

# NEWS LETT ER

VOLUME 7  
ISSUE 4  
WINTER 2017

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](mailto: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 February, 2018.



Mark Corti, Editor  
[newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net)

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Coach training day on the Medway this autumn. Steve C is giving me advice on how not to fall off while taking photos ...

## From the Editor

**H**appy New Year! As the keen-eyed among you may have noticed, this newsletter is wildly late, for which my apologies.

I was busy at work at the beginning of December which held things up for a couple of weeks, and once the seasonal carousel of nativity plays, Christmas drinks, tree-buying, tree-decorating and all the rest had started there was no chance of getting the newsletter out before the New Year.

Kayaking can be a little like that, unfortunately – it often takes lower priority to the other pressures in our lives. Work, family, friends (you have some non-kayaking friends, right?) - it can be hard to carve out the time to go paddling. Of course, you come to all the Club paddles on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings – well, nearly all of them. Sometimes there's that big family occasion that you just have to go to. Or you have to work late, or the shed needs painting. Or it's raining, you're a bit tired, and an extra

half-an-hour in bed would be really nice ...

Carving out a whole weekend (or even a week!) to go on a paddling trip is even trickier. But with a bit of forward planning, it can be done! This year, why not make it your New Year's Resolution to come on a kayaking trip (or more kayaking trips, if you've already got things planned)? Being a member of Maidstone Canoe Club makes it easy! Come sea paddling in Poole (or even Scotland). Dip your toes in moving water on the Dart or Tryweryn. Stretch your paddling legs on the calm waters of the Norfolk Broads. There's lots going on. Take a felt-tip pen and mark the time out in your diary today – you'll enjoy it, I promise!

Anyway, there's lots in this issue, including a new feature - interview with a paddling professional - so I hope you enjoy it! As always, a huge thank-you to our contributors – it's you guys who make the newsletter what it is!

Mark Corti, Editor  
[newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net)





Niki lining up that all-important boof as she goes over the edge at Low Force waterfall on the Tees,. It's worth paddling, if only to get the Facebook profile pic!

## Time for Tees

At the end of October, Bill, Niki, Richard, John, Andy, Tom and I trekked up North to spend the weekend paddling the Tees.

Armed with roll mats and sleeping bags, fully expecting to spend the weekend on the living room floor, we arrived at Bill and Niki's friend's house to find we had our own bedrooms and a drying room- it turned out to be a very luxurious few days.

On Saturday, we paddled the lower Tees, from Barnard Castle to Winston Bridge (famous for a Spitfire flying under it!). It was a lovely first paddle for the weekend with a few features. The most notable being Abbey Rapids, which- after some tips from Niki and Bill- we smashed. To be topped off by John, who had been running safety, doing an incredibly high seal launch, which needless to say didn't end the right way up.

In the afternoon we headed to the upper Tees, which was a short, but adrenaline pumping section of river (for me anyway) where I managed to beach myself on a rock half way down. And skilfully (walked) around the Dog Leg rapid - although I did get to watch everyone else fly down with some nice boofs going on. The day end with a trip

off of Lower Force waterfall, as I went over the top, the thought "Oh that's a long way down". I capsized at the bottom, being treated to a bit of a washing machine experience and then a swim at the bottom.

It was a brilliant day, topped off by a lovely home cooked roast beef dinner courtesy of Mary.

On Sunday we headed off to the Greta. The Greta was a beautiful run

down a continuous grade 3 river with high sides and lots of trees.

Lovely fun weekend. I would love to go again.

Thanks to Bill and Niki for organising and for everyone for making it a great weekend.

By Michaela Wragg

[secretary@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:secretary@maidstonecanoeclub.net)



... and she's absolutely smashed it. Perfect line :-)





*Lunch in the sunshine after a tricky take-out!*

# Cuckmere Valley Tidal Tour

**E**leven intrepid MCC paddlers ventured down to the Seven Sisters Country Park for this tour, the 3rd successive year we have done it.

Those who participated are in the photo except Trish who was on the phone and me, behind the camera. I almost got the tide times right, perhaps 30 minutes too early with the planning but no great

problem on the day. Mark and I seal launched down the wooden steps onto the tidal section on the outward run and managed to stay upright! Everyone else made a more sedate entry. Then on up the Cuckmere with the current (I think!) in the sunshine. Past the White Horse carved in the Chalk hillside to our left, then up through a narrow section of reedbeds to Alfriston. Past the Church and under the white footbridge, we continued up to the barrier and fish pass shown in the second photo where we made a difficult get-out into the right-hand field for lunch. Stirling work by Barry pioneered the get-out, aided by Mark, Geoff and the others. We fed and watered in the autumn sunshine and waited for the tide to turn. The launch for the return was made much easier by seal launching down the bank through the reeds. The river, now much wider, delivered us safely back to our cars following an uneventful return paddle. It had been a long but rewarding day.

A big thank you from me to all who took part. Subject to finding suitable tide times on a Sunday, let's do it again next year!

*By Norman Brooks*  
[normanwbrooks@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:normanwbrooks@yahoo.co.uk)



*Apparently the steps are quite slippery.*



# professional Meet a paddler

*This is the first in an occasional series of interviews with professional paddlers - people who make their living, one way or another, from paddlesport. We caught up with Andrew Bonney, one of the best-known whitewater coaches in the South West, at the Adventure Paddler's Weekend last month, and talked to him about what motivates him in his paddling and coaching. Andrew offers coaching, paddlesport awards, and trips both here in the UK and abroad - check him out at <http://www.abckayaking.com/>*

**Mark:** So how long have you been paddling?

**Andrew:** Since I was nine years old. I've just hit 30!

**Mark:** And did you get into paddling from your parents?

**Andrew:** No, my best friend's brother got me into surf kayaking. So that's where I started - I started surf kayaking, and rivers kind of followed on from that!

**Mark:** What kind of paddling do you mostly do now?

**Andrew:** Now, it's whitewater for myself and work, surf kayaking for myself and competition, sea kayaking if there's no decent surf or no water in the river. I'll get on a SUP - I've just started doing that, to put myself back in the "beginner" stage, so I know how it feels a bit more.

**Mark:** When did you know that you wanted to work in the outdoor industry?

**Andrew:** When I was probably 14, I think. I decided that normal mainstream education wasn't my way. I've always been practically minded, and kayaking was my thing. I went to Duchy College and trained there for 3 years, and then I went out to work, up and down the country all over the shop, going abroad, this that & the other, and then it wasn't until I was probably 21 I did my 5\* in France and then Simon Westgarth [Ed: founder of Gene17 coaching] asked me to come and train. And it was from then that my true whitewater kayaking career kicked off, once I'd been trained by him. I was already coaching and doing stuff, but it was his mentorship, in a way, and the kick-up that he gave me - to go out and paddle and go and do - that ultimately put me where I am now.

**Mark:** You're obviously very passionate about your paddling - but why do you coach?

**Andrew:** Someone said to me the other day, I get paid to play! I get to go kayaking and get paid for it. But ultimately, I love the sport. I enjoy watching people enjoy it - but more so, watching them succeed. So if I can help them to stop coming out their boat, push themselves, or do anything to help them



*The most important thing about being a whitewater kayaker: make it look cool!*

enjoy the sport more, the way I love it, then I'll do it.

**Mark:** Do you have any advice for anyone thinking of paddlesport as a career?

**Andrew:** They'll probably already be a kayaker - that's key. Go and do some coaching qualifications - go and get the basics. But truthfully? Go and paddle. Leave England - for whitewater especially - go and travel the world for three or four years, then come back and hit your qualifications, the high-end qualifications. Then you won't have to say a word, because you'll prove it. A lot of people have to talk - they shouldn't have to, their kayaking should do it for them. And it's the paddlers coming through, which turn into coaches, are the ones who will be succeeding.

**Mark:** And finally, can you offer one piece of advice for someone just starting out as a recreational paddler? We love a bit of free coaching!

**Andrew:** Crack your forwards paddling. If you can put your boat where you want it, you can get to wherever you need to get to. Forwards paddling and running the river in a zigzag, not straight down the middle. But forwards paddling is ultimately where I spend most of my time with every client.

**Mark:** Thanks for your time, and good luck!

*By Mark Corti and Andrew Bonney  
[abckayaking.com](http://www.abckayaking.com)*



*Andrew helping one of his students hit the line during a coaching session on one of Dartmoor's beautiful rivers.*





*Am I the only one to notice that there's no actual paddling in these pictures? I'm sure they did do some paddling. Well, almost completely sure ...*

## Our Amazing Ardeche Adventure 2017

**L**ast year, Richard, Bill and I took an impromptu trip to the Ardèche region in France.

We took one vehicle and a bike and booked our accommodation as we drove down. We ended up in a rustic cottage in the mountains. We drove there on some hairy mountain roads, but the following day found a much less scary route down to Aubenas, a big town where we were able to buy everything we needed. River levels were low, but at least one of the rivers is dam release so we had enough to paddle. Our first river trip was the least enjoyable of the week. We'd been to the tourist information and we were on our way to a recommended river, when we spotted a bunch of full-face helmeted German paddlers getting on a river under a bridge, so we turned around and went to join them. They told us where the get out was and said that the river was low but runnable. Maybe something was lost

in translation, but it was the lowest, scippiest, heave-yourself-over-the-rocks river we have ever run. In parts, you could have actually cycled down it. It made the Dart on a scrape look like fun! It probably would have been a lovely paddle with a bit of water, but we were all relieved when it flowed, well, trickled out into the Ardèche river.

Some of the canoe chutes are amazing and more like something you would find at a theme park rather than on a river. It's a bit unnerving when you can't see the end of the chute. We didn't just plop into the water at the end, we flew! Looking back on it, my favourite memory from the trip was the one where things didn't go quite the way we had expected. When we drove up the valley, we could see the river for most of the way. We had stopped and looked at one section which looked slightly more challenging, but decided that it all looked well within our abilities. What we hadn't allowed for at that point, was that we were way higher than the river. When we got down there, the features were so much bigger than we had anticipated, especially the boulder garden that had looked quite pretty from the road! There was some fabulous rock weaving, flaring, head dipping and river bed inspection on our way down. It was exhilarating and great fun. When we were near the end of the section, we found that most of a canoe chute to get down a river-wide ledge had been washed away and there was nowhere obvious to climb down. We ended up sliding down a dodgy

bit of concrete onto some rocks, but it worked.

Having one vehicle and a bike worked well; Bill got fitter while Richard and I topped up our tans. We enjoyed pleasant sunshine most of the week, although a bit of overnight rain would have been appreciated. We also enjoyed ice cream, beer, cheese and an excellent meal in a newly-opened restaurant in Aubenas on our last night. We thought that the section of river through the town looked like it would be interesting with just a little more water. We had such a good time that we are planning to go again next year, however, this time we thought that we would book our accommodation a little sooner. At one point, it had looked like the three of us might end up sleeping in the van for the first night, with the three kayaks and a bike; definitely something to be avoided!

If anyone would like to join us on our next Ardèche Adventure (31st March to 7th April 2018,) please email [niki@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:niki@maidstonecanoecub.net) and I will be happy to discuss our plans with you. Obviously, accommodation and the number of vehicles would depend on whether anyone joins us. We plan to stay around Privas or maybe Aubenas again. You would need to be comfortable on grade 3 water and be flexible about what you paddle. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees of water levels, but we can hope.

By Niki Norman  
[niki@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:niki@maidstonecanoecub.net)

### Paddler's Breakfast

Once again, Lisa is supporting the Born Free Foundation by means of cookery! Join her for Full English breakfast in the Clubhouse after the paddle.

**Sunday, January  
14th**



# Austrian Shenanigans

**T**he winter of 2016/17 will be remembered by whitewater paddlers in Britain chiefly for the utter lack of water.

What little rain did fall seemed to pour down midweek, and was gone by the weekend when it might have been paddled upon. Most of the weekend trips were canceled, or at the least severely curtailed. It was thus more exciting than ever to have trips organised to the reliable, glacier-fed waters of Europe. The Club ran a week-long trip to Slovenia in May, and Bill & Niki headed to the Alps in August with many other Club members. Some paddling friends had invited me to join them in Austria, and so it was that Club members Rob, Lawrence & I found ourselves bowling along the autobahn at a stately 60 km/h, wipers going furiously, in a steady queue of traffic that lasted almost all the way to the Austrian Tyrol town of Landeck. The heavy traffic had added hours to our journey, and it was dark by the time we arrived at Camp Riffler, a perfect kayaker's campsite located at the confluence of two river sections. After an hour or so of wrestling with our palatial tent in the rain, we finally turned in about midnight.

The last time I'd paddled in Austria, the sun shone, the skies were blue, and the melting glaciers filled the rivers bank-full of clear blue water every day. Swim shorts and a t-shirt to keep the sun off was all the paddling gear you needed – as long as you didn't fall in. I had packed accordingly, and it was only Rob's prescient checking of the Tyrolean weather forecast the day before we left that warned me this time might not be the same. I had swiftly re-packed, and as I huddled in my fleece stuffing a dry-suit into the car on day 1, I was extremely grateful I had.

We paddled the Rosanna on the first day as a warm-up. An attractive grade 2/3 paddle, delayed slightly by the fact that the North Alps guide book is a decade old, and the recommended put-ins no longer exist (use the roadside parking just outside town instead). It was good to blow away the cobwebs after spending all of the previous day in the car, and we splashed down prettily for a couple of hours. On the way back we ran the Landeck Gorge section of the Inn, one of our two "home runs", a bouncy, big-volume grade 3 paddle. Lots of wave trains and holes to trip the unwary, but nothing that was going to cause real problems – a fantastic, fun paddle.



The following day we headed over to Switzerland to paddle a section of the Swiss Inn. Again the guidebook let us down, and we never did find an acceptable put-in. We eventually drove to another section a bit further down, Schuls Gorge, which I'd run before. Another lovely river, set deep in the picturesque Swiss mountains, and winding past a vast hunting lodge of the kind one could imagine Archduke Ferdinand spending his summers in before he was assassinated. The river is mostly grade 3, with a couple of grade 4 rapids, although at these levels this was probably an over-estimate.

Contrary to our regular experience here in Britain, heavy rain in Austria doesn't lead to good river levels. On the contrary – what you want is plenty of sunshine on the high glaciers, melting the winter snowfall and filling the rivers. What the rain does do is wash the fertile soil off the fields, and turn the waters a rich chocolate colour. Luckily, the paddleable sections of the Inn tend to be punctuated by hydro-electric power plants, and so there's always some water somewhere – they need to keep releasing it in order to keep the lights on.

At this point in the trip we discovered the excellent RiverApp app, which lists most of the rivers in the UK and Europe along with water levels where available and, importantly, Google Maps directions to the access and egress points. Thereafter our faff was greatly reduced – this is a fantastic app and I highly recommend it. It doesn't only list whitewater sections, but pretty much every section of paddleable water in Europe – do check it out.

Thereafter we paddled two rivers a day, upping the difficulty and paddling mostly solid class 4. Highlights included the Lower Oetz, an incredibly fast river which I last ran in spate. On that occasion it was a teeming maelstrom, running faster than you could sprint and solid class 4 from the put in – real eyes-on-stalks stuff, particularly once you know there's a guaranteed-lethal weir about halfway down which regularly swallows gear for weeks at a time. This time it was a more-sensible medium level, still fast, continuous and fun, but not so terrifying! (The weir is a mandatory portage at any level). Garsun Gorge on the Swiss Inn was another fantastic run, easing you in gently with a class 2/3 warmup before gradually steepening into a class 4 gorge, set in some of the loveliest scenery that Switzerland has to offer. We were grinning ear-to-ear on this one pretty much all the way down! Our other "home run", the Sanna, was another great run at the high level we ran it at, continuous, bouncy and with plenty of holes to trip the unwary! The day after Rob, Lawrence & I left, the rest of our group paddled it again, turning a corner to find a bulldozer parked in the middle of the biggest rapid, clearing a landslide – but that's another story ...

*By Mark Corti*  
[mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net)

