

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 May, 2017.



Mark Corti, Editor
newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net

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From the Chair

As a member of Maidstone canoe club for the past nine years or so one of the best things for me about the club is the diversity of activities that take place in the club.

If you look back over the last few months we have had the Stour paddle, the estuary paddle, a couple of white water trips, people regularly visiting the Lee valley white water centre to hone their skills and various marathon races. Additionally we have a group of young ladies from Invicta Girls Grammar training every Thursday as part of their GCSE PE course.

I'm sure I've missed some things but the point is there is lots going on, so if you haven't got involved yet what are you waiting for?

While I'm talking about getting involved, if you feel it's too cold to get on the water we have three paddle machines upstairs as well as a multi gym, weights, exercise balls etc. These are for everyone to use, not just the racers and are a great way to improve your paddle technique and fitness. Also after your paddle at the club, why not pop up for a



Brian at one of the many racing events at the Club

cuppa - there's always tea, coffee and hot chocolate available.

Happy paddling!

Brian Williams, Acting Chairman
chairman@maidstonecanoeclub.net

2017 Pool Session Dates

Whatever the weather, there's a sunny welcome and warm water at Larkfield Leisure Centre for our pool sessions! We run one every month on a Saturday evening, 8pm - 9:30pm. Practice capsizes, rolls, braces, and all the other stuff that's not so much fun in the cold! Coaching available. Please ensure boats are clean inside and out - they'll be inspected before the session. Boat cleaning at the Club, 4pm-5pm.

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|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Saturday 25th March | • Saturday 26th August |
| • Saturday 22nd April | • Saturday 9th September |
| • Saturday 20th May | • Saturday 7th October |
| • Saturday 17th June | • Saturday 18th November (Demo Night) |
| • Saturday 29th July (Demo Night) | • Saturday 16th December |

The AGM Is Almost Here

As the AGM fast approaches, do you have any burning ideas for the club? Could you make a difference? If you want to be part of the committee, talk to one of the existing committee members to see what goes on and get yourself nominated.

Some of us have been there for ages and some are very new, so don't be shy - be nominated and come along to the AGM to help form what we do next year.

Catherine Dacey, Welfare Officer (currently)

AGM: 24th March, 7pm

Bryn & Sandra at the World Masters

We were in a bit of emotional turmoil when we left for Germany, to attend the masters world canoe championships at 3 o'clock in the morning on Sunday 11th September thinking of Bryn's sister leaving her new little family with such a beautiful baby. Fortunately she has a good family waiting for her at home, as well.

Also, one mistake resulting in one poor stage result deprived Chris Froome of a win in the Spanish Vuelta despite three weeks of strong winning rides including three brilliant stage wins. It was so frustrating and upsetting. Only emphasises what a consistently talented, strong rider he is to have won the Tour de France three times.

Having left early in case of difficulties as is our normal practice we had a short wait for the train and arrived in France at 7.10 am European time. Being a Sunday we had very little traffic and a very smooth run which with the assistance of John Edmonds music made it a very pleasant experience. It was motorway all the way which was a shame in a way because you could have been driving almost anywhere, the only indication that you were in a different country were the signs by the roadside 'Welcome to Belgium, Holland and Germany' perfect for our situation. However, would like to go again under different circumstances with more time and be able to take longer and see a little more of these countries.

I wrote the following on a memo pad on my tablet sitting on the stands waiting for Bryn. It is a personal account of my own experiences of the event and if you wish to know results and statistics you will have to turn to the official web sites.

So three in the afternoon and there we were at the venue for the World Masters Canoe Championships in Brandenburg am der Havel about 50kms from Berlin in East Germany.

Bryn was, as is way, so organised he'd checked everything and arranged all the finances and arranged to pay by card. Well the first thing that went wrong was the organisers hadn't given us a full address we had a map which was even more useless than me (believe me it was bad). Well 20 minutes later with the assistance of a local or two and much pointing at the canoe on the car roof we finally made it, took another 10 mins or so

room for the first night then be moved to a bungalow, the following day. He did give us the full address this time and the satnav found it easily - a beautiful place at the edge of the forest (in the early morning and evening we saw deer in this 'forest') leading down to the lake, there were some wooden chalets just as you picture in your dreams. In the lovely grounds there was a beach volleyball court, netball court. Football pitch, table tennis, climbing frames, teenager climbing area and a large lawn chess set, so if your kids come home with an invitation to an adventure holiday at



Mary Parry, a regular face at the Club during the build-up to the World Masters, on a portage during her race.

to find where to register. In spite of all Bryn's prior checking it turned out that he couldn't pay by card on a Sunday. Damn, would have saved so much time on practice day, Monday.

We felt it wasn't worth paying for a 5 star hotel as we planned to only sleep there, have breakfast then spend the day at the event. However, this three star hotel turned out to be a youth hostel. The admin at the event said we would have a

Ausbau am See (House on the Lake, I believe) go for it. However, there was no one around, it took Bryn a little while to find our room which was very basic, I don't mind bunk beds but his self was not impressed. Beds were comfy and bed linen clean what more do you want? Well, I could have done without walking down a corridor on a dirty floor to go to the loo and a shower would have been

cont'd on page 3 ...



Club hi-jinks at Lee Valley bottom wave of the Legacy

Lee Valley - Intensive Course

At the end of last year I signed myself up to do the stage 3 intensive weekend course at Lee Valley in January.

Soon enough I was strapping my boat to the roof of my car, and beginning to wonder why I thought this was a good time of year to learn some white water paddling- with the car telling me the temperature was a bit below 0, I set off a mixture of excited and nervous about what I'd let myself in for.

We started the day in the cafe for a briefing and to meet the others of the course, before heading out in the water. We started the day in the lake at the bottom of the legacy loop, to warm up and practice some paddle skills mainly looking at forward paddling, turning, moving sideways on the move and stern rudders.

Then we headed to the bottom of the legacy loop to get a feel for moving water and practice some ferry gliding, which proved a little tricky whilst trying to avoid each other and everyone else coming down the course.

After a break for lunch we moved up the course to an eddy to practice ferry gliding in some faster moving water, I admit I'm pretty sure my boat gained quite a lot of new scratches as I seemed to spend a lot of time hitting the slides. We spent most of that afternoon taking turns practicing ferry gliding or paddling down the little bit of the course when we mucked it up. This was when I took my

cont'd on page 4 ...



Michaela on calmer waters and sunnier days

Bryn & Sandra at the World Masters

... cont'd from page 2

nice. OK, no shower I'll have a wash - no plug for the plug hole?

Monday – Familiarisation Day

Had a reasonable breakfast at about 8. Arrived at the venue, about 9. It is the most beautiful venue and it is very hot, we could be in Africa. There is a very comfortable covered stand with a perfect view of the start, finish and winners' podium, so it would be easy for me.

Bryn queued for two hours, in the hot sun to register (people in the queue were sending members of their team to run and get bottles of water to keep them going) when he got to the front he was told that they now had a cash machine but it wasn't working. He ended up running into town to find a bank to give him cash. On his return, he had to queue again but by midday he was registered and able to get on the lake but I have seldom seen him so uptight. The briefing was supposed to be at 3pm which is why I'm sat on the stands typing this. However, no race number issued and no briefing. We hung on till about six. On the way out we saw a whole team not yet registered thanks to the ongoing saga of the lack of a card machine. Also Mary was trying to interpret for the Spanish team who had several members entered for a race at 1pm which had been rescheduled for 3pm - problem was some of the team were booked on a 4pm flight back to Spain!

Back at the hostel we were given a 'bungalow' which thankfully, had its own loo and shower. However, we had assumed that there would be some basic means of providing a meal. I thought

youth hostels had communal kitchens, but there was nothing, not even the means to make a cup of tea. You should have seen us, using paper bags as plates eating potato salad with an old laminated card – on the other hand – come to think of it, not a pretty sight.

Bryn read and reread the race notes, he apparently had to do five and a half circuits but only 4 portages which lap didn't include portage? The problem seems to have been that the instructions were written in German and then translated and whilst they might have been clear in German they lost clarity in the translation. Bryn felt so unsure of what he was supposed to be doing, he's used to being organised to the last detail. He kept saying, it's my responsibility to know the route, if I go wrong, I'll be disqualified. I suggested, that in the morning, we forget breakfast, go straight to the venue and collar someone in the know before he gets harassed and we find out.

Tuesday – K1 Race Day

Bryn still didn't sleep much last night and here we are 6 in the morning with the morning mist over the lake, one or two people around. I'm sitting in these delightful stands, hoping he has found someone who not only knows the rules but also speaks English, or even Flemish would do, not much hope for Shona or Sindabele. He is in no fit state to race at the moment. He just keeps saying so long as I don't go wrong and finish. There are a few people out paddling and it is really beautiful and peaceful, I wish Bryn could have such a start to his day.

Well 8am - race number obtained, course explained, Bryn going for a quick paddle then hopefully, breakfast racing at 10.20 - my fingers are firmly crossed.

The races are quite tricky to follow because each one starts 10 minutes or so after the other and the first ones do three and a half laps with no portaging and build up to Bryn's race (60-65) the last one scheduled for the morning. They had five and a half laps and 4 portages. So you've got people starting in the middle of the course, others doing laps round the outside and then moving into the middle to finish. It all worked really well, although I couldn't have told you who was winning what, until the race before Bryn's i.e. 55-59 men when the earlier racers finishing paddlers turned to the middle to cross the finish line and they had to hold up the start till the way was clear. Not much fun sitting in a canoe trying to keep steady and Bryn had a bad start, used to that, not his strong

cont'd on page 4 ...

Missing Items

Several paddlers had things go missing over the Rainchaser's whitewater trip on the weekend of 3rd - 5th February. It's unclear whether the items were lost or taken by other paddlers, but those concerned are keen to recover them - they were of sentimental value and some had been nurtured for many years. The items were last seen on the Upper Dart, in the vicinity of Euthanasia Falls or Pandora's Box, and are mostly Pride, with some Ego also reported missing. Contact whitewater@maidstonecanoeclub.net with any information - thanks ;-)



The keen-eyed among you will have noticed that this is not Lee Valley at all. But Michaela really did do the course!

Lee Valley - Intensive Course

... cont'd from page 3

first capsize of the weekend-unintentionally getting myself stuck in the little stopper at the bottom of the course-apparently I surfed it quite well, but I'm not sure if counts if I was trying to get out. Nevertheless I got out (upside down and swimming) with quite a bit of hyperventilating, but my next two swims weren't as much of a shock and I stayed pretty warm.

We finished off the day trying some breaking in and out, before heading in for a recap and debrief. I had a very enjoyable first day and felt my confidence grow on the water.

Day 2, and we were down to just 2 of us on the course, which made for an intense day of coaching. We started again in the lake, practicing paddling on one side and bow rudders, before heading up the legacy loop to where we had ended the day yesterday, again practicing ferry gliding and breaking in and out. I managed my first capsize of the day in the eddy- must remember to keep my edge up. With just 2 of us, we got a lot of practice.

Over lunch we headed out to watch some of MCCs paddlers on the Olympic course.

After lunch we headed back out on the legacy, a bit higher up and after a dubious look seal launch into an eddy we were back to practicing break in and out. Our instructor set up a little route to get into the 3 eddies on the little stretch of

the loop we were on. The coach went through how to use the eddy to get into position to break in, which was pretty useful as I had spent a bit of time spinning around.

I took my second swim, breaking in on the eddy line, and much to the amusement of everyone else ended up in the other side of the course to my boat, with several suggests that I would have to swim across, before my coach sent it over to me.

By the end I was managing to get into 2 out of 3 most of the time, but was chuffed to get them all on one run down.

Brilliant weekend, with so much to practice and learn. Looking forward to the next one!

By Michaela Wragg

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Jez getting stuck in at Lee Valley, on one of the numerous trips there this winter. Join the whitewater mailing list to find out when these short-notice trips happen - mail whitewater@maidstonecanoeclub.net

Bryn & Sandra at the World Masters

... cont'd from page 3

point starting and by first portage he'd overtaken one or two. I tried to take some photos and I got this rather long shot of his first portage and the camera flashed, no more space, so I was frantically trying to take off old photos and somehow, I managed to miss him coming through on the next two portages goodness knows how they ran right in front of us! So, unfortunately, we have no photos of his race or of him wearing a British team vest!! I'll never live it down. Believe me, supporting isn't easy and I'm absolutely useless at it.

On the last portage, Teresa, who was kindly seconding Bryn, reported that when he got out of his boat the wind was so strong it nearly took his boat away but thanks to the way it is his habit of holding on to his paddle he was able to hold on to his boat. In a later race a South African was not so lucky and had to take a swim to retrieve his boat, his team teased him about being the best tri-athlete in their team.

Then of course all the others had finished and there were just the last few in Bryn's race and apart from the one paddler in the water, there was just Bryn on the course, I was hurting more than he was I think because he looked fine and Theresa said what we were all thinking "he'll finish". I remembered the old joke from Tonbridge marathon days, 'is the boat broke, no, so why wouldn't I finish? I had asked him if he found his age was beginning to have an effect and he said not in his endurance, he felt he could stay as long as anyone but the youngsters have the edge on him when it comes to speed. The funny thing was Mary won the gold and when they train together, they are pretty equal sometimes Mary wins sometimes Bryn does. I just thought the last two days and lack of sleep had taken too much out of him. What we didn't realise was that the wind had come up on the far side of the lake and conditions were pretty tough up there and Bryn had stopped to stay with an Australian lady, who was in the water, until the safety crew arrived apparently she'd hired a boat for the race and it was a bit too tippy for her. He was actually paddling smoothly and he did 2 hours 3 mins, for the 19km and before he started he thought it was an 18 km race and was hoping to get in under the 2 hours. So he actually did as good a time as he could have expected. He just had very strong competition.

Bryn's opinion on the race? 'I had a

cont'd on page 5 ...

Bryn & Sandra at the World Masters

... cont'd from page 4

good race the boat is definitely the right one for me, I made a mistake not having a camel pouch, I lost time at the feed stations and the warm head wind that got up during the last laps were really too strong for me. Hey, I've only been paddling 3 years and I've just completed a world championship race, I'm not crying. Admit it, I'm the 22nd best paddler in the world in my age group! It was an excellent experience, now next year ...' (Who said that? Don't go there...)

When he had finished and we'd supported the prize giving and Bryn had had a shower we went for lunch. Bryn was entitled to free lunch and dinner as a competitor and we had decided that paying for me to join him would be our best option. It was a rather long walk for me and I sat outside while Bryn paid for my lunch, he was rather a long time because true to form there was a mix up with the booking for the Australian ahead of him anyway the three of us went to the dining area proudly brandishing meal tickets. We were refused entry because it was now 2.05 and unbeknown to us and apparently to the staff issuing vouchers, dinner finished at 2. Bryn and the Aussie went back to where they had got their vouchers and a lady sallied forth to do battle with the catering staff, who were not happy. As Bryn said there's food left and there are people who've paid for said food what's to work out? The meal might not have been anything special but very welcome at that point.

After all the drama time to enjoy the rest of the racing. I'm afraid I missed the paracanoeists because I was asleep in the car! Bryn does the racing and I'm the one who gets exhausted.

In the evening there was to be a braai at 5 according to the notes. Not wanting to be late we were there at 5.10 picked up a drink and got shouted at! There were private stall holders all round the mess tent who obviously weren't going to sell anything all the time free food was in the offing and had been promised that the free food wouldn't be served before 6. So we sat down and waited, I saw some people getting theirs before 6 and said I'm sorry but I don't want to be too late again. Bryn said if anyone else tells me I can't eat I'm going to biff them one. Not the sort of language I'm used to hearing from my, oh so sociable hubby.

The first team I had noticed was the South Africans. I probably would have done anyway being me but they were really impressive. There were about 150 of them all in very smart kit which

was immediately recognisable. Bryn had recognised the name of one of the team as someone who went to his school but thought it must be a different person because he wasn't the right age. However, guess what? Yes, admin had got it wrong again, he was listed in the wrong age group. Bryn got talking to another SA and found they had swum competitively at school and had probably faced each other on the rugby pitch because he had attended the Anglican equivalent, of Bryn's school. Sometimes



Mary Parry collected Gold in her K1 class

the world seems quite small.

The Australians also sent a large team of well turned out paddlers in easily recognisable kit it was really nice to see.

The Spanish red and white really stood out very smart and very successful, in the K1 ladies categories on the Tuesday the Spanish team had a member and sometimes more than one on the podium every race! They had winners in all categories. In the men's K2 two SA teams had a Spanish team between them and there was another Spanish team ahead and they provided the closest most exciting race of the day. Unfortunately (who said that) the Spanish got gold and silver and SA a bronze, but all paddled brilliantly, one of those times when it's a pity there has to be a loser.

We had seen the British team's boats arrive very neatly stacked on a trailer all boats covered in colours matching the van. Looked very professional and Bryn wanted to have his photo taken with it but when we looked for signs of the team

there was nothing, no uniform kit or anything. When you saw, red, white or blue or any combination of the 3, it could be British, French or even German, none of them had a recognisable kit. A pity, looked unprofessional, disrespectful almost. However a Brit did take a gold in the men's K1. The French also had a gold in one of the K2's.

I can't remember the age category but I do remember the two gentlemen paddlers the one in the back was a real character, always a happy smile and he couldn't resist reacting with the crowd when they cheered him through the portages.

Norway and Denmark have done quite well but again no recognisable set kit. The Japanese have brought a coach load all very smart in black and red.

I saw a Latvian lady receive a silver medal. She looked rather cute in purple culottes the same colour as her shawl? When she joined her fellow medalists for the photo she rolled out her 'shawl' hung it from her arm – her flag. She stood there proudly for the photos and didn't move when the announcer said 'thank you ladies' three times he said it and still she stood. I thought good for you, you've done well, enjoy it.

Congratulations Mary on your gold for your fantastic paddling. We don't speak Spanish but soon found out that we only had to mention Mary's name to get a positive response from the Spanish team. Oh Mary, strong lady she is our hero!

Day 3: The K2s

South African and Spanish teams very prominent today and Mary won another gold, in the ladies K2, with a Russian partner who she'd never met and couldn't communicate with, obviously this can work sometimes! Why are we always saying communication is so important, ask Mary it was pretty hard work we thought she was going to physically lift her partner out of the boat at one time. Then the team leader put pressure on Mary to enter the mixed K2 race in her age group, saying you two have a medal, it's only fair to let this paddler win a medal. At this point, Bryn realised that Mary's partner for the ladies K2 with her partner, and Mary with her new partner were the only entrants for the race so if he could find a lady his age with a boat, they would only have to complete the course to win a medal!! Unfortunately, it was too late to find such a partner, if only we'd bought the K2 with us! I said well you don't really want a medal like that, it's meaningless, but that's not true, because there are many of us who couldn't enter a world championship canoe race and they were already better than those who didn't make the effort. Also let's face it, it

cont'd on page 6 ...

committee Meet a paddler

John Simmonds is one of the longest-serving members of the Club, and has been passionate whitewater paddler for over 30 years. We caught up with him over a sociable pint.

Mark: So, how long have you been paddling for?

John: I have been paddling since I was twelve. That is 35 years ago.

Mark: And you've been paddling continuously for all that time?

John: Unfortunately, yes! I started with the Scouts – did my one and two star – that's how I got into it, really. The first time I ever went to Scouts, I went paddling. But the thing is, after that, where else do you go? Luckily at my school, Cranbrook, the PE teacher was a paddler. He was what is now a Level 3 coach. Whereas most people would just have a little experience paddling, we were shooting the Usk and Wye, the Teign, and



A baby-faced John on the Etive.

grade 2-3 water. With my school, every Wednesday, I was paddling at Bewl, or over at Yalding. And that's what kind of gave us the bug really. And our teacher really encouraged it, and he was quite a non-conforming teacher – one of those who would go against the grain and do things outside the box. Now, you couldn't do any of that – Health and Safety, they really struggle to take kids out. In those days you could just load a minibus up with people and say "right, we're going to Wales". And we'd just go to Symmond's Yat and paddle there. And then, of course, when you leave school, there's that shock – there's a void. Where do you go? Because with Scouts or with the school, you get forced into it – it's a regular commitment, every Wednesday you go to the meeting and you do it. But when you finish that, there's nothing, is there? So that's when I looked around, because I wanted to carry it on. By then I was rolling and paddling grade 3 water, so I did a trip with Bowle's to Dorset, and we did some the Upper Wye, grade 3/4

cont'd on page 8 ...

Bryn & Sandra at the World Masters

... cont'd from page 5

would have been nice to say, I went to the masters world canoe championships and I won a medal in the mixed K2s. Frustration!

The presentation ceremony ran over an hour late and we didn't leave for our dinner till 7.30 and dinner was set to finish at 8. I crossed my fingers that no-one would come between my hubby and his dinner again.

Free Day

Well we got our dinner but being late the pasta and rice had all gone, so we ended up with, runny bolognaise or chicken sauce, cold meat, tomato and cucumber and no pudding – what is this new trend of no puddings. Come on kids, admit it, I would never have given you dinner without pudding!

No racing today, so we went sightseeing. Brandenburg am der Havel is a big city in a beautiful spot. Of course I couldn't do much running around but I sat in this square which has been built on a spot levelled during the 2nd World War and felt really comfortable people coming and going, leaving their bikes without having to lock them, posties weighed down with massive bags of post, and a lorry carrying out some really tricky manoeuvres to water the flowers, highly decorated trolley buses going past, it had the feeling of a village years ago.

The city was a mixture of old and new, beautiful spots and parts waiting for demolition like so many cities. There was no reference to its history and when I returned to UK and read it up I was mortified to read of its horrific past. Hats

off to the people who have stayed and have turned their city into a lovely welcoming place to be today.

Saturday

On our trip to the venue we noticed that there were road works causing awful traffic jams in the opposite lane for people leaving Germany. Worried that if we were caught in similar jams on our way home we would miss the train, we again decided to leave early in the hope that the traffic would not have had time to build up. This worked well and we were able to catch an earlier train. In spite of it running late and thanks partly to the hours time difference we were able to pick our dog, Buzz up that evening instead of leaving it till the Sunday.

One slight niggle, Bryn travelled through Euro Tunnel, four times in a fortnight and it was only on time once. Once he was held up in the queue lined up waiting to get on the train, i.e. after the buffet area from 7 in the evening till midnight! Not a good record.

Well, it seems a long time ago now, but it was a lovely experience. Now next year the championships are in Pietermaritzburg SA and we have been saying we would like to go to SA next year (its 2 years since we've seen Bryn's mum). Maybe we could get tickets a bit cheaper if we got a team together, one of Mary's Spanish colleagues says she'll even paddle for the UK if it means she can get to the championships ...

By Sandra Price

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D-W Support **Easter Weekend**

The idiots in the skinny boats are out on the river at all time of the day and night, doing silly distances and even running along the bank with their boats on their shoulders. The Devizes to Westminster 125 mile race has a proud place the MCC club history with a number of team wins over the years. This Easter weekend Paul Curtis and Bryn Price will be trying to complete the one day race and Mary Parry, our Lady from Spain, will be taking on the 4 day K1 race. If any of you want to come and cheer them on or even help with the seconding please speak to Bryn or Paul.

Invicta Grammar Girls Paddling GCSE

A few of you may be aware that the club has been hosting and delivering training sessions for a group of young ladies from Invicta Grammar School for Girls on a Thursday afternoon, with numbers ranging between five and eleven.

These racing boat sessions have been taking place over the last few months in the dark and on some of the coldest evenings of the winter. Despite the conditions the girls have been keen to get on the water and all have made good progress and some in particular are showing great potential.

Coaching and rescue cover has been provided by myself, Bryn Price, Ian Dan, Ewan Simmonds, Joel Crampton, and initially Alan Nevard who initiated the club working with the girls.

It is anticipated that the girls will be

with us for the forthcoming year and there is the possibility of a new group taking up the sport in September as part of their GCSE PE syllabus.

These sessions will hopefully have a positive effect on the numbers of youngsters joining the club in the forthcoming years. This is something that myself, and the rest of the committee are keen to promote.

Finally I would like to thank all those who have given their time so far. If anybody else has any spare time on a Thursday at 4pm to 6pm, your help would be greatly appreciated. Perhaps we could even get you into a stable racing boat.

By Brian Williams (Acting chairman)
chairman@maidstonecanoeclub.net



Storm Doris necessitated an indoor session last week, but the girls have been out in all kinds of weather this winter.

foot kayak, I set off for Folkestone.

The first day was cancelled due to gale force winds and torrential rain, a part of the course is knowing when to stop, or not even start. A lesson we should all take on board, especially following the recent loss of another paddler in Scotland.

Having thought this course would be a valuable learning experience I persuaded Keith to tag along too. On the water we practiced our skills at edging, turning and ruddering, some of this I found quite confusing as you seem to do the opposite of the white water technique. Eventually I cracked it and managed to follow the line as we snaked our way along the coast.

For the 3* assessment the water has to be at an acceptable state of roughness. The first day was fine, lumpy enough for the training but not so lumpy to be frightening. As I had decided not to be assessed, mainly as I can only do half a roll, I declined the capsize and rescue training. However sitting observing how people rescued and the techniques used was invaluable.

On our assessment day, the sea started flat calm and we were worried that the assessment wouldn't take place as there was no challenge. As the day wore on the wind got up and the sea became more than suitable for 3*. Having practiced various towing techniques, including towing other paddlers away from rocks and hazards it was time for those being assessed to do their rescues, watching these happen I decided that when it's warmer I will do a rescue workshop as these are invaluable skills.

Hopefully I will get to practice the paddling techniques in Scotland this year.

Thanks to Rob for hosting the course and to Phil for persuading me it would be a good idea.

By Catherine Dacey
catherine.dacey@maidstonecanoeclub.net

3* Sea Kayaking Course

As a paddler who goes on the sea, I thought it might be a good idea to improve my skills and gain a better understanding of how sea boats work.

Normally my paddles on the sea are with the very experienced guidance of Geoff Orford and the Scotland Paddlers. The course was run off the coast at Hythe with Rob Davies. It all sounded great except it was in November and December!

Following a very tiring pool session where I attempted and failed to roll a 17-



Catherine paddling past the impressive South Stack, on a relatively calm day.

committee Meet a paddler

... cont'd from page 6

stuff. So then I phoned up the BCU access officer for London South East Region, Paul Newman, and that was it! He said to come down to St Peter's Street on Sunday. But then it was just a Portacabin, and it was just a mud car park, and everybody just met up. We used to meet in the car park and about 10 o'clock, and then Geoff Orford, Mike Lambourne, Paul Newman who are in the Club now, used to get on the river



Same boat, same rivers: John in his purple Spud on the Gyr in the French Alps.

and paddle up to Teston and back, and it was like Geoff does now – just up and down. And it got your mileage up. And then the beauty of what happened then at Maidstone was it just so happened that there were 5 or 6 other people my age who had just joined. A lot of them were through Scouts, or Cadets or something, and they all joined at the same time. We were all the same age, and a similar kind of level. It reminds me of how some of the newer and younger members are at the Club now. But instead of just having a couple and having to rely on older people, you had 5 or 6 people who were all up for it, and that's what made all the difference. We did the odd whitewater trip with the Club, but we just went and paddled on our own. And that was what really pushed it up.

Mark: And was whitewater paddling what you'd always wanted to do?

John: I think so. In those days it was

general-purpose boats, or K1, and with the general-purpose boats you could go and dob up the river, but you really wanted to do white water. It was with school really – you looked forward to that trip on the Teign, or the Usk or the Wye, and you wanted more of it. But when you get a bunch of like-minded people who are all paddling that kind of grade, who all go up to the Trweryn for a good weekend, then you're up for it and it just gets that "what's next, and what's next after that" feeling. I can see that coming in the Club now, whereas 5 or 6 years ago it wasn't so much like that. But there's definitely an eagerness in the Club now to shoot bigger & better water.

Mark: What's the best trip you've done in your paddling career?

John: I suppose the best water is French Alpine water. But it's the trips where you have the laughs. We did a really good trip to Scotland – did a lot of the West coast rivers. Trips to Wales, where you'd phone up on a Thursday – water's running – drive up on a Friday, kip in a Forestry Commission car park, paddle a couple of rivers. Paddle the Figwy or something like that – those are the ones you really remember, rather than the organised trips where the Club goes and does the Exe or whatever. It's when your all a bunch of mates, last-minute just go and do something. But the best water has to be the French Alps. But again, when we used to paddle we always used to paddle as much as we could – not a half-day, it was always a full day. When we went to the Alps, in 14 days – considering we took the wives with us, so we had to have a couple of days where we weren't paddling – we paddled 11 or 12 rivers. And they were all different rivers – we never paddled the same thing twice. It was the same up in Scotland.

Not ticking rivers off, but just to experience something different. If we paddled for half a day, we'd look for a little run somewhere to put on, or go and inspect something for the next day. We were always really up for it – there was not a lot of faffing going on! When you were paddling, that rubbed off there as well – once you've got up to it, you'd boat-lead everything. If there were some nasty bits, the day before or as we were driving up to it, we'd walk in and look at the grade 5 bits or whatever, so that when we got there we could do it by boat.

Mark: What's been the biggest change in whitewater paddling over the last thirty-odd years?

John: What we did, and what we do – nothing really, in terms of skill level. Boat technology has changed a hell of a lot. When I first started paddling whitewater it was fibreglass boats, and it was just coming to the stage of buying off-the-



Old-school playboating at Holme Pierpoint

shelf boats from boats you actually made. You had people like Capel Canoes, who had a set of moulds and if you wanted a boat they'd go and glass one up for you. That's a big change. And with that comes a different type of paddling – when you're hitting big drops and things, the boat gets you out of a lot of it. When I was paddling big whitewater, you'd half expect to be munched, because you'd get sucked back in. And you had to side-surf stoppers all the time, whereas now the boat gets you through a lot of it. It's definitely moved people up to higher grades quicker. Other than that, it's the same. I was looking through some old photos the other day, and there's me at Holme Pierpoint backlooping a boat and doing exactly what people are doing at the moment. It's always been done, to varying degrees – the playboating has come on more – but the paddling side of it is the same. The boat technology has made it easier to get to the higher grades.

Mark: What about kit? Have you got a favourite bit of kit that you've owned?

John: Probably! Something shaped like a potato! [John famously still paddles his trusty purple Eskimo Topo, circa 1980, or the "Spud" as it was better known]. I paddled a Burn the other day, and I did like it, and I paddled a Mamba on the last trip we did, but it's just the Spud – I think my legs are shaped to it! As for personal kit – we never had the kit. When I paddled with the Scouts, it was a cagoule, a pair of plimsols and a woolly jumper, that was it. Helmets – there was only ever an Ace helmet or a Roma, which was a full-face helmet. People adapted polo cages and things like that if they were shooting bigger stuff.

Buoyancy aids – BAs were still the old-

committee Meet a paddler

... cont'd from page 9

shaped BA. The emphasis on equipment has changed a lot – you see people come to the Club and they have £1000-worth of gear, and in 18 month's time they're not at the Club anymore! It's gutting when I see that – the Club's got some fantastic kit, and there's no reason why anybody can't progress up.

Other than the boat, I was taught that the first bit of gear you should really buy is your paddle. That's what powers you through the water – without a blade, you can't paddle. You can paddle any type of boat – but it's always the same blade. The outfitting – things have changed on that front as well. Look at how you tie yourself into the boat, how you become part of the boat, with ratchets and things like that – we just gripped our legs harder!

As for rescue gear – I've still got the old throw rope I've had for ages. It's not long really, it just gets me out of trouble. The only bit of rescue gear which I think is

fantastic is a sling and a pulley. With a blade and a throw-rope you can get out of most things, but if you've got stuff pinned and it's in water the only other thing I've used in anger is a pulley. Other than that you can paddle with anything really!

Mark: You're on the committee. What do you do there?

John: Anything really! Anything you feel like. When you're on the committee, it's because you want to put something back into the Club. It's not just being the paddler and going on the trips, you become a member of the community and put yourself up there because you want to put more back into the Club. I think that's important. So if I can help, I'll do it – with my line of work, the printing side of things I'll do – it's what I do for a living. I've been a member now for 28 or 29 years, and having taken that much out of the Club I think it's important to put back into it. Especially with my son now being a member.

Mark: Why do you paddle?

John: Why do I paddle? I suppose it's historical, because I started young and I enjoyed it. I enjoy team sports – football and things like that – but I've never been

that good at it, I've never felt it's as important as personal skills and motivation. In a sport like canoeing, you're the boss. You're as good as the things you can do, it's your achievement, and if you prefer solo sports – what a great sport! It's different, you're out in the open air all the time – it's a lot to do with that, outdoor pursuits and so on, climbing and canoeing. You're on your own – when you're on that river in the pouring rain and you're on your own, there's nobody else about – it's fantastic! You're in control, you're doing something that other people can't do – I like it! And it is personal achievement, it's nice to achieve something and be moving up. That's why I love shooting new rivers – if I go on a trip and shoot a new river, I've had a good trip. Even if it's an easy river, it doesn't matter – it's just something new, something different.

Mark: And finally, where would you like to be in 5 years, paddling-wise?

John: I want to get back into paddling the big stuff again. With Ewan [John's son] paddling now, I want to him experience what I've experienced, as you do as a parent, and he's really keen and I know he can go a long way and get a lot out of canoeing. At the same time, I'd like to get back into that side of it myself. I've got one more river in the UK I want to cross off, and other than that I'm quite happy paddling anything really! It's that sense of achievement. Fairy Glen is my last river that I really want to tick off. The really big stuff, Nepalese or Icelandic or Norwegian kind of stuff doesn't enthrall me. I'd rather do technical high-grade paddling. When it's massive volume and you see idiots on Youtube going off huge waterfalls – I just think "why?!". Technical little rivers, a few waterfalls on it – fantastic stuff!

Mark: Thanks for taking the time to talk to us.

By Mark Corti and John Simmonds

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Maidstone Canoe Club, after a hard day's paddling Alpine whitewater

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Featured Upcoming Events

Please see the website for full details of these and other upcoming events, trips, tours & training. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter to be notified when new events are added to the Calendar.

Sunday, March 5th, 10am: Alternate Litter Pick

The "Official" Club litter pick is next week, and we'd really like your help - see below. This weekend is the Great British Spring Clean and we'll be helping the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership. Please contact Geoff for details (memsec@maidstonecanoeclub.net) - please note no paddling at the Club due to rowing race!

Sunday, March 5th: No Paddling at the Club

The rowing Club have their annual Spring Head today - no paddling at the Club. See the Facebook pages and website for any alternate venues.

Sunday, March 12th: Litter Pick

Club Litter Pick. Please come along and help clean up our little stretch of the Medway.

Sunday, March 19th, 9am: Cake Paddle!

Club member Lisa will be running the London Marathon this year, and is hoping Club member and friends will help her fundraising by coming for a paddle and cake sale! The paddle is from Tonbridge to Yalding - please let Lisa know approx numbers in advance on lisaa.taylor@virgin.net

Friday, March 24th, 7pm: AGM

Please come along and make your views known - snacks and drinks provided. Please do vote (or stand!) for the committee - contact Michaela on secretary@maidstonecanoeclub.net

Saturday, March 25th, 8pm: Pool Session

Clean boats only, please - boat cleaning 4-5pm at the Club if you want to use a Club boat. £6 members, £8 non-members. Coaching, advice, and general hilarity provided free.

Sunday, March 26th, 10:15am: Paddle to Strood. With Meridian CC

Meet at The Strand car park at 10:15am, launching at 10:45am to catch the tides. Bring packed lunch! 9.5 miles total paddle, hopefully all with the tide - come and explore the Estuary! Contact Geoff, memsec@maidstonecanoeclub.net if you're planning to come.

Saturday, April 1st, 7pm: Banff Mountain Film Festival

Probably the best outdoor film festival in the world comes to Tunbridge Wells! Always a great night out - contact Mark, mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net if you're coming!

Sunday, April 2nd, 8:45am: River Mole

Lovey paddle through the Mole Valley. A slow-flowing river with a couple of small features, perfect for those who haven't paddled moving water before. Organised by Geoff, memsec@maidstonecanoeclub.net

Saturday, April 22nd, 8pm: Pool Session

Larkfield Leisure Centre as usual. Boats will be inspected before entry to the pool. £6 members, £8 non-members.

Sunday, April 23rd, 10am: Demo Day with Kent Canoes

Usual selection of top-quality kit and free advice from your friendly local canoe shop at the Club today.

Sunday, April 30th: Maidstone Marathon

New date for our main event this year. Helpers urgently needed - please speak to Bryn, bryn.price@maidstonecanoeclub.net or any racer if you can help, or would like to enter. No regular paddle today!

Saturday, May 20th, 8pm: Pool Session

Warm. Clean. Lovely :-)) Don't forget to wash out your boats! £6 members, £8 non-members.