets, islands, headlands and harbours, where the only constant was the unknown. Life for us had leapt from one unpredictable event to another. We were battered by violent storms, squalls, suffered under the intense rays of the sun, found ourselves navigating whilst shrouded in the densest of fogs, and were caressed by moonbeams dancing off ebony waters as we camped on isolated islands with only the seals, sea birds and the incessant lapping of the waves. Our only regret was not being able to attempt the open sea crossings due to being forced ashore by a hurricane out to sea which was producing 20ft waves. Nevertheless we had viewed some of the most spectacular scenery in North America as few have a chance to see it.

[We all wish to thank the following people for, without them, the trip would not have been possible: Scott Cunningham - Coastal Advent Adventures; Wild Water; Planned Maintenance; Nova Scotia Museum; Field and Trek.]

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From: Udo Meyer, Isle of Wight

December 1990

Dear John,

You asked me for a review of the Ynys I recently bought off Howard Jeffs. Well, here it is.

I wanted a fast boat with large watertight hatches. I knew that Howard was building the Aleut Sea II with VCP oval hatches, so I asked him if he could build a Vyneck with those hatches. No? But he has got the Ynys.

It is a very small boat, 4.90m long and 0.51m wide. Sitting in it, I was surprised how comfortable it is. If you have long legs which are liable to fall asleep, you can understand how important it is to find a comfortable boat.

The Ynys felt quite tippy compared to a Seahawk, but after about 10 minutes I started to enjoy myself. It is surprising how much support the hull gives if you lean it. Support strokes and rolling are really made effortless. I had no trouble paddling in a straight line in a following sea even without using the skeg. Due to its small size, the Ynys is very light and strong, which makes handling it ashore easy.

My boat has a very useful feature: it's a small hatch on the rear deck, offset to the right, so I can get at equipment on the water.

The only thing I would like to criticise is that I found a few minor leaks on the deck. However it only took a bit of resin to get rid of them. One of the VCP oval hatches was also leaking. After sanding down and polishing the seams on either end I found the hatch to be 100% waterproof.

I do not wish to give the impression that the Ynys is a badly built boat. Quite the opposite is true. It is a very neat and tidy boat.

For someone like me, who wants a fast and lively sea kayak for a weekend or even longer if the list of equipment is kept short, the Ynys is ideal.

Udo



## Trip to the Isle of Bute, 1st - 6th July 1990.

Di Smith, Vince Smith & William Gardiner.

### 1st July 1990, Sunday

William arrived here at 10am, and we put William's roof bars on our car and put all three kayaks on top. We set off about 11:30am for Largs. Arrived at Largs at 2:30pm. We found the Largs marina. A good setting off place with a slipway. We could leave the car in the marina car park, which according to the Chandlers nearby, was safe with floodlights at night. We couldn't set off today as planned since it was blowing a Force 5. So we went to find a campsite for the night. A great campsite with caravans and a field for tents. A special caravan set up for washing dishes. We ate our evening meal and then took a stroll about 2-3 miles up the road to Wemyss - looking at the ferry times to Rothesay (just in case). The sea seemed to calm down about 8:00pm. William found that he'd forgotten his mug, used a flask cup instead.

### 2nd July, Monday

Got up at 7:30am, had breakfast and packed to go down to Largs marina. Packed up the boats and got changed. We set off about 10:00am with very heavy boats to carry onto the slipway. It was about Force 3 going on 4 in exposed areas. We paddled the 1 1/2 miles across to Great Cumbrae, putting in at Millport. We did a little shopping, mainly William trying to buy a plastic mug. Unfortunately, he couldn't get one. There we stopped for about an hour to eat butties and saw our first seal. Sea quite calm. We set off and rounded the small headland and the plan was to go across from there to Bute - but a few yards out I decided that I couldn't handle it, turned around and headed back to Cumbrae. It was blowing up quite steeply. We had to paddle along the coast a bit to find a landing spot. We stayed there for 5 hours, eating and snoozing and at 7 pm saw a submarine. I was filled with much trepidation when we set off again for Bute. I hated it, biggish waves and 3 miles of open sea and elements, I said I'd never canoe again. We landed with no capsizes on a steep, stony beach. The waves had stacked up the stones like a wall. We were unloading when a submarine went past and 10 minutes later you could see the big wave coming. It was massive and made a din landing on shore. I don't fancy being out when a sub goes past. It was a quiet spot apart from the gun shots going off all night to frighten the ravens. We got into the tents at 11:30pm and it was still light. We'd done the 3 1/2 mile crossing from Great Cumbrae to Bute in 1 1/2 hours.

### Tuesday 3rd July

Set off at 9:00am to go around Garroch Head to miss the tide race. Was quite calm with loads of nosey seals around. Got quite choppy further on and we pulled into a little sandy beach, where I did my first automatically-done brace - it felt right and good. We stopped for a Twix and a wee and nearby up the hill was the remains of a Iron Age hillfort. So Vince and William went to investigate. I stayed behind trying to get my wet bum dry in the bit of sunshine and warmth there was. We set off again about half an hour later. The sun was trying to shine as we crossed Scalpsie Bay, which was a drag and seemed to go on forever. Further up we stopped at another bay where it was quite warm, so our top gear came off and we dried it on the rocks, whilst we had our butties and watched four seals being nosey again and some birds further up diving in the sea fishing. We set off round a little headland where we saw the rusted remains of something that had been sunk. Once around the little headland we saw Inchmarnock, a little island with a house on which is apparently owned by Richard Branson's cousin.

Minding my own business, paddling about 10 foot offshore I saw coming my way a sharp black dorsal fin and tail. I remember thinking that's no dolphin. It swam passed me about 8 foot away - minding its own business thankfully. I was so shocked I couldn't shout "Look at this!", but William saw it and said, "That's the nearest I've been to a shark." Well, I was nearer. William said later that it was a 20 foot basking shark. Vince didn't see it, but I paddled like mad after that in case it came back. We crossed St Ninian's Bay, another hard slog which seemed to last forever. Then we paddled into Etterick Bay - which got me slightly panicky - we never seemed to get any nearer to shore and I got quite frightened with the waves and I put a spurt on.

We arrived after quite a large beach, a bit further on near some houses. We stopped to get water and Vince and I called at three houses but no one seemed to be in. The fourth house was a small holding and an old cheery farmer answered the door, not at all perturbed about two strangely dressed, wet strangers on his doorstep. He filled four bottles for us and then his wife arrived, interested in what we were doing and we chatted awhile. We went on for another hour, pottering along the shore looking for a suitable campsite. The wind dropped and the water was calm, clear and very beautiful. In fact we got sunburn. We rounded Kida-

vanan Point looking across to mainland Scotland. We found a tiny, stony beach with a little stream and very secluded. So we put to shore, put the tents up and managed to eat before a couple of showers caught us out.

#### Wednesday, 4th July

Set off at 8:30am to go across to Tighnabruaich, a small village. There was a sailing school in action plus a few windsurfers. It was dismal weather, rainy, windy. We got to Tighnabruaich for supplies, and we decided on a full breakfast in a cafe. They let us in dripping wet and we started to steam. I've never had such a wonderful breakfast. We drank numerous cups of tea, summoning up courage to go out and get wet and brave the elements. We bought supplies, found out that England had won against the Cameroons, and then set sail again. It blew up windy and more rainy so we decided to go back to Bute, opposite Tighnabruaich and put up our tents. Everything was damp. So at 2 o'clock we had to stay in our tents nipping out for the occasional calls of nature, and thus getting wet again. Today we did a massive mileage of 2 miles.

#### Thursday 5th July

Set off across to Tighnabruaich to stay in the lee of the wind, to avoid force 6 winds. We entered into the Kyles of Bute. Really pretty and out of the wind very calm. There was a fish farm and we saw the fish jumping. We pulled into a really beautiful small natural harbour out of the wind whilst we contemplated what to do next. We tried to go up Loch Ridden, cross over and let the wind blow us to the Burnt Islands. But it was too strong - blowing a force 7. We went across blown by the wind with the tide behind us. I headed for land because my concentration started going and I couldn't stand the conditions any longer. William carried on around the Burnt Isles. Realising that I wouldn't be able to stand the crossing Vince landed with me and we portaged 5 yards which enabled us to miss out a little rough bit. A yacht went through and broke its mast. William came back and after a little breather and a Twix, we crossed the few yards round to the Burnt Isles - going up wind and then turning for the wind to blow us down towards Rothesay, and avoiding the ferry.

We practically surfed down towards Rothesay, but managed to swing round into a pebbled beach. So we set up camp much to the amusement of some sheep. We collected wood and made a campfire. We put spuds wrapped in foil into the fire whilst William collected some shellfish and made a concoction with garlic. All the time our stuff was drying out on the one and only tree.

About 8 o'clock when the tide was coming in we decided to shift our tents "just in case" to a higher piece of ground. We then went for a four mile walk to look up Loch Striven. The wind seemed to have died down and the sea was getting calm. All our stuff was bone dry - wonderful after everything being sopping. Vince found a slow worm - I've never seen one before.

#### Friday 6th July

Woke up this morning dripping wet, only this time it was sweat - quite a warm night. We got up early and packed because we had to do 18 miles today. Set off in quite calm conditions and made our way across to Bute and followed the coast towards Rothesay. The decision was discussed and made at this point should we go into Rothesay adding about 3-4 miles on or press on with the good weather and get across to Great Cumbrae. Press on was the decision. So we paddled across the bay. Somehow I'd picked up a grasshopper on my boat and took it across to a cafe on the other side of Rothesay. We crossed the bay with care as the ferry arrived from Largs. Stopped and had a brew just after Rothesay. We continued to follow the coast round in lovely calm water down the east side of Bute.

We halted for lunch and contemplated the crossing to Great Cumbrae (about 3 miles) with a huge tanker parked between us and Great Cumbrae. We went round the back of it just as it was pulling up anchor. We could see somebody on deck. It was called the Ironbridge and had a lot of clapotis from the sides. It got quite choppy and the three of us had to raft up whilst a ferry passed in front of us. Still a good excuse to nibble some jelly and rest a bit. Meanwhile behind us tugs were moving into position to pull the tanker into Hunterston. I was glad to reach Great Cumbrae as I was losing concentration in the increasing sea. We turned the top corner of the island and stopped for another brew.

We contemplated another ferry which was on the go all the time from Largs to Great Cumbrae. We set off towards Largs and thankfully missed the ferry and landed back at the slipway where we'd set off on Monday. As we looked back across we saw that the tanker was coming down the channel towards Hunterston where we'd crossed only minutes before. We landed tired, dirty, briny but happy at about 1pm. As we unloaded all the gear from the kayaks some people sitting in a car were amazed with the stuff that was coming out. It made me feel like a great explorer. A shower soon had us feeling completely human again. As we travelled back home the wind picked up and we all felt that we'd made the right decision to come all the way back in one day as the crossing would have been much more difficult.

From: Richard Gregory, Edinburgh

#### WEEKEND PADDLING

Arisaig is a small west coast harbour some four hours drive from Edinburgh. It is the most convenient launching point to get to the small isles. It has a fairly hard shell and shingle beach which you can drive a car down, making it quite easy to load and launch a canoe from there. I used it for two weekend trips last year and learned a number of lessons which may be of interest to other tyro paddlers.

I paddle a Sea Tiger when I am on my own because I find it easy to keep straight regardless of wind direction. It is also more stable than my Sea King, particularly when unladen, and is better for photography. I have fitted a net over the deck behind the cockpit. In this I keep everything which may be "wanted on voyage" such as camera, foodbox, water, thermos, neoprene skull cap and flares. I also keep two large inflatable rollers in it as they are needed for launching and landing and are generally too wet and dirty to be packed anywhere else. The disadvantage of keeping all this gear under the net is that it makes getting in and out of the canoe difficult. I also have a knee tube which is mainly used for storing my cagoule and opened packets of shortbread.

I have had considerable problems with chart bags and have tried a variety of materials. Polythene mini grip bags are difficult to see through when wet and tear easily. Melinex - sold by glass fibre suppliers is much better - you cut two sheets to the size you want and seal the edges with paper masking tape. It is possible to make it watertight but it is not very strong and as I use my chart elastics as a paddle park it is not for me. At present I am using clear PVC sheeting 0.4mm thick, welded on three sides using an electric soldering iron and sealed with masking tape on the fourth side. It is hard to make completely watertight but possible with care. It is normally used for windows in sails and can be bought from Point North Limited, Newry Fawr, Holyhead LL65 1LB. I would be interested to hear how others make chart bags.

I took to canoeing as I damaged my legs in a flying accident and they won't take me far. The rollers are used to get the laden canoe up the beach to where it can be unpacked and then if the beach is anything except sand (when the canoe can be dragged) they are used to get the empty canoe clear above the high water mark. The Sea Tiger's hull is wholly unsupported throughout its length and is not strong enough to use on a roller. It is also insufficiently strong to cope with the normal vacuum arising when a warm boat is launched into cold water and the hull deforms badly if you have stopped up all the leaks that these boats are supplied with. I have therefore reinforced the hull with carbon fibre tape between the rear of the pod and the skeg box and I have filled the space between the hull and the pod with polynethane foam, leaving voids for storage on either side. This has the additional advantage of preventing small items of equipment from getting lost under the pod. The stiffened hull is r / easier to secure onto a roof rack as previously great care was needed to prevent distortion.

In June the weather forecast was not promising and with a northerly Force 6 foretold it seemed wiser to visit Eigg another day, especially as it was 20.30 on Friday before I was ready to launch. It appeared better to travel north past Mallaig to Loch Nevis and then to camp at Sandaig Bay on Knoydart. The Tiger is very comfortable in a following sea and if the wind performed as predicted I would have a fast passage back.

It was a lovely evening with a steady Force 3 headwind and excellent visibility. The panorama of the coast is splendid, white shell sand beaches backed by dunes, off lying rocks and islets covered in birds and seals and the mountains of Morar intersected by deep glens. The north and south horizons are filled with the great peninsulas of Sleat and Ardnamurchan while to the west there is Eigg with Rhum behind it. The coast is, however, spoilt by a rash of caravan sites and by Mallaig which must be the ugliest seaside town in Britain.

Loch Nevis more than made up for Mallaig and Sandaig had peace and beauty - even at 23.30 when I came ashore at half tide on a rocky beach. I camped beside the two ruined crofts but had difficulty finding any depth of soil to get the tent pegs into. Having emptied the canoe, I used the roller to get it up the beach.

On Saturday the 0555 forecast was for northerly Force 8 and it seemed wiser to find shelter as I headed back south into the lee of the Arisaig peninsula and then across Loch nan Uamh to the tip of Ardnish where there is a very secluded landing spot, a small stream and a very well protected camp site. It was raining heavily when I landed so I pitched the tent and then decanted the contents of the canoe into large waterproof sacks before carrying them up to the tent. I have made a long compression bag for the sleeping bag and this and nearly all other equipment is carried in home made waterproof bags. I find I can keep the inside of the tent and the inside of the canoe reasonably dry by carrying these small bags in the waterproof sacks which I then use as groundsheets in the bell end and porch of the tent. I have not yet worked out how to deal with a soaking wet tent in the Tiger. In the Sea King I put it in a waterproof bag in the cockpit, tied up against the deck outside my right leg, but quite a lot of water always seems to accompany it into the hatch of the Sea Tiger. I have tried strapping it on the rear deck but this obstructs access to the splits and impairs the handling of the canoe. I would be interested to hear how others cope with this.

The wind blew quite strongly throughout Saturday night with actuals at Tیره of Force 6 + 7 and a constant forecast of Force 8. On Sunday afternoon I got fed up listening to the wind and rain and paddled back to Arisaig. Although it was only a 5-6 it was a hard slog across Loch nan Uamh and round Rubh Arisaig but it was quite comfortable once in the lee of the land - much better than I had imagined when listening to the forecasts in the tent.

The September trip was different. The forecast was superb but with sunset at 1940 it was a mad rush to get on the water and across to Eigg. The sun went down in a cloudless sky behind Rhum and after an interesting encounter with the off lying rocks off the north west coast of Eigg I managed to get carried in on invisible surf onto the famous singing sands of the bay of Laig at 20 50. I had never camped on sand before and was surprised that so little got into the tent and eventually into the canoe.

Next morning I woke to see the sun slowly wash down from the mountain tops of Rhum until the whole island was bathed in an orange glow. Black cattle and ponies slowly wandered along the beach and through the white surf. It was all so incredibly beautiful.

The paddle across to Rhum was enlivened by the presence of several shoals of fish with attendant flocks of gannets, gulls, fulmers and shearwaters - over 400 of these last circling round one shoal. They are a marvellous sight and nest in huge colonies high up on Rhum and Eigg.

Passing Kinloch with its outlandish castle, I continued round the north east coast stopping for lunch at a delightful sandy bay which has a convenient waterfall at one end. The 1355 forecast was unpromising - west Force 6. There were a lot of red deer down by the shore in the next bay and a stag silhouetted on top of the cliffs. There were also grey seals all along the coast and of course a quite superb view of Skye. Rounding the north tip of Rhum Canna came in sight and it was then only 10km to that island. I paddled into the harbour and right up to the old red telephone box where I was greeted by some very kind people who provided tea, fresh scones, butter and cheese and then opened up the post office to sell stamps and postcards and to give me change for the "press button B" telephone.

In view of the forecast I camped in the lee of the small wood at An Coroghan - a sandy beach just outside the harbour. The forecasts got worse and it seemed increasingly foolish to attempt the passage back, particularly the exposed crossing with a beam sea between Eigg and Arisaig.

On Sunday I paddled back into the harbour and beached just below the Catholic Chapel which was filling up. There are only 20 people on the island now (in 1890 there were 102 and in 1830 436) and 14 of them were in church. They get a priest two Sundays running and then they are the Church of Scotland and get a Minister for two - everyone goes to whoever the service is. I was made very welcome and did not feel at all out of place as oilskins and wellies were the dress of the day. I had just got back to my tent and started to cook lunch when the farmer arrived to say that Etive Shearwater was at the pier with a charter party of people from Rhum and would be returning to Arisaig in  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours if I wanted a lift! She is a wartime harbour defence motor launch now converted to carry passengers. We rolled heavily in the sound of Rhum and again as we came out of the lee of Eigg and headed for home and the office on Monday.

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From: Peter Lyne, Swansea

Dear John,

I enclose my subscription for another year. I thought that Michael Taylor raised some interesting points, but I am not sure quite how "pro-active" you could be without devoting all your time to the production of the newsletter. It might be nice to produce a newsletter using all the fancy technology which is now available and certainly it is feasible to produce near print quality material that way. The catch is that none of this comes cheaply! Okay if you have a friendly local business contact who will let you use it out of hours, but even then I suspect that the materials cost would work out very much higher than your present system.

It would be interesting to have more authoritative articles from leading figures in the sea kayaking world, but I suspect that some of these need to make money out of what they write. It would be a shame if there was no room for contributions from the lesser mortals in sea paddling who may well have very valid points to make. When I took up the sport I found the totally contradictory dogmas being propounded by various experts pretty confusing, and it is useful to have the views of the ordinary intermediate paddler on what works well, for example in backup self rescue. Test reports on equipment and boats would be helpful. The highly experienced paddler can probably overcome most of the

design deficiencies of any boat and is not necessarily the best person to write a test report on a boat being aimed at the paddler seeking a user friendly craft. The current vogue for short, wide stable boats using retractable skegs to maintain directional stability is a case in point. The expert paddler will cope even if the skeg does fail to come down when needed, but the less able paddler, who may have chosen that type of boat because it is normally easy to cope with, could be in quite serious trouble if it fails when the chips are down in a tricky following or beam sea.

The idea of identifying themes is, I think, a useful one. Inviting comments on the experience of paddlers with retractable skegs or in using Howard Jeffs' paddle tubes or electric pumps or whatever might provide interesting material. Another type of theme could be to invite articles with detailed information on a particular paddle which could be enjoyable for others, perhaps particularly drawing on the writer's local knowledge and using a common format, identifying access points, parking, escape routes, local tidal conditions, other hazards, wildlife and scenic features etcetera. "Canoeist" has done a series working their way round the coasts around here, but frankly that could be greatly improved upon with more practical information for the visiting paddlers. Having a young family, I necessarily have to do a lot of my paddling locally, and consequently now know it pretty well. I would happily write you an article on what I feel is an enjoyable paddle, the trip round the whole of the Gower peninsula (over 32 miles) on those lines if you felt that it would be of interest to others. I did this twice in one week, using different boats and reversing my start and finish points. Both were enjoyable paddles but although sea conditions were not completely straightforward, neither were they in any sense epic. I would not want to bore your readers with an account of my modest exploits, but if I could provide information which would help other paddlers to share my enjoyment of paddling around here, then I would be more than happy to do so. It would not be aimed at the really expert paddler, who would perhaps prefer to suss it out for his/herself and cope with any expected snags as they came up, e.g., 6 foot groundswell coming off the Atlantic on to some of the beaches.

Anyway, I must not ramble on. Keep up the good work. I look forward to my newsletter, but I think that Michael Taylor does make some valid points in suggesting ways in which it could be improved, and I for one would be willing to make a contribution, despite, I am afraid, not being an eminent paddler (yet!). This letter is not really intended for publication, but mainly to offer support and I hope to be constructive. I am not sure that improving production should be your first priority. In some ways, the rather basic layout is a refreshing change from all the glossy material we are all constantly bombarded with, but more editorial direction of content might be worthwhile and even ease your task.

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From: Dick Faulder, Farnham, Surrey

23 December 1990

Dear John,

I do hope in future that writers will heed Winning's letter, for I certainly found Carter's note, even if not fully understood, of value and Nick's informative. An unfortunate pair of misprints in Byde's letter had me confused before accepting his 9 inches. Surely it is immaterial whether the Centre of Gravity (CG) is above or below the deck (as it just is in my 'Islander'). What is material for stability is the position of the CG relative to the Centre of Buoyancy (CB) (admittedly in the case of a kayak the CG is usually above the CB).

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From: Duncan Henderson, Scotland

15 December 1990

Dear Sir,

I was asked to submit an account of a trip this year solo around Lewis. I don't know if it helps the issue of solo kayaking raised by Bill Farthing in your issue No. 72.

Best wishes.

#### BUTT OR BUST by Duncan Henderson

I was standing at last on the pier at Loch Tarbert. Above me reared the ferry, at my feet lay my fully laden sea kayak. For many years I had dreamed of a solo trip around Lewis. Now I was here. Already I faced my first major problem: how to lower a fully laden boat 10 feet into the sea? The answer lay in a karrimat, my tow line and a seal launch of the empty boat.

Smiling to myself I rejoined my boat, climbing in swiftly to leave before the ferry. Soon I was paddling out of East Loch Tarbert into the Minch heading south for the Sound of Harris. The landscape was new to me, falling into the sea in a series of rocky headlands. Beginning to wish I had taken my navigation a little more seriously, I paused to work out my position along with the remaining mileage to Rondel. Much to my surprise I found I had already arrived.

Deciding to push my luck I paddled around Renish Point into the Sound of Harris. The one thing I had learnt about these tides was that they were incalculable. Pushing on I crossed to Ensay arriving in four foot surf to find myself the sole occupant of a pure white sandy beach. I then began to realise the value of landing at the designated campsite, not near it!

The next day dawned overcast with a northerly wind. Off I set again pausing at Toe Head to prepare myself for the Atlantic onslaught. Fortunately the onslaught was mild but it gave me a taste of the clapotis to come. I decided to save myself a day's paddling, so ignoring Taransay I set off across West Loch Tarbert for Scarp. I arrived several hours later cold and tired from battling a head wind and cross tide. A quick coffee at the old ferry pier helped revive the body. Painfully I limped my way around the corner to Loch Cravadale. The last effort was well rewarded by copious fresh water. Even better was to sit in the tent watching the golden sunset glinting on the water.

The next day dawned clear. Deciding to make the most of the weather I passed quickly up the coast, pausing briefly to enjoy the sands of Mealasta. The sea looked peaceful but I was aware that these placid green waters were all too capable of becoming a snarling sea. From here I pressed on to Gallan Head. By now I was beginning to experience the Lewis clapotis, being very thankful that this was a good day. I had previously realised that if one followed the lobster pots one usually found a good route along the cliffs. Unfortunately off the sheer rocky headland in a particularly nasty piece of water I realised the "lobster pot" was a bit of rubbish. The next few minutes were very gripping as I dodged around between wherry and headland in confusing sea. A surfacing fin did not help! It was a great relief to paddle into West Loch Roag. The Kyles of Pabay were mercifully calm and I rested briefly before passing south of Bernera for Callanish. Even at midnight the standing stones were worth a visit.

Day four dawned clear but overcast Off I set up Loch Roag. Passing the spectacular cliffs of Craigearn I once more encountered the clapotis which gave me a rough ride around to lunch at Loch Shawbost. Pressing on the sky began to darken with a squall blowing up my stern. There was however little to land at so I decided to press on to Eoropie being blissfully ignorant of how bad the surf could be. I arrived near midnight at Swainbost Sands deciding to camp on the golden beach. A gentle two foot surf landed me on the beach. I felt peaceful as I settled into my sleeping bag admiring the wonderful sunset.

Peace was shattered by a heavy crump in the night. I decided to wait until the morning. From nowhere a monstrous swell had come up. My peaceful beach was now the domain of dumping breakers while Eoropie was a nightmare seen in daylight. In a show of bravado and utter ignorance I attempted to launch but after a severe battering in which I did not even escape from the beach I gave up. Instead I opted for a wash, scout and rest, all of which I enjoyed.

The next day the surf was still there but a little quieter. After my third attempt I managed to launch but was off target for the rip I hoped to follow through the gnashing waves. The next wave pinned me horizontally against my rear deck. Its successes gave me the most unpleasant clump of my career. Rolling up I saw my deck was off, my boat full with a monster towering over me. I decided in these precious few seconds to swim. The next thing I knew was the fully loaded swamped boat was lifted over my head to land at the top of the beach. I was left to learn the art of body surfing.

Exhausted I lay down to sleep on a sunny rock. Waking the sea seemed to have lulled for a moment. Frantically dragging my boat to sea I launched using a tighter deck. This time the line was right, but even so the waves still tore out a deck fitting. Sprinting in I was soon out to sea, horrified at the giants breaking just a hundred yards away. Now all that was left was the Butt.

There was no turning back As I neared the Butt the clapotis grew in size. Soon I was dropping or ascending at an alarming rate. For one moment I would be above the chaos, the next I would be looking at four walls of grey water. Slowly, carefully, I worked my way trying to not be too close nor too far out into the tidal stream. Again I was following the lobster pots. One more reef then the clapotis began to ease. I heaved a sigh of relief. Glancing back I noticed my boat was somewhat low. On looking again I realised my rear hatch was flooded. It was a tired canoeist who limped into Port of Ness. The love and friendship of the many people who helped me out in the next few hours was wonderful. Whenever I think of Lewis I think of the generosity of these people.

Next day I left early to beat the Sabbath, paused briefly at Traigh Mhor before pushing on to camp on the Eye Peninsula.

I left again in the afternoon with the tide heading south aiming for that awkward point at the join of two maps. Arriving exhausted several hours later at Loch Odhairn the midges deterred all but the briefest of visits. Pushing on I kept working south. As midnight neared the sea slackened to calm so I kept going aiming for Tarbert. I was to learn later it is 47 miles by road from Tarbert to Stornoway but have not calculated the distance by sea. Night fell gently as I paddled on slipping gently towards my goal. Passing the Sound of Scalpay I approached Loch Tarbert having paddled through a short night. Dawn was breaking when I arrived. Exhausted by now I realised it was imperative to camp as soon as possible. Precious minutes were wasted looking for a place to rest. At last I pitched on an ugly strip of wasteland. I crashed asleep after a mumbled prayer of thanks without supper. The feeling of exhilaration food could wait until later in the morning!



From: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers

PRESS RELEASE

COMMITMENT AND OPEN CROSSINGS:  
The First Circumnavigation of Britain  
and Ireland by Kayak  
by Bill Taylor

To be published on 13 December at £16.95

PUBLISHED BY DIADEM BOOKS

Between April and September 1986 Bill Taylor, along with Mick Wibrew and Richard Elliott, accomplished the first circumnavigation of Britain and Ireland by kayak. In doing so, they turned their paddler's dream into reality in a five month expedition, demanding total commitment, endurance, patience and skill.

COMMITMENT AND OPEN CROSSINGS is Bill Taylor's superbly illustrated account of their unique expedition which started at Garrison Point on the Isle of Sheppey on 19 April and finished 2,612 miles later on 22 September.

Detailed maps chart the three kayakers journey as they progress on their clockwise adventure around the coast, battling against the ever-changing winds and seas, and they gained rare views of the most spectacular coastak scenery in the British Isles. Bill Taylor does not conceal the human cost of the expedition, but also shows that the success of the enterprise was a triumph of loyalty and comradeship as well as skill and courage.

BILL TAYLOR is Head of the Stubbers Outdoor Pursuits Centre in Havering. He lives in Rochester, Kent, and will be available for comment or interview. For further information, please contact Sheila de Souza on 071-636 9851.

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PRESS RELEASE FOR ADVANCED  
SEA KAYAK CLUB NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 6, 1990

The Soviet Far East is a region most of us have never heard of. It is not a republic or other political unit. It is the Pacific Rim of what us foreigners have always known as Siberia.

In the Far East is over 5000 miles of coastline. Unlike the comparable areas of Alaska, Canada and Norway, the Soviet coast is not crenulated with the traces of past glaciations. With few exceptions it is a straight, featureless coast of alternating headlands, sand beaches and dense forest. There are three notable exceptions and foreign paddlers will have a chance to explore each of them next summer.

Far East Adventures is the Alaska based travel company that will offer trips to the Chukotka Peninsula, Shantar Islands and Kurile Islands.

The Chukotka Peninsula is home to Siberian Eskimos and Chukchi people. Today they are friendly people who make their living by the sea. Kayak visitors are welcome in this traditional homeland of the seal hunting, kayak paddling Eskimos. In June join experienced Soviet kayaker

Oleg Guyfullin as he leads paddlers along a coast he has travelled both in kayaks and traditional Eskimo umiaks. Paddlers will visit these Eskimo people and have a chance to go to sea with them in their traditional walrus skin covered craft. The Bering Sea is rich in walrus, whales, seals and a dozen species of pelagic sea birds. Puffins, cormorants and murre are so common on some rookeries their flight darkens the sky. Migratory birds in the area include ducks, swans, herons.

The Shantar Islands (Lat. 55°N, Long. 137°E) are truly remote archipelago that have not been visited by kayak. This trip is available only to experienced paddlers who want a true expedition adventure. The Amur River is the world's sixth longest. From a start near the mouth of the Amur, paddlers will explore sea coast that was first documented by the Western Union Telegraph Expedition of 1867. Since that time less than a handful of explorers have visited the region. Many species of sea mammals make their homes among the islands. Ashore this is the range of the Siberian brown bear, moose, elk, reindeer and many other large mammals. The islands lie astride a major migratory bird flyway.

Most remote of the kayaking regions in Pacific Russia is the Kurile Islands (Lat. 45°N, Long. 146°-156°E). Far East Adventures will visit the southern reaches of this 700 mile long island arc. Volcanic in origin, the islands are peppered with hot springs, steam vents and towering volcanic cones, many as active as a California Freeway. Paddlers can land on black sand beaches, work their way to volcano summits accessible only to those who approach from the sea. Thick bamboo forest grow side by side with evergreens, creating a botanical anomaly found in no other place on earth.

Only one adventure in each of these areas will be offered in 1991. Chukotka was first visited by modern kayaks last summer. 1991 adventure will be "Firsts" in both Shantar and Kurile Islands.

Weather is the dictating factor in the kayak season. Ice is out by mid-June in Chukotka. Whales and birds are migrating, walrus haul out on isolated beaches - the richness of Chukotka is well appreciated in June.

Typhoon season sweeps the western Pacific in June and July. August can be warm and pleasant. Berries are ripening by then and salmon fishing is at its best. September is Indian Summer, often the nicest time of the year in the Soviet Far East.

Expedition/Adventure Dates:-

Chukotka-Eskimo Country - June 22-July 6 1991

Shantar Islands - Sea of Okhotsk - August 3-August 24 1991

Kurile Islands - Hot Springs and Volcanoes - September 1-September 21 1991

For more detailed information contact Far East Expeditions, 738 "H" Street, Anchorage, Alaska 99501, Fax (907) 561-1541. Each Adventure will be limited to eight participants, except by special arrangements. Contact us early to reserve your place in these unique kayak explorations.

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Dear John,

In reply to T. Lockie of Lairg who uses a kayak to fish and hunt from, N/L 79.

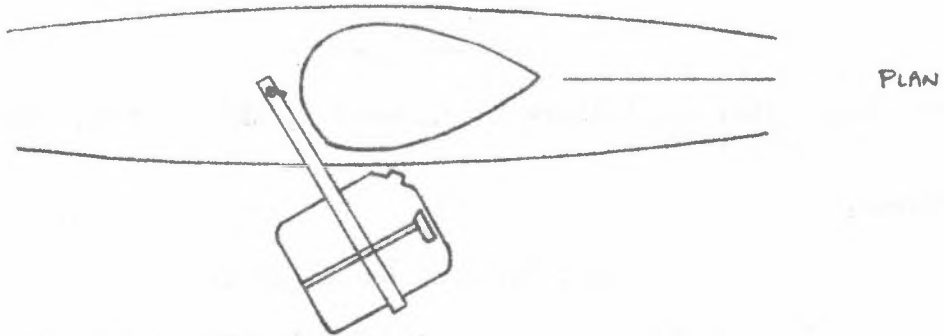
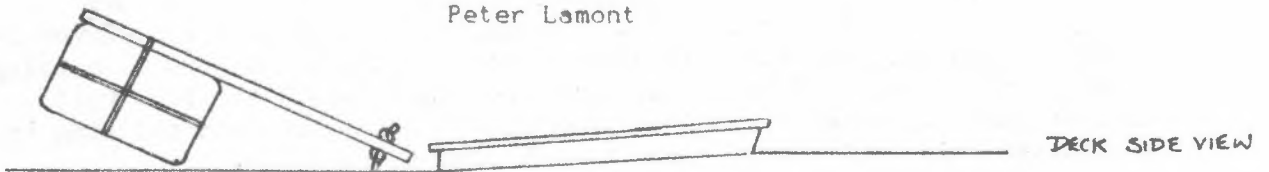
A few years ago I did this too for a short time. My double kayak could hold four wire-framed creels on the decks. When paddling with a partner, lifting the creels onboard was helped by the other paddler leaning in the opposite direction to compensate. The double was stable enough to get a creel onboard solo. However, using a much tippier single (an old Ottersports 'Sea Otter') lifting a creel was impossible without support.

The solution was to attach a 25 litre plastic drum to the flat rear deck. The drum was lashed to a short piece of wood the other end of which was located in the rear deck behind the cockpit by knotted rope. On arrival at the buoy the drum was slung out alongside the cockpit, attached by the wood to the rear deck. It could then be leant on whilst lifting the creel and, if necessary, secured to the fore deck line for additional security.

I don't follow this practice anymore - the return simply wasn't worth the effort due to commercial overfishing. In any case, wildlife around here survives in spite of, rather than because of, man's activities.

Yours,

Peter Lamont



Underwear for Kayaking and Its Order Lives  
by Gail Ferris

Have you ever thought that your underwear, that innocent stuff that just sits in your bureau drawer when you are not wearing it, could be doing something else? Yes, your underwear could be doing something exciting such as being worn by someone else going interesting places and doing exciting things instead of languishing in that dark drawer.

I have found the answer to this crisis which is quite simple. You just loan it to friends who are taking trips to cold interesting places especially the Arctic. When they leave for their trip your friends will feel elated. You will find as I am discovering that when your friends return from their paddling and hiking trips that they are completely euphoric having experienced completely the exquisite physical and psychological warming qualities of the suitable underwear loaned to them by a friend "who knows" can possibly provide.

Now after this auspicious introduction I shall elaborate on how I happened to provide two friends with Thermax long johns. I had read an account titled North to the Pole by Will Steiger in which he verifies that Thermax underwear kept them warmer than other fabrics under extremely cold conditions with excessive exercise and long periods of inactivity. I experimented with Thermax underwear worn as the innermost layer beneath by drysuit which retains all condensation. I wore as many thin layers as needed and paddled two winters in dark as well as daylight conditions on the coast of Connecticut. I found that this fabric was as Steiger had reported to be warmer, more comfortable and dryer feeling with less retention of odours but most important very light weight than other fabrics such as wool, silk and polypropylene.

On my first trip to the Arctic I was able to wash and dry easily despite limited conditions. Because this underwear had served me so well I was only too happy to loan it to my friends who were also going to the Arctic because I was quite concerned that should all else fail that at least my underwear which I had always relied on when paddling in the bitter cold would carry them through without question.

Nothing like good underwear. No I don't wear a girdle!  
Perish the thought!

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From: John Flynn, 449 Unthank Road, Norwich, NR4 7QN (Tel. 0603-54238)  
17 August 1990

Dear John,

I said I would let you know how I got on.

I have wanted to canoe in the Mediterranean for years. I have come to the time in life, if I don't do it now, I never will. Canoeing here is the fulfilment of a long standing ambition.

I knew I would have to go solo because I was restricted as to when I could go and I gave a lot of thought to which country. I ruled out France because I've heard the French are so safety conscious that if you told them what you were doing, they would stop you. I ruled out Greece because I've heard of people being locked up there before any questions asked. I regarded Spain as being good for communications and quick to get there and not so prone to inflicting arbitrary arrests as they used to. I chose Majorca, because the north coast is said to have the highest cliffs in Europe.

What one fact your readers may find interesting is that the maximum length for a canoe in a Boeing 737 is 178" - 14'10" which ruled out my Umnack and meant that I had to take a Mirage which turned out to be okay with a Skeg. There was no problem with taxis at the airport in Pallma and I started out at Puerto del Soller. The first day I went to just short of La Calobra - north up the coast. The next day south towards Deja where Robert Graves used to live. After that, I took the canoe on the trippers boat up to La Calobra and then moved my things up and stayed at the local hotel. The sea was calm the whole time apart from one day when their feared wind, the Tramonta which comes from the Alps. blew. Not a boat moved that day and I went just outside the harbour to check if their misgivings were due to lack of moral fibre or dictated by common prudence. I reached the latter conclusion.

One feature of the coast is that because there are no tides, there is no scouring action in the bays and so there are no beaches. Between La Calobra and the next port about 15 miles up, I do not believe there is a single point where you could get out if there is a swell and I took the view that to make that trip was comparable to an open water crossing of the same distance and decided against it.

I was very pleased with the VHF radio I brought with me. I spoke Spanish and had some difficulty communicating whilst on land. One of the most comforting moments I had was when I called up Barcelona radio on channel 16 and heard a voice say in very good English, "switch to channel 27" and on switching to channel 27 hearing him say, "this is Barcelona radio - what can I do for you".

I had decided to do the north coast because it has few towns on it. This in itself creates problems because the number of bays are small and in only two cases are there roads down to them. Being alone I was concerned about being caught out because if I had to land I would have had to stay where I was until the storm abated. My aim these days is for luxury canoeing and the idea of a night on the beach away from communication is something best left for those who see canoeing as a character forming experience.

The cliffs are quite spectacular. There is one peak of over 3000 feet which is only a kilometre from the beach and another of over 4500 which is no more than two kilometres away. Because there is no tide, the rocks tend to erode at sea level but not higher up so there are a lot of over hangs and large caves. The rock is volcanic and some places you can see where the lava has dribbled down into the sea. The cliffs are eroded so that they are full of holes and take on fantastic shapes rather like emmental cheese with large caverns half way up them.

The coast lines to the north of La Calobra was like entering into a different land. On the day I went furthest up it was cloudy and the mist hung over the cliffs. Sometimes rocky peaks with trees on them poked out of the mist, dim sun shone upon them, giving the effect of another world. I thought it was like Illyria in Twelfth Night.

On the practical side I took with me far more things than I really needed, e.g., a roof rack, a trolley and a lot of clothes which were appropriate to much colder conditions than I was ever likely to encounter. This meant that the excess baggage when I was coming out was 77 lbs but when I was coming back I benefitted from my experience. I loaded all the heavy things I could into my small case which I decided was hand baggage and put all the light things into the canoe which was able to take advantage of the 20 kilograms weight allowance. The result was that on the way back I only had to pay £50.

The bird life along the coast was much less than you would see in England or Scotland. The only thing I noticed were cormorants which were a lot smaller than ours, seagulls and what appeared to be a special sort of kestrel. The great reward was the fact that every now and again a flying fish would emerge from the water and fly 30 or 40 feet on wings which were at least as wide as its body.

It was hotter than I expected and when I go next time I'll certainly go much earlier - say March or April. I learned to keep out of the mid-day sun and I tended to do all my paddling either first thing in the morning or last thing at night when the light in the Mediterranean has a unique **warm** quality about it and makes it such an attractive place.

To sum up, it was a very rewarding experience and the fulfilment of a dream. The place I would like to try next is Albania just as soon as democracy arrives. As far as I can see it is the last unspoilt section of the Mediterranean coastline. Anybody interested?

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From: Phil Eccles, "Faith", Ralph Street, Borth-y-Gest, Porthmadog,  
Gwynedd

Dear John,

As you know I try to take a group of children or adults away for a week's canoeing each summer and this year was no exception. It was so much fun I thought readers of the magazine might be interested and, of course, if any wanted more details I'm always contactable at the above address. Eight Coventry teachers borrowed sufficient gear from Plas Dol - Moch, the city's outdoor centre in North Wales, for a week of coastal investigation, surfing, island hopping and camping on the west coast of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides.

Shared out between us the cost of the ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway was quite reasonable at about £30 each. The campsite at Kneep is basic, idyllic and cheap (35p per tent per night) and, most important, only 50 yards from the water's edge with views of distant islands waiting to be explored. The field is more akin to an alpine meadow littered with flowers - orchids, bog asphodel and ragged robin. A glance at the O.S. maps immediately reveals the wealth of possibilities and a chance to get on the water in most weather conditions. The coastline is made up of broken Lewisian Gneiss and offers cliffs up to 300 feet, a great many caves, stacks and arches interspersed at reasonable distances with magnificent golden beaches. On one of these a dead 30 foot sperm whale rotted in the corner and removing five of its 6" teeth one evening is too long a story for these pages. Even better were the four live pilot whales that swam within 100 yards of us in Kyles Campay with one clearing the water in a show of majestic superiority. Basking shark, dolphin, porpoise and hosts of sea birds accompanied us and enriched the semi-wilderness experience which was ours for a week. There's nothing much between Margersta Sands and America and for a day and a half we revelled in the beautifully formed six foot waves creaming onto the small deserted bay. Bliss. There's a lagoon on the north end of Pabay Mor which could almost have featured in "South Pacific" and an ideal place for the Star Testing. We didn't explore so many places it would be easy to return next year for another week.

Just down the road, for example, is Little Loch Roag which the Pilot says fills and drains at five knots in its bottleneck entrance. For a group with sea kayaks the Flarnar Isles lie 21 enticing miles off Gallar Head. After a week on such a quiet beach Stornoway seemed to be really hopping on the Friday night when we returned in plenty of time for the 0530 ferry. Reminiscent of what an old cowboy town must have been like people seemed to have flocked from all over Lewis to catch the buzz of live music in the bars and a festival atmosphere on the streets. A local fisherman gave us an island farewell with a bag of crab claws.

The sun set but it didn't really go dark - like our memories, I hope.

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