

MIDLAND CANOE CLUB

SCILLY ISLES CROSSING

30 APRIL/1 MAY 1993.

The Team: Ian Copestake (28)
Tim Oldrini (34)
Steve Nelson (35)
John Chamberlin (47)
Land support: Chris Cope. (21)

Of Heroes and Statistics

At 23.35 on Friday 30 April 1993, four Midland Canoe Club paddlers left Sennen Cove on route for the Isles of Scilly. Nine hours and forty minutes later we landed at Porth Cressa, Hugh Town, St Mary's.

The Trip:

The 23.35 start was earlier than planned, but we were all impatient. We'd arrived at Sennen mid-afternoon on the Friday, and with boats packed by tea-time the intervening time had dragged through afternoon and evening, cafe, gift shop and pub.

Our course and navigation was plotted from Longships lighthouse, so that was really the starting point as well as the first objective. Departure from there was timed for 01.00 Saturday, May 1st, and we'd allowed an hour from the beach at Sennen, primarily so as not to be late from the lighthouse, but also in case we were late from the beach. We were neither.

It was dark when we set out, and even relatively calm seas don't look smooth in the dark. Wavelength seems shorter, and in the reduced light there's less warning of a wave's approach. And it was relatively calm, or we wouldn't have been going, but on the way through 'The Tribbens', inside Cowloe rocks, the early bumpiness allowed us to become accustomed to surface movement in the dark. It wasn't pitch dark, yet, there was borrowed light from the land, and each paddler had some form of small personal light enabling us to see each other, but no illumination for the way ahead. To top this the fog of the afternoon and evening still lurked above us.

So why go at night anyway? The logic here was based on the chosen weekend and the tidal slots we were thus presented with. Our 'window of opportunity' was between 03.00 and 08.00, five hours of favourable tidal flow from Land's End towards the Scillies. We could have gone later, on the Saturday afternoon, but that meant running out of light just as we approached our objective, which none of us fancied. Also, we could not get there in five hours (we'd estimated eight or nine) and so chose to have the opposition from the tide at the beginning of the trip, rather than at the end.

We'd set an envelope of weather, meaning wind, at less than Force 4, preferred, but if it was '4', it depended in what direction and what the rest of the forecast said. In the event it was inside that, but with no favour from the direction, and there was fog. We'd seen it in the afternoon, HMCG at Falmouth had mentioned it when Steve had phoned in, and it was still around us as we left.

The Coast Guard at Falmouth hadn't been happy with us going. He had done his best to dissuade us, Steve that is, over the phone - '...I'm not a policeman, I can't stop you going, but I must caution you against it. It's dark, there's fog about, and you are going through the main shipping lanes. Having said that, I wish you luck and hope you have a good trip.' - or words to that effect. We had been prepared for our call to him with a complete listing of people, equipment and supporting info', and I think that preparation had swayed his view towards the term 'responsible', which he voiced on Radio Cornwall the following

morning. He asked Steve if we were 'experienced at this sort of thing?' 'Yes,' replied Steve. He'd lied, it was his first sea trip.

It took us only twenty-five minutes to get to Longships, and so bang on midnight therefore we rafted for a quick photo and conference. A full hour ahead of schedule needed compensation to account for the extra period of non-assisting tidal flow, and there was the slight head-wind. Steve suggested ten degrees north of our planned 260 mag., giving 270 mag. We agreed. Steve knows more about this sort of thing than we do, he teaches people to fly aeroplanes. He'd also got the most efficient compass, and I was happy to make up the front pair alongside him.

We didn't linger here, partially because of the unfavourable drift, but also I suspect because we all wanted to get on with it.

The first two key problems of the trip happened within this next half hour. Even whilst at Longships the fog enveloped us, like a rocket-net catches birds, turning the laser-like red light up and to our left into an orange/red fan - beautiful, but tremendously eerie. I've regretted since not taking a second photo.

As we left the light behind, the sea simultaneously kicked up, giving us the twin problems of difficulty with seeing where we were going, whilst keeping in contact, and dealing with a roughened sea state which we couldn't see coming.

By 00.10 Ian was being sick, and at 00.30 we stopped for another conflagration, as he was definitely struggling. Steve made it quite clear to him; turn back now, rather than in three hours' time! I didn't enter into this debate, for personal reasons. It was their trip, so it was their decision, and primarily Ian's. Tim and Steve admitted later they wouldn't have minded then if Ian had turned back, as it would have saved them the dishonour of suggesting it. We were all a bit nervous and the unhelpful conditions exacerbated this. Ian decided to carry on. A decision on which the whole trip then hinged. He's a strong and very competent paddler, as are the other two, and he took the tough option. I couldn't have. He continued to be ill until the fog lifted again at about 01.00, when he again had a horizon to look at. By then he was empty of most fluids and all solid food.

The next two hours, 01.00 to 03.00, were probably the best of the trip. We had a hazy moon to look at and occasionally some stars. We could also see the few ships that were about - only one was heard but not seen - and so had no problem avoiding them. It was good to be back, and this was the time to enjoy it; fresh (relatively), paddling well, the problems apparently behind us, and the plankton. Bow-waves of fire, like Bonfire Night sparklers on both sides of the kayaks. Great swirls of light behind us where the paddles had been, like footprints across the sea, then disappearing after briefly noting our passage. The others had not seen the phenomenon before. I had, but with an infrequency that gave me a thrill equal to theirs. I suggested to Steve that he dip his hand in the water and lift it out to see the cascade of light as the water trickled between his fingers. His muttered obscenity suggested to me that he was keeping his hands on his paddles and was happy to watch the luminescence run through my fingers.

The only setback early during this period had been the testing of the VOR navigational aid (VHF Omnidirectional Radio). Back at Sennen Steve had tried it and been jubilant when it worked on land. He'd not expected it to, but when it did the back-bearing on its beacon had shown its usefulness in enabling us to check our position from behind. That, along with all the lighthouses we'd been able to see (!), would virtually confirm our track all the way across. But it didn't work at sea. Steve's morale thudded as it hit bottom. It was more important to him than me, as he's used to that sort of navigational aid anyway, but I was more used to just relying on the compass after accurate plotting. I think the other two were affected also by Steve's disappointment. In reality the device still had the ship-to-air communication capability, so all was not

lost. 03.00 - Seven Stones lightship came into view, on a confidence-boosting bearing of 290. Unfortunately the moon went down and the stars disappeared. Now there was no light, save the little emanating from our tiny 1.2v bulbs, nothing of any use. We couldn't even see the ends of our own canoes. I could see Steve's. The torch lighting his compass also lit the bow of his boat. The difficulty for him was the he couldn't see beyond that. The beam lit nothing else as it disappeared into the gloom. That same gloom descended on us. The water was black, and it was pitch black all around us.

Tiredness once more became my enemy. I'd hardly slept on the week running up to the trip, averaging about three to four hours a night. It's my problem, me and water don't really get on. People who know me do try and understand, but it's me that gets screwed up. On the Thursday night I'd only slept for one and a half hours. Tonight I would get none. My brain and body thought otherwise. My head started to nod. There was nothing to look at, nothing to see, nothing for my eyes to do except close. I splashed my face with sea water, shook my head, tried to find new muscles to hold my eyelids up. But it was relentless. Most of the trip so far I'd had an unfortunate veer to port (left), unfortunate for Steve as I kept drifting away from him, and then bashing into him after I'd swapped sides. Part of the reason was tiredness, and part due to an incorrectly adjusted skeg, but it took me a few hours to realise that, during which Steve's tolerance was sorely tested.

At the 03.00 stop I had leant on Tim's boat and said to him and Steve, 'Just get me through these next two hours, please.' Conversation was mostly what I needed. It was selfish really, as Steve's mind was fully occupied with the bearing, while Tim was buddying Ian. We did talk though, as we were there to enjoy it. That was why we were going. The original plan had envisaged a clear night, moon and stars, no wind, plenty of photo's, and a bright and sunny morning to follow. I'd taken some photo's already; Sennen, Longships, a few at about 03.00 and some whilst paddling. I had to suffer a few obscenities as I called someone's name and then surprised and dazzled them with the flash as they turned towards me. But now I just wanted to sleep.

We paddled on, Steve and I always conscious of the need to remain in touch with the two behind us whilst also maintaining the heading. They'd turned off their headlights once and had to be reminded to turn them on again as we all needed to see each other, not just them see us. It was most strange being able to hear voices behind, but unable to see anyone. Then, during those few hours, both Ian's and Tim's headlights failed. Also they had chosen not to use, and therefore bring, the small ex-WD red lights I had supplied. Only Steve and I had them on, and they were just as useful and relevant now as they had been twenty-one years earlier when crossing to Ireland by night. We gave Tim Steve's, as his torch was more than enough to keep him in view.

04.00 and another break. Ian was managing OK, but fancied a pee. He didn't fancy getting out to have it though.

At about 04.30 we were abreast of Seven Stones lightship, I guess a good six miles north of us. We'd been watching it since it came into view - one flash, two, three, wait for twenty seconds. One, two, three

My primary goal now was to stay awake and upright through this last hour of darkness (I'd convinced myself it would be light by 05.00). Then we'd have the sun behind us, clear skies, warmth, the Scilly Isles in view, in effect be home and dry. No problem.

05.00 came, and the darkness went, almost. No sunshine though, just a gloomy and dismal morning in the making. Visibility was poor, just a grey murk and clouds above us. No warmth, and no Scillies! This was what we'd all dreaded - missing!

Five minutes' break nonetheless, consistent with the plan; five minutes on the hour, every hour. A small amount of food and liquid each time. Even Ian began

to take some in. I was still using the High Five Pro carbo' meal.

The sea livened up too, as if awakening from its slumber. The '... force 4 north-westerly ...' was a little early (see Appendix 3 for full forecast). It did nothing for morale, but quite a bit for concentration. Looking ahead for the first sight of land was now interspersed with sidelong glances at the on-coming swells. They weren't big, three-foot-ish, but a silly capsize was high on the list of undesirables. It's easier to capsize when the whitecaps are infrequent - they surprise you. Body heat had dropped also, Steve and I at least felt the need of a degree or two more.

06.00 - no rest, first break from the plan. I'd called out the time, as monitoring its passage had been a growing preoccupation. Each hourly milestone took me closer to the goal; sight land, reach land, land. 08.00 I'd told myself, we'd be there by then. No rest for the wicked this time though, the lads wanted to carry on. No stop meant no time lost, and no more sea-sickness from rafting in a choppy sea. I carried on paddling, briefly disappointed. No big deal but my arms were aching for a rest. The growing light reduced the tendency to drop to sleep, but concentration was still on red alert.

The occasional looks at my watch now became more frequent, every five minutes it seemed. Conversation had died, morale had gone with it. Everyone was sunk in their own thoughts, some deep, even morose. They all came out later, on land, but no-one wanted to voice them at the time - How long do we give it on this bearing without sighting land? What will tomorrow's papers say? What will my mum say? It's a thin line between being a hero and a statistic (Tim). When do we pull the pin on the Locat? Will the flares work?

I thought of giving up, truly feeling at about this time that I couldn't actually paddle any further. But then the logical thought takes over, reeling off the likely sequence of events if I just stopped paddling, there and then. No, no-one was going to tow me to the Scillies! I paddled on, shoulders screaming at me for respite. Steve was in front and to my left, Tim behind him, with Ian behind me on the right.

06.30 - still nothing but greyness ahead. We should have been in sight of the Scillies for hours by now. Was it the early start? Had the wind imperceptibly blown us off course, presumably south? Were we just slower? I'd discussed with Steve earlier if we should read just the bearing again, but we had agreed to keep to 270. I had felt that was correct anyway, it had just been conversation, suppressing desperation. How long though do we stay paddling on this bearing before we accept that something has gone wrong? What decision do we make then? I never did check the sell-by date on my own hand-held red flare, but Tim had loaned me a new one anyway. If that didn't work he could always take it back.

'Land! I can see land!' shouted Steve. It was 06.40.

'You sure?!' Trusting lot we are, For over an hour every swell on the horizon, every cloud, had been land, but then it hadn't. It was almost now as though we didn't want to believe it.

'Yes, a rock, over there.' He pointed. I couldn't see anything. But Tim did, a minute later.

'Yeh, he's right, I can see it, like a Walnut Whip.'

Gradually it came into view, a hoary cone on the horizon.

'There's more, to the left, and behind it,' cried Steve, exultant at seeing it, them, and the thought that he was not now going to die, not today anyway. Melodramatic? Not a bit. You've got to be there to feel it, Especially Ian with his hour of sickness through the fog after midnight. The two hours of pitch darkness followed by the disappointment of dawn. No sun, just cloud, but

much more importantly, no land. Nothing but an unfriendly sea in every direction as far as you could see, and that wasn't far. No, he'd thought it all right, We all had.

Morale rose somewhat, somewhat like a geyser. Apparently I started talking. They said I didn't stop for a while. So what. We'd cracked it.

Steve, noticeably more cheerful, said, 'When I'm as old as you are, I hope I'm as fit,' which boosted my morale even further, until that is, he added, '... and I hope I've got enough bloody common sense not to do anything like this again!' Relief.

As more land crept out of the penumbral distance, it became clear the land ahead wasn't St Mary's, as my initial optimism had suggested, but a range of outlying stacks and islands. St Mary's was still some way ahead and to the left. The immediate objective however was an island to the left of Walnut Whip Rock, and a break for refreshments.

We arrived at the island, Menawethan, at 07.25, seven hours and fifty minutes from leaving Sennen, (Walnut Whip Rock was actually Hanjague, standing at 22m, which was why it came into view first). We were on or ahead of schedule, and bang on target. To ask if we were pleased, is like asking if Dolly Parton's got boobs.

Ian left his boat, like an orange pip from fingers. The rest of us took in food and coffee, and the penultimate satisfaction of reaching land. The ultimate satisfaction was still a few miles off. We also took photographs, even photo's of people taking photo's. There's one of me looking how I must have felt at the time - 47! Ian said later, 'That one definitely tells a story.'

I ached so much it hurt. I had serious doubts about my ability to go any further. I knew I didn't want to go any further, so I asked Steve how far he reckoned it was to St Mary's. He looked at the chart, but noticeably not into my eyes as he said, 'About two miles, -ish.' I knew he was lying, but also that he was doing it with the best of intentions. It was actually five miles, and I probably already had a good idea of that anyway, but at that point I resolved to make them all honorary members of Help The Aged when we got back. They had been a fantastic team; Tim the shepherd, Steve 'Navaid' Nelson, and Ian (if you'll pardon the expression) bringing up the rear.

Ten minutes after stopping we set off again, on a bearing to the south of Toll's Island, then later heading for the huge windmotor on the west coast of St Mary's, closing eventually on Deep Point. Skirting the south coast, a variety of aircraft and helicopters came and went overhead. One of them, we were to learn later, had reported us in to the airport, and hence to Falmouth Coast Guard. We didn't know it then, but we had already been the focus of a discussion between the Coast Guard and the presenter of the Radio Cornwall breakfast show, at about the time we were heading for our first landfall. HMCG had voiced his surprise that we had actually gone, but commented that we seemed a 'responsible' group (Steve was particularly pleased to learn later that he had been described as 'intelligent'), and asked that if anyone saw us would they please give him a ring. Someone had.

Passing the airport, and then across the bay at Old Town, we rounded Peninnis Head and entered Porth Cressa, the end of our journey. Landing at 09.15, nine hours and forty minutes after leaving Sennen Cove, we were immediately greeted by a young mother and her two children who ran down the beach, shook hands with each of us and said, 'Welcome to the Scillies.' Sally Oldrieve (her husband joined us a few minutes later, still hobbling from a rugby injury) and her family had heard of our trip on their car radio just a couple of hours earlier as they'd been driving from Truro to the heliport at Penzance. Having landed, they were subsequently settling into their flat overlooking Porth Cressa when the children had spotted us, so they came down to give us the welcome. An amazing coincidence that created a super welcome and a moving few moments for us.

The next few hours became lost in a tired but halcyon daze. It was as though we'd come home. 'Steve' the campsite man came down and took Ian and all our gear up to the site in the back of his Land Rover, after directing the rest of us to the Yacht Club where our boats could be stored, right next to the beach. 'Bill', there, became an early friend and assistant, carting Steve, Tim and me all the way back to the campsite in his Fiesta conversion, followed by further daily offers of help. People seemed to know us - the old lady on the moped who just stopped in the street and asked, 'Are you the ones who've just come over from Land's End? I've heard all about you on the radio.' The lady in the Isles of Scilly Steamship Co. office, 'You'll have to look up Ken. He's our policeman and he's a sea canoeist.' We did, later in our stay, smashing bloke. The gig racers who invited us to their barbecue. It all seemed too good to be true, but it wasn't.

Because of the World Championships of the Pilot Gig Racing being coincidentally held over the May Day weekend, our chances of a ferry back to the mainland before Wednesday were zero. The plan therefore was also to see some of the Scillies on foot and by canoe. This we did with a walk around St Mary's on the Sunday; a canoe over to Tresco, pub lunch, walk and canoe round the island and back on Monday; and, the climax of all, the paddle out to Bishop Rock lighthouse, 7.5 miles from St Mary's, on the Tuesday, with the fortune of seeing three helicopter landings and departures on its top whilst there. This was rounded off by a gig-rowing lesson in 'RHOS', (belonging to the family we'd been welcomed by) on the day of departure. And Ken the policeman came to see us off.

Magic. It's a thin line

John Chamberlin

May 1993

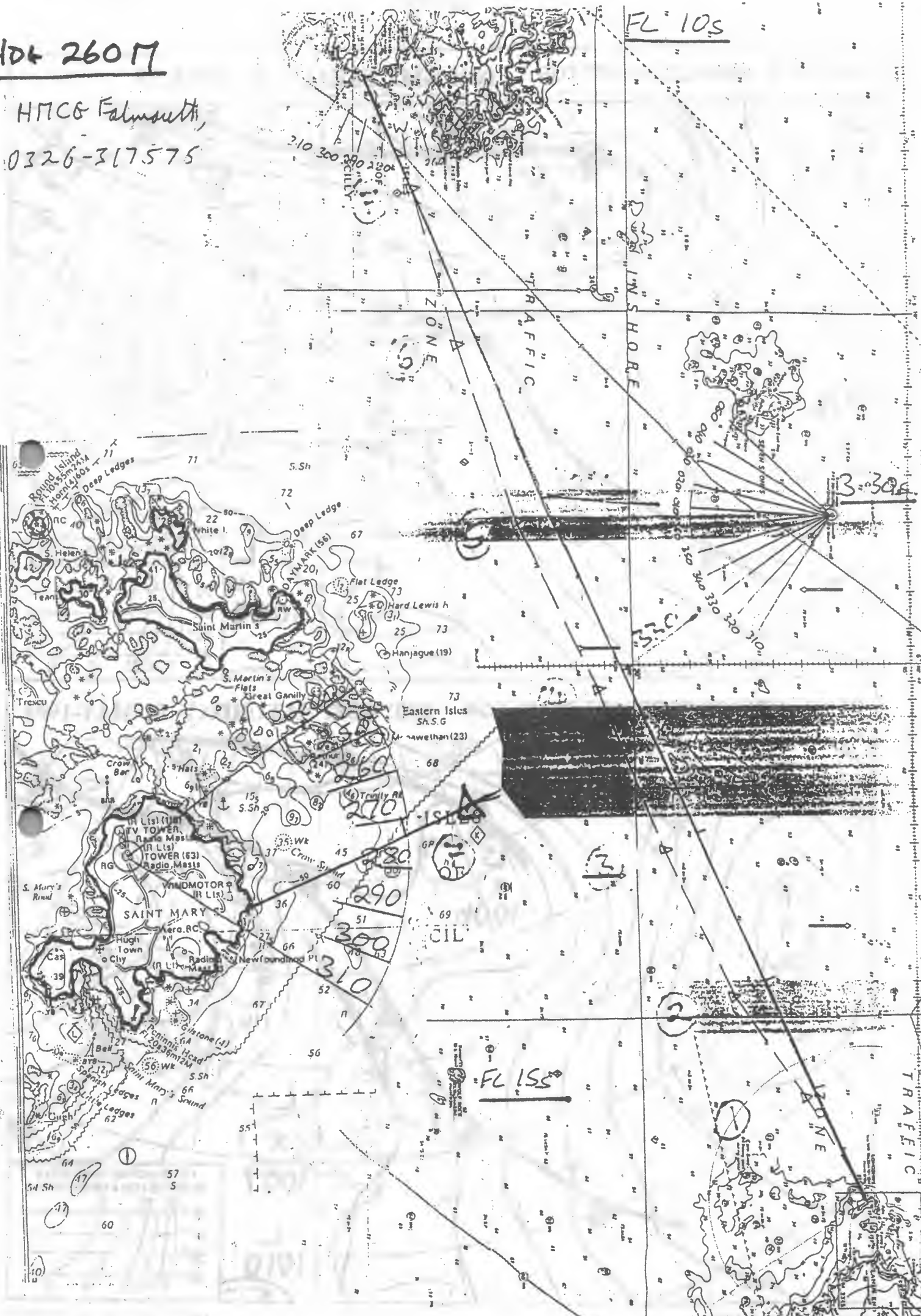
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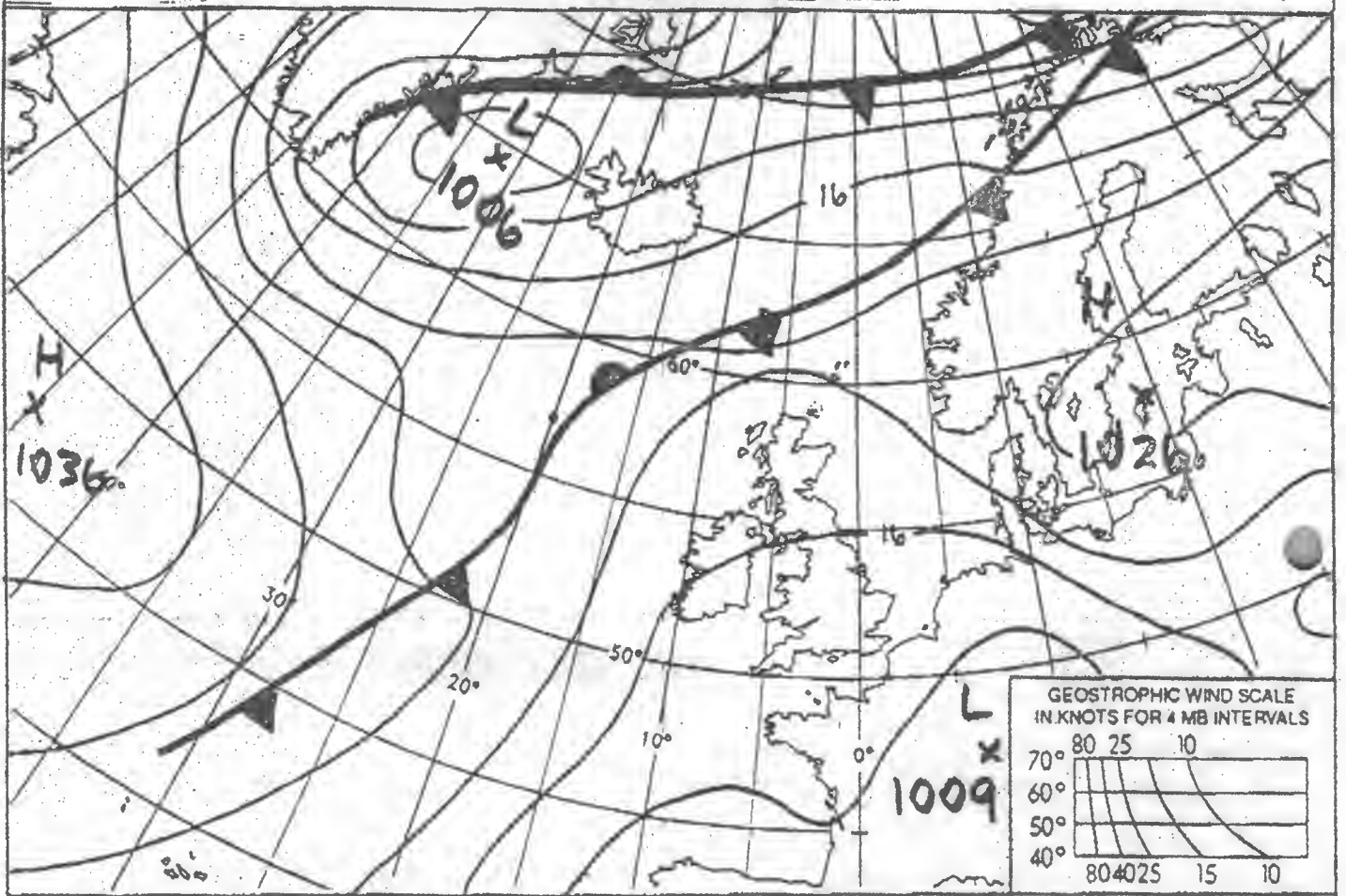
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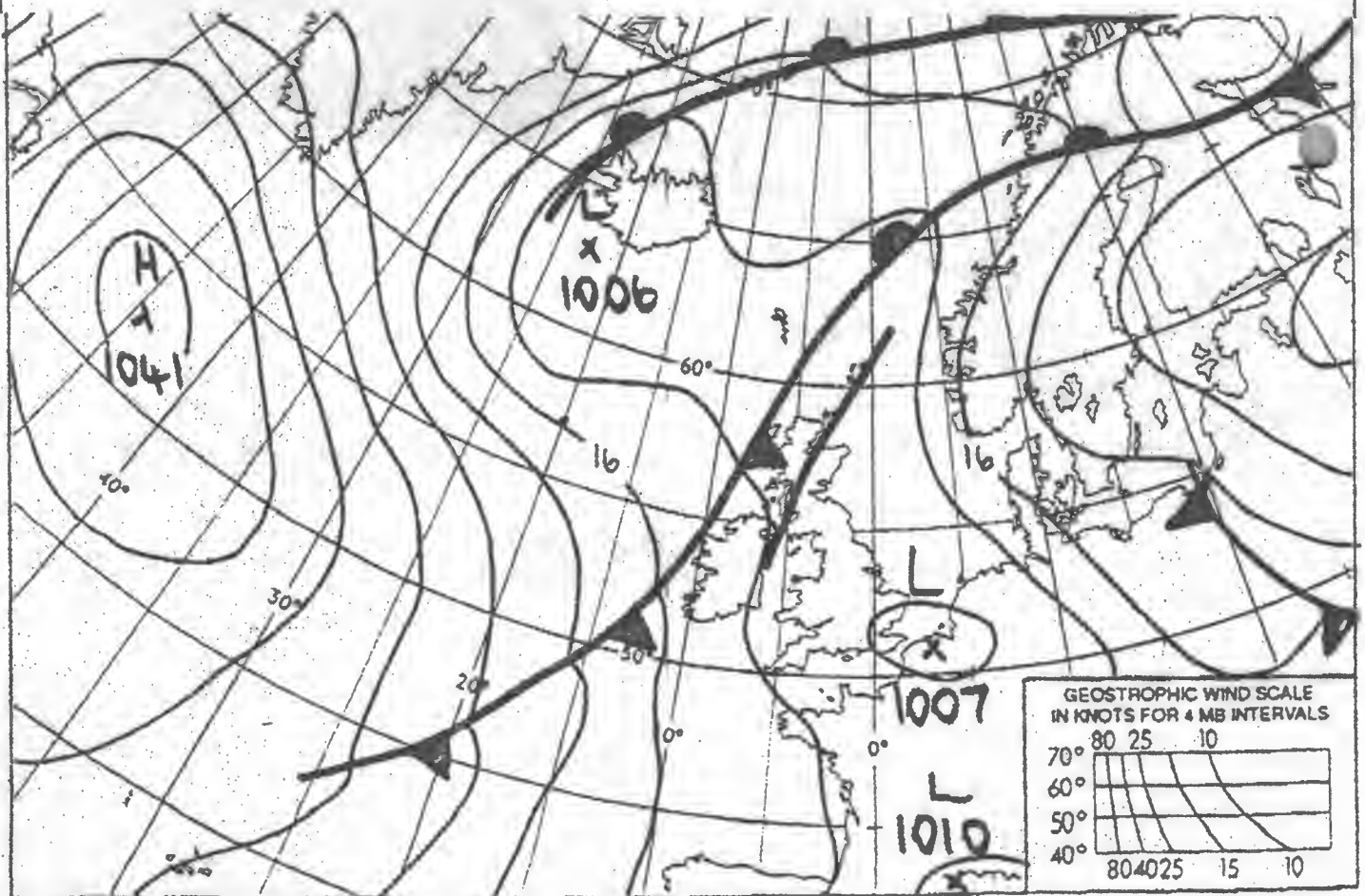
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SURFACE ANALYSIS CHART FOR 0001 GMT FRIDAY 30-APR-1993



24 HR SURFACE FORECAST CHART FOR 0001 GMT SATURDAY 01-MAY-1993



REFLECTIONS:

The trip started for me nineteen years ago in 1974. It was to be the hat-trick of 'firsts' for George Bazely, Ian Tatam and me, after doing the southern Irish Sea (17hrs) in '72 and the first non-stop around Anglesey (18hrs) in '73 (incidentally both in P & H Swift slalom kayaks). In the event it was called off when Ian broke his arm during the week before departure. It's been lurking in the background ever since.

When Tim and Ian asked me if I'd 'help them plan it', my immediate response was, 'You don't need any help'. But they insisted and I agreed to look over their shoulders. On the second time of mentioning, I asked if I could join the trip, at the time feeling a clutch of fear in the gut, as I knew what it would mean to me. I insisted I'd not be offended if they'd prefer me not to go (them being on average fifteen years younger), and they insisted equally they'd like me to join them.

Steve joined the clan at about the same time.

Paddle training took place through March and April on the Trent, Beeston Canal and Derwent, the milestone excursion being the one on Easter Sunday up the Trent against the flow, while it was in flood. That was five and three-quarter hours, four of which being very hard upstream paddling (see 'It Didn't Matter To Ayrton').

This crossing was always going to be a test for me, but I didn't realise how much. As the date approached I became more preoccupied with the event, even though I knew full well we'd set an envelope of weather conditions outside of which we weren't even going to drive to Cornwall, let alone set off from Sennen. Some of this 'preoccupation' only became apparent after the event, when I was told by a number of people how 'quiet' I'd been for the previous few weeks.

I had a few concerns about my physical canoeing capabilities, primarily because the other three are all more competent white-water paddlers than me, but also because I would most probably be unable to match their pace on the water. The latter proved to be the case during training, although my own pace was acceptable. I confronted the others with this concern early on, giving them the opportunity to 'release me from the commitment' if they preferred it. They would have none of it. On the day (night) I was pleasantly surprised by the way I felt as we set off from Sennen, and paddled comfortably in the lead pair with Steve. This pace only tailed off during the middle of the night as the inevitable effects of the tiredness overtook me.

In the event the team proved very strong: Tim (-perturbable) - big, a strong paddler with a strong personality, not excitable except by choice, but ever of light heart and hearty humour. Steve - no previous sea experience but plenty on white water, unflappable and utterly reliable (see 'navigation'). Ian - the youngest, again a confident and adventurous W/W paddler, a comedian along with Tim, but quite responsible when on the water, with a tough decision early in the trip. I learnt a lot about them in this unique time slot and the days that followed, and they each earned my increased respect and friendship. Nine jours may not sound a long period, but it was continuous paddling for longer than the average working day, the bulk of it through darkness, plus the fog. You try it.

In addition there was Chris (Elmo) Cope - out of the limelight but big enough to force himself into it - happy to lend support on the Friday/Saturday and magnanimous enough to turn up with a bottle of 'bubbly' on the Saturday morning for us all to toast the trip. A moving moment - thanks Chris.

The crossing was a unique experience in all our lives, and we all gained from

it in immeasurable and individual ways.

On a personal note, the mental issue is different again. It resulted from a combination of my particular and lifelong difficulties when in the proximity of water, and the fact that at 47, I was rapidly approaching the magic '50', the age at which my father died. That was, and is, always going to be a milestone for me. During the week approaching the trip I'd hardly slept effectively any night, averaging three and a half hours most of the week, but gaining only one and a half hours on the Thursday night before we drove down on the Friday. I was seriously concerned by this and shared my concern with Tim on the way down. I also tried to sleep on the way, but managed less than ten minutes overall. I tried again on the car park, after we'd packed the boats, and yet again in the pub after the 'last supper', but again to no avail.

By the time we set off I was truly ready for a good night's sleep, but that's the last thing I was going to get. It became a problem later on and contributed to my continually drifting into Steve, testing his tolerance severely. (Ian also was affected by tiredness on the way over, although less so than me, but clearly not helped by his sickness early on.)

Once we'd arrived the earlier 'preoccupation' was displaced by the success, like a warm front rushing in. This purged emotion flooded out (literally) on a number of occasions later on the Saturday, much to my embarrassment and that of my colleagues, although yet again they were very tolerant. I just hadn't realised how much tension had built up inside me over the preceding days, weeks and months, and I couldn't stop it coming out. I've not cried as much as that for a long while. It's probably difficult to understand, unless you can relate it to a phobia of your own, but my friends there on the Scillies tried to. Finally I was able to catch up on my sleep, initially snatches in the daytime, but then that night, after a superb celebratory evening out at a local restaurant. A pint of Murphy's has never tasted so good!

The weather (or Whether Not?) 'envelope' was tight - 'nothing greater than 4' - and set so purposefully.

Thirty miles is not a great distance - a good day perhaps when coastal camping - but this was different, and 'advanced' trip of a different type. Advanced status varies, with trip and paddler. For me, Bardsey Island and South Bishop (behind and beyond Ramsey island) are 'advanced', primarily because of the tidal knowledge and research required, which the average 'proficient' sea paddler is unlikely to have, or have done.

In rock climbing they have letters indicating degrees of 'advancement'; eg M (Moderate), D (Difficult), H (Hard), S (Severe), E (Extreme), and I think even 'E-numbers' (no, not E466 Stabiliser!) indicating how 'extreme'; eg E1-E9. You can even get combinations like HVS - Har3-Very-Severe.

In sea canoeing we don't have such a categorised approach to areas or excursions, but even if we did I suspect such classifications would have considerable weather dependency for the same trip. For instance a 'supported' crossing to the Scillies on a flat sea, with no winds, a favourable tide, in the daytime and with excellent visibility would still be 'advanced' - by the nature of distance and area - but not 'HVS' or warranting a high 'E-rating'. Whereas an unsupported trip, at night, with fog, and very poor visibility after eventual daybreak would rate more highly - even 'N' (Nutty!) as some suggested.

Whatever the individual view on this, we approached it cautiously. We wanted primarily to enjoy it - after all that's why we do the sport. We wanted no bad press (HMCG had hinted, '...in light of recent events', alluding to the Lyme Regis tragedy), nor a wasted trip - it's a long drive from Derby to Land's End, only to find conditions unfavourable.

One of our aids in assessing potential conditions as the day approached was MarineCall, with which most paddlers will be familiar, and the nice advantage

to this against a normal forecast is that it includes 'sea state'. What was new to me, however, was 'Metfax'. Basically this provides a printout of the Marinecall forecast - verbatim - with the added bonus of two synoptic charts, and it's updated twice daily. Once you've mastered the buttons to press on your particular (office?) FAX machine, you just wait for it to print out. It takes a minute or two, but it's a hard copy, avoiding memory or 'shorthand' errors. If you do get into difficulty the MetFax Helpline is always on hand to talk you down (See Appendix 4)

On our trip the 'wind' aspect was just acceptable. (The day before it would have been superb - NE to N 4, dropping to 3, and variable 2 overnight.) It was still 'variable', if mainly westerly (ie against us), but it had been variable for a few days. This suggested to me a 'smooth' or 'calm' sea state (as confirmed by MarineCall) because there had been no duration of 'fetch' in any direction. The force 3-4 W/NW later was a nuisance, but nothing too serious. Had we been tempted, however (ie on the grounds of excessive ambition or misguided optimism), to set our limits just one point wider, it could have been an entirely different story.

Vive la caution!

The navigation, and therefore course, had all been planned on my dining room table weeks before, during which copious amounts of my home-brew had been consumed - none by me, all my decisions were to be sober ones! An early concern had been whether Tim and Ian would contain their usual boisterousness long enough to take the trip seriously enough. Tim knew this and assured me they would.

Steve however was a different personality. Whilst still not abstaining from the beer, he nonetheless took the trip, and particularly the route planning to heart. His method was different to mine, plotting as he did all the drift factors from one spot and then translating that into the resultant track. Mine emanated from, 'The Gospel, According to Saint George' (Bazeley that is), and consisted of taking each hour at a time and plotting the appropriate drift on to it, ending up with the course progressing across the chart. After a few false starts and discussions on which way the water was actually flowing, we ended up agreeing the course of 260 degrees mag., and Steve went away and copied A4 'charts' for all of us.

Not only that, he also went away and mounted a small aircraft compass on a spare forward deck hatch, a move that, for me, was the salvation of the trip. Whilst accepting that we were a 'team', from the beginning I had considered myself an add_on, a passenger. I therefore took a somewhat casual approach, tending to rely instead on my tried-and-trusted kit, and the principle that the others would plan it properly, as they were going anyway. Unfortunately my particular 'tried-and-trusted' Silva compass, for example, had been tried too often, and was completely lacking in luminosity! I also totally failed to recognise the possibility of visibility being other than 'good'. After all, it's always been good on previous trips. On the night, however, it was far from good, and noticing that Ian and Tim had headlights, I commented how helpful they would be when glancing down at their own deck-mounted Silva Compasses. After all, I was just going to follow them. Both headlights had failed before the night was out!

Fairly early on in the trip, and especially after the 'VOR' had failed to work at sea, it became apparent to me how reliant we all were on Steve's little torchlit 'P2' compass, and therefore on Steve. This placed a heavy burden on him, as with me just swanning along for the ride - actually thoroughly enjoying it now we were on our way - and Tim and Ian in the second pair, Steve inevitably carried the directional responsibility for the group.

The Scilly Isles are a small enough target anyway, even in good visibility, and very easy to miss. Right from the beginning my paramount priority had been the combined need for us to maintain our agreed pace, and our agreed bear-

ing. This is primarily why I dropped in next to Steve as we set off. Steve carried this responsibility without quibble, and with the calmness and competence his profession clearly demands. Whilst taking nothing away from any other member, Steve for me gets the 'Man Of The Match' award. He was a star.

We had 'planned' on seeing more than Longships (if we'd missed that we'd have had serious problems!) and Seven Stones on the way across. There was also Wolf Rock off to the south (never seen!), and Steve had even suggested that we'd be able to confirm our track by being able to see Bishop Rock, way beyond the Scillies, through the St Mary's/Tresco gap. And Santa Claus came up the Trent on a scooter!

When land first came into view, at 06.40, it was bang in front. That was after nearly thirty miles of dead-reckoning and little confirmation on the way. We may as well have been blindfolded with someone shouting, 'Left a bit, right a bit...', etc. In fact for about three hours that's what Steve had been doing.

We stopped next to the closest island of any shelter (Menawethan) at 07.25, just forty-five minutes later, and less than eight hours out from Sennen. Our paddling pace at the time can have been no more than 3mph (if that), meaning that we can have been no further than two miles away when first it appeared out of the murk. That meant to me that had we been just two miles off track, either side of the Islands, we'd have missed them altogether, and not even known it. Also, the following week Steve had worked out that we were just two degrees off course when we hit land. 'Five degrees,' he added, 'and we'd have missed!'

Yes, It's a thin line between being a hero and a statistic.

Kit Details & Sponsors

Kayaks:

All the kayaks were made by P & H Fibreglass Ltd, Station Road, West Hallam, DERBY, DE7 6HB (Tel. 0602 320155 - Fax. 0602 327177).

Steve's, Tim's and Ian's were loaned specifically for the trip by Dave Patrick of P & H.

Tim and Ian - Bairdarka Explorer.

L 16' 10" / 513 cm
W 20½" / 52 cm

Steve and me - Iona. Both these kayaks had retractable skegs.

L 15' 6" / 472 cm
W 22" / 56 cm

The noticeable difference between these two designs (apart from Steve's being pink!) is the length and beam comparison. The Baidarka is potentially faster, more straight-running and less stable (beginners only). The Iona is principally built for smaller or lady paddlers, and is more stable and manoeuvrable than the longer boats. Equipment capacity is therefore less in the Iona, but in the event we simply split the kit between us on an agreed weight/volume basis.

Compasses:

Silva walking compasses for three of us, but Steve had equipped himself with a 'P2' aircraft compass, efficiently mounted on a spare forward deck hatch and illuminated by his torch. See 'Reflections'.

Nutrition:

1. We were fortunate to be supplied with 'High Five Pro' glucose polymer energy fuel (food) by High Five, PO Box 217, LEICESTER, LE4 7DZ (Tel. 0533 611892 - Fax. 0533 611293).

High Five Pro (HFP) is an Advanced Long-Chain Glucose Polymer (a super polysaccharide) designed specifically to enable the body to store and replenish the optimum levels of muscle glycogen. HFP is 100% muscle fuel with Zero fat. The advice we received with the product recommended Carbo-Loading for four days leading up to the trip, by complementing our usual food intake with 6 scoops (provided) of HFP taken with 750 ml of water, twice per day over the period. The aim was to supply the equivalent carbohydrate energy of 3.5 tins of spaghetti each day, whilst also boosting the fluid intake.

Intake during the trip was advised as 4-6 scoops an hour from the 750ml feeding bottles (supplied). In the event this latter recommendation was impracticable, as we did not use fluids at that rate, and it would have necessitated disposing of them with much increased and inconvenient (no pun intended) regularity.

Our experiences with HFP were varied:

Tim - decided not to use it at all as he felt he'd enough 'lard' to live off, and wanted to lose some. Judging by his subsequent food and liquid intake on St Mary's this desire had waned.

Steve - commenced the 'carbo-loading' but was then beset with the 'squits' (easier spelling!) and subsequently gave up. He did however drink from our communal supply during the crossing, and intends to use his remaining supply on future training.

Ian - followed the programme instructions, but further intake during the trip was terminated when he was sea-sick after less than one hour (nothing to do with the HFP). However, he has offered the view that it may well have been the 'pre-loading' on the fuel that enabled him to continue paddling so effectively, albeit marginally slower, after completely emptying his stomach of food and fluids. He did resume some intake later in the night/early morning.

Me - commenced the 'load' a day late (away at a conference) and continued through to departure. I also took 2.5 litres of the fuel made up for consumption during the trip, but the amounts taken at each 5-minute break were minimal compared to the recommendations. Knowing how tired I was at the start, I was surprised how well I paddled, at least for the first few hours before the tiredness set in. (NB On our earlier sea crossings/excursions (1972/73) we were then sponsored by Beechams with their Dynamo glucose drink. I was convinced then as I am now of the benefits of these supplements.) HFP had been recommended to me only a fortnight before our trip by an old canoeing friend, Andy Morgan, who now coaches competition swimming and uses HFP for his swimmers. He has no doubts about its benefits. It is currently used extensively by swimmers, tri-athletes, cyclists and marathon runners.

Anyone interested should contact Simon Blackburn at the address above.

2. We were also supplied with Lucozade Sport drinks and Mars Bars by Darley park Tea Rooms (Derby).

3. Other donors were:

Steve Charlish of Balloon Flights Ltd - VHF Radio and Nav.

Andrew Higton of Derby Aero Club - Emergency Locator Beacon.

Our sincere thanks to you all.

Appendix 3

MarineCall/MetFax Forecast, Friday 30 April 1993

Forecast for the area Hartland Point around Land's End to Lyme Regis and 12 miles offshore, including the Isles of Scilly, issued by the Met. Office Plymouth Weather Centre at 1pm on Friday 30 April 1993 for the period ending 7am on Sunday.

General Situation: Flabby Low Pressure over France will creep northwards over the south of the British Isles by tomorrow, with an Atlantic front moving close to the region by Sunday morning.

Forecast until 7pm on Saturday.

Wind: Variable 2 to 3, becoming generally northwesterly with sea breezes near the south coast during the afternoon and evening. Later on Saturday winds veering more northerly, perhaps Force 4 on the north coast by evening.

Weather: Mainly dry during today and tonight though rather misty with the chance of fog patches, particularly near the south coast, where there is the risk of a thundery shower. Much the same for Saturday with the thundery shower risk increasing in the afternoon. Cloud will increase in the west towards evening.

Visibility: Moderate on both coasts with risk of fog patches, especially in the south.

Sea State: Slight or smooth.

Maximum Air Temperature: 14 degrees Celsius.

Sea Temperature: 10-11 degrees Celsius.

Surf: 0-1 ft and mushy on both coasts.

Forecast from 7pm on Saturday until 7am on Sunday:

Wind: Northwesterly Force 2 in the south at first, becoming generally north Force 3 or 4.

Weather: Rather cloudy with outbreaks of rain or drizzle spreading to all parts during the night, along with mist and coastal fog, especially in the north.

Visibility: Moderate with fog patches on both coasts.

Sea State: Generally slight.

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This forecast can also be obtained by telephoning Marinecall on 0891 500 458. Calls are charged at 36p per minute Cheap rate, 48p per minute at all other times.

TLX:+306 timed at 12:46 30 Apr 93

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

NB This FAX also comes with two Surface Analysis Charts; in this case timed at/for 0001 GMT Friday 30-APR-1993, and 0001 GMT Saturday 01-MAY-1993. JC

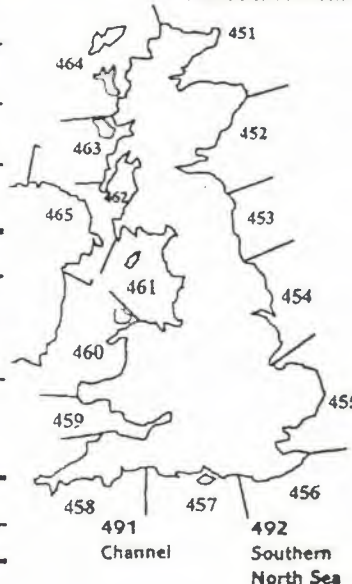


Helpline: 0344-854435 (Tel)
0344-854018 (Fax)



MetFAX
M A R I N E

Index of Products

FAX NUMBER	PRODUCT	UPDATE TIME				DURATION
0336-400-401	Index Page	As required				2'20"
SHIPPING FORECAST						
0336-400-441	24hr. Shipping Forecast	0030	0600	1400	1800	2'30"
0336-400-442	Map of Shipping Areas	For Reference				2'15"
0336-400-443	Description of Beaufort Force	For Reference				3'00"
STANDARD CHARTS						
0336-400-444	Surface Analysis Chart	0340	0940	1540	2140	3'00"
0336-400-445	24 hr. Surface Forecast Chart	0440	1040	1640	2240	3'00"
0336-400-446	Guide to Surface Charts	For Reference				3'00"
0336-400-447	Plotted Chart of Weather Reports	0030 then every 3 hours				2'30"
0336-400-448	Description of Plotted Chart & Index of Locations	For Reference				4'30"
2 DAY FORECASTS & CHARTS (See map for last 3 figures to dial)						
0336-400-XXX	2-day Local Inshore Forecast 00/24 hr. Forecast Chart	0700 0500	1900 1700			5'00"
3-5 DAY FORECASTS & CHARTS		UPDATE TIMES		DURATION		Map of 2-day Forecast Areas 
0336-400-450	3-5 day National Inshore Waters Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0500 0800		5'15"		
0336-400-471	3-5 day Channel Waters Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0500 0800		4'30"		
0336-400-472	3-5 day Southern North Sea Waters Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0500 0800		4'30"		
0336-400-473	3-5 day Irish Sea Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0500 0800		4'30"		
2-5 DAY SHIPPING AREA FORECASTS						
0336-400-468	2-5 day NW Scottish Shipping Areas Planning Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0800	2000			4'15"
0336-400-469	2-5 day Northern North Sea Shipping Areas Planning Forecast & 48/72 hr. Forecast Chart	0800	2000			4'15"
0336-400-498	Users Guide to Satellite Picture	For reference				3'00"
0336-400-499	Satellite Picture	0700,1300,1900				6'50"
0336-400-598	GPS Newsletter (Background Information)	Thursday PM				3'30"
0336-400-599	GPS Newsletter (Status Report)	Thursday PM				3'30"

Please note: 0336 numbers are charged at 36p per minute cheap rate and at 48p per minute at all other times (including VAT). Call durations are approximate and may vary depending on length of forecast. **Please also note:** 2-day forecasts for areas 455, 456, 457 & 458 are also updated at 1300 hours. Update times shown in **BOLD** are available one hour later during British Summer Time (28th March until 24th October 1993).

Index Page Last Updated: 26th April 1993.