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 coaching

ADVANCED SEA KAYAK CLUB

NEWSLETTER No 96

MARCH 1993

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Editorial

This is the Newsletter that goes out with the 1993 ASKC Address List and many of you will, hopefully, be collecting both at the Canoe Exhibition at the end of February. I am looking forward to meeting old (and new) friends there. I am wondering what changes will ensue with the move of the Exhibition from London to Sheffield.

North Uist to St Kilda in 9½ hours; not bad going and recently achieved by A.J. Tyrrell.

I hear that Peter Clark is off to circumnavigate the Falkland Islands, using open canoes. I look forward to hearing about this exhibition.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are buying Ramsey Island, known by paddlers for the Bitches Rodeo and a popular paddling area.

Nigel Kingston has just telephoned to say that his SEA GUIDE covering the South Coast from Dorset to the Severn will not be available until this time next year. It will be in three parts. Nigel has agreed to send me a copy of the three parts for a review in this Letter. Watch this space.

Do not forget the Third Anglesey Sea Symposium, Mayday Bank Holiday, 1st to 7th May, '93. Lectures/Demos/Clinics/Trade Stands/Trips/BCU Training & Awards Good company/Good time.

SmithKline Beecham have produced an excellent booklet (52 pages @ £1.50) on Health Advice for International Travellers. Send to the International Society of Travel Medicine; 8, Old Lodge Place; St. Margarets Road; Twickenham; TW1 1RQ.

I don't want to dwell on the Oil Tanker BRAER that recently collided with the south end of Shetland,- any comment from me will add little to the debate; suffice to say it is appalling and 'when will we learn!', and our thoughts are with the Shetlanders, particularly the sea kayakers and all those associated with the sea - which means most of the inhabitants.

Campaign for a Living Coast

Plaice and bass finally made it to Westminster last October but, rather than swimming up the Thames, they were taken there by staff from English Nature to mark the launch of their 'Campaign for a Living Coast'. Minister for the Environment David Maclean, opened the campaign which has three themes
1. The Seas of England
2. Caring for English Estuaries.
3. Coastal Zone Conservation
There is a lot to do. Half a million hectares of marine habitat are in need of active conservation.

THE HIENZ GOOD BEACH GUIDE, launched by the Marine Conservation Society each year, gives details of the best and worst beaches and most polluted bathing waters in the U.K. Clearly the Water Service Industry has to clean up its' act and one solution starts with tackling local sewage treatments problems.

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Wash on the Norfolk Coast between Snettisham and the mouth of the River Nene has been upgraded to a National Nature Reserve. The Reserve will cover saltmarshes, mud flats and open water.

The Sony PYXIS G.P.S. receiver pinpoints your location by utilising signals from Navstar G.P.S. satellites to determine latitude, altitude, course and velocity. The multi-functional PYXIS system calculates the distance between current position and destination points and provides graphic display of the route already covered. It weighs 1 lb 5 oz. The water resistant antenna and

Editorial (continued)
compact keyboard with two line a.d fourty character LCD display are detachable. Price $ 1,195 from Sony of America, Sony Drive, Park Ridge, New Jersey, 07656, USA Incidentaly, I recently read that if you are carrying a G P S receiver, a third party can, using a computer with modem, pinpoint your position...BEWARE!!

The British Lighthouse Society is looking for members. Write to the Secretary, B.L.S., Gravesend Cottage, Torpoint, Cornwall, PL11 2LX. This society wants to preserve our lighthouse heritage and aims to act as a focus for information about lighthouses of all kinds and in all eras. It is anticipated that a database and archive of lighthouses information will be established for the benifit of future generations. The society hopes to encourage the preservation of artifacts associated with lighthouses and their functions. Send a S.A.E. for details.

A.S.K.C. SHOP (all prices include post and package)

Ties @ £6.50 each
ASKC stickers @ 35 pence each
ASKC letter-headed note paper(A4) @ 50 pence per ten sheets.
T shirts - small/medium/large/x large @ £6.00 each (yellow or black)
Sweat shirts - small/medium/large/X large @ £12.00 each (yellow or black)
ASKC ski hats @ £3.50 each
QAJAQ - the book by David Zimmerley @ £12.50 each
SEA KAYAKING by Nigel Foster @ £9.95 each

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From Angus Geddes of Swindom, Wilts.

Dear John,
Here's an idea I've had for a while which I would be interested to see if anyone else has tried out. This is to do with the carrying and deployment of emergency kit. There seems to be a lot of debate about where to stow things like flares and the other bits of repair kits people carry around. I tend to carry them on the person as I reckon that the time I would really need help the most, one would be out of the kayak and in the water. However I am not that keen on stuffing my buoyancy aid with extra bits of kit. I am also worried about the point of getting seperated from the kayak which, in serious conditions would cause very major attacks of fear to say the least.

So the idea is to carry the survival kit stowed in a container of your choice inside the cockpit. The kit is attached to the body, i.e. ankle, by a leash such as surfers wear and further attached to the kayak by another cord. In the event of ejecting from the kayak, you remain attached by the long leash to not only the kayak but also the emergency container.

Being a wimp, I have decided to wait for warmer weather to try this out properly. Meanwhile I am checking out the system with bits of rope, etc. The obvious danger is getting tied up in the ropes, but I think the ankle attachment will minimise much danger as long as there is no possibility of becoming tied to the footrest.

Yours sincerely

Angus.

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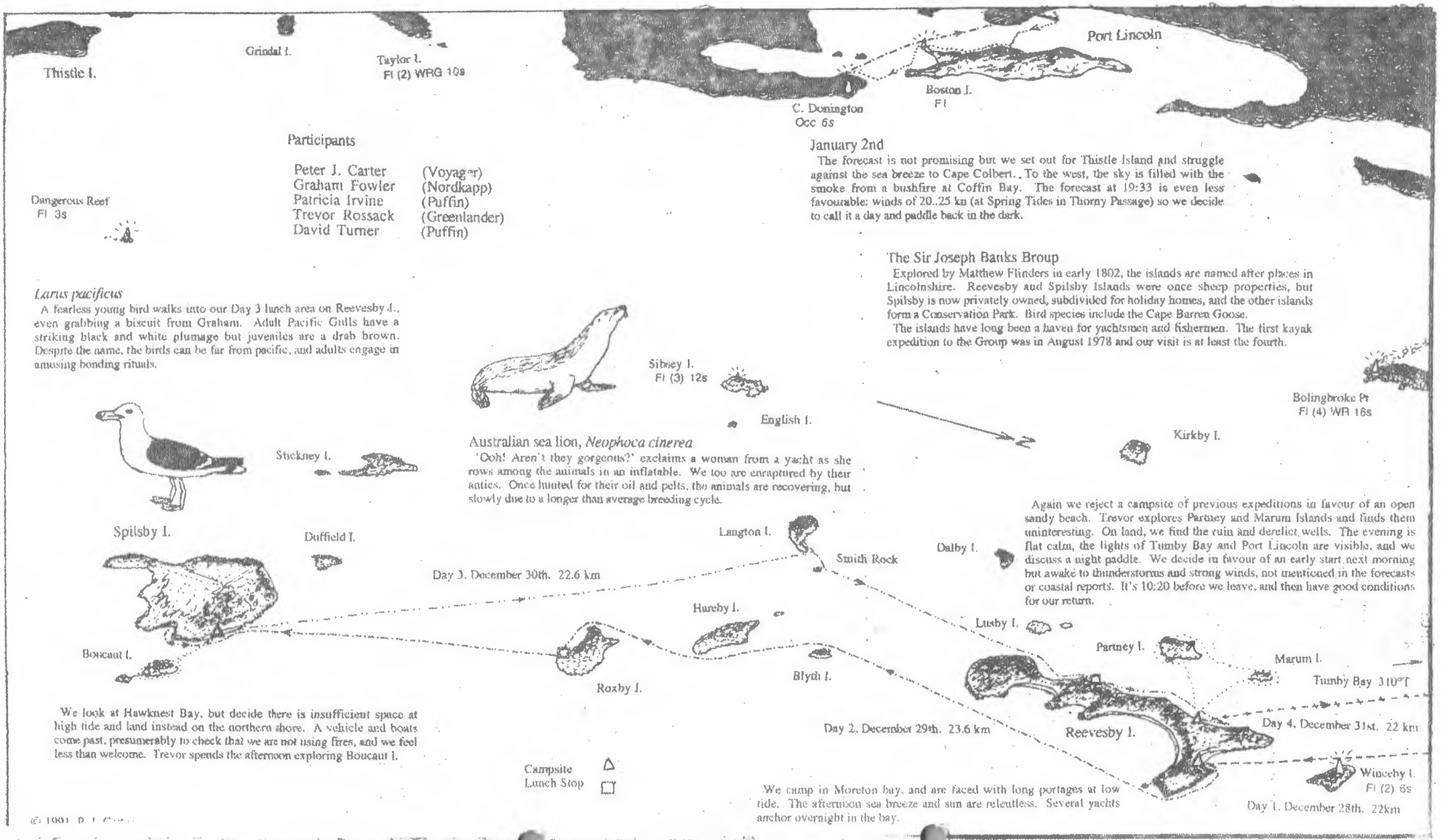
Sir Joseph Banks Group Revisited, December 28..31 1990



Participants

Peter J. Carter	(Voyager)
Graham Fowler	(Nordkapp)
Patricia Irvine	(Puffin)
Trevor Rossack	(Greenlander)
David Turner	(Puffin)

Larus pacificus

A fearless young bird walks into our Day 3 lunch area on Reevesby I., even grabbing a biscuit from Graham. Adult Pacific Gulls have a striking black and white plumage but juveniles are a drab brown. Despite the name, the birds can be far from pacific, and adults engage in amusing bonding rituals.

Australian sea lion, *Neophoca cinerea*

'Ooh! Aren't they gorgeous?' exclaims a woman from a yacht as she rows among the animals in an inflatable. We too are enraptured by their antics. Once hunted for their oil and pelts, the animals are recovering, but slowly due to a longer than average breeding cycle.

January 2nd

The forecast is not promising but we set out for Thistle Island and struggle against the sea breeze to Cape Colbert. To the west, the sky is filled with the smoke from a bushfire at Coffin Bay. The forecast at 19:33 is even less favourable: winds of 20..25 kn (at Spring Tides in Thorny Passage) so we decide to call it a day and paddle back in the dark.

The Sir Joseph Banks Broup

Explored by Matthew Flinders in early 1802, the islands are named after places in Lincolnshire. Reevesby and Spilsby Islands were once sheep properties, but Spilsby is now privately owned, subdivided for holiday homes, and the other islands form a Conservation Park. Bird species include the Cape Barren Goose.

The islands have long been a haven for yachtsmen and fishermen. The first kayak expedition to the Group was in August 1978 and our visit is at least the fourth.

We look at Hawknest Bay, but decide there is insufficient space at high tide and land instead on the northern shore. A vehicle and boats come past, presumerably to check that we are not using fires, and we feel less than welcome. Trevor spends the afternoon exploring Boucaut I.

Again we reject a campsite of previous expeditions in favour of an open sandy beach. Trevor explores Partney and Marum Islands and finds them uninteresting. On land, we find the ruin and derelict wells. The evening is flat calm, the lights of Tumby Bay and Port Lincoln are visible, and we discuss a night paddle. We decide in favour of an early start next morning but awake to thunderstorms and strong winds, not mentioned in the forecasts or coastal reports. It's 10:20 before we leave, and then have good conditions for our return.

We camp in Moreton bay, and are faced with long portages at low tide. The afternoon sea breeze and sun are relentless. Several yachts anchor overnight in the bay.

THIRD TIME LUCKY, FOR THE SECOND TIME
OR, EIGHTEEN HOURS CONDENSED INTO FOUR DAYS.

From John Chamberlin, Breaston Derby

Wednesday night, 17 June 1992. The phone rang. It was Dave Patrick ringing from Beaumaris on Anglesey, ostensibly to see how England were doing in the European Cup, but really to tell me he was enjoying his first pint of Boddington's. He rang again later, ostensibly to see how they'd done, but really to tell me he'd had three. I didn't need telling. He put Carole on in disgust when I said England had lost. She told me the sea was lovely and calm, with scarcely any wind, unlike Dave. We arranged to meet near the pier at half past eight the following morning. I'd wear a pink carnation. Tim would wear French knickers and a camisole top - no reason, he just does.

Our aim was to canoe around Anglesey, Mon to its friends, over the four days 18 to 21 June, Thursday to Sunday, camping from the boats. Dave and Carole were in their Seascape double, Tim Oldrini - my lad - in a borrowed P & H Orion, and me in my Iona.

In recent years I've been over again with the aim of doing it over four days as a canoe-camping trip. Again we'd twice been forced to alter our plans or abort the trip, both times by the weather. This time we said we wouldn't even drive over there if the weather for the period didn't look totally favourable. On the Wednesday, apart from the winds being in the wrong direction for the early part of the trip, N/NW, and the Force 4/5 looking set to reduce over the week-end as the high pressure ridge moved in and flattened, it looked almost acceptable. So we went, and so did the high pressure! But we made it anyway.

Tim collected me on the Thursday and we set off. We pulled into Beaumaris at 08.15, ahead of schedule, and quickly sought out the pier and a likely launching apot, right next to the lifeboat station. We wanted them to get a good look so they'd know us later! Dave and Carole joined us by 20.30 and parked in front of the lifeboat station doors.

All the boats were packed within the hour, and with a planned launch time of 10.30 that gave us a further hour to kill, so we found the first open cafe and went for breakfast. Later we returned to the boats for our final preparations and a call to the Coast Guard at Holyhead. I gave him the plan, and he was none too happy.

"Are you sure?" he asked, "Yes," I answered. "Have you heard the forecast?" he asked, in a tone that was not unfriendly, but did indicate that we were not his primary consideration at the time. "Yes, but you can give it me again," I responded respectfully. "Northerly 4/5, gusting 6," he read with forboding. It confirmed the 05.55 shipping forecast, and my own fears that the sea would be choppy and the wind against us up the north-east coast. **He** took all of our details and concluded the call in a business-like manner.

On the water by 10.50 we headed north. After some while happily paddling alongside Tim - 'the lad' - I realised the flooding tide was making life quite difficult. In contrast, Dave and Carole were enjoying much better progress by hugging the coast. The problem was, with Tim on my left I couldn't see Dave and Carole, in fact I couldn't see Anglesey! I asked him to paddle on my right as it didn't matter so much if I couldn't see North Wales.

Two hours and ten minutes later we landed for lunch just short of Penmon Point. Dave and Tim set off up the path to have a look at the conditions past Penmon lighthouse, returning with a thumbs down for an early passage and tales of gloom from a self-styled 'lifeboat-man' who said he'd "...have the boys out...", if we even tried it. Carole and I then went for a recce. It looked decidedly rough.

We settled down for an extended lunch break, taking advantage of the shelter and sunshine for a post-prandial doss. At 15.45 Dave and Tim recce'd again and gave

us the OK to go, with the proviso that we stayed between the lighthouse and the point, where the water seemed to be breaking the least.

Afloat again by just after 16.00 and with only a minor delay while Tim ehlped release my jammed skeg, the three boats rounded the point under the watchful eye of our personally attendant lifeboat-man.

The sea tossed and threw us about for the next three miles. The conditions were quite testing for Dave and Carole in the double, and forced a brief discussion on whether or not to land there or continue across to Moelfre. They opted for the latter, and we plugged away at the beam sea and head-wind for a further hour-and-a-half.

Landing at 18.15 there was a definite air of 'that's it for today', Bull Bay however was still eight or nine miles away, and the curve of the coast would turn us northerly, more into the face of the wind. My concern was that yet again the main object of the trip was already in jeopardy, this time before the end of day one. Nonetheless the concensus was quickly established in favour of a camp where we were. As luck would have it we had landed right next to the coast path, and backing on to that were a number of very green and reasonably flat gardens. Within less than fifteen minutes we had firm offers of two pitches for the night. I think it was the limps that did it, Dave's from his hip, and mine from a stubbed toe at Beaumaris, but played for best effect when in sight of any potential hosts.

We chose the closest pitch to the boats and within a further half hour they had us eating our of their hands, or at least off their silver tea tray. The accom-panying short-bread biscuits were almost too good to eat. We were told by 'uncle' not to leave any, so we didn't. (Our hosts instructed us to refer to them as 'uncle and aunt' when in earshot of others, in order to avoid any unwelcome comments from the council on their impromptu camp-site.)

This is the life - roughing it straight out of the boats - and they not only recommended our eating haunt for the evening, they also phoned ahead to ensure we wouldn't miss the last sitting.

We had completed only thirteen of the twenty-one miles planned for the day, but after a couple of pints and a decent meal the short-comings of the day's paddle receded into a utopian, if inebriate, dream. After all, the sea would be flatter tomorrow.

It wasn't.

Friday dawned overcast, with the wind still fresh and northerly, and an early stroll along the cliff path confirmed the sea's moderate state - in line with the 05.55 forecast of, 'N/NE, 4/5, gusting 6'. Literally interpreted, 'moderate' means a range from; 'Large wavelets, crests beginning to break. Foam of glassy appearance. Perhaps scattered white horses', to, 'Small waves, becoming larger; frequent white horses'.

Bidding our hosts thanks and farewell I trogged off to the phone box to log in with HMCG, leaving Tim to stroll nonchalantly up the street and find their postal address for the flowers and letter of gratitude we had agreed to send.

By 10.40 we were afloat once more and heading for Moelfre Island Sound and another debate on whether or not to go on. In the event, we agreed it was best if Dave and Carole didn't continue in the prevailing conditions. Reluctantly Tim and I parted from Dave and Carole, leaving them to fetch their car and join us further round, and by 11.15 we were heading north once more.

With the tide not due to turn in our favour until 13.30 and the wind against us it was a long slog up through Dulas Island Sound and some occasionally, 'frisky' seas, towards Point Lynas. Approaching the headland Tim commented that it didn't look too bad. but as soon as we started to round it the true turbulence of the seas became apparent and we bounced about in the headwind-opposed tidal flow with the superimposition of the reflected waves. Now past mid-day, the sun had

burgled through the clouds and the next three miles were covered in beam seas and raised spirits to land for a late lunch in a tiny cove east of Bull Bay at 14.45.

The tide had already turned at 14.00, but we took a 50-minute lunch in order to refresh ourselves and allow it to gain speed for the paddle across Holyhead Bay and around the Stacks. Tim's positive attitude towards the original objective had reinjected a determination into Friday's paddle, and we had almost implicitly agreed that the primary goal was still there to be taken. There were still twenty-six miles to do and our original plan of a 'Silver Beach' camp for Friday night could be reasonably modified to Trearddur Bay, giving an overall mileage for the day of thirty-two, but still getting us on to Holy Island.

Opening one eye after five or ten minutes I espied a face at the first floor window of the house to our right - it was their beach! Tim's luck was definitely in, but not wanting to take advantage of it we lunched quickly and repacked before she found a friend!

We left at 15.35, immediately bouncing through the overfalls as the now mature ebb tide scoured its way out of Bull Bay and along the north coast. There were about seven miles before the last good stopping point this side of Carmel Head, Hen Borth, and we would want that break before crossing Holyhead Bay, but initially we took full advantage of the flow and really tanked along through the confused and bounding sea.

Middle Mouse and Cemaes Bay passed much sooner than expected and as we prepared to pass inside of Harry Furlong's Rocks we saw Dave and Carole coming down to the water's edge to meet us, on the headland Trwyn Cemlyn. Tim wanted to stop in a small inlet at the tip of the rocks, but I insisted we carry on and make the landfall I had intended at Hen Borth, about a mile further on, and I waved and shouted that intention to Dave and Carole. Tim struggled to understand my inflexibility on the issue and my logic for not stopping where we were. My problem, was the area of water over the quarter mile immediately ahead of us. It was confused, not seriously so at all, but off to our right the main overfalls were also working, like a train, and with the same amount of noise, and for my own purely personal reasons, good old deep-rooted fear, I just had to be past there before I took a break.

My lack of consideration caused Dave and Carole to leg it back to their car, drive the extra mile or so and rejoin us at Hen Borth. Landing there at 16.25 we had done the seven miles from Bull Bay in fifty minutes.

A quick coffee and consultation with Dave and Carole had agreed our target of Trearddur Bay and twenty minutes later they pushed us off on the final leg of the day.

Carmel Head on the full ebb was the next unknown, although it didn't remain so for long, as fifteen minutes later we were alternately diving and soaring in the tide race and overfalls, as the rushing water encountered the undersea obstructions and Carmel Rocks beyond. Once again we were embroiled in the altercation between the standing waves off the headland and the northern swells determined to reach it.

Leaving Carmel Head at 17.00 the seven-mile crossing of Holyhead Bay took a little over an hour. I was getting tired and needed to push reasonably hard to keep up with Tim - six-foot-two, fifteen stone and thirteen years my junior. With the sun now ahead and to the right of us, the tiny cove at Soldiers' Point - the start and finish point of our successful '73 trip - was just visible.

18.07 - North Stack - and the final lumpy water of the day, more or less. The outgoing eddy scoured out of the bay along the north coast of Holy Island and met the main stream of the dying ebb in a half-mile area of tossing, spouting and argumentative waves. The sea shone golden in the reflected light of the cliffs and steadily we eased into Gogarth Bay, where Tim regaled me with

one of the less tasteful of his repertoire of canoeing/climbing stories.

A mile further was South Stack lighthouse, its tower and buildings sharing the same builder as Dartmoor prison. Within twenty minutes we were threading the needle of the only remaining gap under the suspension bridge. Suddenly it was calm. Not only calm but beautiful, the cliffs, the birds and the sea. Totally flat, placid, at peace in the lee of the island and cliffs.

Four and a half miles left, but with the wind from the north it pushed us along to Penrhyn Mawr, to then become offshore and on our left as we turned in towards Trearddur Bay. The final three miles were a slog against the growing flood and sideways on to the wind, guided in over the last half mile by the big grey house on the headland. We landed below the slipway at the north end of the bay, just before 20.00 Dave and Carole were waiting with news of the campsite. It was a field bang in front of the Trearddur Bay Hotel and just thirty-seven paces from the bar. Within the hour we had the boats unpacked, the tents up, donned our prandial garb and were installed inside with three pints and a sweet sherry. Tim's.

So far we had kept in touch with HMCG at the beginning and end of each day, and on Saturday morning we contacted them again from the payphone in the hotel foyer. Prior to that we had breakfasted, partially packed and joined a wedding party for coffee in the sun lounge - characteristically incongruous with Dave in his 'what you see is what you get' trunks, Carole in full thermal gear, me in my green hat and Tim in his torn shorts and colostomy bag dangling publicly from the left leg.

Departure time was 13.00 By 12.30 we were on the beach, completely ready and only a little out of place amongst the holidaymakers, so the opportunity was taken for a half-hour's doss in the golden June sunshine.

On the water on time, a rarity rather than the norm, we left the bay on a cliff-hugging route towards Rhoscolyn Head and the bottom end of Holy Island. The spot we chose for lunch was a tiny cove right next to the entrance to Cymyran Strait, totally deserted and overlooking the west coast as far as the eye could see. Untouched sand, bathed in uninterrupted sun.

But it didn't last. Once Conan The Vegetarian had eaten his cheese sarnies Dave, Carole and I were summoned into action with a 'Come on. I can't be doin' wi' all this 'angin' around.' The delay however had allowed the tide to turn and build up into what meagre assistance it was going to give through the middle of the afternoon. There were nearly twenty miles till to do and the last three or four would be against the ebb in the strait, so any help over the first two or three hours was welcomed.

The next two headlands saw us into the two-mile Malltraeth Bay, and for the last time we again set off due east. Passing inside the three Prongs, we breasted the tower at about 17.30. Hugging the lee coast we made our way north east towards the Newborough sands, and just before 18.00 took a quick break on shore. Quite tired by now and knowing the next three miles would be without tidal assistance, and then the following three against the increasing ebb, Tim produced his hip flask and gave us a shot of morale, liberally laced with whiskey. It worked, and with renewed determination we set off abreast the long and almost featureless shore.

Gaining the end of the forest within no more than fifteen minutes, I wrongly judged we would make the point by about 19.00. We only just made the entrance at Abermenai Point without needing to walk, and once inside six-foot high sand banks gave us a new navigational dilemma. Dave was clearly keen to finish and sure of his way, as he shot ahead. The problem here is that over the years the channels and banks move with the storms and tides, and the map gave us little comfort as to the accuracy of our choice. But optimism is a wonderful thing when you're down, and by the time we'd covered a couple of miles our destination of the Mermaid Inn was in view.

The prospect of pie, beer anc chips guided us and the kayaks into the pool we would launch from the following day, and alternately walking, stumbling paddling and towing, we made the slimy weed-covered shore beneath the pub at round about 20.30. With the tents up, we changed and secured the gear before seeking out the bar and menu, ordering our meals seconds ahead of a crowd of trippers. Later, the landlord - with a nod and a wink - took Carole by the hand and led her outside towards one of the unlet, and unlit, chalets. Dave was greatly reassured when she returned with a smile (relief!) and with the key to the chalet! 'Our toilet,' she grinned triumphantly. We were given the run of the bathroom, and had we wanted them, breakfasts were available at the pub. It's really good this roughing it.

Sunday morning saw us packing for the last time and as soon as the channel was full enough to permit our exit north-eastwards we set off. The wind-against-tide made for an energetic paddle and we didn't ease off until passing under the new reinforced arch of the old tubular bridge some six miles later.

With a good hour to go there was still sufficient flow on this marine conveyor to ease us round the bend and under the single suspended span of Telford's 1826 A5 road bridge, 100' above our head. Less than a quarter mile further on we crossed to the island shore and pulled into a tiny cove beneath Menai Bridge town at about 12.30. Mooring next to the slipway, this bedraggled quartet sloped up the ramp to eat our lunches on the public benches overlooking the straits, watching the local posetariat launching their speedboats with their cool wet-suits, cool-boxes and cool birds.

Afloat again, the area between here and Bangor was partitioned by confused flows as conflicting tidal streams duelled for supremacy. Our course took us over to the mainland shore, where assistance was still to be had, and then out past Bangor pier to cover the final two miles of the trip against a knot or two of flood. It's nice to finish as we started!

We landed at 14.20. Third time lucky, for the second time. George would have been proud of us. It was his trip.

x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x

17th Nov 1992

Dear John

I notice that on the last page of No 94, that I have had some sort of response to my earlier article on 'Immersion and near drowning'. I had hoped for a more positive response in order to discover how others re-acted in circumstances of near-drowning, i.e. acceptance of the situation, drowsiness, or super human efforts to avert disaster, or even sheer panic. Perhaps those who have had the experience are reluctant to write about it. After all it is a very personal experience. But I still hope for some results in due course as I think it would make very interesting reading to many of your readers and to Dr Wilmhurst in particular.

Best Wishes

Eric Totty, Kendal

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ATLANTIC

by Stan Chladek, Michigan U.S.A.

A section of the northwest Irish coast north of Galway looked like an interesting place for a kayak trip: the old worn out mountains of Connemara meet the sea forming many sections of steep cliffs. This Clew Bay area with lots of islands is mostly wild country along the coast, if not in a true "American sense" of the word, since there are occasional villages in a few bays, but big cities are far away. Like elsewhere in Ireland there are historical monuments along the coast and on islands, the sites which are tied to historical events and legends.

Frank Goodman and myself planned to start our kayak trip at the southern end of Clew Bay and cross the full width of it toward the north with stops on a few islands. We would then arrive at Achill Island and round this mountainous headland and cross over the mouth of Blacksod Bay. After this we would either take the inland route to the town of Belmullet or paddle along the Atlantic coast, visiting more exposed islands on the way. In case of bad weather, as must be expected on the Irish West Coast, it looked that there would be shelters from Atlantic gales in the eastern part of Clew Bay amongst the many islands, and most importantly in Achill Sound, separating Achill Island from the mainland.

At the beach of Rinvyle we loaded our two singles with gear and provisions for two weeks and were off into gentle surf to cross to our first planned stop, the Island of Inishturk. It was a simple pleasant crossing, accomplished early in the afternoon. Arriving at the island we met a lobster fisherman. He invited us to camp on his lawn and let us know that he also ran a pub in the village. We pulled out on the shingle beach inside of a small fishing harbour and built our tent on the grass, having not a small difficulty to find a spot which was not marked by the presence of long-haired sheep.

We returned down to the camp covered with mud and after eating we moved to the local pub. The island pub was a rather simple affair, but with good Guiness or Murphy it gradually became a bit more pleasant. A young pretty girl with short black hair came in and after two shots of whiskey and a beer turned to us, as she knew that we came here in kayaks: "You may be staying on the island a bit longer than you thought, the gale is reported to arrive tonight". Sure thing, she was right, the next morning was totally miserable, and the weather forced us to stay in our tent for a good part of the day.

After one more cold evening in the pub and a chilly wet night, the forecast at 6.30 am came with another gale warning in the early afternoon. We thought we just may make it to another island only a few miles away. So we hurriedly packed and started to paddle. We figured out that we would make it to Caher Island and then decide whether we should attempt to continue with a longer crossing to Clare Island further north.

Under darkening skies and increasing winds we paddled some 3-4 miles toward Caher Island. We reached a full view of the inhospitable cliff-bound coast surrounded by a wreath of white surf with no visible landings. After running the swell along the east side of the island and turning north, we spotted a small cove with a small boulder strewn beach. We landed and pulled the kayaks high between boulders, so they would be out of reach of big swells reflecting around headlands. This was a holy island with several graves of saints from the 5th-6th century, who also built a small stone chapel whose ruins can be observed near the beach where we landed. An old chapel, built of dry-stone masonry also contained a few graves as well. The island is wild today and no one lives on this windswept inhospitable place. It is evidently the site of pilgrimages, since there is a small stone dish in the chapel ruins containing a handful of coins covered with patina.

The real storm camp upon us once more and almost blew us off from the top of the island, where we climbed to get a view of surrounding seascape. By that time, it may have been about 4 o'clock, and we were quite sure that we were going to spend the night there. On such a barren island and under those conditions it

was quite difficult to find a place at least partially protected from the elements. After some searching, we realized that the most protected spot would be in a hollow behind the large burial mound. I did not really like it - it seemed to me like camping on a cemetery and I had scary dreams the whole night as the tent shook violently in the wind.

Morning dawned on us, but it was very dark, raining and the southeastern gale was still blowing about force 10. The sky started to clear and the wind seemed to be dropping a bit around noon, so we decided to attempt an 8 mile crossing to Clare Island. It was totally unprotected and we expected to have large waves on the tail of the storm. As the sky cleared up, the Croagh Patrick came into view, and we planned to land on the leeward side of Clare Island. We turned a little more down-wind and in the last two miles gained a good ride on following seas straight into the small harbour, protected by the seawall.

Later, in the shelter of this large and high island we paddled over easy waters until we were hit by large waves as we passed the high western bluffs of the island. As we progressed westward we passed the straight separating the mainland from mountainous Achill Island. We were aiming toward the wide open bay where the village of Dooega was located. As we paddled toward the middle of the bay, we realized that the line of reefs extended way across the bay perpendicularly from the cliffs, seemingly completely blocking our projected route to the village. With strong wind in our backs, we were coming to them very, very, quickly and had to deal with the situation without hesitation. We cleared those boomers on their north side, but the adventure was not over yet, because what looked like little white crests from the distance turned out to be a line of huge surf, which was evidently full of jagged rocks where we could smash the boats and our necks as well. We found a narrow window in the middle of the surf line and moments later we were landing on the nice sand beach without any difficulties.

Happily we pulled out our kayaks and we were met by a man who was tending fishing nets. He offered us camping on his lawn and advised us how to find the village pub. After putting up the tent and a late meal we walked to the pub, and were welcomed by a bartender who asked us: "are you those two men who came from the sea in kayaks?" Evidently the village telegraph works fast.

Next morning looked pleasant and less windy. Another fisherman came by and told us that the weather was going to be quite good. This was very significant, because we were facing the most difficult part of our journey - rounding the Achill Island, and there would be no landing for more than 20 miles. The first possible stop would be a bay behind Slievemore Head. So with high hopes we started out. Reflections around the first headland, Dooega Head were much bigger than I expected, the seas were high, steep and very confused.

We quickly came to a view of the last outpost of civilization, the village of Keel. Soon the crossing of the bay was over and for 10 or maybe 20 miles there would be no landing, because the swells were running pretty big. The seas quickly built up and soon we were negotiating a totally confused mess of clapotisis. After a while I realized that I actually liked it, gone was the apprehension which I had felt when we were rounding the Dooega Head earlier. After about a couple of hours we were approaching the end of the world - Achill Head - and I thought we were arriving to the climax of the day. (It was not.) The headland was littered with hugh rocks (Priest Rocks), and seemingly no way through for the kayaks. So we paddled a bit further away from the cliffs, skidded over a few large waves, broke through the wall of spray and suddenly we were sitting in an eerie calmness behind the rocks.

It felt good to be over with this stretch of gnarly paddling and so we kept paddling along the north side of the steep cliffs where there was almost no wind. We now noticed that the sky was indigo dark, although it was only early afternoon. I was thinking that it looked like hell was going to break loose soon, and Frank agreed. We paddled fast toward the east hoping to make it to the small beach some 8-10 miles distant as quickly as possible. Soon we arrived under the gap in the cliff wall (Achill Ears) and were hit by a strong offshore wind funneling down through the Ears. We were trying to stay in the shelter of the

cliffs and make it to the beach. As we were coming to Saddle Head, we suddenly beheld a huge cross swell in front of us, which forced us to move further away from the cliffs in order to avoid it. In that moment, it occurred to us that we should change our plan and aim directly for the north shore of Blacksod Bay, some 10 miles away, instead of fighting the wind to make it to the sheltered beach behind Slievemore Head. Thus we turned our bows north and accelerated in the face of an impeding storm. This decision may have saved our day - we would have never made it to the beach behind Slievemore!

With a strong push we made progress and the sun-lit north shore looked more and more inviting. As we were coming closer to the shore the land looked really inviting. I elegantly surfed onto the beach without broaching. Frank landed seconds later and we pulled our kayaks away from the pounding surf. Now we could fully appreciate how strong the wind really was - our kayaks were rolling over the beach and we both fell on the ground as we could not stand up into the wind. It was imperative to find shelter quickly. Frank found a decent hollow hidden between dunes, but it was some 600 yards away and we had to make three trips to move everything. Even in the deep hollow our tent poles snapped right away and the tent became totally useless. Frank preferred to go to the village to find some sort of accommodation. As we walked on the road I looked into my pocket to see how much money we had left, but as soon as I opened the pocket, the money was gone with the wind. So we were lucky that a farmer offered us shelter for the night in his house. He already knew about our dramatic arrival on the beach via the village telegraph.

After spending a good night we returned to our kayaks. Achill Head was looming across the bay. We launched our boats and paddled the remaining 18 miles over diminishing swells and entered a quiet portion of the bay which led us all the way to the town of Belmullet. Frank's wife Doreen arrived with the car and picked us up. After lunch we moved a few miles to the Atlantic side to paddle a few more miles to a group of islands.

Landing on the island of Inishglora was quite difficult; almost the whole island was surrounded by cliffs and reefs. We almost gave up on landing, when we finally discovered a tiny sand beach studded with big rocks. This might have been a decent place to land in low tide, but in high tide there was not much room. We finally managed to land in rather heavy seas, and in my case with some boat banging and body torturing as well.

The return trip was uneventful with a good ride through now smaller (perhaps lower tide) surf. I only wish I could stay here a bit longer and do some surfing on these absolutely perfect beaches. Nevertheless I am quite sure this was not my last trip to the wild Irish Coast.

ONE DAY ON THE ISLE OF BARRA

Every year we run a fortnight's sea canoeing holiday in the Outer Hebrides, during which we teach canoeing to children on the Isle of Barra. This takes place in July, as the Scottish school holidays begin in June, and they go back in August. My job gives me time off in July, but not in August except when I have finished putting together the half year accounts for the Group who employ me.

We have six small canoes there, suitable for children to about 16 years, and a sea kayak. We also bring up as many other boats as we can manage. In its present format we have now done four summer holidays, but we also did two summer holidays before that in which we brought up four or five boats, and just did one session a day. Now we run three 3-hour sessions a day working with up to 6, or exceptionally 7, children on each one. The children are nearly all the sons and daughters of local lobster fishermen, but there are a few children of holidaymakers, most of whom come back every year. We charge 50 pence per session, though this will go up next year to £1. All the money is ploughed back into the equipment, which is owned by the Isle of Barra Watersports Club, while the boats are owned by myself. Over the years on this basis we have broken even. In 1990 we worked with 26 children, most of whom did 4 or 5 sessions, though one did 8. Every year they obtain a number of one and two star awards, with the occasional three star. Some of the children go away to a local authority boarding school in Stornoway, where they can carry on their canoeing. Some of the visitors come from Fort William, where canoeing is a school activity, and are staying with relatives on Barra.

I am a British Canoe Union Senior Instructor (Sea) and no person with a lesser qualification should contemplate taking anyone out on the sea, still less children in Hebridean waters. To help me I bring up at least one assistant who will be an Instructor, or Trainee Instructor looking for experience. I am also always prepared to take club members up provided they can handle the long journey, the 100 miles across the Minch by the Caledonian-MacBrayne ferry "The Lord of the Isles", the camping or sleeping on the floor of the canoe hut, and the long hours, without wingeing. If anyone ever feels they could cope with this they would be more than welcome, and can be guaranteed the canoeing holiday of a lifetime.

I am going to describe a typical day. No persons or events are fictional in the tale I tell. It will be just one day, exactly as it happened, not bits of different days cobbled together for effect. Of course I could have told you of how we canoe to the skerries on the end of the isle of Vatersay and sing to the seals to bring them curiously bobbing around our boats; or of how we go to that strange natural outcrop of rock in the Minch called the Weaver's Castle; or of how we paddle out to the Isle of Eriskay on which Bonnie Prince Charlie landed on his return from France and from which he was carried over the sea to Skye; or of how we visit the very spot where the S.S. Politician foundered with her cargo of whisky and her secret cargo of banknotes that Compton Mackenzie wrote of in "Whisky Galore"; or of how we canoe round the hauntingly beautiful uninhabited island of Sandray; or of our trips round the stark rocks of Maol Domhnaich rising almost vertically 500 feet out of the ocean, its edges thickly encrusted with mussels; or of the Golden Eagles soaring round the peaks of Hellisay and the Peregrine Falcons on the heather-clad slopes of Fuiay; of the 100-foot waves thrown up in gales on the west-facing Doirlinn Head, which we in awe view respectfully from the hillside; or of the looks on the children's faces as they gaze into the Pipers' Cave, the very cave into which a man went with his dog, and a year later the whispering dog emerged with all its fur gone, and the man himself came out as one of

the undead four hundred years after that. No, the mouth of that cave is the play place for the otter, that magical creature whose name must not be spoken aloud and is referred to in Gaelic as dobhran - the black one.

To canoe in the Hebridean seas is to visit the real world, the world as God created it, the world from which we in the cities and towns are almost totally excluded except when storm and flood disturb our equanimity.

Our day starts with the shipping forecast just before 6 am. This has to be listened to attentively as an understanding of the weather is very important for Hebridean waters. There are then two hours during which I can doze or plan the day's work with a view to making the most of the weather for the children that have booked. At eight sharp I get up and put the kettle on. This is not just throwing a switch, but entails checking the paraffin level in the cooker, refilling, cleaning and priming it, and finally bringing it to roaring life. From that time on I produce endless amounts of boiling water for coffee, washing, washing up, shaving and so on.

By about twenty to nine we are both ready and dressed for canoeing, and have sorted out the equipment. Luckily we are sleeping this year on the floor of the watersports hut, so getting ready is a good deal easier than it used to be when we were camping on Tangusdale Beach on the far side of the island, and all the gear had to be collected from someone's garage and rehung out there last thing at night. The hut was put up in time for last year's fortnight, but we didn't think of sleeping in it till this year (fools - Ed.).

The morning session is reserved for one star training. Our first client will be along in a moment. Sure enough at a quarter to nine there is a patter of little footsteps and Seomas has arrived. Though ten years old he is rather small for canoeing, but has been longing to join in with his older brothers for a number of years. He is a very intelligent and observant little chap, but like so many of that type finds it very hard to concentrate on the matter in hand. At nine o'clock the parents of the other trainees arrive with their offspring and leave them with us until midday. The children get kitted up, then, working in pairs, get their boats to the water's edge. Today we have five and it is their third session, so we will be expecting great things of them. The wind is southerly and not too strong, so we will be working all around Castlebay harbour, which is quite large and has all sorts of features that we can use. The water is quite clean as well, so they won't come to much harm, even if they do fall in. The first hour is spent in getting on the water then working through all the one star exercises. Half way through, the unexpected command "All raft up on Angus!" is given. 40 seconds that took, 10 better than yesterday, but they will have to get it down to 15 to satisfy me that they can really apply their strokes. Circuits around the fishing boats, stern rudders to hit a given buoy smack in the middle, drawstrokes to raft up, slap supports till their hip-flicks are well evident - these are some of the one star exercises. Now we are off for some adventures.

First we take a tour round the island in the harbour. On the island stands Kisimul Castle, home of the 49th MacNeil of Barra, the clan chieftain. The tour goes well and everybody is confident and happy. So we go off to the pier, where the rising tide has just cleared some transverse beams, and we can follow one another in a little slalom course between the upright piles of the pier. We have to use mainly turning strokes, but emergency stops come in useful as well. At this stage the children are not too smart at doing this so we don't keep them at it very long. They are given a choice of what they would like next. Andrew says "round the yachts". Half a dozen yachts have come in overnight from the Clyde, so we go crosswind over to them. On the way the children learn the value of the stern rudder on the down wind side.

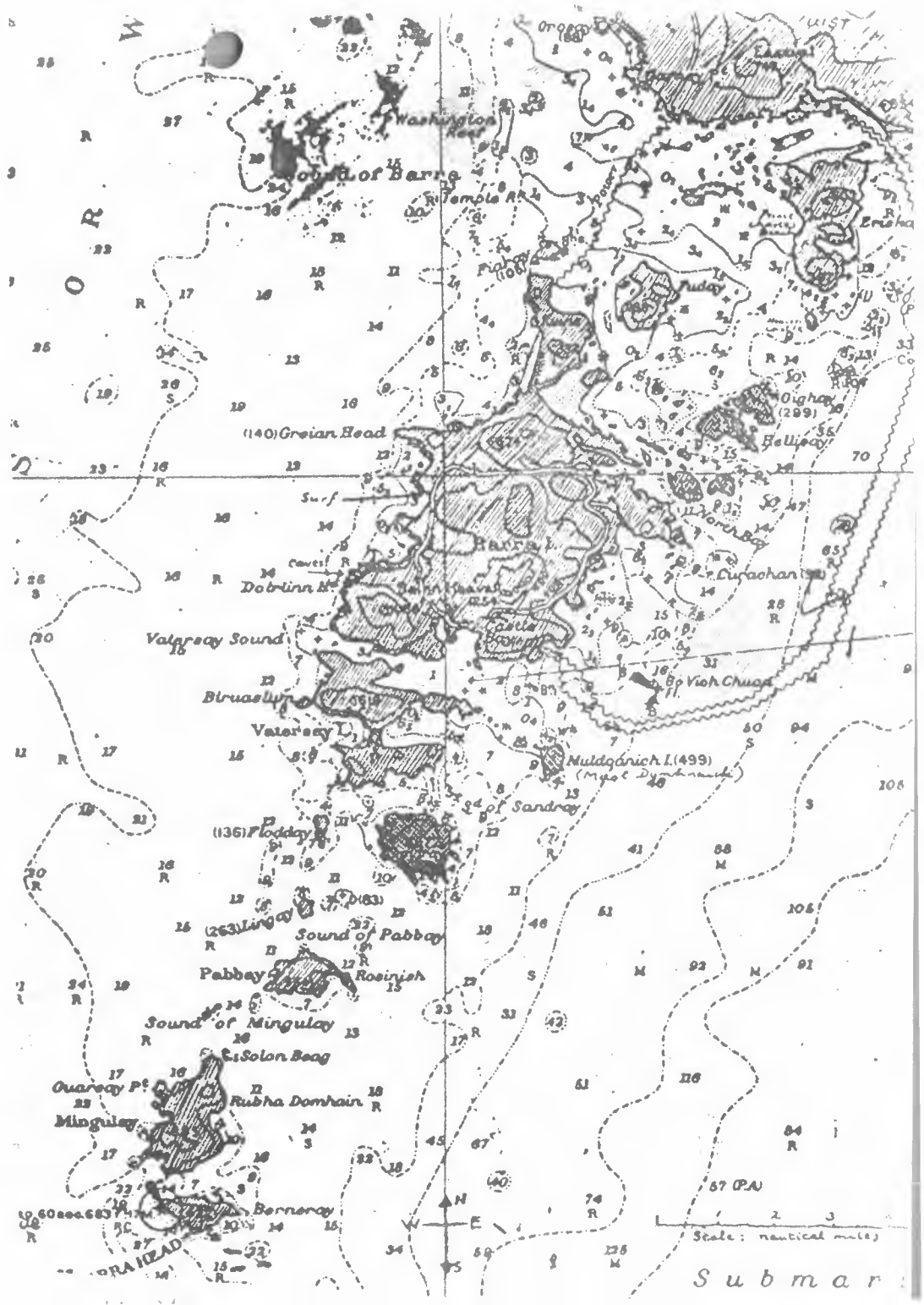
They also learn to use a little jab stroke on [redacted] side to correct matters when the bow starts to swing upwind. We arrive at the yachts, and chat to a few of the skippers, then regroup. Neil chooses and we are off to the Bagh Beag (pronounced Bach Beg), which is a sea loch with a tiderace at its mouth called the Sruith (pronounced stroo - sr in Gaelic sounds like str in English). We paddle there past the rocks in front of the hospital. As usual I am in front, but paddling backwards to watch everybody all the time. After all these years I'm dead brilliant at paddling backwards! Near the hospital a movement on the rocks at the side of me catches my attention. An otter was grooming himself in the sunshine, and after a moment's surprised stare at us bounds into the water. We pass the hospital and then comes a tiny bay. Little waves roll in, miniatures of the surf waves on the west of the island, so everybody has a quick try of surfing. One or two catch waves and whoop with delight. They are quick to paddle out and try to catch another one. Then we come to the stroo. The tide is rising so the water is flowing into the Bagh Beag. On a falling tide it gives a good grade II rapid for a couple of hours, but we won't be using that today, even for the afternoon group as we have other things to do on such a relatively calm day. The stroo is the entrance to the Bagh Beag, so in we go. There is a floating salmon farm in the middle, so we paddle up to it and watch the caged salmon leaping.

On request from two of the children we paddle to shore for a stretch of the legs. This is a much needed comfort stop. We also use it to give them practice at choosing a good place to get out of the boat. This will be the first time they haven't got in and out on a nice evenly shelving beach. As this cannot always be provided they have to learn how to select a place to land. Mark and I scurry around trying to prevent people from making mistakes like putting their boat on top of a rock and stepping out of it into deep water, instead of the other way round.

We now have about an hour left and are a mile from our starting point at Leideag. A pair of herons fishing in the loch remind us to look up at their untidy nest near the top of some small cliffs about 200 yards away from the mouth of the Bagh Beag. On the cliff walls two sea urchins are browsing. I find these animals rather inscrutable. Seals on the rocks nearby clumber into the water at our approach and bob around us with inquisitive eyes. A tern plummets into the water and comes up with its beak full of sand-eels. A cormorant stands on a rock with its wings spread out to dry. Not far away some guillemots are swimming, occasionally diving as we come too near. Now we must cross the harbour to our base. Seonas and Andrew, the two littlest ones, raft up together, and I take them in tow. Deliberately we don't head straight for home, but go to the old harbour a quarter of a mile from it. Here we unhitch the tow, and play about for twenty minutes, taking boats to the tops of richly weed-covered rocks, and sliding down them into the water. This is called seal launching, and is a very favourite part of the day's sport. Then at last we do the few yards back to base and make our way to shore. Wet things are hung up to dry outside the hut, and the contents of plastic bags investigated for towels and dry clothes. Their mother arrives for Andrew and Angus, who need a little help with their clothes, especially their socks. The others pile into my car as I will be running them back to their homes. One of them, Neil, lives at Tangusdale, which is half way to the surf beach, so I continue on up there to check it. Yes, it looks good, so that's where we will be this afternoon.

Nominally we have a two hour lunch break, but I need 20 minutes of it to load and rope up the boats for the surfers, and I have already used half an hour on the delivery trip and checking the surf. A quick bridie, beans and chips at the village cafe, washed down with a coffee, and we are back to the base.

The surfers will be the 10 year old twins Lachie and Jamie, sons of a local fisherman from Bruarnaich, six miles away; Matt and Dorothy, 14



and 12 respectively, regular holiday makers from near Glasgow; and Allie, a strong 14 year old who takes time off from running his father's croft to come out with us. His father is back and away in five week spells, which alternate from year to year. So Allie happily tells me that next year his father will be back in Barra for July and he will be able to come with us much more.

We arrive at the beach at about twenty past two. We park the car at the roadside, 50 feet above the beach. It is just past high tide. The swells can be seen rolling in from the Atlantic. There isn't much wind, but what there is, is southerly, sideways on to the beach, which may create problems of people drifting towards the rocks. The waves are not too big, and are quite regular and orderly. Ideal. The boats are brought down to the beach and everything is made ready. As always, the rules are explained to the children. Mark goes out to demonstrate some points to them while I stay on the shore as beach marshal. First of all they are to stay in the soup, the area between the shore and the breaking waves. There they must learn to watch the interplay between the environmental forces - the waves, the wind, the varying depth of the sandy bottom, and most important the ledges of rock on the side of the beach. Then they must learn to paddle out and back, and to paddle sideways on to the waves with their paddles over the top. All this at the edge of the soup, with little forays out into the breaking waves. When they feel happy doing all this they will be wanting to do some simple runs.

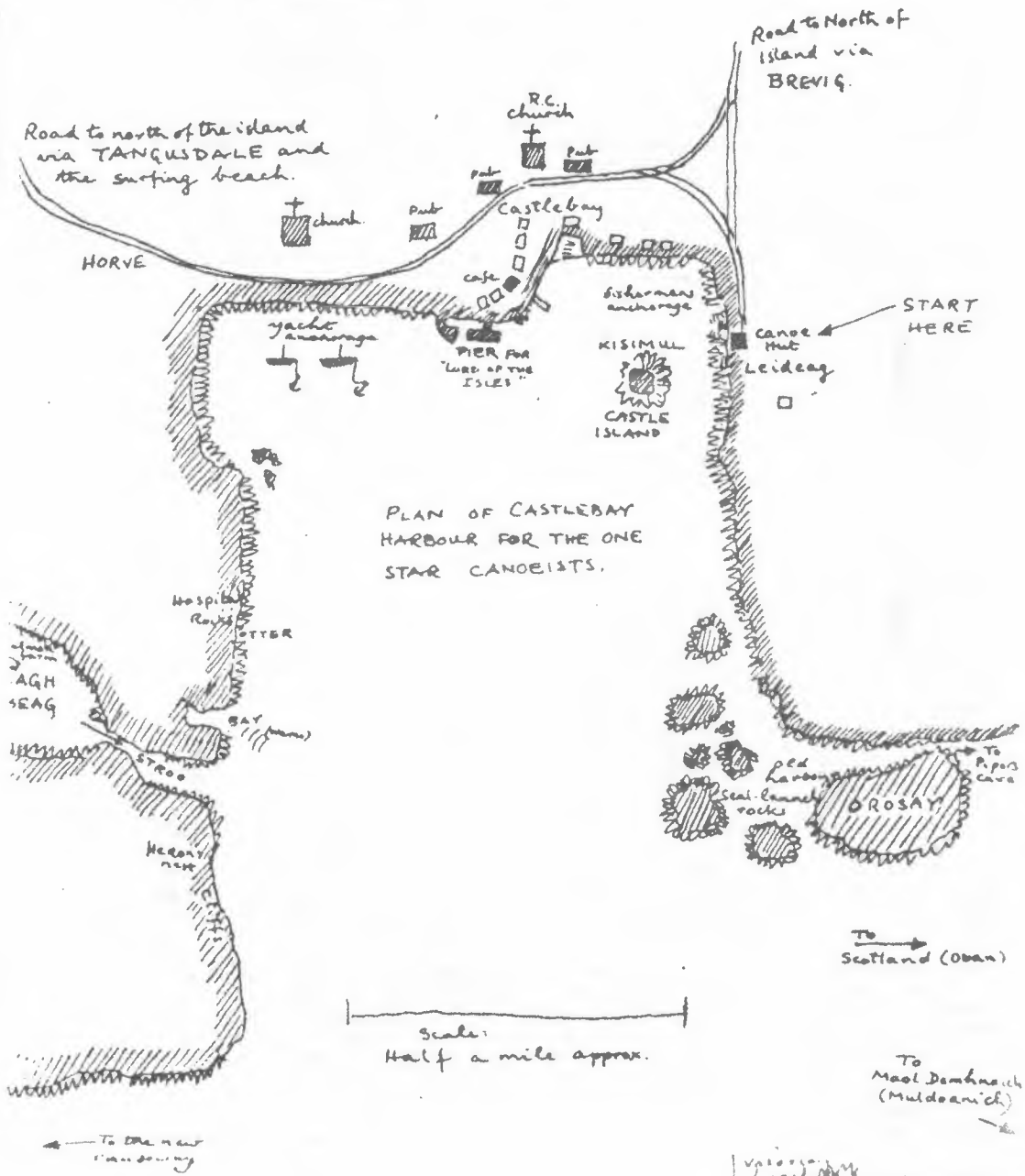
The twins are very adventurous, and soon catch their first wave. Their eyes shining they zoom in towards the shore. Allie is also doing quite well. Dorothy looks happy, but isn't being very adventurous. Matt is a tough but skinny 14 year old. He tries to push his luck a bit, and capsizes. As beach marshal I get him back to shore and empty his boat out, but being so thin he is already a bit cold. Anyway, he has another go. The twins are doing nicely, and beginning to go well out to pick up their waves. One of them manages a bongo slide, where you surf in sideways, having first made sure nobody is in the way. Then first one then the other twin capsizes, so we have them all off for a breather. They go up to the car, dry off, and are soon running about happily on the beach.

My turn on the water, as Mark is looking after the children on shore. There are bigger waves on a slightly different part of the beach. I catch a few good ones and do some demon runs. One rather steep wave capsizes me. I know exactly what was wrong: depite my stern rudder on the down wave side I was broached and left with no support. I need some coaching, but I think my stern rudder was not placed far enough back, and my edging into the up wave side was not positive enough. Anyway I roll up and carry on. Ten minutes later and dammit the same thing happens. Mark and I are keeping a running score of our capsizes and rolls in the surf - I am leading with 4 to his 3, but of course I tell everyone I pick the harder waves.

The children come on for their second session, and all goes fairly well for a time. Mark is now beach marshal, so I am instructing on the water. Eventually all the children except Dorothy have capsized again. Dorothy, who is a most engaging 12 year old, NEVER capsizes. She says its because she never takes on waves she cannot handle. This seems eminently sensible, and obviously boys are sillier than girls, so you can expect them to try to get eaten up by huge waves, if they can find them.

Eventually everybody is dry and in warm clothes, and the boats and gear are back in the van. The twin's mother, who is marvellous at driving around to collect the various members of her family, arrives for them - what a pity she wasn't there to see them in action. Once again I drive the others to their homes, this time in Brevig on the other side of the island. Then to the cafe for a cup of tea and a scone. It is now half past five.

use this plan to see what the children did during the 9-12 session.



The last session of the day is for old hands. The weather being sufficiently calm I decide to take them to the caves. On a very calm day when there are also no swells rolling in from the Atlantic you can paddle right into most of the caves, but today the Atlantic swells will make that impossible, though I know of one cave that might just be sheltered enough.

The boats are already on the van, from the surfing expedition. The team consists of Stuart, who first paddled with me in 1983 and is now a quietly spoken 17 year old; Iain Ruaraidh who is 12 and thinks only of water sports, caring nothing for football; his sister Mary Catherine who at 10 is nearly as big as he is, but not quite as strong; Donald and Neil who are Seomas' older brothers and who are now in their fourth year with us; and Donald John who is the son of the Lifeboat's engineer and who is probably our hardest working paddler, as he has scarcely missed a day for 4 years. Most Gaelic children use two Christian names, either in the English form or the Gaelic.

We have to drive out to Tangusdale, and across the machair (a sort of seaside meadow), then we have a very long carry over a beach. I always mean to work out a better way of doing this trip, given that canoeing is easier than walking, but somehow have never quite managed it. It is now almost low tide. When everyone is on the water we group up behind a little island. I explain to everyone how the swells interact with reefs, even with ones that you cannot see because they do not break the surface. We will be paddling to keep clear of reefs. With a slightly different group we would go closer, but today we stand right off. The swells seem bigger as we go out, but they slide under us harmlessly. All the children are happy: they all have fathers or uncles who are lobster fishermen, and they are all used to being out in small boats in all kinds of weather. They all realise that this is well within their capability so long as they paddle as and how I direct.

Going straight along the coast, and keeping about 100 yards to seaward of all reefs we are eventually able to see the biggest cave of all. Thousands of sea birds inhabit it, but with the swells surging directly into it no one is going too near it today. Nearby is a deep groove into the coastline carved by a geological fault that runs right across Barra, coming out on the other side of the island as the Piper's Cave.

Starting to work our way back I show them a place where we can get into a small bay if we paddle exactly between two enormous rocks about 100 yards apart. Everyone has to follow me in exact line astern. They are warned about the clapotis, where two wave trains meet, and produce wobbly waves. They all manage it easily, and glancing over my shoulder as I led the way in I saw the unusual sight of all these kids in perfect formation and concentrating like crazy on paddling exactly as they knew they should be.

We got in, and in that bay found calm level water. I told them to look at a tiny fissure in the rocks. Dwarfed by the cliffs it looked about six inches wide. To everyone's amazement I disappeared through it. They all followed me in, and found themselves in a deep chasm leading into a cave. You should have seen the look of awe on their faces, for none of them had suspected where that fissure would lead them.

There was room to turn round, so we all paddled out. Again to their surprise, the next fissure, which was a little bigger, led us into another bay. After exploring it we had to form up into line again to paddle out. The next bay had a wider mouth and was easier, so we went in and found another cave. Resting in front of it we could hear the deep roar and sucking and gurgling going on deep inside it. They could easily visualise how far in it goes. I explained that on a very calm day at the right state of the tide you can paddle right into that cave through chamber after chamber, and after a right angled bend inside it emerge near a beach. I took them to a point 100 yards away from the mouth of the cave, at the back of that headland, and showed them the exit. Quite a surprise to some of them!

By now we were almost back at our put-in point on Tangusdale beach. This is probably the finest beach in the British Isles, with a good length of golden sand and crisply refreshing clean water. With tired paddlers it took a bit longer to get the boats back to the car than it did to get them to the water, so it was ten past nine when we emerged from the gate to the machair onto the road. Luckily all the children lived close by, most of them in Horve, which was the first village we came to on our way back to Castlebay.

By twenty five past nine I was back at the hut, and the primus was soon roaring away with a good dish of spaghetti bolognaise on its way. While this was happening I could get the boats off the van and ready for tomorrow's nine o'clock one star lesson. What a good day it has been. I really do believe that I have the best holidays of anyone in Britain. It may be hard work, and you have to take advantage of the weather, but I know how much the children value their canoeing, and I would not want to be doing anything else.

The meal over and tidied up, we set out on a little walk to the village. It is still broad daylight, though well after ten pm, and most of the young people are still around in little knots in the square. The ship arrives about now from Oban, so we look out for it and see it heading purposefully in. It comes alongside the pier, the warps are made secure, and cars and lorries drive off. Fancy how these lorries have carried lobsters from this tiny island all the way to Spain. A group of children from Wales who have been staying for a week on Barra, and to whom we have also been giving canoeing lessons, go reluctantly up the gangway, while two pipers on the quayside play highland laments at their going. There are maybe a hundred people that have come down to wish them goodbye. The Welsh children, now lining the rails, sing a farewell in Welsh. Suddenly there are two blasts on the ship's hooter, and the gangway is cleared. The lines are hauled in, and the ship is now sliding forward as her propellors start to churn. Everybody on the quay and all the people on the ship's rails wave and cheer frantically. This send-off is something those Welsh children will never forget as long as they live.

We turn, and follow the sound of more piping into the Castlebay Bar. We have just one pint of heavy and even though the pub doesn't close until two am we know we will be wanting to be awake for the shipping forecast in just over six hours. As we emerge from the door, I hear my name called, and it is a very old friend, a born and bred Barra man, Neil MacNeil, now living elsewhere, but back for a holiday to stay at his sister's with his wife and two small children. This is how I first met him: we had sailed over from Torridon in 1972 on my first visit to Barra. We had entered Castlebay about 7 am, and after breakfast I sent the crew ashore in the dinghy while I slept. I was awoken by a knocking at the cabin window. I sat up and looked out at a child of about six seated in my own dinghy. Before I could speak he said very solemnly "Helloo, my name iss Neil Mac Neil, and who are you?" His mother and his older brother Ronny took charge of us and showed us our first views of this most beautiful and enchanting island. I have been back to it many times, and over the years have brought up large numbers of people to share my enjoyment of it. Thank you for reading this, and I hope you too have gained a little pleasure from that beautiful little island so far out in the Atlantic.

FOREWORD

The following transcript was made from cuttings pasted into a battered old pocket notebook which in the mid-1940s stood for many years on a book-shelf in Clyde Canoe Club room. The only alterations which have been made are to typographical errors and spelling where in doubt.

Knowing well most of the waters covered by these intrepid adventurers, it is amazing how much they accomplished so early in the history of canoeing.

A. G. C. Dunn, 1983

Canoe Cruise from Ardrishaig to Portee
"The Glasgow Herald" - 14th August 1875

One of the best ways, undoubtedly, of spending the summer holidays is by taking a canoe trip round the West Coast of Scotland. With this intention, three members of the Clyde Canoe Club with their canoes, Ranger, Rambler and Monsoon, started about 7 o'clock on the morning of 6th July, for Greenock where they were put on board the Iona en route to Ardrishaig which was reached about 1 o'clock. Here we carried our boats into the canal and after a rather monotonous paddle of nine miles, reach Crinan, where we encamped for the night.

Rising next morning about 7 o'clock, we carried our canoes from the canal on to the small jetty on Loch Crinan where we launched them. After paddling down this loch and across the mouth of Loch Craignish, we went through the Dorus Mor, which was very calm and but for the round glassy swirls and waves breaking near the Island of Garraesar, one might have passed it on a day such as the 7th July without having any idea that it is such an ugly customer as it is when the wind is against the tide. Upon reaching the Point, we found the ebb tide running past so fast that as it was hopeless to paddle against it, we decided to land and wait for slack water. As the tide did not seem so strong near the shore, we started and managed to creep along so close to the rocks as to be able to touch them with our hands. After having passed Ris an vic faden, a fine westerly breeze sprang up which enabled us to bore our way through the current very fast. The wind, however, brought up with it a heavy mist which had been hanging all morning over Coirebhreacain and which completely hid from our sight the land on both sides. Luckily we had time to take our bearings before this occurred and were able to shape a compass course for the Sound of Shuna. When about opposite Barachan Bay we passed over an overfall or waterfall at the bottom of the sea, caused by the tide running from a depth of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 17 fathoms. This causes a short choppy sea which is very dangerous in rough weather but it was moderately calm then as it merely made the water bubble up as though it was boiling in some gigantic cauldron.

In a short time the mist cleared off and showed us the island of Shuna on our starboard bow The wind, increasing in strength, drove us up the Sound of Shuna at a great pace, past Loch Melfort on the right, Torsa Island on the left, through the Sound of Seil, and on to the Clachan Sound, which, but for the seaweed floating about, one would be apt to take for a river. It is no broader than the Kelvin at the West-end Park, and is spanned by a bridge 26 feet high and 69 feet wide. When we came up to it, we found it dead low water so we were obliged to jump out, haul our boats over the shallows and then sit astride legs on the deck and allow the canoe to ferry us over the deep pools. While going over one of these deep places, Ranger and Monsoon who were slightly ahead, heard Rambler give a

deep groan which made them turn back in dismay. When they reached his side, they found him gazing with dim eye to where one of his slippers was lying about 10 feet below. After trying a number of times to fish it up with our paddles, we gave up the attempt and proceeded on our journey to nearly the end of the Sound, where we found the remainder dry. We dines here while waiting on the tide to float us through which it did in the course of an hour.

We had not gone far up the Sound of Kerrera before the wind entirely died away, leaving us to finish the distance to Oban, which we reached about 7 o'clock, under the paddle. After making a few necessary purchases, we paddled round past Dunollie Castle and the Maiden Island near which we got a strong steady breeze from the north-west which carried us up very smartly to a small bay near Dunstaffnage where we encamped.

Next morning opened we and drizzly with a stiff breeze from the west. About 10 o'clock, however, the sun appeared and soon drove off the rain before his fiery gaze. We had to sail close hauled across Loch Nell Bay till we rounded Rudha Firr, after which we got the wind pretty well aft. We had a most delightful sail up the Lynn of Lorn, past the small dark island of Dubh across Aird's Bay and up to Port Appin, near which the wind was so light as scarcely to move the boats. As the water was darkening under a good breeze astern, we lay where we were till it came up and it sent us flying along with our lee gunwale well under the water, round the Island of Shuna on the northern side of which we landed for dinner, after which we climbed a hill in the neighbourhood and had a magnificent view stretching from Oban in the south to Lochaber in the north.

The wind being still favourable, we hoisted sail and slipped quickly along past Eilean Balnagowan and the mouth of Loch Leven till opposite Glen Tarbert where we caught some very hot squalls that made us plough up the water like little steamers. Having both wind and tide with us at Corran Ferry, the passage through the narrows was made without any difficulty. As the wind farther up was getting too light to be of any use, we lowered sail and paddled up Loch Aber to Fort William which we reached about 9 o'clock. As it was getting dark there was not much to be seen in the town, we crossed the loch to the other side where we encamped for the night.

We started about 9 o'clock and as it was very hot, we paddled very slowly up to the head of the loch which we reached about 1 o'clock. Looking back from here, the view of Ben Nevis is the best that can anywhere be obtained. It seems here to rise directly up from the loch, its lofty summit, which is seldom seen even in the clearest weather, piercing the clouds. At Kinloch Eil Crofts we got two carts to carry the canoes and luggage over to the head of Loch Shiel, a distance of five miles. Having walked across, we visited the monument erected by Mr McDonald of Glen Aladale on the spot where the standard was unfurled to the memory of those who fought and bled in the rebellion. It is situated on a level piece of ground at the head of the loch which forms the centre, from which four glens go off in different directions like four gigantic streets. It is not only on account of its scenery that this loch is worthy of a visit, but on account of it having been so closely associated with Prince Charlie and the '45. On the 25th July he landed at Borradale in Arisaig where the Prince was visited by Locheil who advised him to postpone the attempt for a more suitable opportunity. He refused however to take Locheil's advice, insisting that a better opportunity could not be. He stayed at Kinloch Moidart till the 18th August, when he started and sailed up Loch Shiel as far as Glen Aladale and on the morning of the 19th started with his followers in three boats to Glenfinnan, where they landed about mid-day. Here the standard was unfurled while the manifest and commission of regency were being read.

For the first five miles down the loch the rain poured so hard as to shut out from our view the land on both sides. About 8 o'clock, however, it cleared up a little and allowed us to see enough of the shore to pick a spot to camp which we did about 10 miles from the head.

We had a pretty stiff paddle to the foot of the loch next morning against a strong westerly wind. We reached the mouth of the river Shiel just too late to get over the fall which the river makes shortly after high water, into the sea. We employed the seven hours we had to wait very profitably by visiting the ruins of Castle Turrin and taking a walk up the banks of Upper Loch Moidart, the scenery round which is very romantic. We went over the falls about high water and though it was near high water, we went flying like an arrow past the banks which are only about 10 feet apart. We intended to try and reach Arisaig that night but after we got outside of Eilean Shona, it became so dark that, though quite close together, we could scarcely see one another After one or two narrow escapes of getting shipwrecked upon the rocks, which are dotted here as thick as peas, we resolved to land and wait for daybreak. We had scarcely got our tent pitched before the wind commenced to blow half a gale from the northwards and as it would be of no use starting against such a wind, we spent the day which was very wet, chiefly in sleeping and eating.

Monday was but a second edition of Sunday and, if anything, worse. On Tuesday the wind veered round to the south and rolled up a good heavy sea outside but being a little green moulded, the Ranger and Monsoon determined to start for Arisaig, leaving Rambler, who was an enthusiastic fisher, to spend a week about River Shiel. Between Ru Smirisimí and Ru Arisaig we caught the sea in all its force and although in the trough of the waves, all that one could see of the other was his flag fluttering in the breeze. So buoyant were the boats, that we did not ship a single drop of water. Being pretty well soaked by the time we reached Arisaig by the rain, which was falling copiously, we stayed at the inn and got our clothes dry before proceeding any further.

Next morning was beautifully clear with a light breeze from the north but as we got up the Sound of Sleat the wind increased to such an extent that to try and paddle against it was a mere waste of power so we landed near Armadale and waited to see if it would calm down. Starting again about 7 o'clock we managed, by keeping close to the shore, to make our way up to Isle Ornsay, where we stayed for the night.

The water was calm when we started and until we reached Kyle Rhea there was not a breath of wind; after passing through the Kyle a strong northerly breeze arose which made our paddle through Loch Alsh to Kyle Akin rather stiffish Here we landed and dined and as the natives prophesied that the wind would go round towards evening to the east, we loitered about until 7 o'clock, when seeing no sympton of the wind changing, we started. We paddled straight ahead for the island of Longa, a distance of seven miles, which we passed to our right; from here we shaped our course for the Sound between Scalpay and Raasay. On the latter we landed about 7 o'clock and had a cup of strong coffee and a few slices of bread to keep up the steam while paddling all night. Starting shortly after this, we paddled round the Raasay shore till opposite Churchtown Bay when a light breeze sprang up from the south and, as we did not wish to go along too fast and over-shoot Portree before dawn, we lashed our two canoes together and hoisting one sail, went along very comfortably. Day was just breaking as we paddled into Portree which looked quite enchanting glancing under the rays of the rising sun. Landing at a small jetty near the head of the harbour, we hauled our boats up and along the road on to the pierhead, ready for the steamer which was to be here at 6 o'clock. After having performed our toilet and put on our long-

shore clothes, we took a walk through the town to pass the time until the steamer came. After an uneventful voyage we reached Greenock about noon on the following day and the club house at Roseneath an hour later. Here ended our 11 days' cruise, the boats none the worse and their owners much the better for having paddled and sailed some 200 miles.

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From Michael Taylor, Edinburgh.

Dear John,

I hope you have now settled into your new home.

I am writing in response to the editorial of A S K C Newsletter 95 re: your request for views on three aspects of paddling. I am not quite sure why you are undertaking the research but I assume you intend to publish it. If so I think it could be misleading. I think the main problem is that you have added a qualifying clause to some of the possible answers. For example, I usually paddle solo. However, I do not "generally advise against it" so I cannot agree with your first option. I do see harm in it, so I cannot agree the second option (assuming my defin'ition of 'harm' is the same as yours).

I am not against it in principle, so I cannot agree the third option. I do not know if the question is designed to find out the proportion of members who paddle solo or whether it is designed to ascertain attitudes towards solo paddling. I don't think it will do either.

I do not carry flares. What will you do or, more importantly, people who have little knowledge of canoeing conclude if a large number of paddlers answer "never rely on them, don't bother carrying them"? The last clause is the problem. It is likely that members agreeing with the statement will be branded irresponsible. Yet many of your correspondents may, like me, always carry an alternative signalling device (in my case a LOCAT). A questionaire that allows paddlers to indicate this might provide a very different picture.

I think that a survey of members' views on a wide range of issues would make fascinating reading. Perhaps we could devise one through asking members to identify the issues they think should be included and then constructing a more valid questionnaire.

I look forward to seeing you at the Canoe Exhibition in Perth.

Best wishes.... Michael Taylor.

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I have since written to Michael and agreed that a more valid questionnaire would be well worth undertaking. I have asked him to take the lead on this and have made the ASKC Newsletter available as the meduim.

As for my 'straw poll' that I am currently conducting - see the last ASKC Editorial _ it is merely that, a 'straw poll', meant only to gauge attitudes to a few fundamental differences that I know exists between paddlers.

John R.

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CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF THE ISLE OF SKYE

By Dick Whitehouse, London

The drive up the A1 from London was so uneventful that I had plenty of time to become quite despondent over Scottish weather, recalling April's galebound week on Mingulay and previous encounters of the tentbound kind. A good sea kayaker always gets galebound near a pub, so on arrival in Edinburgh to pick up Mark our route planning was very much based on the "never mind the natural arch where's the nearest hotel" school of expedition planning.

Thursday afternoon and two fully laden Nordkapps slip quietly away from Armadale on the Sleat peninsula. Three hours later we were camped in the lee of Geur Rubha and sipping whisky by the driftwood fire.

Friday morning and a fierce choppy sea to splash through as the wind accelerated. Landing on the stony beach of Soay all that stirred were two horses and an elderly man mending a dry stone wall. "Hello", says I. "Well you're from bloody London; where's he from?" says he. "Edinburgh", says I. "Aye, a bit better I suppose" says he, "have a raisin; found them on the beach the other day".

And so began our acquaintance with Mr Geddies, aged 73, and an expert on everything. Within half an hour we had been lectured on five Norse languages, the legal position of the sea bed, the correct way to punch a horse on its nose, (with practical examination afterwards!) and why he had a good mind to charge us for fresh water as the English were privatising Scottish Water.

Leaving Mr G. the next stop was Rubh an Dunain and ordinarily we would have stayed and fully explored the Dun and the chambered cairns, but already, with the wind dying and the sun out, talk of a circumnavigation had surfaced. Now committed to a camp at Talisker Bay, we decided to stop for tea on An dubh Sgeir, the islet at the mouth of Loch Eynort. Hearing the familiar slap of seals launching we rounded a rock which gave a view of the centre of the islet. Expecting to see more seals we looked up and not 25 feet away were two magnificent eagles. "Gobsmacked" as Cilla might say.

Scared of us? You must be joking! They were totally unconcerned, one lazily stretched its wings before joining its mate in eyeing us haughtily down their beaks. "Oh look Hilda, another couple of those strange sea kayakers" ..... "Don't know what they see in it Fred, I'm sure"

Fred and Hilda kindly posed for photographs and eventually flapped regally off towards Rhum, leaving us to paddle in fine spirits to Talisker Bay and enjoy a fine sunset over the southern Outer Hebrides. All we needed now was another 4 days of good weather and we could do it.

Saturday dawned cold and clear and in fact the weather was settling down into a period of relatively high low pressure. Rather than risk boring you with another "and then we" saga, take a look at the map for details of our route and lunch/camp sites. Hopefully I can give you a flavour of the rest of the trip with some edited highlights (and lowlights).

Getting the tides wrong crossing from Waternish to Camas Mor; a 3 hour paddle became a 5 hour slog .....
But finding the eddy from Camas Mor to Rubha Hunish.
The atmosphere around Rubha Hunish; glowering with menace and grandeur.
Finding the Floddigarry Hotel was open to non-residents; even sea kayakers in their best fibre pile.
Porpoises and sea otters galore.
Meeting a yacht off the southern tip of Raasay and being handed the gale warning hot off the Navtex.
Just, and only just, beating the gale into Kyleakin.
Finding lots of hotels in Kyleakin ..... and
Finding a really sheltered camp site in Kyleakin ..... only

The entire world population of the Clan MacMidge were holding a convention in Kyleakin.
The car started when we got back to Armadale.

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Back to work and the usual conversation in the canteen .....

"Do much on holiday Dick?"

"Well I paddled right round the Isle of Skye in six days"

"really! That's um ... er ... very um ....."

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150 miles or thereabouts of paddling daily marathons in sea kayaks was what paddlers who wrote books got up to, not Mark and me, founder members of the W.I.T.W.O.T.T.A.T.O.P. Sea Kayak Club, (Well I Think We Ought To Think About That Over a Pint)

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To all the wonderful archeological remains and every geological marvel that we rushed past without a second glance ... we're sorry, but just for once it was nice to pretend to be real expeditioners and GO FOR IT.

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