

NEWS LETT ER

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The success of this newsletter relies on contributions from **YOU!** If you've been on a trip, in a race, or just have an opinion or some news you want to share, please send it to newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net. Articles should be short (between 100 and 250 words) and can be accompanied by a picture. The deadline for submissions for the next issue is 10th November, 2017.



Mark Corti, Editor
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From the Chair

Summer is finally drawing to a close, though you wouldn't have thought that if you had been on the annual Joss Bay trip on the bank holiday weekend.

It was a scorcher and enjoyed by everyone who attended. It was great to see so many new members there and the paddle boards proved to be popular. As the nights draw in and the temperatures drop there's still

lots going on at the club and further afield so plenty for you to get involved in. A reminder to members old and new, that we have the facilities upstairs in the clubhouse for everyone to utilise e.g. the paddle machines and gym equipment. If anyone would like some advice on use of any of the equipment Bryn and I are more than happy to help or speak to any of the other coaches.

Happy paddling,

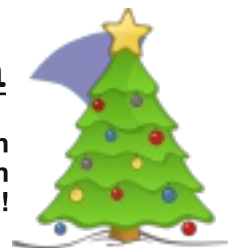
Brian Williams, Chairman
chairman@maidstonecanoeclub.net



Christmas Party!

Saturday 9th December, 7pm

Save the date! Our legendary Christmas Party, with Mince Pies and Festive Cheer! Tickets on sale soon (£5) - bring your own booze!



A faceful of salty water is just the thing to wake you up in the morning! More from our Scotland Sea Paddling trip on page 3

Upper Thames Trip

Four days in Mediterranean-style sunshine with the beauty of the flora, fauna and wildlife in the Thames and organised campsites - heartfelt thanks to Mike Lambourn for the idea, the organisation and the detailed planning.

Ten of us were able to complete all four days of the trip with three others who joined us for the weekend.

We met in a very well equipped campsite in Newbridge, Oxfordshire on Thursday evening and got on the water by 9.30 the next morning after a car shuffle to our first planned destination, a sea scout HQ campsite at Donnington Bridge in Oxford. We were greeted by clear, sparkling water and a river to ourselves, with the exception of swans, geese and ducks, including many of their offspring. We learnt how to use locks, rather than portaging round them. For some, where there was no Keeper on duty, our expedition leader Mike Lambourn proved expert at the process. We paddled through 7 locks on Friday prior to reaching our camping spot. During the next three days, we navigated another ten locks, experienced more camp sites, investigated a couple of pubs near the river and by 3.15 pm on Monday, had paddled nearly another 50 miles.

The whole trip was a learning experience for most of us. Whilst we failed to see a golden eagle, we saw many red kites. There were many herons standing erect and observing us pass, but my impression of these birds was soiled by being told en route that they were one of the main predators of ducklings on the river. Our ornithologist, Keith Dacey, pointed out an Egyptian goose amongst many feathered creatures of a more



A peaceful riverside lunch spot

common basis.

Those of us that needed to were also able to practise strokes to move ourselves in all directions inside a lock, many of which we had to share with anything from a lightweight rowing skiff to a large cruise boat.

There were other challenges: which box did you have to push your scrounged 20p into for the vacant shower, and how to empty space near the bar for our hungry assembly. In one hostelry a code was developed with the landlord – “3 B Ms and 5 B Ss, please” and a few of us enjoyed hitching a ride on the wake of a motor cruiser or two. One of our mix was also kind enough to capsize during one of the two locks we had to portage, to enable others to practise their rescue skills. We also had to search for lunch break spots ...

From a personal perspective, what encouraged me to join our club and learn

to kayak, was the surprising joy of paddling down a river. I find it so fulfilling to have the range of opportunities available to all of us to experience calm, gentle streams, battling with white water and the thrill of deep water and remote Scottish islands. It also has caused me to return to camping in a very basic and controlled fashion and over the course of 4 trips this year, to have refined my technique sufficiently so that I am no longer necessarily the last to be leaving the campsite. I would encourage many more of our members to have a go, enjoy the spirit of adventure and share these experiences. Mike is planning two more Thames trips, next year to involve the middle section, and the year after out through London into the estuary. I will certainly be involved in these expeditions.

*By David Alexander
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Mediterranean sunshine at one of the campsites on the Thames

Summer Kids Club

A huge thank-you to Rob, Annie, and everyone who helped out at our first-ever Kids Club this summer. The kids had an amazing time, building confidence and new friendships as well as learning new skills. The Coaching Group and the Committee are looking at what we can offer for young people at the Club in 2018. We've got some ideas, but if you've got suggestions, please contact our Youth Rep Reece, on reece.nelms@maidstonecanoeclub.net



In the hands of a master, the Weeniwave can take on anything the Alps can throw at it!

Summer Isles Trip

This being my first sea kayaking club trip to Scotland, I was told that it was traditional for the “new-be” to write the report.

It was truly a memorable trip with some like minded paddlers thus, it is my pleasure to write the following report on behalf of the group. Please see the photographs.

Eleven paddlers in 4 cars, left Maidstone on Thursday 25th May about 7pm depending on the pick-up time.

Car 1: Geoff Orford, Norman Brooks and Mike Lambourne

Car 2: Keith and Catherine Dacey and Phil Barbuti

Car 3: Mark Harris, Jerry Murray and Carolyn Hawkes

Car 4: David Alexander and Jason Bailey

The plan was to drive through the night sharing the driving in 2 hour shifts, meeting up on the M6 at about 1.00am and driving on together to arrive at Morrisons, Inverness on Friday morning. Where we could have breakfast and purchase those last minute perishable items. After breakfast there followed a 2 hour drive to our first and only commercial campsite at Altandhu. The plan being executed the drive was memorable for its stunning scenery and the emergency stops provided by Norman who had difficulty adapting to a car with automatic transmission!

Having safely arrived at the campsite just after midday Friday, the group, set about setting up camp and sorting equipment for 7 days of wild camping. It was decided to enjoy the last meal on mainland Scotland in the local pub adjacent to the campsite. Fish was the popular choice although Geoff still needed his meat in the form of a large steak. Jerry's friends, Andy and Jenny, who lived on the coast very near the campsite joined us for the meal, they also came to our rescue on the last day with a welcome treat. Happy, we discussed plans for the week.

Saturday started well in bright sunshine, the sea was like a mill pond and with an early breakfast 10 paddlers were on the water for the 9.00am high tide with laden kayaks for the short paddle across the water to our first campsite on the Isle of Ristol. The group was fully assembled by 9.10 heading for Ristol.

A white sandy beach spoilt only by the plastic rubbish and ropes that had been deposited on the beach over a number of years by the tides. Having checked out the beach and confirmed its credentials as a

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Gear Review: The Weeniwave

We were looking for a small kayak for our grandsons, Alex and Hayden, to use during our holiday in the Alps.

While searching on the internet, we found the Weeniwave on Square Rock's website. Frustratingly, we couldn't find any reviews on it and the description on the website was very brief. It read, “Our “Weeniwave” features a lively but stable hull, 100 mm rear hatch, integral carry handle and self-draining cockpit.” It also said that it could be used on up to grade 2 water or 50cm surf and the weight range is up to 40kg. We decided to take a chance and ordered one. It was delivered to me at work two days later and fitted easily in my Fiesta to take home. At just 10kg, it was light enough to carry, although slightly awkward, due to its bulk. It was a pleasant surprise to find that it came with a 190cm two-piece paddle.

The Weeniwave is a small sit-on-top kayak with a choice of foot positions so it easily fits a range of sizes. It moves more like a sit-in kayak than a traditional adult sit-on-top. It is very forgiving and can be recovered from being tipped a long way over. The boys were delighted with it and found it to be very manoeuvrable. They used the Weeniwave to develop their kayaking skills for their Paddlesport Passports and could perform all the skills on the Weeniwave that they could do in the kayak. They both had fun on the lake and paddled a section of the Lower Guil – a bouncy grade 2 with wave trains and a couple of small drops. The Weeniwave performed well on the moving water. It broke in and out easily and it was

responsive and surprisingly fast. The boys had no problem keeping up with the group. Despite being very stable, when it hit a strong crossflow, it capsized. However, it has the huge advantage of depositing the paddler straight into the water, so no worries about being upside down, and it's obviously relatively easy to get back onto. It handled just like a kayak when Hayden landed in a small stopper after going over a pour-over and he did a huge brace and got himself out of it. We were very impressed with Hayden and the Weeniwave.

Overall, we were very pleased with the Weeniwave. Hayden, who is only seven and weighs 25kg, sometimes hits his thumbs on the side of the kayak, despite our best efforts to make it fit him. He loved that there was nothing to bang his thumbs on. It was so stable that he could happily stand up on it and use it as a stand-up paddleboard. Alex is towards the top of the weight range at 37kg, but the Weeniwave was still responsive and stable for him and looked brilliant as he bobbed down the wave trains on the Guil. At £229 we felt that it was a great purchase and gave us an excellent alternative to a traditional kayak for children. We will now need to consider whether to buy the larger Craziwave, which goes up to 60kg, for Alex as he gets too heavy for the Weeniwave.

By Niki Norman

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Summer Isles Trip

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suitable campsite the group continued to circumnavigate the two islands of Eilean Mullgrach and Ristol in a figure of eight. It was the first encounter with the extensive wildlife that were to be seen over the next week. During the round island paddle a number of seals surfaced close to the canoes to check us out. There was plenty of opportunity to visit numerous caves not only to test

canoeing skills but photograph wild life and spectacular rock formations, a feature of the trip.

The total distance of 7.3 miles were completed before landing on the sandy beach back on Ristol Island, only the tide had gone out and the heavy canoes had to be carried over a pile of boulders to reach the white sands. Once unloaded the task was to pitch camp and cook a meal. After the meal we were lead on a walk by Jason to the three highest points of the island. Some of the group were lucky enough to see the deer on the

island before the rains came. For the rest of the evening and night it poured with rain it was time to hunker down and catch up on lost sleep and wait for the rain to stop.

Sunday started bright and with the freedom of empty boats we paddled to Tannara Beg to checkout a suitable future campsite. After circumnavigating the island including a lunch stop we returned to Ristol - it was sunny and the tents had dried. A total of 9.5 miles was recorded on Geoff's GPS, which does not record the beauty of the place or the



The Summer Isles and surrounding coastline is one of the finest places to sea-kayak in the world, easily the equal of more exotic destinations overseas. Join us next spring!

Summer Isles Trip

sense of being at one with nature. Back on the island Mike went on a mission to find firewood and plastic containers, firewood for the campfire and plastic drums for the seats. Keith and Mark set up their fishing lines without success. Later around the campfire the whisky flowed, Norman sang his stories, others told tales of previous trips and David told us a story about his days as a dog

breeder!! It was a fine clear evening and a good time was had by all.

Monday started with the decision to go back to the mainland and refill the water containers and to pick up the last remaining food as we were to stay out on the islands until Friday. Having completed the task we paddled to Tannara Beg and set up the tents and unloaded. With empty canoes we headed for Tannara Mor to find another suitable campsite for Tuesday. Exploring more islands and

having found a suitable campsite at Mol Bay on Tannara Mor we headed back to Tannara Beg. Arriving at low tide we were greeted by slippery seaweed covering large rocks, it would be impossible to safely carry the canoes over the rocks. Our leader Geoff came up with the solution, the canoes were tied together and left floating at the bottom of the rocks a 20metre rope ran over the rocks and was tethered to large boulders at the high tide

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2017 Slovenia Trip

It all started in mid-2016 when I saw a post on the club webpage advising of the club's trip to Slovenia and advising people interested to get in touch with Niki.

Having seen the photos from the 2016 trip, I was keen, but as a relative newcomer to paddling, and a very new one to White water was not sure if I was suitably experienced. After discussion with the team and encouragement from various members I decided to go for it and so started the crash course (for veterans like me) in white water paddling. To cut a long story short, after some time in Wales, Lee Valley and various other spots through the winter I managed to get to a level where I thought I could hold my own (just) without jeopardising the rest of the group.

As the trip grew closer, and a few final planning meetings, Friday 26 May (our departure date) was finally upon us and Slovenia was a reality. The MCC team consisted of 11 members, Bill, Niki, Paul H, Ian, Pete, Tom, Lee, Richard, Tony, Vessie and I, with an additional 5 from "the North", joining the party, Mary, Rosie, Joe, Andy and James.

I was collected from home at the precisely arranged time (13h15!) and before long we were on our way in 2 vehicles, Richard's van and Bill's 1st Class VW transporter!

24 odd hours later and after crossing 7 countries we arrived in Bovec, sunny Slovenia. On our arrival, our accommodation was not quite ready, but we were allowed to drop our bags off and then we got ready for our 1st paddle!



Smiley faces are a common sight on Slovenian whitewater (also in the ice cream shops)!

(Talk about keen).

As we thought the levels would drop it was decided that we would get a run in on the Koritnica river. For those who don't know, the put in involves a 500 odd meter walk in down a pretty steep path to the river below. With my heart pumping from the walk in (a perfect warm up) my first view of the river left me gobsmacked. It was the most stunning sapphire blue with sheer walls up each side of the river.

As I was new to this we did the usual inspection of the first feature (just after the put-in) a grade 3+ (I'm told) gorge without any real warm up. What an introduction to white-water Slovenia. With some great guidance and

encouragement from the team I managed to make it through unscathed. A real confidence boost, and an adrenaline rush of note. WOW!

The group were awesome, the banter vicious and hilarious, but always thoroughly professional and aware of us weak ones, and always supportive. What a team.

That night I was introduced to the beer, food, local celebrities and a sample of some the finest ice-cream around, 32 odd flavours, of which only 2 remained unsampled by the end of the trip! This was to become pretty much our routine for the rest of the trip.

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Plenty of bank support helps build confidence.



Guaranteed sunshine makes this a popular trip!



Miles and miles of turquoise whitewater paddling.

Summer Isles Trip

... cont'd from page 4

line. Later when the tide came in, the canoes were pulled in and laid on the pebbles. Phil and Jason oversaw this operation as it was raining again and time to hunker down for the night. The midges came out and so did the nets.

Tuesday was a straight paddle day between Tannara Beg and Tannara Mor, 1.5 miles, with a section of choppy water due to the increased wind speeds. Once on the island it was about making oneself comfortable. The increased wind speed helped to dry the wet tents. Geoff and Mark arranged their tents so a shelter could be made from their tarps large enough to accommodate the group for evening drinks (Whisky of course). To make the shelter more comfortable two dry stone walls were built to form a wind break. Mike provided the plastic seats

Mor. On the other side of the island were a number of houses that were being renovated by builders for a property investor who had recently purchased the island. To everyone's surprise among the houses was a building marked "Post Office" - the office opened to coincide with the arrival of the boat from Ullapool. Teas and coffees were also available at the Post Office for a donation to a wildlife trust. We took full advantage of the drinks with biscuits before eating our packed lunches. After lunch we paddled out and explored the nearby island, of Eilean Dubh before heading back to Mol Bay for the night a total distance of 11.4 miles. An evening discussion on the items to carry on a canoe camping trip was started with Mark showing his knife sharpener, full tool kit and glue gun! Later he carried out a repair to David's tarp pole using his glue gun - Mark being an extreme Cotswold shopper. The evening continued with the convivial campfire.

decreased a little as we turned for Horse Island our final campsite of the trip. Before landing we circumnavigated the island, seals, interesting wildlife and rock formations were again enjoyed by the group. The bay campsite was well protected. Norman, Geoff, Carolyn and David took the lower area while Keith, Catherine, Mike, Phil, Jerry and Mark took the large scenic plateau. Jason camped on one of the highest parts of the island and claimed the highest dump of the trip! Jerry and Mike found a large tree log in a nearby bay and dragged it back for the final beach campfire. The tree log was complimented by Phil who had carried fire logs on his canoe for the week. Mike provided the plastic! Norman, who still had the most whisky left, shared it with the group as they drained their last bottles. Nearly 8 litres of whisky and rum were consumed by nine paddlers over the week! Mike and Carolyn are TT.

Friday's launch was a little later due to the lower tide but was assisted by pushing the canoes over slippery seaweed covered rocks. Mike sustained a lip injury as a result of a flying paddle, no lasting damage. The sea was choppy as Jerry led the group across the bay to the mainland and the house of his friend's Andy and Jenny, where copious teas, coffees and bacon butties were provided, a welcome treat for hungry paddlers. The final paddle was against both wind and tide as we hogged the coast back to Altandhu where the cars were parked - a distance of 7.1 miles. At the campsite Geoff negotiated the use of showers and toilets, the first in seven days. Following our transformation in the shower block we packed the cars and headed for Ullapool where we had the traditional fish and chips. Would you believe it was national fish and chip day Friday 2nd June! All that was left was the drive home.

For any new-be Scottish paddler of the future, it is a memorable week, living up close and personal with nature and spending time with some great people.

I am looking forward to going back in 2018 ...19...20...21...

I am sure I speak for the whole group in thanking Geoff Orford who is not only an exceptional leader by an inspiration to us all. THANK YOU GEOFF.

By Mike Lambourne

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Editors note: Mike has kindly supplied copies of maps and routes for the trip, which we don't have space (or copyright) to reproduce here. Please contact Mike or I for copies of these.



Another perfect wild campsite. It looks like they're building a house - maybe they want to stay!

again. Jason who seems to live on personal challenges set his tent on the most exposed and steepest slope of the island and while he slept in the lower corner of his tent in the fetal position he survived! The other tents were pitched in two main locations - Keith, Catherine, Phil, Carolyn and Jerry choose the exposed upper plateau with stunning views while Geoff, Mark, David and Mike chose the cramped lower slopes with more shelter. You make your bed and lie in it!

Wednesday, a bright sunny start as we paddled clockwise around Tannara

Thursday the wind direction changed and was blowing strongly on shore, this made the morning launch the most memorable of the trip. Jason was the star helping everyone into their canoes, however the photograph of the trip was of Mark flying over a wave. It is rumoured that Mark filled the back on his canoe with his tools and fitted a helium balloon in his front hatch (see the photo) it does not resemble a loaded sea kayak. Paddling out from the bay there were some nervous paddlers, in true MCC tradition we kept together and offered support as needed. Once clear of the Bay the waves

Fun Times in France

We treated ourselves to three weeks in the French Alps this summer and had a wonderful time!

We camped in L'Argentiere-la-Bessee again. On our first day there, we found ourselves doing the hardest paddle of our holiday. So much for warming up gently! The Middle Guil is a fantastic section; it is interesting and presents a whole range of fun and challenges all the way. My favourite parts of that trip were; firstly, nailing a section where I had previously had my worst swim ever, and secondly, becoming a grade 4 river goddess as I soloed a section while chasing a boat and paddle downstream. I really need to paddle like that all the time.

It was mostly sunny when we were there which meant that the rivers were quite low but some torrential thunderstorms brought some of the levels back up. Bill and I had a few days paddling with friends from "up north" before we were joined by Richard, Ian and Penny (another northern friend). Our daughter Laura and grandsons Alex and Hayden also joined us. It's very easy to get to Turin airport for those who prefer to fly. The biggest surprise of the holiday was when Richard's children joined us, having hopped on a train to get there. Later still, Malcolm, Hazel, Joel and Cameron joined us, having spent a few days at a white-water course on their way down.

As soon as the second group joined us, we gave them tea and cake and then dragged them to the get in for the



Niki sliding down a waterfall without her boat. It's not all about the boating!



Sit-on-tops and SUPs are a fantastic way to combine a family holiday with a paddling trip.

Gyronde. It was a bit low but the water was turquoise and the sun was shining. Well, it was to begin with. As we made our way down, it clouded over and as we neared the town, we could hear thunder and see lightning flashing higher up the valley. We paddled positively towards the get out but we were still a good ten minutes away. We decided that the trees were taller than us, so should attract lightning more readily than the carbon rods we were holding in our hands. It was a bit scary paddling past the sub-station, as they always take lightning strikes in the movies, but we made it back to the campsite unscathed, although a little wet! We also paddled in a thunderstorm on the Upper Guisane. It had been raining when we got on and the rain just got heavier. By the end you could actually see the water level rising. The s-bends were easier to run by the time we had scouted them due to the rapidly rising water. Exciting times!

The next day we did the Sunshine Run on the Durance down from the Rabioux. By then, the water had changed from turquoise to chocolatey-brown. The wave trains were huge and bouncy, but when we got off we found that our kit was covered in muddy water marks.

The Ubaye Racecourse is one of my favourite sections in the French Alps. The scenery is beautiful and the river is interesting all the way down. Towards the end, you paddle under a Roman bridge as the river drops down into an impressive gorge. We visited the Ubaye twice, once when we all paddled and a second time when Laura, Alex, Hayden and I rafted the section and the rest of the group paddled. Rafting is much more fun than it looks and enables non-paddlers and beginners to get on the harder and more exciting water. We have previously rafted on the Sunshine Run

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2017 Slovenia Trip

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Day 2 saw us take on the Koritnica again in the morning followed by an introduction to "the Classic" section on the Soca River, in the afternoon. The views and paddling were awe inspiring and in spite of becoming the group's swimmer-in-chief, (obviously to cool down from the 30 degree ambient temperature and sunshine) I was having the biggest rush I had had in years. What a place.

With the encouragement I was receiving my was confidence growing, along with slowly improving my swimming skills, I was really noticing an improvement in my skill set after each run, even if the others weren't.

Day 3 saw us run the classic twice, morning a slow run followed by a blast in the afternoon. Just can't get enough of this place.

Day 4 Bill and Niki went off on a course and we agreed to do "Bunkers" which runs into the infamous Gorge. I elected to do the full run and after 3 swims on the first 3 features, was wondering if I was ready for the "big one". That said , after the obligatory inspection and line reviews there appeared to be 2 options river left in the fast water and river right – slower water. I watched the first few do the run, and then it was my turn, in for a penny in for a pound. I chose the river right option, took a deep breath and serious concentration and went for it. I managed to come out the other side (just) to great cheers of encouragement and a feeling of real elation, not to mention my heart beat of 170! After the rush of the entrance the gorge is really narrow, but absolutely stunning and a real treat. The scenery throughout is just awe inspiring and the photos however stunning, do not do the

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Racing Team Needs You!

Enjoy paddling, but not sure what to do next? Would you like to get fitter while having fun? Come along to the Club on Friday nights, 6pm, and get involved in the racing side of the Club. We've a huge array of stable boats suitable for beginners, as well as faster craft for those more experienced - they just need someone to paddle them! There's help and advice for those who want it, and a friendly welcome for everyone.

Our current racers are aged from 8 - 80, and have a wide range of fitness and skill levels - why not come along and give it a try?

Friday Evenings,
6pm



Rarely-seen whitewater kayak portage trolleys, in the Slovenian mountains. The kayaks have fallen off.

2017 Slovenia Trip

... cont'd from page 7

real thing justice.

Each day came and went with us getting to know the rivers better and the stunning weather continued with the river levels dropping off only slightly, but continually challenging and thoroughly enjoyable.

It was not all paddling with some of us taking a day off to do a bit of cycling and walking and Pete getting his boat patched following it springing a leak. We also managed to hire some off road scooters and do a rapid dirt road descent down the mountain to add a bit of variety to our already action-packed days. Again great

fun and hilarity prevailed and fortunately came out with no scrapes at all (only a few near misses!)

All too soon Saturday was rapidly approaching and on Friday afternoon we did our final run of the trip. I managed to get pinned really close to the get out point resulting in me being sucked under a rock before popping out the other side (a thoroughly stunning experience) but not one I would recommend doing again. That night it was the final dry out and pacing up session before we all started the long journey home.

What an awesome week and what a fantastic team we had. Like all these things they don't just happen, and a special thanks to Niki and Bill for pulling the whole thing together in such a

diplomatic and democratic way. To all members of the team a massive thanks for your support, company and most importantly good humour on the trip.

Unfortunately it seems that next year's trip is currently on hold, but if and when another trip is organised, if anyone who is in any doubt, about going I would strongly recommend the trip (or any other) . If you need to chat to a relative beginner like me I'm happy to discuss. What a trip, what a week, and most of all what a great bunch.

Thanks all. Roll on the next one (where and whenever that is)!

Wally Shave

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Each year I try to take my kids on an overnight canoe trip somewhere.

This is generally a gentle English river, with a semi-wild riverside campsite. It's always been good fun – the kids enjoy themselves, we get some quality father-son bonding time, plus I get to go boating. Again. The key part has always been that we do it expedition-style – carrying everything with us on the river. My secret long-term plan has always been to prepare them for a Proper Expedition – helping them learn the skills and mindset needed to go into the wilderness for a week or more. Taking their ole' Dad with them, of course!

This year, I decided they were probably ready – maybe not for a full-on trans-Canada yomp, but certainly for a trip somewhere genuinely remote. They're reasonably proficient at setting up camp, lighting a fire and paddling a

Loch Maree - A Canoe Expedition

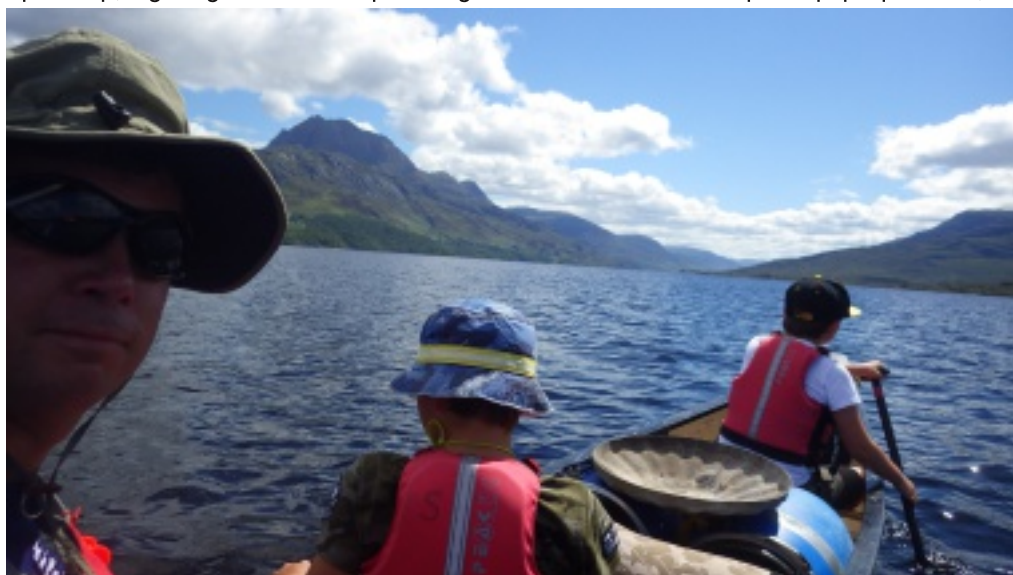
canoe, and sensible enough that they could raise the alarm if I was, for example, unexpectedly eaten by a haggis. We looked at a few options, and in the end decided to head north, to Europe's "last great wilderness". The wilder parts of Scotland are quite a long way away, and rather than drive up there solo (my wife having sensibly booked herself into a spa in Tunbridge Wells as soon as the idea of an expedition was mooted) we flew into Inverness and drove a rental car to the local outfitter. (As all good outfitters will, In Your Element - <http://www.iye.scot> - provided a wealth of local knowledge, and were invaluable in our pre-trip preparation, as

well as having a great selection of reliable gear).

I shall skip over the tedious tribulations of modern travel, the traffic jams and car parks, the over-priced airport food and the under-staffed car rental agencies, and pick up the story just at the point you cross the watershed which separates Loch a'Chroisg from Loch Maree, where the A382 winds down below you towards the water sparkling in the sunshine, and the thirty islands are scattered across the surface like lost jewels crying out to be explored.

After a brief stop to chat to the Beinn Eighe warden and find out which areas were currently off-limits (there's a rare breeding population of Black-Throated Divers on the loch; the warden claimed they were only rare because of their incredible stupidity), we parked up at a convenient picnic area and launched our canoe on to gently-lapping waters, with the intimidating bulk of Slioch ("the Spear") looming over our bow. As the picnic tables disappeared far behind us, and the opposite shore failed to get any closer, the kids began to realise the scale of the loch. This was very different from the Wye, the Severn or the Thames that they'd paddled before. As we inched across, Slioch grew to dominate the skyline. The only sounds were those of the water – waves lapping at the hull, paddles cutting through the surface.

We paddled for a few hours, stopping to look at waterfalls and explore potential campsites that the kids spotted on the map. In the early afternoon we stopped at a truly lovely little beach on a tiny isthmus which connected a small hillock to the mainland. We pitched the



A sunny first day, with Slioch looming ahead. The kids eventually noticed I wasn't doing any paddling.

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Junior Paddler Cards - A Plea

Over the last few months we've introduced our new Junior Paddler cards.

Catherine Dacey, our fabulous Welfare Officer, has taken the lead in this, and the aim is to ensure our younger paddlers are getting the best possible experience at Maidstone Canoe Club. It also keeps us in line with current best practice, making sure everyone is properly looked after both on & off the river. The Junior Paddler cards have got names, emergency contact details, and any allergy information etc. on them, and need to be brought along to every session.

As with all new ideas, this one needs all of us to pull together to make sure it works. Please help us out with this – take a minute to read through the

information below, even if you don't have any Junior Paddlers yourself!

The first & most important rule is: **No Card, No Boat!** If you don't have your Junior Paddler Card with you, you can't take a boat out the boatshed. Adults, please don't give boats to juniors without one. (There are a limited number of temporary cards available in the Club for occasional use).

Secondly, **parents of juniors** need to give the card to one of our Responsible Paddlers. These are adults who have agreed to look after your child on the water – please don't just "drop & go", we may not be able to take your child out.

Finally, **parents of juniors** need to collect the card at the end of the session. If we've still got the card, we will assume the child is still in the Club or on the

water. This is why the cards must go back to the parents – not the child! Please pick up promptly – our Responsible Paddlers will wait for you to collect your child, and if you're late they might not want to take your child out next week!

If you've got any thoughts about how this is working (and especially if you're willing to occasionally take responsibility for one of our junior members on the water), please drop Catherine a line – welfare@maidstonecanoeclub.net - or have a chat to her at the Club. Thanks!

Mark Corti - on behalf of the committee
mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net

Loch Maree - A Canoe Expedition

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tent on a tussocky level of grass looking north over the loch, shooing off the resident toads and slow worm, and set the kitchen area up on the beach, where abundant firewood and a sheltered aspect made for a cozy camp.

I've always found that food is an important part of a trip, and one of the joys of canoeing (rather than, say, hiking) is that you don't need to go ridiculously lightweight. Expedition food should always be something hot and served in

large quantities, but with a bit of extra preparation you can be eating delicious food in a fabulous wilderness setting, and it adds so much to the experience. A few years ago I was given a book called "The Paddling Chef" (authored by Dian Weimar), and I'd dug deep into it for this trip. For the first night, I wanted to use up the fresh ingredients that wouldn't keep well, so we had chicken cordon bleu followed by fresh melon, with cheese quesadillas beforehand to stave off hunger.

The next day dawned bright and clear, and we worked up an appetite for breakfast (blueberry pancakes, maple syrup, coffee) with a quick swim-and-wash in the loch before breaking camp. We always practice Leave No Trace camping (see <http://www.lnt.org/>), and so there was no sign of our passing as we slipped away into the still waters of the loch. It was at this point the weather decided to remind us we were, in fact, in Scotland, and a light rain began to fall. Despite our being surrounded on all sides by blue sky, the rain intensified, and by the time we decided to get our waterproofs on, we were soaked. The



The uninhabited islands are a kids paradise, and we spent a lot of time exploring them!

weather worsened, with the wind picking up and the chop becoming more noticeable. By lunchtime the kids were frozen, and we cut short our planned journey and debarked at Isle Maree, the largest island on the loch and the one most touched by human hand. It wasn't our first choice of campsite, but it was the closest one. I rigged a tarp for the kids to shelter under while they ate lunch, and then set about making camp. By mid-afternoon the sun had come out and the kids had warmed up sufficiently to strip off for a swim in the loch, and we decided to take the boat and explore around the islands. The warden had told us there were sea eagles (and possibly ospreys) nesting somewhere around, so we headed out to see what we could find. The loch was like glass, and it was a real

pleasure to be paddling the boat unladen for a change, gliding across the water between rocky islets. Sure enough, a pair of sea eagles swooped out of the trees, powerful wings beating as they headed to the other side of the island, away from us human intruders.

As we watched, the glassy surface of the loch broke up into ripples, and in the north we could see the chop picking up. We turned back to our camp, and by the time we got there it had freshened to a force 3. I'd pitched the tent, a tipi-style affair, on the beach – I'm a sucker for a campsite with a view – and weighted the guylines down with rocks. I figured it would be fine in anything other than a fairly strong blow, and no wind had been forecast ... By the evening, the wind had been at least a force 4, and we made the

decision to strike the tent and re-pitch it in the shelter of the trees.

The next morning, we spent some time exploring the forest. The islands of Loch Maree contain some of the last remaining fragments of the original Caledonian Pine Forest, and in the woodland of Isle Maree itself is an intact stone circle dating from at least 100BC. The graveyard in the centre of this circle has been in continuous use since at least 700AD. We found the graves of the Viking Prince Olaf and his bride, who committed suicide in a Romeo-and-Juliet style story, and found the remains of the cell of St Maelrubha who brought Christianity to this part of the world. The weather stayed fine, and after almost letting the kids get hypothermia

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Fun Times in France

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(with the boys) and on the Guil from Chateaux Queyras to Triple Falls, a section that is way too hard for me in a kayak. It's a long drive (about an hour and a half) to the Ubaye, but the route goes over the Col de Vars and the views are stunning. This road had been used for the Tour de France just days before we arrived and there seemed to be cyclists in lycra everywhere. The route home goes alongside the lac de Serre-Ponçon and again, the scenery is just amazing. We also took bikes with us which was great fun, but managed to avoid wearing lycra, except Bill!

I was lucky enough to go canyoning in the first week. Wearing my kayaking kit and a climbing harness, I walked, climbed, jumped (very bravely.... eventually!) and swam my way down a section of the Fournel. Our first attempt to do this the previous day had had to be abandoned. A siren had sounded, so we all got out of the water and waited. Then rather dramatically, the river level went up by about 20cm (and turned brown) as they'd had to release water at the barrage higher upstream.

On the last day, the rest of the family hired harnesses and enjoyed a via ferrata climb at Puy St Vincent. Apparently, it was fun and exciting and followed a small

river with sparkling water and beautiful, foaming waterfalls. This was not enough to convince me to climb. I chose instead to run a section of the Durance with Richard and Penny. Unfortunately, it had rained the previous day and night and the water, once again, was brown. I had never considered the effect of the sediment in the water on paddling until the river was joined by a tributary which looked like there had been a landslide upstream. The water looked like liquid mud and it became harder to paddle through until, quite a distance further on, when it had become more diluted or the sediment dropped out in the larger river. We were very careful not to fall in.

It worked well combining a family holiday and a kayaking holiday. Having so many friends with us meant that there were options for everyone. Off the water, we visited the historic town of Briançon and went to the gorgeous mountain village of Vallouise for the market, fire festival and the fireworks. Playing on the lake with the SUP, kayaks, the Weeniwave and the inflatables was always a popular choice, but despite the low levels, we also managed to fit in a fair bit of kayaking, ice cream eating, deep frying Mars Bars (don't ask!) and beer drinking. Roll on next year!

By Niki Norman

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Loch Maree - A Canoe Expedition

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Dabbing comes to Scotland. I can't see it catching on ...



Niki paddling on whitewater. The keen-eyed among you will spot this isn't the Alps. It is Niki, though!

yesterday, I managed to get them slightly sunburned today, which is a new parenting low for me! We didn't paddle far today, and camped on another idyllic beach. The afternoon was spent exploring inland, and we watched golden eagles soaring along the escarpment high above us, tracked deer spoor through the bracken, and followed streams to rushing waterfalls.

The next day was our final one, and we meandered back down the loch towards the picnic site before a mad dash across the narrowest point as the wind picked up again, all three of us paddling hard into a stiff breeze and brisk chop to make any headway at all. Another swim-bath in the loch to wash the woodsmoke out of our hair, and all-too-soon we found ourselves back in normal clothes, eating an uninspiring burger in an unremarkable chain restaurant before the flight home.

By Mark Corti

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Featured Upcoming Events

Please see the website for full details of these and other upcoming events, trips, tours & training.

Every Wednesday, 5:30pm, and Sunday 9:30am: Regular Member's Paddle

All year round, whatever the weather, we're out paddling! Come along and join us!

Saturday, September 9th, 8pm: Pool Session

Capsizes, rolls & braces at Larkfield Leisure Centre. Clean boats only, please! Meet at the Club to wash boats beforehand - see calendar.

Saturday, September 16th & Sunday, September 17th, 9am - 5pm: 3* Canoe Training

For those looking to move their canoe skills on, this course will teach the some intermediate canoe-handling skills. You should have some canoe experience first (2* standard). At Yalding.

Saturday, September 16th & Sunday, September 17th, 9am - 5pm: 3* Canoe Training

For those looking to move their canoe skills on, this course will teach the some intermediate canoe-handling skills. You should have some canoe experience first (2* standard). At Yalding.

Sunday, September 17th, 9:30am - 12pm: Demo Day with Kent Canoes

The fine people at Kent Canoes will be on hand with a selection of kit for you to try. Get in touch with them beforehand if there's anything in particular you'd like to demo.

Saturday, September 16th & Sunday, September 17th, 9am - 5pm: 3* Whitewater Kayak

With Pirates Canoe Club, in North Wales. Intermediate boat-handling skills on grade 2 whitewater - contact Paul French for details, pjfrf@aol.com

Sunday, October 1st, 9:30am: NO REGULAR PADDLE

The rowing club are holding a race this Sunday, so no regular paddle. We will be heading somewhere else (fairly local), so please check the website to see where to meet etc.

Saturday, October 7th, 8pm: Pool Session

Capsizes, rolls & braces at Larkfield Leisure Centre. Clean boats only, please! Meet at the Club to wash boats beforehand - see calendar.

Sunday, September 10th, 8:30am: Cuckmere Valley Tidal Tour

Meet at the Club at 8:30, or Seven Sisters Country Park for 10:30. This is a lovely paddle, catching the Spring tide for minimum paddling effort! See website for details.

Sunday, September 10th, 9am: 3* Canoe Assessment

For those who completed the 3* training session earlier.

Saturday, September 15th - Sunday, September 16th: Exe & Barle Trip

The final camping trip of the season, with a campsite conveniently located across the road from the finest pub in Devon! Easy whitewater, lots of support and help - see website or speak to Geoff, memsec@maidstonecanoeclub.net, for more.

Sunday, October 22nd & Sunday October 29th, 9am - 4pm: 3* Touring Kayak Course

Intermediate skills to get the most from your touring kayak, from wake-running to save energy, packing for trips, and basic moving-water skills.

Saturday, November 4th, 8:45am - 14:00: BCU Lifeguards Emergency First Aid

4-hour first aid course.

Saturday, November 18th, 8pm: Pool Session & Demo Night

Capsizes, rolls & braces at Larkfield Leisure Centre, with Kent Canoes. Clean boats only, please! Meet at the Club to wash boats beforehand - see calendar.

Saturday, December 9th, 7pm: Christmas Party!

Tickets on sale soon - £5! Festive Fun, Mince Pies, Christmas Music. Bring your own drink.