

# 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](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 August, 2018.



Mark Corti, Editor  
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Whitewater safety & rescue course in North Wales. Have you done yours recently? Full article page 2.

## From the Editor

**T**he Club is always buzzing at this time of year.

As I write this, there's a convoy of Club members driving south through France on their way to the turquoise waters and sunshine of Slovenia for a week of whitewater fun (fuelled mainly by cheap icecream and cheaper beer). There's another convoy of Maidstone paddlers heading northwards for a week of sea kayaking in the glorious surroundings of Arisaig in Scotland – less cheap icecream, but better whisky. Next weekend there are some people heading

westwards to the Tryweryn. I don't know of anyone heading eastwards to the Swale or the Medway Estuary or Westgate, but there's some great paddling there as well, and if you ask around on the Facebook group you'll probably find someone to come with you!

We're covering a wide range of topics this summer – as always, a huge thank-you to everyone who has contributed. If you've enjoyed the newsletter – or even if you haven't and think you could do better – then please do drop me a line and tell me about the paddling you've been doing. We can't put it together without you!

Mark Corti, Editor  
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# For The Safety Of Our Friends

**S**o I was at the start of my day whitewater kayaking on the River Dee, looking forward to another good day on the water. But right in front of us was a serious incident unfolding with a kayaker from another group stuck in a weir.

The rescue effort and subsequent first aid treatment from myself and the 20 something other kayakers on the bank and in the river was amazing. The quick reactions, the experience of people available and the determination to save a life gave this person the best chance of survival, but unfortunately it wasn't to be.

I am a kayaker and open boater, with 18 years experience and this was a shock to see and be a part of. It lead me to question how and why it happened, in all accounts to an experienced kayaker, and how could I prevent something similar happening to myself or my friends.

Weirs are man-made structures which control water flow, made out of concrete they often are very uniform, and so is their stopper (recirculation of water), this makes it difficult for a swimmer to exit. Some weirs are always dangerous, some are safe and some become very dangerous as the water rises. The width of the Dee at that point and the horseshoe shape of the weir, hindered rescue of the kayaker. Once unconscious someone risked their own life to paddle into the weir, on a rope, capsize and grab the casualty. I'm not sure I would have had the skill or knowhow to be able to do this.

Kayaking is an adventure sport, which includes a number of risks including drowning. But only 4 people on average die from kayaking in the UK each year. The severity of hazards and risk of injury increase the harder the environment. So touring is relatively safe, whereas grade 4 whitewater kayaking has plenty of hazards and therefore a higher risk of injury or death. But that is not to say that

people don't die when touring and experience, environmental and situational awareness increases safety.

I think those of us who have been whitewater kayaking for a while will all have had a hairy moment or two and thought, "Phew, that was close". Then we



*Not just for whitewater paddlers. Horseshoe weir, where this incident took place, could easily be encountered in a*

all go to the pub and chat about it, and it becomes a rite of passage....you're not a whitewater paddler until you've had a close call. But these situations mean that something has gone wrong, we failed to avoid the hazards and someone was potentially put into a serious situation. We have to remember that whether we are touring, sea kayaking, marathon or whitewater paddling we are not just responsible for our own safety, but that of our peers.

Changing some of my equipment was the first port of call, for making my paddling safer. I upgraded my first aid kit, sorted my chest harness out on my

buoyancy aid and made sure I would never go paddling without a mobile phone.

My first aid was up to date, so I didn't need that. But what I did need was a re-cap on my whitewater safety and rescue (WWSR) skills as my last course was over 7 years ago. I booked one with some peers and headed back to north wales.

WWSR is a British Canoeing 2 day course and is essentially 2 days of messing about in boats and swimming in rivers, learning how to throw lines, chase boats, rescue people and equipment from pins, swim in whitewater, equipment choice. Another side to the course was the avoidance, how to avoid needing these skills in the first place, through good communication and river leadership. It was a great course which was very informative and good fun.

Safety courses such as this and the foundation safety and rescue (FSRT) are often thought of just pre-requisites for moving onto leadership and coaching. I disagree with this, they are open to everyone and should be thought of as a way of keeping our friends safe. Speak to Lee Horton about FSRT and First Aid Courses as he organises these for the club. There are plenty of companies that run WWSR, speak to myself or the coaching team for advice on these.

Just remember, to finish your day safely you need to make sensible decisions, not just for you, but for your peers, your family and your kids.

*Mary Cutts*

*BCU Level 3 Coach (Inland)*

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*Touring paddlers encounter weirs all the time. Would you know how to effect a rescue?*



# professional Meet a paddler

*As part of our ongoing series of interviews with paddlesport professionals, we spent some time with Sam Heaton, passionate paddler and the owner of everyone's favourite kayak shop - Kent Canoes*

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

**Sam:** Since I was about 14, so 16 years? Something like that.

**Mark:** And where did you first start?

**Sam:** My first start was Scouts, the same as everyone else's was! Doing little bits & pieces, learning to do my first whitewater on Symond's Yat and all of those bits & bobs. And then I didn't do it for a little while, and then my brother-in-law Paul, who used to be the manager here at Kent Canoes, starting doing it a bit more when I was about 14 or 15 and dragged me along. And I kept doing it!

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

**Sam:** Whatever's available. Being where we are it's mostly playboating stuff rather than anything else, but it's whatever's going, really. Little canoe trips, sea kayaking bits & pieces as well.. I do have access to a lot of toys so I can go and play with whatever I like, which is quite nice!

**Mark:** At what point did you decide you

wanted to make a career out of paddlesport?

**Sam:** I'm not sure I ever did, to be honest. Grant offered me the manager position here, however many years ago now, and I was like "Well, thanks for the offer but I can't be the manager of a canoe shop for the rest of my life", and he said "at some point I am going to sell it", and that's a very different proposition. It seemed like a nice idea, working for myself, in the Paddlesport industry. Generally as an industry everyone's pretty nice – no-one's super angry or super competitive, I'm never getting angry emails or anything like that, everyone just has a nice chat which is pleasant.

**Mark:** Was there someone in particular who inspired you to take up paddlesport as more than just a weekend hobby?

**Sam:** Not really! I just enjoyed it, so I did it more. I had more free time so did more paddling and it went on from that. The more I did it, the more I enjoyed it so the more I went.

**Mark:** I know this is a hard question because you've done so much, but is there a particular moment or trip which has stood out in your memory?

**Sam:** You remember all the good trips. And all the really bad ones as well – you definitely remember those! My trip to Chile was pretty amazing, just because it was a bit of a culture shock. I had

thought that I wasn't bad, I was a fairly reasonable paddler. I turned up there and on the first day – the first rapid – they said to me "see that horizon line? Just boof really hard off of that". And I paddled towards it, thinking "I wonder what it is", and it was a thirty-foot waterfall! It was bit of a culture shock, going from thinking "oh, I'm not bad" to realising "actually, I am quite bad! These people are leagues ahead of me". That was one of the scariest, most hanging-on-for-dear-life trips that I've done. But it was amazing! There have been loads of memories, so it's hard to pin down any one in particular, and hopefully there will be loads more.

**Mark:** You have access to a huge amount of gear, and test out kit that the rest of us never even hear about. Is there a piece of equipment that you wouldn't be without?

**Sam:** That's really tricky, because it's a matter of choosing the right tool for the job. There's something to do whichever job it is you want to do. There's a lot of personal preference in gear as well, so it's hard to say that a particular piece of kit is brilliant for everyone. There's the standard answer of helmets and buoyancy aids and things – obviously you should always wear those, don't be an idiot. I test out a lot of bits & pieces, but I

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## SUPs at MCC

**T**he club currently owns two SUPs (Stand-up Paddle-boards) and the committee has agreed to increase this to four.

The SUPs, like other club boats, are available for use by club members during the regular club sessions. SUPs are great fun and especially so during the warmer months.

To introduce paddlers to SUPs there will be some short taster sessions available; these are aimed at existing club members who want to learn the basics. There will also be some beginner sessions aimed at novice paddlers, run

along the same lines as the kayak and canoe beginner courses. Keep an eye open for details of these sessions on the club website and Facebook pages.

If members use a club SUP then there are some points to note: make sure the SUP is properly inflated; attach the leash to ankle or knee; wear a buoyancy aid;

wear appropriate clothing for the weather and river conditions; when leaving or approaching the jetty or bank, kneel on the board to reduce the likelihood of falling (or wear a helmet); paddle with a group; paddle into the prevailing wind or flow (so that you return with its benefit).

Contact Steve Chinn at [stevec@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:stevec@maidstonecanoeclub.net) if you want any more info on SUPs.

By Steve Chinn  
[stevec@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:stevec@maidstonecanoeclub.net)





Sam Heaton in the thick of some big rapids.

## Meet a <sup>professional</sup> paddler

... cont'd from page 4

like the bits that fit me properly – it's not easy to be able to say "this is amazing, everyone should have one of these". There's nothing like that.

**Mark:** What's the best thing about working in paddlesport?

**Sam:** I get to try out lots of toys, and I don't start work until 10 in the morning! I only live 5 minutes up the road, so I can set my alarm for 9:30 and still be here early! You get to try out lots of things, and generally it's quite a nice industry. I still enjoy it, it's still interesting – when new boats and things come out I want to try them firstly for the shop, to make sure I know what I'm talking about with them, but also the kid in me just wants to play with new toys!

**Mark:** What advice would you give to someone considering a career in paddlesport?

**Sam:** It depends where they're considering their career. If you're one of those people that wants to get sponsored, there's a lot involved in that. It's not as easy as a lot of people seem to think. We get emails every week from people asking to be sponsored, and I

think "well, I've never heard of you, you don't paddle locally, why should I give you something for free?". I think most of the people in the paddlesport industry seem to fall into it, rather than specifically decide go into it. But it's a nice industry to work in, everyone's very pleasant – go for it!

**Mark:** You're personally more involved with the retail side of paddlesport rather than the coaching side. Do you speak much to the full-time coaches?

**Sam:** Yes, that's true. We do coaching courses here – we run 1\* and 2\* and a few trips and bits & pieces here, and we've got some coaches that we use regularly. We're in a bit more contact with British Canoeing now, they're trying to work with us a lot more which is a nice thing. I don't do any coaching – I don't have the paperwork, and I'm absolutely fine with that. I'll happily help people get



Sam styling it. The long hair acts as a counterweight.

down rivers – when I go down rivers with my friends it's often me leading down there river, I just don't have any official bits of paperwork.

**Mark:** What changes have you seen in the paddlesport industry in the last 14 years?

**Sam:** For the first seven years I wasn't quite so actively involved. There's more stand-up paddleboarding stuff appearing, that's still growing in the UK, a lot of people liking that. There are lots of new boats and toys and things, the hull shapes have all changed slightly. There's this interesting push at the moment to go back to old-school style boats but with modern hulls. The things they've learned from making better faster creek boats they are now putting back into making those older-style playful river boats. So a few years ago everything was very specialised – freestyle boats were one thing, and whitewater boats were creek boats, and it's quite nice to have this mid-level boat back where it's fun again – it doesn't have to be really serious, you can just get on the river and play around for a bit. They're quite a bit better than the old versions were, you do notice that the feel like modern boats.

**Mark:** And finally, where do you see yourself in five years?

**Sam:** Probably still here! Paddling as much as I can. I do a bit less paddling

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# The Banff Mountain Film Festival

professional  
**Meet a paddler**



From "Into Twin Galaxies", the kite-skiing / kayaking adventure movie.

**A** wise person once told me... 'Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take your breath away'. The Banff Mountain Film Festival, which I saw recently at Tunbridge Wells, had many such moments!

Showing 8 films of varying lengths, the Red programme was packed full of inspirational people and jaw dropping, adrenaline fuelled adventures.

For me, one of the most inspirational people was climber Maureen Beck who, born with her lower left arm missing, repeatedly attempted a difficult climb in Boulder Canyon Colorado, falling dozens of times before eventually succeeding and overcoming what seemed near impossible circumstances.

For the adrenalin fuelled adventures

look no further than the film 'Into Twin Galaxies' where 3 adventurers travelled over the Greenland Ice Cap using kite ski's to tow their white water kayaks to reach the northernmost river ever paddled. There were many occasions during the final near vertical descents of the river that it seemed impossible that they would survive the raging torrents and massive rocks. Watching them triumph was adventure enough for me!

Sadly the Banff film tour will end on May 18th but I shall definitely be looking out for the programme in 2019, hopefully next time to see both the Blue and Red programmes and watch many more moments to inspire and to take my breath away!

now that I own the shop – it's a bit harder for me to have time off. Trips, especially in the middle of summer, are a lot harder to have – the shop's really busy so I can't afford to just go off for two weeks. But hopefully at some point I'll get to the stage where I can have a bit more time off and do a bit more paddling for me. I'd really like to get to Uganda this year before it's gone. The current estimate is that by September most of it will be under water, and it would be a shame to miss out on that and never get a chance to paddle it again.

[Editor: The White Nile, a playboater's Mecca, is being dammed for a hydroelectric project this year, despite a huge campaign by environmental groups, local people and paddlers].

By Sam Heaton & Mark Corti  
<http://www.kentcanoes.co.uk>



By Trish Cadman Boofing off a waterfall, this one not so unexpected.



Stumped. Maureen Beck doesn't want to be a good one-armed climber - she wants to be a good climber. And she doesn't want to be called "inspiring".

# The Stunning Remoteness of Antarctica



*Some of you may have already read this article in the excellent Paddler magazine (<https://thepaddlermag.com/>) - if you haven't subscribed, then you definitely should - but I've re-printed it here in case you haven't.*

**T**he polished dome of ice which was our home last night is slippery underfoot as I struggle back to my tent. A short burst of morning sun has melted it just enough to cover everything in a thin film of water, and I windmill my arms wildly as I make my way up the shallow slope, trying to avoid falling into a discoloured stream of snow algae and penguin poop.

I make a mental note to write to Palm Equipment on my return: "Dear sirs, I note that your Palm Descender kayak boot, whilst excellent on rock, is unable to be fitted with crampons. Please correct this oversight in the 2019 model". I give up windmilling and plop down into an icy, greenish stream. When I finally totter back to my tent, I discover that the katabatic winds, which came down off the glacier while I was gone, have squashed it flat. I reflect, not for the first time, that camping in Antarctica is something of a

challenge, and that I am perhaps a little under-prepared.

Only a few short weeks before, I had been sitting on my comfy sofa at home, probably in front of a roaring fire, while flicking through January's "Paddler" magazine and reading about other people's paddling trips. An advert caught my eye: Antarctic kayak expedition. Four weeks. Last-minute space available. "That looks amazing", I thought. "I'd love to do something like that". And I flipped the page, and carried on reading about someone else's adventure. And if I hadn't been between jobs, there it might have stayed – but as it happened, I could (just maybe, just possibly) take four weeks off. Trying not to think about it too hard in case I changed my mind, perhaps reassuring myself that the trip was probably full by now, and anyway they'd want someone with more experience, I pulled out my phone and wrote a quick email to the address on the advert – [cath@icebirdexpeditions.com](mailto:cath@icebirdexpeditions.com).

And just like that, I'd fallen down the rabbit hole. I'd taken the red pill. I was going kayaking in Antarctica ...

Fast forward a few weeks – weeks filled mostly with Google searches like "best cold weather kayak hat" interspersed with periods of panic – and I found myself in Ushuaia, stepping aboard the Icebird, an 18-metre aluminium-hulled sail boat, custom-built for work in Antarctic waters. The other expedition members were already there, and we did a quick round of handshakes and introductions before a tour of the boat – bunks, head, galley, and all the rest – before a getting-to-know-you beer and some food. As I'd expected, they were an international bunch – a couple of Aussies, a couple of Americans, a French Canadian, a couple of Brits – and again as I'd expected, all pretty well-travelled, with lots of interesting stories to tell. Which was lucky, as we had a few days to explore in Tierra del Fuego together, as we waited for a storm to pass in the Drake Passage. Then another storm blew up. And another ... we did a bit of sailing up the Beagle Channel, took the kayaks out for a shakedown paddle to a penguin colony and made good use of the time, but we were keen to get to



Antarctica. Captain Cath Hew took another look at the weather forecast, and said that if we were prepared to “take a bit of weather”, as she put it, we could leave the next morning.

Like most paddlers going on a trip, I suspect, I’d spent a lot of time planning the paddling, but hadn’t really thought too hard about the journey to the put-in. My international paddling has always tended to follow the same pattern – a flight or two, a long drive, maybe a Zodiac ride – and some amount of foreign-country faff with language barriers and customs officers and all the rest. As I unscrewed the lid of my 2-litre plastic jar and vomited unhappily into it, I began to consider that this may have been an oversight. Taking a 60-foot sailboat across the legendary Drake Passage was definitely not the usual journey to the put-in. My Happy Tripz™ over-the-counter travel-sickness pills, while ideal for stopping small children feeling sick on long car journeys, were simply not cutting it here in the teeth of a storm in the Southern Ocean. My fellow expeditioners, better prepared than I, were covered in a variety of Scopalamine patches and it looked as though a particularly virulent chickenpox epidemic had swept through the boat. “Try looking at the horizon”, someone urged. I did. The “horizon” rapidly came closer before breaking over the side of the boat: when the wind is blowing at 40 knots and the seas are running to 6m and more, it turns out the horizon is not actually that far away. I unscrewed the jar lid again ...

We were on rotation for watches – 3 hours on, 6 hours off – and by the time my second watch came around I’d scrounged some proper seasickness medication and was feeling much more chipper. The winds had picked up a little, and the Icebird was being smashed by heavy seas across the beam. She was penduluming 45° or more with every



wave, and the motion inside could only be described as “violent” – huge bangs and jerks as the boat crashed down and side to side, and one could only move about with exquisite care and timing, holding on with both hands at all times. At least the stove was on gimbals, so we were able to make cups of tea to fortify ourselves through our ordeal. Outside the pilothouse, when I went to assist the crew putting a reef in the sail, it was even worse. In full waterproofs, my lifejacket tethered securely to the deck lines, I made my way to the foot of the mast. Clutching the railings for dear life with one hand as the seas foamed knee-deep over the deck and the boat yawed sickeningly beneath me, I used my remaining three hands to haul down the various ropes needed to reef in the sail. Did I mention I’m not much of a sailor?

All joking aside, it was an utterly exhilarating experience. Cath Hew is a hugely experienced captain, and her first

mate has worked on boats of all sizes all his life. Despite the storms, there was never a moment when the boat was not perfectly safe and under control. And the storms were unseasonably severe – on the first crossing the mainsail ripped, the mainsheet (a half-inch Dyneema rope controlling the boom) snapped, the autopilot gave in, and the pounding of the waves was strong enough to snap a polyethylene sea kayak almost in half where it was strapped to the railings. It was quite a crossing.

Dawn was just breaking when we arrived at Enterprise Island, Antarctica, and I had the wheel. I motored slowly down the narrow channel, avoiding barely-seen growlers (a kind of small, semi-submerged iceberg), before relinquishing control to Cath for the final approach into a sheltered anchorage, mooring up to the wreck of a century-old whaling ship. Tall ice cliffs surrounded us on three sides. Imperial shags flew back & forth, bringing squid to their hungry chicks. A pair of Antarctic terns wheeled noisily overhead, their shrill cries echoing in the frozen silence. We had arrived.

The first paddle, slowly circumnavigating Enterprise Island, was magical. Ice surrounded us, swooping in curves: blue, grey, green. The sky was leaden, and a fine sleet was falling, but the light was luminous from the snow all around, giving everything an otherworldly glow. Drops of sleet lay on the surface of the super-saturated salt water in tiny silvery globules. Small blocks of ice were everywhere, and on the horizon a procession of icebergs drifted down the channel. Plumes from a small pod of humpbacks spread and dispersed in the distance. Closer to our boats, the relics of commercial whaling were all around –



discarded coal dumps, wooden water lighters abandoned on a rocky islet. Most fascinatingly, we discovered a cache of barrels - some still containing whale oil or chunks of whale skin - which had been covered by snow since the whaling industry collapsed here in 1929. Only the relentless march of global warming had uncovered them for us, the first people to set eyes on them for almost a hundred years.

We had originally planned to kayak the whole way from Enterprise Island to Vernadsky Base, some 150 nautical miles down the Antarctic Peninsula, but the storms had reduced the time available and forced a change of plans. Phil Wickens, our vastly-experienced Antarctic guide, suggested that we "cherry-pick" the best bits of paddling, and return to the Icebird to sail between them. This had the added benefit that we could camp for a few days at a time before returning to our comfortable yacht for a hot shower and some proper food.

We motored to the put-in for our first multi-day paddle, but were compelled to stop a mile or two short of our objective by the increasingly-dense brash ice. We lowered the laden kayaks into the water as the Icebird held station, and then she turned her stern towards us and was gone. This, then, was proper Antarctic expeditioning: completely isolated, utterly self-sufficient. Setting off through the brash ice in a laden sea-kayak, with the rumble of calving icebergs rolling around the icy peaks surrounding us, was without

a doubt the most thrilling kayaking moment of my life. I think we all huddled together a little as we set off, feeling incredibly tiny and vulnerable against the enormous backdrop of the White Continent.

We soon pushed through the brash into a narrow channel between towering peaks. Penguins raced past us, porpoising briefly out the water for breath as they returned to feed their hungry chicks, bellies full of krill and squid. After an hour or so, we could smell the pungent aroma of guano, as we approached the largest Gentoo colony on the peninsula. Thousands of chicks, nearly fledged in their late-season plumage, lined the rocky shoreline, and were clamouring for their parents to feed them one last time before they were abandoned to fend for themselves. An elephant seal eyed us lazily as we passed. I'd love to tell you that we made good speed to our objective, but there was just too much to see: penguins, fur seals, incredible ice sculptures, the huge bones of whales washed up on a beach. A herd of crabeater seals came over to investigate us, rolling and diving between the kayaks before heading deep to harvest krill and fatten up before the long winter. After the violence of the Drake Passage, the protected waters and narrow channels of the Antarctic Peninsula itself were a welcome relief, and the open crossing of Andvord Bay passed without incident, other than a curious elephant seal and some whales on the horizon.

Landing spots are few and far between in Antarctica, and campsites are even scarcer. The glaciers march right down to the water, terminating in heavily-crevassed ice cliffs sometimes hundreds of feet high. It's too risky to approach them – enormous chunks of ice tumble unpredictably, sending sky-scraping waves towards unwary kayakers, and flinging building-sized blocks of ice in all directions. Only occasionally are there rocky beaches, and often these are just a few metres wide: big enough for a quick leg stretch and loo break, but definitely not campable. It was thus almost 6pm by the time we arrived at our campsite – a low, icy dome of an island rising a scant few metres above the waterline. Slipping and sliding, we manhauled the heavy boats up the ice and tethered them to a deadman, before heating up some food and collapsing wearily into our tents until the morning.

As you'd expect this far south, the day dawned bright and early, and since the sun was peeking through the clouds, I ambitiously went for a wash and shave by the water's edge. A pair of penguins had clambered up onto the boats, presumably to keep their feet off the freezing ground, and observed curiously as I struggled out of my down jacket and splashed some icy water over my head and torso in an attempt to get clean. Feeling suitably invigorated, I started back to the campsite – which is where I started this article, slipping and sliding my way up to the tent ...







Antarctica supplied too many extraordinary experiences for me to fit them all into a single article. Every day provided something new – a moment that, in another place, would have been a once-in-a-lifetime paddling memory. But a few extra-special memories stand out – like the morning a couple of us slipped out early from the yacht for a pre-dawn paddle, the water glassy smooth, and the bay utterly silent except for the slight plop as our paddles broke the surface. The occasional penguin flashed by in the water underneath us, heading out to look for breakfast. Somewhere in the distance we could hear the breathy exhalation of a pair of humpbacks making their way down the channel. Fur seals were hauled out on icebergs, and they watched us unconcernedly as we slowly paddled by. Taking a leaf from their book, we also hauled out on a low tabular berg, pulling the kayaks up and sipping hot coffee from our Thermos flasks. The resident fur seal wasn't entirely sure what to make of these strange humans with their brightly-coloured boats, rudely arriving unannounced on his iceberg and making themselves at home, but he contented himself with a few huffs and barks before settling back down to sleep. As we drifted down the channel on our icy raft,

the humpbacks surfaced again, nearer this time, and we seal launched back into the water and paddled to intercept them. We stopped ahead of them, a good distance away and slightly off their course, and waited – they knew we were there, and could approach us or avoid us as they chose. The whales surfaced closer, blew, and dived. Closer – they'd seen us, and altered course to investigate. They stayed at the surface, perhaps ten metres away, occasionally puffing plumes of steam into the still air. After a few magical minutes, they dived once more. I'd removed my spraydeck to get to my camera, which lived in a waterproof Pelican™ case inside my cockpit, and my heart leapt into my mouth as the mother humpback surfaced only a few metres from my kayak, still moving at speed and heading straight for me. She dived at the very last moment, her great carbuncled head less than a metre from my bow, and I had a fabulous view of her as she glided beneath my hull. Just another magical day in this icy paradise.

The day we paddled down the Lemaire Channel was probably the single best day sea kayaking I've ever had. The water was mirror-calm, reflecting huge dark mountains - ice-shod and snow-capped – on both sides. A regular stream

of penguins broke the surface, their ripples disturbing the calm. Blue-white icebergs, carved by wind and water into fantastic fluted edifices and arches, provided resting places for seals – fur, crabeater, even a leopard seal. Even the steadily-building brash ice as we made our way southwards just added to the atmosphere – the steady sussuration as the hulls of our kayaks pushed through it, the occasional thump as a larger-than-usual hunk made itself felt under our paddles. We camped above the aptly-named Iceberg Graveyard, where the current pushes bergs into a shallow channel, trapping them until they melt. There are hundreds of smallish ones here – probably no bigger than a large house, or a smallish apartment block – resting on the bottom and being eroded into ever-more-fantastic shapes. This was probably our best campsite – clean ice, a shallow slope, and a gentle rocky beach to land on. It was a marked contrast to what was probably our most-memorable camping spot: at the top of an icy slope, on a relatively-clean piece of flat snow right in the heart of a bustling penguin colony. The stench there was indescribable – everything was covered in reddish excreta from the barely-continent chicks, and you could smell the



colony from well over a mile away – but still an amazing and unique place to pitch a tent for the night. The birds are utterly unafraid, and hungry chicks will come up and beg for food, investigating everything – tents, stoves, kayaks – in case they're edible. As I sat on a rock eating my dehydrated dinner, a curious Gentoo chick waddled over and eyeballed me, perhaps wondering if it could get the hang of a spork, and whether it would enjoy my Chinese Noodles with Vegetable if it did. As the moon rose over the mountains, we were lulled to

sleep by the clamour of the colony, feeding continuing late into the night.

That was, sadly, our final campsite. Captain Cath had generously offered to extend our trip to make up for the time lost on the stormy crossing, but we all had jobs to return to, and it was time to leave. But as we started to prepare the Icebird for the long crossing back - lashing the kayaks to the railing, stowing the Zodiac, washing the penguin poop off the bottom of our tents - I was already secretly wondering how I could come back to this captivating, spellbinding

continent on the underbelly of the world.

*With huge thanks to Cath Hew (<http://www.icebirdexpeditions.com/>) and her first mate Greg, as well as Antarctic guide extraordinaire Phil Wickens (<http://www.ski-antarctica.com/>), ably assisted by Alex Deschênes-Philon, as well as expeditioners Kevin, Curt, Ann, Rod and Claire who made the expedition such a success.*

*By Mark Corti  
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## New Classics

**W**ith all these new old school boats coming out it's hard to tell what does what, all the adverts say they all do everything but that can't be true?

I have paddled them and they all do different jobs and feel very different to paddle (one of the fun parts of the job!)



### RPM

Starting with this one as it is the oldest, The Radical Play Machine (RPM) was one of the best selling boats of all time and for good reason, at the time it was one of the most fun boats on the market and let you still do your local run, but things have moved on since then. Most shops are selling them in action spec (full plate footrest but not posh ratchets) for RRP £599 this is the cheapest of all the boats on the list, but it hasn't really changed since 1996, new outfitting in but not the contour ergo (we have tried to get them to make us one!) and it still does everything the classic one did, fun river runner that is fast and you can get vertical in. The standard RPM is a little small for a medium and me at 90Kg sinks it a little so i would need a max. The hull is a little flat which is what gives it it's speed but makes it a little harder to keep

the nose high and dry through drops, which can make river running a little more fun, though not impossible. Overall a fun boat especially for a budget but an 'old school' feel to the hull



### Antix

When it came out it was one of the most fun boats I paddled in a long time, it was what I paddled for about 2 months. It is shorter than all the others in this list, this makes it much more like a long playboat than the others. On the legacy course I can loop it (with a little work) and tail squirt it and you have loads more



speed than a play boat. It's also great to surf and definitely has used modern design to improve the hull to feel like a fast playboat rather than a river runner. Not that that makes it a bad river runner, my first test run in the medium was down the upper dart and it did fine and then made the Loop much more interesting. that is exactly where these boats excel, grade 3/4 river running then helping lead down grade 2/3. you get all the speed of the river runner but with a hull you can really throw around. At 90Kg the medium works for me though does come through a few drops on the Olympic a little skyward if I punch the middle of the larger holes. The Olympic course was where I felt the limit of the medium for me, fun and great at surfing and just pushing the limit of it's river running, the Large is pretty big and loses some of the fun but makes for a better river boat. At RRP £1149 it is the most expensive on the list, but worth it for a boat to do a bit of everything and make those lower grade rivers much more fun whilst being comfy, a fast play boat.



**Ripper**

This is the newest one on the list and needs a little explaining.... It is a little longer than most mediums at 9ft, but also very narrow. It is a little more river runner than the others because of this, it is the fastest boat I have paddled for some time which puts a big smile on your face. I am currently paddling the medium and find it big enough for me, I can get it vertical on

lower grade runs like the legacy course but not loop it, even plugging on some the bigger holes on the Olympic it doesn't really want to. not saying it's impossible but not easy. But it's not meant to be, this boat is far more river runner than play boat, the large rocker and bigger volume bow mean it's super easy to keep the nose up and dry and incredibly fast, it is the most fun I have had in ages (hence why I'm still paddling it) even on the lower grade rivers it's grippy fast and responsive with a little vertical fun thrown in for good measure! described as 'Perfect for the Olympic course' but any local run you want CIWW Treweyrn anything. It feels a little more hard work to carve around but will surf even the smallest wave with ease. This is not a 'friendly' boat, you do need to work it but it really pays off if you know what you are doing with it. you lose some of the fun if you take it on super low rocky runs, you just can't get the speed to make it fun but if you are bored in your creeker and want to step up and run river fast this is the boat.



**Axiom**

It seems to always spring up on these lists though it was never meant to be this type of boat, it was always meant as a river runner and still is. It is a bit softer and safer feeling than the others. Far more a boat to learn to have fun on rivers and still have fun years later. Slower than the ripper and shorter but a little wider

and more stable feeling. If you want a first boat that will still be fun and grade 3 then this is the type of boat to go for.



**Braaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaap**

The only one I have yet to paddle, it was designed by Pat Keller after he left dagger. He had got a little frustrated as he wanted to change the RPM a little to make it more modern but Dagger weren't too keen so he moved to liquid logic and 6 months or so later the Braaaaaaaaaap appeared. So predictable a bit like an RPM with a little more rocker added but hard to give exact review until I try one

So what would I choose? It all depends on the river. The legacy course or grade 2/3 the Antix is more fun and I can try to find holes to loop in, anything bigger then the Ripper, so fast and so much fun plus the air time off rock/ waves is pretty addictive. But if you want a safer river runner then the Axiom or if you are on a budget go for the RPM. The Ripper and Antix really do bring a huge amount of new design to the hulls of older style boats and they are a huge improvement. As with all boats try them out, most places will have demo's available and find what suits you!

By Sam Heaton  
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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.

## **Friday, June 8th - Sunday, June 10th: River Wye Trip**

Probably the most popular multi-day touring river in the UK, and with good reason. Suitable for open boats and tourers - contact Lee, [lee@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:lee@maidstonecanoecub.net)

## **Sunday, June 10th, 9am: Maidstone Marathon**

Helpers always needed to make our biggest racing event of the year run smoothly. Please speak to Bryn ([bryn.price@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:bryn.price@maidstonecanoecub.net)) or Brian ([chairman@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:chairman@maidstonecanoecub.net)) if you can help. This year, British Canoeing are running national team selection races at Maidstone.

## **Saturday, June 16th, 7:45pm: Pool Session**

Fun and frolics in the warm, as usual! Clean boats only - they will be inspected before being allowed into the pool. Speak to Lee or Richard if you need to borrow a Club boat.

## **Saturday, June 23rd & Sunday, June 24th: Leeds Castle Triathlon**

Once again, we've been asked to provide safety cover for the swim in Leed's Castle Moat. It's always a fun day, plus you get to paddle in the moat! Speak to Niki, [niki@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:niki@maidstonecanoecub.net), for details.

## **Friday, July 6th - Sunday, July 8th: Tryweryn Trip**

Usual whitewater paddling fun at the only river running in the summer. Speak to the usual whitewater paddlers or join the whitewater mailing list - [whitewater@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:whitewater@maidstonecanoecub.net) - for details on how to get involved.

## **Friday, July 6th - Saturday, July 7th: Estuary Barbecue**

A perfect summer's evening paddle out on the estuary, with an (optional) camp under the stars on one of the islands, barbecue over a driftwood fire. Suitable for most, see website and speak to Norman - [normanwbrooks@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:normanwbrooks@yahoo.co.uk)

## **Thursday, July 12th - Monday, July 16th: Thames Touring Trip**

Mike Lambourne is organising another of his popular Thames trips - spaces limited, so get in quick! Details on website.

## **Saturday, July 21st - Saturday, July 28th: Switzerland Whitewater Trip**

Bill & Niki are organising a trip out to some new rivers in Switzerland. Suitable for those with some whitewater experience - have a chat to Niki if you're unsure, [niki@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:niki@maidstonecanoecub.net)

## **Saturday, July 28th, 7:45pm: Pool Session & Demo Night**

Kent Canoes will be showing off their latest collection of shiny shiny boats! Come down and have a play! Regular rolling, capsizes and general practice also.

## **Saturday, July 28th - Saturday, August 11th: Alps Paddling and Family Fun**

Family camping and paddling trip to Briancon with Bill & Niki and their family. More mixed-ability than the Switzerland trip, and there will be a number of non-paddlers going. Speak to Niki if interested, [niki@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:niki@maidstonecanoecub.net)

## **Saturday, August 11th, 7:45pm: Pool Session**

You know the drill. Clean boats, clean water. Capsizes, rolls, braces, fun!

## **Sunday, August 26th, 10am: Joss Bay Barbecue, Paddle & Beach Party!**

Norman's legendary annual beach barbecue. Bring something to burn, something to eat, and something that floats. Bring the dog, bring your s.o., bring your offspring. All welcome :-)