

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 can be long or short (between 250 and 1500 words) and will ideally be accompanied by some pictures. The deadline for submissions for the next issue is 10th December, 2019.



Mark Corti, Editor
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Letter from the Editor

I was paddling with a group of young people a few weeks ago, helping out at one of the fun sessions the Club runs for local groups.

For most of them, it was their first time in a kayak, and there was the usual mixture of excitement and nerves. One girl in particular was extremely anxious to begin with, and needed constant reassurance that she would be safe. By the end of the session, she was paddling confidently, joining in with the games of her friends and laughing with the rest. I was struck by what a powerful thing kayaking can be – for self-belief, for wellbeing, for exercise. The health benefits of getting outdoors are well-known, and paddlesport is perhaps one of the best ways of immersing oneself in the environment. Not literally, of course, if you're doing it right! But pushing off from the riverbank and floating away in a craft

you control yourself gives you a sense of independence and separation from the everyday that it's hard to easily replicate. Those few feet of water between your kayak and the riverbank are insulation from the mundane. Of course, other outdoor pursuits can offer the same thing – the vertical rockface between you and the ground, the lonely mountaintop, the rush of wind around a parasail – all provide the same segregation from the real world. But they're harder to access, and often require more dedication to achieve. Kayaking can be as relaxing or as challenging as you want – from a gentle bumble up to East Farleigh to a remote wilderness adventure or tough endurance race. But all of them give that sense of self-reliance, of control of one's destiny, and – I would argue – of wellbeing.

Enjoy your paddling this Autumn – see you on the river!

Mark Corti, Editor
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A massed start at the extremely windy Nationals held in Norwich earlier this month. See page 2.

Norwich Flat Water Marathon Nationals August 2019

The windiest weekend in August just happened to be the weekend of the Norwich Nationals and we had planned to camp!

But camp we did and 4 members of the MCC racing team were able to attend and compete at this year's Nationals held at Norwich Canoe club.

This was to be my first Nationals and the difference to these races as opposed to the Hasler series in which I am used to racing in, is that instead of racing within a division races are split into gender and age categories.

So I set off at noon on Friday with Bryn – tents; camping gear; food; boats and paddling gear all loaded into and on the car. When I say boats, we had 3 between us - 2 K1s and a K2. After a slow drive we arrived in a makeshift camping field with just portaloos so roughing it was; this had been set up solely for the Nationals. Once pitched and the 2 tents had been erected in the windy conditions we cooked in the open and then sat and relaxed (we even allowed ourselves some wine). Here we met up with other clubs and competitors and had friendly chats – what impressed me is the really friendly atmosphere amongst the clubs and competitors with everyone happy to share tips and experiences.

Racing over this weekend is set up so that on the Saturday all the K1s race and then on the Sunday all the K2s race. MCC had 3 racers take part on Saturday as unfortunately 2 of the team were poorly and unable to make it. Hence I (Catherine Ayling) raced in the Over 54s ladies K1 and Bryn Price raced in the Over 59s males race both covering a distance of 4 miles. Chris Ashcroft was in the K1 males Over 44s covering a



Moderately windswept, but still smiling! She won't be so smiley when she notices Bryn has only cooked one sausage ...

distance of 8 miles with 3 portages – Chris and Steve Rowe having arrived in the morning ready to camp with us Saturday night.

All 3 of us held our own in the races finishing as would be expected for our abilities and I was very chuffed to have achieved a respectable 6th/14 being the first Division 6 lady paddler and having only been beaten by division 5 lady paddlers. The races were great fun as we battled the wind pushing us sideways as well as the odd gust of wind fully against us – however all 3 of us stayed afloat; a real achievement in what were

challenging

conditions.

So now we had our K2 races to look forward to on Sunday. However we first had another lovely evening in the open air; drinking a little red wine and chatting though 2 of our party who will remain nameless did prefer to walk to the local pub and enjoy the hospitality there.

On Sunday again we only had 3 MCC racers taking part. Chris and Steve participated in the Over 44s males K2 race and I raced in a K2 with a lovely lady from the Netherlands – Lisette De Boer and I had to paddle in the age category below, the ladies' K2 Over 44s and so both crews paddled an 8 miles race with 3 portages. Again the wind was with us and so fun was had. Steve and Chris paddled well and put in a good time.

For my race I will give you a brief overview. It was my first race with Lisette and we had paddled all of 5 minutes together along with me still learning how to portage as this I have only just started to do in the divisional races so what could possibly go wrong! The race started fine we weren't out in front but we were about midfield. We were able to paddle hard so as to stay on another crew's wash and then came the first portage where we got out fine ran along the path and having kept up with the other crews I put the boat back into the water however my lack of experience with what is called a beach portage showed – I grounded poor Lisette in the back of the boat and we lost time,

Cont'd on page 3 ...



Chris Ashcroft in the banana boat and going hard.

Norwich Marathon Nationals

... cont'd from page 2

probably about a minute. By the time we were paddling again we were behind and no longer able to wash hang (the term for sitting behind another boat where you get about a 10% advantage). So now we paddled really hard and were catching the other crews up slowly but we again lost time when turning though we did this reasonably however the Marsport Condor is a tough K2 to turn. We carried on paddling and Lisette was a great paddle partner giving encouragement and advice as necessary. Eventually we arrived at portage number 2 which was at the halfway point and at the start of the 2nd lap. We got out well and we quickly emptied the boat of water and off we ran until opps I dropped the boat – wet boats are slippery! However we did not waste too much time and amazingly I managed to run most of this portage. The rest of the race went well for us and we

thoroughly enjoyed the race – Lisette said 'thank you that was so much fun', I suppose it was but then I was exhausted but nevertheless jubilant. We were both very happy to have finished a very respectable 5th/11.

Taking part in such an event at such an early stage of my racing career was such an honour and I want to thank Bryn for driving and coaching; Chris and Steve for being there with me and for all of the racers for the great fun we have training. I have never been fitter and absolutely love flat water marathon racing.

For the full results of the Nationals visit

<https://results.norwichcanoecub.co.uk/results.html>

*By Catherine Ayling – photos courtesy of
Bryn Price and Catherine Ayling
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Catherine and Lisette de Boer on the portage



Close Encounter- MCC members making a new friend.

Arisaig, Scotland 17th - 24th May

Having been a member of M.C.C for ten years I thought I was long overdue the experience of Geoff Orford's yearly expedition to Scotland's western coast.

After treating myself to a sea kayak as a 50th birthday present and getting permission to go away from my boss (the wife), I believed the time was right to enjoy the pleasures (and pains) of this most beautiful part of the British Isles, along with seven other hardy souls - Geoff, David, Jerry, Alan, Mark, Mike and Carolyn. As the newbie on the trip, tradition dictates that I produced a

narrative of the week's adventures...

The group assembled early on the Friday morning in Fort William. Two cars had driven up over Thursday night, whilst Jerry and myself had driven up in Jerry's van the day before, so we'd had the pleasure of a reasonable sleep at local accommodation. Our first set off point was at Castle Tioram, which was an hour's drive away. However as the tide was not in our favour (there wouldn't be a suitable water level until 3pm) we had some time to kill so, after a hearty Scottish breakfast, we decided to enjoy a walk on Ben Nevis. The day began

overcast, but the sun came out to produce a lovely afternoon. We arrived at Castle Tioram with plenty of time for the preparation and packing of our boats. The trouble with being a newbie is not quite knowing what and how to pack your sea kayak so you have all you need for a week's wild camping. It was whilst doing a four man cradle lift to the waters edge, it was noted that my boat was a good deal heavier than the others! I might possibly have over prepared! It was warm and calm as we paddled the short trip to Shoe beach (2.7 miles) on the south end of Eilean Shona, our first campsite. We managed to set up camp despite the relentless midge attacks. After dinner, as

Cont'd on page 4 ...



It's here somewhere! Loading boats at Castle Tioram.

Arisaig, Scotland 17th - 24th May

... cont'd from page 3

we had a few drinks from our very carefully packed alcohol resources, we were treated to wonderful sunset. It had been a long day/night for the majority, so sleep came easy...as did the rain.

Saturday was a big day. Geoff's 80th birthday! After breakfast we presented Geoff with all the cards and presents we'd smuggled with us (mostly single malt whiskeys) along with a lovely ginger cake baked especially by Catherine. To be honest the presentation was hosted in less than ideal conditions as it was pouring with rain and the midges were on the attack again! We then set off on our very eventful day's paddle (9.5 miles). The weather was cold and wet and we were all wishing we had worn an extra layer. It had just been decided to stop at a beach for lunch when there was a shout of "Dolphins" and, all of a sudden, we had a pod of bottlenose dolphins moving between the boats. This was a truly wonderful moment, as the dolphins swam around and beneath us. They kept us guessing to where they would surface; sometimes coming within 10-12ft of one of our boats. It was a privilege to witness, but hunger and cold soon got the better of us so we retreated to the beach for

lunch. When we returned to camp some of us decided to explore the island on foot, where we found a deserted village. That evening we all piled into Geoff's tent to escape the rain, drink whiskey, and eat ginger cake to celebrate M.C.C. main man's birthday.

Day three and it was time to break camp. As it had rained non-stop for 30 hours it was a very wet pack. Old hands who made it look simple surrounded me but, having only done a few practice packs in ideal conditions in my back garden, I found I was ill prepared for this testing task. The worst part was, as the others slipped off shore, I was one of the remaining warm bodies left for ALL the midges to feast on.

Once we were all on the water we set off for White Sands beach. We took short cut between rocks, which had to be timed right to catch the lull between waves. Alas, Dave hit a submerged rock, which caused him to spin and take the full force of an incoming wave and he was thrown out of his fully laden boat. Fortunately the water was shallow and he was able to scramble onto some rocks. We rescued Dave's boat and pumped it out. Mark also got dumped out of his boat but, as he is reasonably young and fit, he could look

after himself! We arrived at camp and set up, then took a paddle to Glenuig. It had finally stopped raining and the water was like a millpond (9 miles). That evening our wildlife "expert" Alan spotted some otters. The tents were dry and we are all looking forward to a night of civilisation the next evening at the Glenuig Inn.

We were up early to catch the tide but, unfortunately, not early enough to miss a heavy downpour that soaked the camp, which meant another wet pack. We took a scenic paddle back to our vehicles along the North Channel of Eilean Shona, where we encountered thousands of jellyfish! (4.8 miles) We loaded up the cars and van with the boats and our gear and drove to the port of Malaig for lunch. After we drove down to the bunkhouse, via a recce for the next day's put in. We took advantage of the turn in the weather and soon all the fences were strewn with our gear, trying to dry it all out! After a shower, a good meal and a few drinks, everyone was looking forward to a good night's sleep. Unfortunately some epic snoring (mentioning no names) resulted in poor Mike sleeping in the bunkhouse bathroom.

Another early breakfast to catch the tide and the group was well rested (except Mike) and in good spirits. Put in was near Arisaig and it was a short

Cont'd on page 5 ...



Many strange things lurk in the waters around the coast of Scotland.

Arisaig, Scotland 17th - 24th May

... cont'd from page 4

paddle to the campsite (4 miles). Whilst unpacking I realised I'd made a rookie error and left my toiletry bag in Jerry's van. As we had lost the tide for vehicles Geoff suggested we paddle into Arisaig to purchase new items. So began the infamous toothbrush run (8.7 miles). In hindsight Geoff should have told me to just walk! All eight of us paddled around the exposed shore. The wind had picked up and the sea was choppy. We had some respite when paddling behind the off shore islands and Carolyn tried to charm the dozens of grey seals that were basking on the rocks. We paddled into Arisaig and used what we thought was a public slipway to land. Only after we'd all disembarked did some jobsworth decide to tell us that we couldn't actually use the slipway! We found another way, found a shop, then headed back to camp. We started having to fight the wind and, as the tide was turning, it became a long and hard paddle. The trip round the exposed shore was a lot lumpier than on the way in and Geoff was taken by surprise by a large wave crashing on some rocks. In the ensuing turbulence Geoff capsized! It took a good few minutes in the rough sea for his rescuers to get along side him, but then the octogenarian leapt back into his boat like a man a quarter of his age. We pumped out his boat and returned to camp. In the evening Mark got a fire going, which was much appreciated after a long day.

The next morning the wind was still very strong and the forecast was not looking good so we took the more cautious paddle to Turtle beach (12 miles). After a powwow, called by Geoff,

we decided to cut our trip short by a day. We returned to camp with boats laden with firewood and enjoyed a roaring fire and the rest of our booze. Mercifully wind and the smoke kept the midges at bay.

With fully laden boats we had our last paddle of the week and negotiated the rough seas back to the vehicles (4 miles). A couple of stops for showers and fish and chips (not at the same time!) and it was time for the long haul home.

All in all it was a fantastic week and it was so refreshing to use pure white beaches that are kept clean, a credit to the kayak and camping fraternity. With not one cross word amongst the group, just plenty of good natured micky taking, spectacular scenery and crystal clear waters, I can safely say I won't be waiting 10 years for my next trip.

By Barry Wilkie

New Club Welfare Officer



It feels like I have been paddling for longer than just over 2 years but it is only just 2 years since I first picked up a paddle at MCC to take up kayaking.

However I have very quickly become immersed into the club and this year became a committee member where I have the role of Club Welfare Officer.

It's an honour to be part of MCC and to serve on the committee ensuring that the club is able to continue with all the very successful activities that are run by the coaches and the members of this very active club; these activities range from trips away to open days with BBQs and race meetings.

As I am new to the role of CWO I thought it would be a good opportunity to remind everyone that it is all of our responsibility to ensure that we behave appropriately towards one another and to avoid any actions that could cause offence. I ask that we are all vigilant in the club to ensure that our young people also remain safe. This way we can rest assured in the fact that our club will continue to be a happy and safe place for everyone.

Happy paddling everyone.

By Catherine Ayling

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Costa del Scotland.



He's in there somewhere! Tearing it up on the Olympic course in one of the new R4s

British Rafting Open Euro Cup

My passion for white water rafting happened upon me quite accidentally back in September 2018.

Relatively new to the world of kayaking I quickly developed a passion for moving water. I remember now the first time the tame flow at the bottom of the legacy hit the bow of my Wavesport Diesel and turned the boat 180 degrees back onto the lake. That was in November 2016 and since then I have been a tentative novice on trips to the Usk, Dart, Tryweryn and the Soca. To hone my skills I joined Lee Valley Paddlesports Club and would make the 50 mile journey on a Wednesday evening to recapture that buzz of being on moving water.

Wednesday Club nights bring an array of people from clubs all over the country to have fun on the course. From novices, Team GB freestylers, slalom paddlers and seasoned river runners meet up to enjoy the rapids. At the time, allocated slots were 6-7pm and 8-9pm for mixed boaters. The 7-8pm slot was reserved for Slalom boats and rafts. Most would head back to the Café for a hot chocolate for an hour. I would watch the GB rafting teams training and think that it looked a lot of fun. One evening an open offer was made by a member of the GB Masters Team to give it a go as there was space competing in the upcoming British Selections event held on the Olympic course.

A group, including myself and others

from Bewl and Sudbury Canoe clubs put together a team of 6 and named ourselves Old Spice. We started training in October and were competing for a place to represent our Country in December. Needless to say our expectations were low, in fact so low the aims were to not come last and not to die. We survived and came second to last but we were pleased for our fellow club members Team RED who won in the Masters category and were chosen to

represent GB in Australia and Bosnia.

I was won over by this experience. Being part of a team and competing in race events was thrilling and a new addiction. As a team we met most Wednesdays to train at Lee Valley and competed in the Euro Cup at HPP Nottingham in March again we survived and didn't come last.

The highlight of the weekends racing was that we managed to clock the fastest speed down the course at 13m/s! I must mention that this was in the Slalom event and was down to us missing most of the gates!

Cont'd on page 7 ...



Duckball. Netduck. Raftduckball. What do you call this game, anyway? Smiles all around for the last race of the day.

The £10 Sail - A Review



I don't do a lot of canoeing.

I enjoy it – I like the subtle grace of the paddle strokes, more fluid and concatenated than kayaking. And I love the freedom that a big boat provides. My 16' Esquif can soak up 450kg of gear – that's nearly half a ton – but is still light enough that I can throw it on the roof of the car without busting a gut. But I don't paddle it enough, and so I'm not very good. Plus, I don't have the stamina in the right muscles that regular canoeing would give.

So when my son and I committed to doing the Great Glen Trail (*see his article elsewhere in this issue*), I had good intentions of putting the canoe in the water a few times beforehand and getting some miles under my belt. The road to hell, they say, is paved with good intentions, and these ones fell by the wayside. With a giant lack of fitness on my part, there was a chance that the 100+ kilometres of the trail would indeed be hellish.

Then I had a brilliant idea. The prevailing wind in the Great Glen blows from the south-west, and should be behind us all the way. I'd done some canoe sailing before – only once, admittedly, and that only for about five minutes under the expert guidance of a coach – but how hard could it be? I started scouring the internet for canoe sails.

My word, was I surprised. The Endless River sail kit, including the mast, was £150. The Windpaddle Cruiser, essentially a hula hoop covered in fabric, was £140. Even the Endless River Downwind Sail, which appeared to be a nylon bedsheet which you hooked a couple of paddles into, was nearly £50. It was time to search the online tat bazaar which is eBay. Ten pounds later and I was the proud owner of a pop-up canoe sail from that well-known watersports

Cont'd on page 8 ...

British Rafting Open Euro Cup

... cont'd from page 6

The camaraderie is apparent amongst rafters, you're all competitive and you need to work as a team. You shout at each other but at the end of a race it's all high fives and smiles. What happens in the boat stays in the boat!

The last bank holiday in August saw a change to the race format for the British Open Euro Cup at Lee Valley. This time it was R4's competing. Four of us committed and we booked the event. This time we only managed to train once or twice before the fixture due to family and work commitments.

We arrived on a warm Saturday morning, slightly nervous but eager for a

on the raft is back left and I had my paddle taken from my hands by the sheer force of the flow. The front two were pushing frantically off the block as we took on water and started to sink! But then suddenly, we were free from the block and heading sideways down the feature. My paddle was handed to me... it had snapped in half! This was just the practice run!

I was defeated, we seemed to have no control of the boat and my £150 carbon paddle had snapped like a toothpick. The sprint race was due to begin in 30 minutes.

I managed to borrow a spare paddle and the team composed ourselves for the



days racing. Teams from over the country and Europe had descended onto Lee Valley white Water Centre for some racing action in the sun.

The programme had been released and racing was to begin with a practice run down the Olympic course. We gathered our boat from the lock up only to be told that there were new boats!

British canoeing had invested in 8 smaller R4 rafts and we were to use them between 22 teams over the weekend! We heard stories from other more experienced paddlers that the new boats were faster, twitchy but would wash out of the features! Already the psychology had kicked in. We made are way up the travellator trying to exude confidence but deep down we were apprehensive!

Our mantra as always was Don't Die - just make it down the course! Our first run was OK as we got accustomed to the new boat. They were certainly twitchier with smaller diameter ribs but this wasn't to our advantage. The second run saw us pinned to a block halfway down the course and taking on water. My position

timed sprint. This was one run of the Olympic course from top to bottom with 1-minute intervals between teams. The start gun went, and we were off! We were slow and steady with timed paddle strokes eager not to push the twitchy boat too far out of our control. We paddled through Jaws in a straight line, our strokes were synchronised, we had cracked this. We paddled through Boom. Over the big drop, we hit the second wave and landed in the third wave sideways. The boat was surfing on its side, I was standing upright with the boat on my back. The guys on the right-hand side were submerged with just their feet in the pockets of the raft floor. Then I saw a head and an outstretched arm, I lent over and grabbed the paddle and pulled my team mate back in the boat and we managed to bounce out of the wave and bumble to the finish line. In last place.

Next up was slalom. 17 gates to make, some upstream, some downstream, some in the eddies and some in the flow. It was a challenging course. We regrouped, had a good run

Cont'd on page 8 ...

The £10 Sail - A Review

... cont'd from page 7

manufacturer, Wei Lin Wave. Like the Windpaddle Cruiser, it was a circular hoop of springy plastic covered in nylon material, like a cheap pop-up tent. Webbing loops at regular intervals around the circumference provided attachment points for the supplied bits of string, and a transparent panel in the middle meant you could almost see where you were going.

We took it to the Club one Wednesday evening to try it out, and spent an hour or two playing with different permutations of canoe, string and sail. There was almost no wind on the Medway, which was just as well given the level of competence we possessed, but we eventually got it set up to our satisfaction. In fact, the hardest part was getting it back in the bag – like the pop-up tent it resembled, it comes in a bag about the size of a frisbee and trebles in size with a springing noise as soon as you take it out. There's some trick involved to coiling it back up, but we never really got the hang of it. There may have been instructions – there was a piece of paper covered in Chinese characters in the bag – but it may have been the Lord's Prayer or a recipe for sweet and sour pork balls. We will never know.

Full of hope and trepidation, we took it to Scotland. You're not allowed to sail on the Caledonian Canal, but as soon as we got to the first bit of open water – Loch Lochy, which is Gaelic for "Lake Lakey" – the wind picked up. I was adamant that it was too risky, and anyway the wind was pushing us along quite nicely without it, but my son is younger and thus braver than me, and insisted on giving it a try. The set-up we'd settled on involved clipping the base of the sail to the lacing at the front of the canoe (although any central attachment point would have worked – the carrying handle, on the seat, wherever) – and using two pieces of metre-long string tied to loops equidistant apart at the top to control it. As long as you didn't wrap the string around your hands, you could always drop the sail just by letting go, and it gave a reasonable amount of control when the wind veered. Of course, it was strictly a downwind sail – we weren't going to be tacking back and forth with it – but since the lochs were long and narrow with mountains on either side, the wind tends to blow either straight up or straight down them. Alex popped up the sail, I dropped my paddle over the side in a stern rudder, and off we went. And it worked – pretty well, truth be told.

Cont'd on page 12 ...



British Rafting Open Euro Cup

... cont'd from page 7

and didn't suffer too many penalties. It was good, we were still competing. Feeling buoyed we discussed tactics for our second run sounding almost like old hands as we walked the course with athletic Germans and Slovaks.

On our way up the traveller my teammate James looked at me and said, "That was good, but we would've done better if you had made an effort through some of those gates!" With those words ringing in my ear we set off and made the first few gates. Paddling in synch and driving the raft where we wanted it to go. Through the upstream gate 7 and turned to make downstream gate 8. We were tracking at an angle; I was going to miss the gate and incur a penalty. I dived over to the right-hand side of the boat and... the boat flipped. We all got tossed into the flow. By this time the Men's Slovak team had caught us up and were bearing down on four middle aged swimmers gasping for breath. With my mind on dodging the raft, I dropped my legs and took the full force of several blocks on my shins! I was in mid flow and was losing my energy. I washed over the drop to see the Slovak raft sideways in the surf. I hit the raft and was underneath it, pushing off the bottom of the raft to get free. I found myself in the eddie and clambered to the side. Exhausted.

Battered and bruised, the team rescued the raft and prepared for the final race of the day. Head to head against an experienced Team from Bratislava. We started strong and were neck and neck for the first 30 metres, driving the paddle trying to nudge the other boat and jostle for first position. Head to head is a straight race with 2 buoys positioned in different eddies. You must make one left

eddie, circling the buoy and one right then race to the finish line. The other team made the left buoy first, but we were still driving in and tried to push them out. It was futile. The Bratislavans pulled away and we were several seconds behind. But we made it down in one piece.

By now the flood lights were on and the evenings races ending. It was time to shower, have a beer and discuss the days racing with other competitors in the club bar.

The following morning was an early start to take part in some light-hearted fun with a competitive spirit. Based on



basketball the aim of the race was to race down the course and shoot yellow plastic ducks into the overhead baskets to score points. Today was a new day, the sun was shining, and we were keen to finish on a high. We made it down the course safely shooting 6 hoops out of a possible 8.

Overall, we came last in our class over the two days, but we survived. First and foremost, we had fun and are looking to sign up to the next event in Llandysul West Wales in December.

By Richard Caine
richcaine@hotmail.co.uk

An introduction to a change of plan

Warm settled weather, clear blue skies, tropical waters with a gentle, cooling breeze.

None of these were in the forecast for Saturday 20th July, but despite this we were set firm to have a good day on the water. So it was with 'Plan F' now firmly in play that the group of novice paddlers gathered in the drizzle at the front of our boat house. Joined by more experienced hands, we are about to introduce these new faces to the joys of touring.

Now, throughout our great culture, some questions pervade every corner of life:

1. Can I have an ice cream?
2. Are you sure this is the right way?
3. Are we nearly there yet?

And in the life of a paddle coach:

1. Does this boat go in a straight line?
2. HOW does this boat go in a straight line?
3. WHEN WILL this boat go in a straight line?

Answers to all these come at the end of your journey.

Touring is that strange place where progress isn't always measured in distance, time can be taken to look around and have a chat with your fellow paddlers, and new skills can be learnt by new faces in new places. We teach forward paddling, but we always teach that you can improve with experience. For the new faces, this is progress.

The initial plan was to paddle a stretch of the Stour but the weather and wind made this somewhat less attractive. The venue was switched to the stretch of the Medway from Teston Park back to the club. Maybe not the adventure of the century, but the point was to show our new paddlers a new stretch that they had not seen before and give them a distance they had not considered. For paddlers who have only been to the Malta and back at most, to be faced with 6 miles of the unknown is something to be noted.

Looking over the boats set out on the grass at Teston, a few things stuck out, all were equipped with a dry hatch (lunch box), all were about 10ft long, all had a skeg, and most were attended by paddlers who had no idea what a skeg did.

After launching our new friends on the lower level of the lock, three of us took the chance to run the shoot. Appearing at the bottom with a gentle landing, this is something most will play with given a little time. The flow at the outlet did show how

Cont'd on page 10...

A boy and his dog - canoeing the Great Glen Trail



After a failed sea kayaking trip in Anglesey, my Dad and I wanted a new expedition that was just as long and hard, but less weather dependant.

My Dad suggested a 4 or 5 day canoe trip and I agreed. We decided that we should drive and take our own Prospector 16, the Daffodil Explorer. Dad had a look at great canoe trails within a drivable distance and he found the Great Glen trail in Scotland. We read a few reports and websites about it and then looked at the route on Google Maps. I said that it is the right sort of level and length and was really excited about canoeing across a whole country and Loch Ness. We also decided we should bring Molly the dog with us too. The trip was decided, all that was next was when.

After we decided when, we looked at the challenges that we faced. We packed everything we could need without going too wild. In total we probably had 25kg each. Enough supplies for 6 days in case things went wrong. Plus 5 or so kg for the dog. We would wild camp every night and eat quite well. We also had some "just add water" beef stew for the extra day. We had warm clothes in case it got cold and our kayaking gear in case it got really rough on Loch Ness.

We left on Sunday morning at about 6am so we missed the worst of the traffic. It was a pretty good drive time-wise, we only had 2 delays and only 1 of

them was big. We lost about an hour and a half of time so got to Inverness at about 5pm.

For the first night we stayed in a nice campsite next to the estuary of the River Ness. We had a decent burger from a food van run by a lady who permanently lived on the campsite. We tied Molly to the towbar on the car and had a good night's sleep. The dog woke my dad up a few times but I slept all the way through.

The next morning we woke up and packed up fast enough so we could get to the taxi pick-up point for 9am. We were going to have porridge for breakfast but we realised that we forgot the oats! We had a check to see what else we had forgotten and saw we forgot the oil for the pancakes as well. We sat down with a coffee and realised that the powdered milk had gone off as well! We left the campsite and drove to the co-op, bought the food we needed but they didn't have the powdered milk so we just bought just-add-water porridge. We finally got to the taxi place at 10 past 9. He told us where to park the car and then took us to Fort William. The taxi man was called Donald and he wrote the guide book for the trail so we asked him a few questions. We were joined by a guy called Mike for the journey as well.

After we got to the canal at the top of Neptune's Staircase, we went off paddling down the canal towards Loch Lochy. There was only one portage for

Cont'd on page 9...



A perfect wild campsite on the still waters of Loch Lochy.

An introduction to Canoeing the Great Glen Trail

... cont'd from page 9

different a crossover can feel given a green flow passing under the hull. Enough in one place, it was time to head down stream towards our destination and the answers to the questions we face. Progress was good, the angling competition had yet to start, the skegs had been explained and deployed and it was turning out to be....damp, overcast and a bit clammy. But we are paddlers and we fear not the clammy neoprene.

Now for the twist that comes with touring for any time in the UK. The clouds that had followed us thinned and departed, the sun came out and the cags we were wearing became even more clammy; this is summer! As we rounded the bend a familiar bridge came into view. We had reached our half-way point and time to make inroads into the contents of our dry-hatched lunch boxes. A disaster was narrowly avoided at this stop when a passing dog mistook a standing tube of Pringles for somewhere to do what a dog does. But for a very deft movement, the snack would have tasted more of Springer Spaniel than Spring Onion.

Break over, time to launch once more and time to experience some flow as the river passes through the weir gates close to the landing stage.

From this point, a strange thing happened. The skegs had been lifted for

Cont'd on page 11...

... cont'd from page 10

today and that was at Gairloch Lock. It was a very long portage of about 600m - we were very happy Annie Davis had loaned us her wheels. The suggested campsite was at the end of the portage but because the wind was behind us we got there at about 2pm. So we decided to carry on paddling for a couple more hours. We found a lovely campsite on the north side of the loch about 8km further than the suggested campsite.

We set up camp and had tuna pasta for dinner. The dog was under the propped up canoe and we were in a little sheltered spot just on a little headland, about a third of the way up the loch.

After a great nights' sleep and bacon and egg muffins we set off to find a new campsite and cover some distance. We were not too tight for time and distance because we were ahead and we decided it was best to stay ahead. We sailed almost all the way to the end of Loch Lochy and back into the Caledonian canal. We stayed on the canal for around 7km and paddled out on to Loch Oich. The wind instantly picked up and we were back to sailing. We covered great distance on the loch and stopped for lunch at the recommended campsite near the end of the loch. At the end of the loch we had a choice of the Caledonian canal or the river Oich. We chose the river. Dad paddled down the weir on his own while I watched with the dog. Molly and I got back into the boat and paddled down the rest of the very small rapids. The river flattened out a bit but there were still

plenty of 'ripples' and it was very fast flowing. We found a quite nice camp spot on the bank near a sheep field. We set up camp and were happy to have somewhere to rest after quite a long days' paddling. We ate chorizo pasta and played some cards. After being beaten at cribbage twice in a row I settled down for bed while my dad stayed outside.

After another great night's rest we set off much earlier than the day before, due to the fact we had porridge instead of bacon and egg muffins. We paddled down to the first of the 2 marked rapids. We tried to scout but couldn't get any view at all so we got out at the slipway next to a lock to see a beautiful Victorian steam boat go through. Half way through the portage we saw Mike and his wife Vanessa. After a short chat we headed off down the canal towards Loch Ness. After the portage at Fort Augustus, we paddled off and looked out. It appeared that the loch simply fell off the edge of the world! We paddled out a way and braved sailing again. We covered some distance and then the Scottish weather came in.

Cont'd on page 11...



Very grateful for the wheels!

An introduction to a change of plan

... cont'd from page 10

landing and launching. Some were forgotten about and remained up, some were only allowed to half drop. Oddly, the boats remained straight. Progress had been swift.

With sun and warmth comes a desire to be on the water. So it was as we approached our intended end point. The trip had not been long, not long enough for this group and it was put up for the vote that we may want to pay a visit to the lock hut just a short 2 mile hop down the river. What's a 4 mile extension between friends. A quick comfort break at the club and back on the water. No skegs used for this, all in control and all set for the true test of the touring paddler. Do you go latte, cappuccino or Americano? And the biggest tester: Cake!

So the end of our journey and the answers to our questions:

1. Yes, you can have an ice-cream, but cake is better.
2. It's probably the right way, but scenery is more fun than direction.
3. If we are nearly there already, we can always go a bit further.

And for the coaches:

1. It can go in a straight line.
2. You make it go in a straight line.
3. About 9 miles should do it.

Well done everybody. It was a pleasure.

By Mark Harris

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Canoeing the Great Glen Trail

... cont'd from page 11

Teeming with rain and really rather windy we pushed on and were glad to find a dry-ish spot for lunch. After the cheese, biscuits and salami - that we were to have for the whole trip - we pushed on.



Expeditions: not all sunshine and flowers.

We eventually got near where it suggested we camped (Foyers) but after a long day we decided to make camp about 1.5km back from Foyers. It was not as nice as the first campsite but better than the second. There was a pre-used fire place that we used and then scattered about and destroyed as part of the 'leave no trace camping' ethos.

Today was to be our final day. We decided that we would do the extra 8km that we would otherwise do tomorrow, today. We woke up early and tried to pack up the camp in time to be on the water at 9am. We ended up being on the water at 8:50am. We paddled a few km past Foyers and then 'ferry glided' across the 2 foot swell towards Urqhart Castle.

We paddled around the ruin and had a snack on the beach on the other side. We soon started to push on again through the swell and rain and finally, got to the entry of the canal. There was a short canal and then we were on the very tiny (2.4km tiny to be precise) Loch Dochfour. We had some lunch in the limited shelter of a small tree and pushed down the final straight. We saw the Victorian steamer again going through the lock. After a long walk back to the car we had finished our expedition. Great Glen Trail officially conquered.

I would recommend this trip for anyone with any small amount of practice in a canoe on some moving water. Anyone who has had some practice in a canoe would really get a lot out of this trip. It would also be great for any experienced canoeist. Racing against the time and the grade 2+ rapid would all be challenges too.

By Alex Corti

[via mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:mark@maidstonecanoeclub.net)



Inverness at last, 100km later.



Campfire, canoe, boy, dog. Expeditions don't get much better than this..

The £10 Sail - A Review

... cont'd from page 7

The wind was blowing about force 2-3, and we probably made 3-4 knots of speed. Which considering we weren't paddling, was very respectable. The boat didn't feel unstable, it wasn't hard to keep on course, and although the sail needed reasonable attention – it acted more like a kite than a true sail – it never caused any problems.

As the expedition progressed, we grew in confidence and competence with it, and on the final day we were sailing down Loch Ness in a force 5 wind, with rolling swells around 0.6m coming in from the stern quarter, with reasonable success. We did have to kneel rather than sit in the

boat for stability, but this was more to do with the swell than the sail. I wouldn't say we were ever speeding along, but it definitely added several knots to our progress whenever we used it.

The main limitation was directional – anything more than about 15° off the wind made it almost impossible to maintain course, as we had the sail connected right at the front of the boat and any crosswind pulled the bow around. Another slight downside was the string – unless you held your arms up high, the downward pressure on the string deformed the sail and reduced the surface area. But it was still very usable.

We did see a few other canoes using the Endless River Downwind sail and they were really flying, but I think that was more due to the canoeists greater skill (and courage – they were in the middle of

Loch Ness in a stronger wind than we were prepared to sail in) than the sail itself.

So, all in all, it was well worth a tenner. If you're doing trips where the wind is likely to be behind you (i.e. rivers and narrow lochs, rather than wide lakes with crosswinds), then a downwind sail is probably all you need and this one does the job. It seems reasonably well-made, and shows no signs of wear after our 100km trip. Perhaps if you're doing regular long-distance trips then longevity might be an issue, but for occasional use on an extremely modest budget, I'd heartily recommend it.

By Mark Corti

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Ten quid well spent for an extra couple of knots on a breezy day on Loch Lochy

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