

# 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 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 May, 2019.



Mark Corti, Editor  
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## From the Editor

**The newsletter is slightly late this time, but in my defence I was kayaking!**

I've just got back from Wales on the Club's "Easier Whitewater Trip", and it was an amazing weekend. It's been a while since we did a trip focussed on more gentle (grade 2/3) white water, and it proved to be really popular. We had a whole range of abilities, from those at the beginning of their whitewater journey, through to intermediate and improver boaters, and on to paddlers starting to take leadership roles on the river. There were nearly 20 of us on the trip, and with lots of willing river leaders we had plenty of flexibility and could split up into multiple groups on different rivers and really make sure that everyone was paddling at the right level.

On the drive home, I was reflecting how lucky we are at Maidstone Canoe Club that we've got so many people happy to volunteer their time. Of course, it helps that we've got

an incredibly supportive Coaching Development Group to nurture both aspiring and existing coaches & leaders, but that only thrives because we have a culture where generosity is the norm - where it's usual to donate your time and skills to help the Club as a whole, whether that's on the water, in the gym, or something only tangentially related to paddling: joining the committee, painting the Clubhouse, repairing boats. In many organisations, this kind of thing is taken for granted - a few stalwart helpers toil away in the background, and everyone else passes by, oblivious. It's fantastic that MCC isn't like that, and that a large proportion of our members do get involved in helping out - and that volunteers are always valued and appreciated. Thanks, everyone!

See you all at the AGM on Friday, 15th March at 7pm!

By Mark Corti, Editor  
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Smiles all around on Llyn Dinas, at the top of Afon Glaslyn. The start of another brilliant day on the river.





*Apparently there are fish in the Medway after all! No wonder people don't like doing capsize drills there - this one could have your arm off!*

## Open Access - An Alternative View

**M**any in the club will know I have a foot in several camps, I kayak a bit and I like to fish, so I can see both sides of many of the arguments that arise.

Whilst the open access argument is not solely linked to angling, I will use that example to make a few points. For the avoidance of doubt, I have written to British Canoeing several times in this vein and have yet to receive a response. The messages coming from them recently would suggest they have accepted the arguments of the Open Access Fundamentalists, so may be in need of a little balance.

The fundamentalist argument seems to be that it should be possible to drop your canoe in and paddle anywhere at any time, with no regard at all for other river users, landowners, or consequences. To me, this appears as selfish. They also appear to want to do this for nothing, other than their BC licence. (Although they appear to be happy to pay for other facilities such as white water courses).

I am a great believer in shared access, allowing all river users to enjoy their sport without interference. I preach tolerance on the Medway most weeks, when anglers, canoeists, boaters, swimmers (human and doggie) want to

use the same patch of water.

So, where to begin. I will use some angling analogies, as these will help to make the argument.

Firstly, disturbance. On lowland deep rivers such as the Medway, it is perfectly possible for canoeists and anglers to co-exist. I regularly have kayaks in my swim when I am fishing (Norman!), and there is no detrimental effect. The only real time canoeists are a nuisance to anglers is when they insist on stopping where you are fishing. This is a momentary inconvenience, keep moving and everybody is happy. This is not so true on shallow waters. Fish are more wary, and sit in areas where they are comfortable, and can feed without too much effort. If a kayak moves through one of these areas, the fish move out. It may take hours or even days before the fish return. Anyone fishing will have their day ruined in a moment, by a kayaker who may not even be aware that anything just happened. On these rivers, it is just not possible to have kayaking and fishing successfully happening at the same time. (I'll leave the other arguments about spawning beds etc. as these should be self evident).

Next, cost. Anglers pay for a national fishing licence issued by the EA. This makes it legal to fish, but does not confer any right to fish at all. In the overwhelming number of cases, the right

to fish comes at an additional cost, either of club membership or a day permit. On the shallow upland trout stream we discussed above, it is entirely possible that the guy who just had his fishing ruined had paid £50-£100. Is he entitled to be a little miffed on his way back to the pub early?

There is an answer here, in the spirit of shared access. Why not have pre-booked kayaking days on these rivers, so that anglers and kayakers know where they stand and can avoid conflict. Fishing clubs or land owners could recoup their loss of angling revenue by charging Kayakers a day ticket, so everybody should be happy.

Lastly, there is the permission thing. There are places where it might just be inappropriate to canoe any time you like. There is not only landowners privacy (a consideration, like it or not), but security and safety. I'm currently trying to organise a paddle around Docklands. Getting permission isn't an 'Open Access' issue, but one of security.

In closing, I think that there is a good case for all river users to work together to improve access for canoeists, where such access is not currently possible. But that is the point, work, together. Relying on ancient, dubious precedent to force a way through will encourage doubters to throw obstacles in the way and will only lead to confrontation.

*By Keith Dacey*



# Rainbows and Rapids at the Adventure Paddlers Weekend

**W**eekends like this remind me of why I adore Dartmoor, and the River Dart in particular.

I'd fallen out of love with it over the last couple of years – too many disappointments as trips were cancelled at the last minute due to lack of water, too many unsatisfactory scrape runs on the Upper Dart. This weekend, though, looked like it was going to be just perfect. It had been raining all week, and my Facebook feed was filled with photos of Dartmoor locals enjoying the best levels for ages – runs down the Upper Upper Plym, big water on the Teign, before-work blasts down the Dart. My fingers were itching to type "Yes!" in reply to all the posts asking "Is anyone around for a Dart run in the morning?", but I marshalled my patience and went to work instead as I should. Still, the excitement was building, a babble of voices on the mailing lists and social media, checking the forecasts and predicting the levels. This weekend was going to be special.

Water or no water, I always enjoy the Adventure Paddlers' Weekend. It brings together whitewater paddlers from all over the south of England for a weekend of paddling, kayaking movies, talks and parties. It's a chance to meet friends old and new, to rub shoulders with pro boaters and fresh paddlers, to tell tall tales and to be an audience for those of others. I always come away with my passion for kayaking rekindled, inspired to paddle more, to run new rivers and to go on new trips. But when the rain gods smile and the levels are right, this weekend is, for me, elevated to the best



*The end of the Mad Mile: Sharrah's Pool (aka Pandora's Box) at a good chunky level.*

paddling event in the calendar.

I'd eventually succumbed to the call of the river and taken the Friday off work, meeting up with a handful of other Maidstone paddlers for an afternoon run down the Dart Loop. The levels were high but dropping, which makes this run one of the finest class 3 river sections in England. As I surfed back and forth across the jet of water sluicing through the stone arches at Newbridge, I could tell we were in for a fantastic afternoon. And so it proved: big, bouncy wave trains to play on, big eddies which whipped the nose of your boat into calm waters, green tongues of water accelerating you down into breath-taking stoppers, and all under

the otherworldly arch of a brilliant rainbow. We had a solid intermediate group, and despite some initial trepidation – this was the highest level that several members of our group had paddled – everyone swiftly adapted to the pace and power of the flow, and were all nailing their lines and hitting the eddies with gusto. We did walk around Holne Weir – although there's a straightforward line down the left, missing it at these levels would have led to an unpleasant rescue in the foaming trough below the weir face, and we took the sensible option. There was almost time for another run, but we'd had a superbly enjoyable afternoon and, with a whole weekend of paddling ahead of us, headed to the dormitory to bag the best bunks!

When on Dartmoor, it's become my custom, my personal ritual, to try to paddle from dawn until dusk. Watching the sun rise over the ancient monoliths at Dartmeet, seeing the rocks and eddies and pourovers slowly gain solidity as they emerge from the pre-dawn gloom, is a magical start to the day; and if you can book-end that with sunset at Holne Bridge, finally clambering up the bank in the gathering dusk, and knowing there's a warm bar and a pint with your name on it waiting a short walk away, then you've had pretty much the best day's paddling I can imagine.

The sun was just rising behind a leaden sky as we eased our kayaks off the bank at Dartmeet on Saturday morning, our fingers nipped by the cold water and our breath clouding ahead of us. John Simmonds & I had arranged to meet Paul French and Jack Lamer, who

*Cont'd on page 5 ...*



*Joel C making it look easy in one of the boulder gardens on the Upper Dart*



# Michael Bramwell Passmore

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 1928 – 13<sup>th</sup> Oct 2018

**M**ichael was the first President of Maidstone Canoe Club.

After eventful schooling at Bryanston, notably where he distinguished himself as House Captain, Captain of Boats, School Prefect and Rugby Secretary and, with the help of his tutor, started a sailing club.

After serving in the Navy he returned in 1948 and continued the family hobby of sailing with the family 47 foot sloop, built in 1902, Theta. This was successfully raced in the Channel, North Sea and Fastnet races, and cruised to Spain and Denmark, together with two circumnavigations of the British Isles. Initially living with his wife, Anne, in Blackheath, when he moved back to Kent he was asked to become chairman and secretary of Shepway Manor Youth Club. Profits made from their activities were used to start the Maidstone Canoe Club. He was also asked to become involved with the Kent Association of Boys Clubs, which is where Geoff Hunter, our first honorary life member met him. Geoff, as you will probably be aware is one of our

distinguished members, paddling solo around mainland Britain and completing a first circumnavigation of Iceland with Nigel Foster and many other serious navigations. Michael was one of the workers salvaging the first floating barge that was home to Maidstone Canoe Club at Mill Meadow Wharf.

While Paul Newman and Ian Bourn (another of the very early members) could not make Michael's funeral, Geoff Hunter and his wife attended to represent the club and pay respects to a very good man. It was extremely well attended, as you would expect for someone so intertwined with good deeds in the county and Maidstone.

Geoff Hunter, Paul Newman (current club president) and Ian Bourn decided to go to Michael's grave to remember him with the affection he deserved from the club and visited St Margaret's Church, Barming, where an earlier generation of Passmores is also buried, finishing the day toasting him in the Fusilier.

*By Paul Newman*

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## Medway Pollution

**M**ost of our paddlesport takes place ON the water, but we always get some water on us, and occasionally (more frequently if practising closed cockpit kayak moves and/or rescues) we do get totally immersed in the Medway.

After the paperworks at Tovil, brewery and sweet factories upstream of the club shut down, the water quality in the river passing our club improved. We showed some care in our demos during the past river festivals because of the deterioration in the water quality, caused by the moored boats in town discharging effluent into the river and eventually decided the risk was too great, and stopped rescues and kayak rolling amongst the moored boats for the festival spectators.

When the question was put to the EA, during one of the many Navigation meetings I attended on behalf of the Club and Region, "is there a requirement on the Medway as on other waterways for a holding tank for effluent on cruising boats?", the answer was that, although the Thames and other waterways have that requirement in their byelaws, the Medway does not – and it is not on the

agenda for any time soon. Holding tanks are containers on board cruising boats which take grey (eg washing up water, shower water) and black (eg toilet flushing) water, which is then not released into the river but pumped out to sewage systems at venues provided by the river authority. There are three pumpout stations at present, at Allington, Yalding and Tonbridge. Some marina moored boats are connected to the mains systems (?), and the restaurant next to the Bishops Palace is also connected ashore. The assumption is that boat residents will use the marina facilities and not pollute the river with water discharge!! I continued asking the question at every meeting, but had no answer. Club members can add to the pressure by asking the question of their MP, or the Environment Agency.

Currently there are 21 live onboard boats between the club and Farleigh Lock, with moorings for a further 6 at least. It is obvious these boats rarely, if ever, leave their moorings (many have scaffolding mooring systems to cope with flooding), have no link to land sewage systems and are very probably discharging everything, including faeces, into the Medway. There is also a boat right next to our landing stage.

Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease) carried in small mammals urine, eg. rats, continues to be present, and added to it are the pathogens from the pollution discharged by moored boats.

Pertinent advice:

- Don't ingest the water!
- Wash hands before eating (a packet of disinfectant wipes if travelling on the Medway make sense – disposed of after use in a bin)
- Where possible, shower after paddling.
- Cover cuts with a waterproof plaster.

I have read the reply letter from one of our elected MPs expressing concern and supporting the environment. She is obviously not aware of this anomaly on the Medway which affects rowers and paddlers and prospective swimmers. Legislation is required.

To prevent paddlers from contributing to Medway pollution use the paddlers code (CLEAN, DRY, not just boats but clothing too) when visiting other waterways to prevent carrying unwanted animals back to us.

Be aware, and think before you enter the water, e. Coli is not pleasant.

*By Paul Newman*

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# Rainbows and Rapids

... cont'd from page 3

were with Meridian CC this weekend. This was a river we all knew well, and with the water covering the slab at Newbridge we had ideal conditions for a fast, no-stops run down to Newbridge. Paul was the most experienced boater amongst us and took the lead, choosing some excellent lines, and we had an absolutely fabulous time blasting down what is probably my favourite run in England. It's rare to catch the Dart at such a perfect level – it rises and falls pretty quickly – so we were feeling pretty spoiled as we negotiated the initial rapids and headed into the “Mad Mile”, a series of fantastic rapids culminating in the much-storied Pandora's Box. There was enough power in the water to keep all of us on our toes and paddling hard – we caught a couple of rolls and even a swim between us, but that just added to the fun! It was with beaming smiles that we shook hands at Newbridge and went our separate ways to meet the rest of our respective groups, to run some easier water at a more-measured pace. All this, and we still had time for breakfast before heading out again!

John & I squeezed in another two paddles on the Saturday, both down the Loop section with different groups. The

first run was with a couple of young lads, one of whom only had a little previous moving-water experience. It was fantastic to see how much progress he made during the morning, particularly when breaking in and out. With the fast flows that the Dart was providing that day, it was easy to feel a little intimidated when sitting in the eddy preparing to go, and then it can be hard to build up the courage to really commit to the break-in. If you don't put some power into those first few strokes, you can end up wobbling precariously about on the swirling waters of the eddy line and risking an impromptu out-of-boat experience. By the end of the run he'd really embraced the energy of the water, his kayak had firmed up under the pressure of more-positive paddle strokes, and he was looking really confident on the river – it was a thoroughly enjoyable morning.

By Saturday afternoon, the levels had dropped a little, and the water was just lapping at the slab beneath Newbridge. It was still a lovely medium level, and the fact the water was a little less powerful than earlier in the day encouraged people to try new things, surf some waves and hit some eddies that they'd perhaps been a little leery of in the morning. With the larger group, we each paddled with a buddy – a good system with larger groups which ensures that no-one goes unnoticed. There was still plenty of power in the water, and commitment was required to really nail the lines – a fact

that my buddy really noticed when he hit the eddy just after the first drop of Triple Steps. The main flow is concentrated to a powerful line down river left, and there's a lovely large eddy just on the right – if you hit it right, you can whip the kayak into the eddy just behind the rocks in a really satisfying way! However, at these levels, the eddy forms a powerful whirlpool, and any attempt to sneak out the bottom sees you quickly recirculated back to where you started. The only way out is to bravely paddle back into the main flow, which at this point is a roaring, fast-flowing frothy wave train. With plenty of speed and edge, you're then whisked into the main line and down the remaining two drops of Triple Steps, generally with an ear-to-ear grin plastered across your face. It's a lovely line, and not as hard as it looks, but it is intimidating and my partner made several efforts to sidle out the back of the eddy before finally gritting his teeth and fully committing himself to the hard line!

The last of the day's sunlight threw another rainbow overhead as we paddled towards the take-out, the brilliant colours against the heavy clouds which presaged more rain overnight, and promising another day of perfect river levels tomorrow.

That evening, savoring a pint of Tribute ale and surrounded by the babble of happy paddlers, I listened as a series of boaters got up in front of the screen and shared their adventures with the



Cont'd on page 6 ...

Lean forward and paddle hard! Tom smashing through a stopper after a very long day on the Upper Dart.



# Rainbows and Rapids

... cont'd from page 5

crowd. Of course, there were the obligatory shots of people falling off enormous waterfalls, fabulous to watch but somehow awkward to relate to – they're so far above my skill levels that I find it hard to get inspired by them. But there were some other gems, tales of adventures that were, perhaps, within reach of a weekend paddler from Kent. Barney Prees' "10 tips for making the most of UK boating" was interesting, marrying clips of paddling hard whitewater with folksy suggestions that you could apply to your own paddling. "Put something back" was an obvious one, as was "Try another discipline" – both good tips for getting enjoyable paddling days when you can't be running the rivers you want to. "Don't be afraid to be a dirtbag paddler" was less obvious – a reminder that, if we're prepared to forgo a few home comforts, longer paddle trips can be done on a shoestring. I felt a surprising resonance with Joe Rae Dickens talk of his years of paddling across India. I was expecting another set of clips of hucking picturesque waterfalls, but in fact many of the rivers he waxed lyrical about were technically within reach – class 3 or class 4 multi-day runs, relatively accessible by road. A trip out to Meghalaya, where rainfall can reach 25m of during a single monsoon season, would actually be an achievable aim. Finally, the video of Neil Peter's North-to-South Nepal expedition showed what can be achieved with minimal resources: stretching the shoestring budget by hitching rides on lorries and eating basic local food, Neil and his girlfriend Leanne, together with local paddler Hari, crossed from the Chinese border in the North to the Indian border in the South. The rivers run were not new, and not particularly hard – the Bhote Kosi, the Sun Kosi, and others – but by linking them together in a single expedition they became more than the sum of their parts, coalescing into an expedition worthy of the name.

Sunday started late. Last night's pint of Tribute had unaccountably multiplied into several more, and I wasn't quite as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as I had been the previous morning. The river was much the same as Saturday, with the overnight rain falling just hard enough to keep the levels holding steady, and the online gauges suggesting the river would continue to fall, so Niki & I took a small group to run the Upper Dart. I was conscious that I'd be taking a fairly



All over. The calm(ish) paddle out.

structured approach to the river, rather than the more-relaxed peer paddle that I'd done previously – out of the other three group members, Tom Aylen had never run the river before; Dido Bashev had only run it at a low level; and the talented Joel C, while paddling at a very high level, was still 10 years old – but I was confident that with Niki as well, we had the experience required to have a good time. In the event, this paddle didn't go completely to plan – the river was, in fact, rising as we paddled it and became a lot pushier than expected – but that's a story for another time. Tom, Dido and Joel stepped up when things got tricky and paddled as a really strong team, supported by Paul French and Jack Lamer who offered assistance when it was most needed, and it was smiles all around when we finally made it back to Newbridge.

On the winding road between Newbridge and Dartmeet, there's a moment when you climb a gloomy forested lane, overhung with branches and scattered with the dark mulch of autumnal leaf-fall, and then suddenly emerge over the brow of a hill with the open vista of Dartmoor rolling away below you into the mist. Sheep are dotted among the gorse, and you can quite often spot a pair of rough-coated Dartmoor ponies nuzzling one another on a patch of short-cropped turf. It's a moment of tranquility before you descend to the busy paddler's car park at Dartmeet, and on the pre-paddle shuttle it can feel like the calm before the tempest of the river. Today, the paddling was over, and I was cadging a lift to be reunited with my vehicle, but the moment of tranquility remained: a final, glorious arch of colours stretched across the sky, framing the dark shapes of the nickered ponies on the grass below. It was a magical way to finish the weekend.

By Mark Corti

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*With thanks to all the Maidstone paddlers – too many to mention – who made this such a memorable weekend.*

## Cold Water Shock

**T**here are paddling disciplines where paddlers expect to get immersed in the wet stuff on a regular basis.

Playboating, kayak surfing, wave ski racing and white water touring, to name just a few. Adherents to these are probably more used to, and therefore less prone to, the shock of sudden immersion. They each have their attractions and appropriate preparation and sometimes, appropriate clothing and equipment are advised.

However, unless racing away from the club, touring another river or venturing on to the sea, we paddle a usually placid river, the Medway. Our intentions are to enjoy paddling ON the water. Sometimes we fall in. During safety and rescue practices it is intentional; at other times accidental and unintended. If we know we are likely to fall in we wear clothing suitable for the conditions (if we are sensible). Accidental immersion can always occur. Racers tend to wear a minimum of clothing, even in cold weather, knowing they will warm up fast while paddling and aim to get out of the water as fast as possible if they capsize.



Swimmer watching paddlers. The Medway is surprisingly chilly at the moment.

Most paddlers are aware of the dangers of hypothermia (reducing the level of body heat from normal) either by prolonged immersion – the time depends on factors such as the temperature of the water, whether there is any water flow past your body taking away heat, and what you may be wearing, eg. Wetsuit, drysuit, cagoule, etc...- or exposure to windchill on the bank. The latter is especially dangerous if unaware of the symptoms.

Cold Water Shock (CWS) is a cause of death many people fail to understand. Sudden immersion in cold water (below 15c) causes a number of physiological responses that can incapacitate or even kill. The sudden lowering of skin temperature is a strong stimulus causing increased heart rate and blood pressure and may even cause a heart attack in

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# Frank Luzmore Memorial Marathon

## 6th January 2019

## Cold Water Shock

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**W**ell it's not known exactly the turn of events that brought Catherine and myself to enter the Frank Luzmore race, but we later had conversations between us and never really got to the bottom of how it happened - however alcohol was not involved!

Two K2's from Maidstone were going, Catherine and myself, Bryn and Paul C with Paul Newman supporting; he kindly offered to help out by driving us and the boats to Elmbridge and he then drove onto Richmond. Thus saving us taking 2 cars and a lot of hassle and time with the shuttle (very much appreciated by all of us, thank you Paul).

It is necessary to explain that the Frank Luzmore is a well-established marathon race and rather than the races Catherine and I have become used to, it is a linear race and takes place on the river Thames starting at Elmbridge

Canoe Club and finishing at Richmond Canoe Club. It is approx. 12 miles with 3 portages (Sunbury, Molesey and Teddington) this is the longest distance by some 6 miles that Catherine and I have ever raced. Additionally it is not a distance we have often paddled in training as we generally paddle around 8-9 miles.

We had been warned that the conditions were likely to be somewhat turbulent (not quite the flat-water we are used to) so decided to take Richard Clarke's super stable Elio.

So here I was on a Sunday morning at 7:15 with the temperature a mild 5 degrees and a nice clear calm day finding myself at the club and due to not having had much rain in the last week, it looked to be a day for a good race ahead.

On getting to the club Bryn and Paul

*Cont'd on page 8 ...*

healthy people. At the same time a "gasp" response may result in water being inhaled into the lungs and your breathing rate may increase by as much as tenfold. The ability to swim well makes no difference.

The key to surviving CWS is being alert to the symptoms and acting quickly to protect your airway and conserve your strength. If ever you, or someone you are paddling with has suspected CWS, have been recovered from the water, there may still be the danger of secondary drowning, where any water entering the lungs can cause a condition called pulmonary oedema. This can happen within one to 24hrs after the incident. Look out for coughing, chest pain, troubled breathing, tiredness and irritability. With the Medway now in the low single figures centigrade, be careful out there!

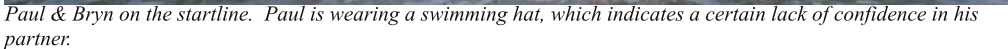
*By Paul Newman*

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*The big Elio handles the turbulent start with finesse, no doubt assisted by the expert helming provided by Ian and Catherine.*





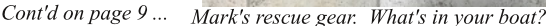
... cont'd from page 7

Marathon races are split into classes and therefore there will be several different starts. Bryn and Paul were first to go and started with 9 boats. They got away well. It was then time for Catherine and I to get onto the water however as there were 52 boats in our start we knew

As we approach the second portage the really fit senior men's race who had started behind our race start to overtake

A chance conversation with a friend made me realise that it's been a few years since I last practiced this stuff, and it was perhaps time for an update. I booked on an Advanced Whitewater Safety & Rescue course, and one frosty weekend in January found myself shivering on a riverbank amidst a tangle of ropes, slings, prussiks, and other detritus from various rescue kits. As is traditional on these courses, we started the weekend with a quick show-and-tell – everyone talked about the safety equipment they carried, and what they used it for. These sessions are always really useful, because they force you to re-evaluate your own assumptions about kit – about what's necessary, what you can improvise, and

*Cont'd on page 9 ...*





# Frank Luzmore Marathon

... cont'd from page 8

us and by the time we are getting to the portage these K2s are everywhere, all vying for the best place to portage. Ok so Catherine a little panicked by all these boats makes the decision to try to avoid the over-crowded portage and to come out at the lock. This means a much higher climb out of the boat which is not so simple, as we have to stand up and jump up out. Catherine successfully gets out first then it is my turn and opps I end up having a quick swim; this leaves us having to recover the boat and empty it of water losing us about 5 mins. Fortunately we make it over the portage and after a slow start we start to settle again and start making up some ground with the boats ahead that had managed to overtake us at the portage.

Between the second and third portage we pass through Kingston which according to Catherine was very picturesque, however I was too busy just concentrating on keeping my paddling in time and following her lead. Between these portages we again had to dodge Sailing Boats.

After a steady paddle we made it to the 3rd portage and this one fortunately goes well and we make up some places. So for this last part of the race we find ourselves with other boats in our race and Catherine is holding us on the wash, not as easy as it looks, keeping the boat that close to another K2; we even managed to eventually pull away leaving them behind. Never having raced over such a long distance we weren't sure how much further we had to go. So despite having caught up with another 2 boats we slowed down concerned we would not be able to keep going. However we then spotted the finish line and were able to put in a last burst and were bearing down on them at the finish - we did not manage to overtake them ... but in the end we were only seconds apart, it was totally exhilarating.

Once past the finish line we had to go round the buoys to head back up stream to the car at which point I asked Catherine if she was OK. There was no reply and being totally out of character I thought something must be wrong as we had both given every last bit at the end of the race however she quickly recovered and started chatting again, phew! We even managed to out run the motor boat chasing us up the river wanting their expensive number board back; they thought we were going home with it!

Paul N met us by the bank and had

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# Ropework & Rescues

what you can leave behind. We're always restricted with size and weight in kayaks, and so the expeditioner's adage that "every item of gear you carry should have at least two uses" is apposite. For instance, an open sling (like the Palm Snake) can double as a short throwline, towing sling, or anchor, whereas a traditional looped sling is single-use.

We spent a few hours on the bankside, setting up increasingly-complex pulley systems to rescue boats from fictional pin situations. It was great that the focus of this course was on practicality: all too often, ropework courses rely on specialist, complex gear such as swing-cheek pulleys and belay devices. Some kayakers do choose to carry this kind of stuff, and tote a clanking drybag full of mysterious gadgets everywhere they go. And although that does have its place - perhaps on a sketchy mission in a steep-sided canyon where escape may involve full-on mountaineering - for the majority of paddling days, it's massive overkill. In my experience, the weighty bag of pulleys and descenders and all the rest never leaves the boat and is lugged from one river to the next. Much better, to my mind, to have some versatile gear and a bag of tricks to get the most from it.

One revelation to me was how low-friction a modern tape was when leveraged around a karabiner. As anyone who's tried to set up a mechanical-advantage pulley system using a throwline and krabs will tell you,



The unlucky airbag is recirculating behind the waterfall.



Bankside pulley practice with minimal resources.

the forces involved as the rope curves over the karabiner means that about 40% of the energy you apply is lost to friction. Add any more than 2 karabiners to your system and you actually end up with less force on the rope rather than more. This is the traditional justification for carrying a couple of pulleys in a "pin kit". However, the wider face of nylon webbing, coupled with its thin cross-section, means that it slips over a karabiner-as-pulley with ease. Admittedly, using a short tape rather than a throwline means that you have to re-set the pulley regularly if you're doing a long pull - but generally, you only need to move a boat a metre or so before it's dislodged from whatever obstruction was holding it, and you can then easily pull it in to shore.

Whitewater incidents requiring advanced rescue techniques come in basically two types: complex recoveries where time is not critical, for instance rescuing a firmly-pinned kayak from a dangerous rapid; and rescues where the technique is not particularly complex, but speed is absolutely crucial, for instance a foot entrapment. The pulley systems and mechanical advantage setups we worked on for the first day clearly come into the first category - they take time to plan and set up, and are primarily for recovering kit. The second day looked much more at rescues of people, where time is of the essence. Despite the freezing temperatures - the mercury struggled to hit 2C all day - the livebaiting was good fun. When I've practiced this before, it's always been on a fairly innocuous bit of river - in short, the kind of place you're extremely unlikely ever to need to use it. This was not the case today. The Erme is a lovely bit of grade 4, incredibly steep but enormous fun.



# Frank Luzmore Marathon

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parked the car really close which was a bonus as only a short way to carry the boat. Then a high-five with Catherine for we had made it. Bryn and Paul C were already changed and drinking hot drinks having achieved a very respectful time of 1 hour 48 mins and placed well among their division.

We quickly changed out of our wet paddling kit into warm clothes all again in a car park – this I think is common to all types of canoeing and comes with the territory. Once changed we walked back down to Richmond Canoe Club with the all-important number board, and picked up our competitors snacks. It was my turn to buy Catherine and myself a hot drink and a bacon roll which has now

become a very much important team building after-race routine. Back to the car we are now both bubbling over and neither of us could stop chatting, just going over the race the good and the bad being happy that we had made it to the end and were not last. As we arrived back at the car we are congratulated on our effort and received the best news as we had managed to hit our target of achieving a time of less than 2 hours – we actually managed a time of 1 hour and 59 mins; amazingly all 52 boats had completed the race and we achieved a respectable 42nd place.

*By Ian Dann & Catherine Ayling*

rope did an excellent job, waiting for me to untangle myself before hauling me back to try again.

This was really useful training - not only learning to spot the weaknesses in the flow where you could sneak past the main force of the falling water, but how to manage ropes in chaotic water flows, about the importance of communication in effecting a successful rescue, and more.

It's hard to overstate the importance of communication in these situations. Good communication is often the difference between a successful outcome and a botched recovery. It's easy enough to plan a rescue when you're all standing in a field, pretending that the river is running between you; it's quite another thing to coordinate separate teams of people on opposite sides of a rapid, communicating over the roaring water in a game of high-stakes multiplayer charades. For the final exercise, we worked on a rescue from a vertically-pinned boat in the middle of a rapid, utilising teams on either side of the bank. For added realism, someone drew the short straw and sat in the pinned boat - the aim was to rescue the paddler in as short a time as possible.

This is probably the most complex high-speed rescue situation you're likely to come across, and the preferred method is usually to throw two lines across the river - one upstream and one downstream of the pinned boater. By clipping the lines together with karabiner and moving the ropes down the bank in tandem, you can cinch the paddler in the middle and help them escape. This relies on good timing, and on every member of the team knowing their role - in short, on communication. Needless to say, it took us a couple of attempts before we got it right!

As I drove back up the A303 on Sunday night, the heaters blasting out hot air as I tried to re-warm my frozen extremities, I reflected on the things I'd learned over the weekend. It was more than just a grab-bag of techniques to pull out when needed - it was a system of thinking about rescues, of approaching the situation in a logical way, maintaining an overview of the whole team, and recognising the appropriate solution to each individual scenario. But you still need the techniques. Executing them flawlessly in a high-pressure situation requires practice - more than just the occasional weekend training - and I've now included "throwline practice" and a few other things in my monthly routine. Probably all of us should.

*By Mark Corti*

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*Practice rescue of a pinned paddler and boat in the centre of a rapid.*

## Ropework & Rescues

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Part-way down, there's a bedrock waterfall - only a metre or so high - which plunges into a narrow gorge. If you do it right, it's a lovely move - but if you mis-time the boof or get the line wrong, you soon realise that the gorge isn't really wide enough to roll back up in, and you have become a kayaker-in-temporary-difficulty. Compounding your problems is the cave behind the waterfall, which is undercut by a good metre or so. Swimmers can find themselves behind the curtain of water, pushed back into the cave and unable to get out. This is the scenario we practiced.

For the purposes of training, the role of "unlucky kayaker" was played by an

airbag, which bobbed about happily behind the curtain of water while we took it in turns to try and rescue it. Standing on a slippery rock a few metres downstream, the waterfall looked a great deal bigger than it had a few moments ago. I took a deep breath and flung myself out over the water, my partner paying out the rope behind me. As I landed, the shock of the ice-cold water slapping into my face left me gasping for breath, and I swam furiously towards the drop, trying to power through the waterfall by brute strength. Just as my fingertips brushed the airbag, the full force of the falling water battered me, plunging me down into the green depths of the pool, tumbling me over and over as I was pushed down. I surfaced, spluttering and shamefaced, with the rope wrapped around my arms and neck - not my most successful rescue! My partner on the