

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 August, 2019.



Mark Corti, Editor
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Happy Birthday, Geoff!



Geoff Orford, Membership Secretary, Treasurer, paddler and all-round good egg, celebrating his 80th birthday in the best way possible: on a kayaking trip, with cake and whisky!



Unable to arrange a children's entertainer for Geoff's party in the wilds of Scotland, the team persuaded these dolphins to perform in exchange for some "Tuna Surprise" pasta.

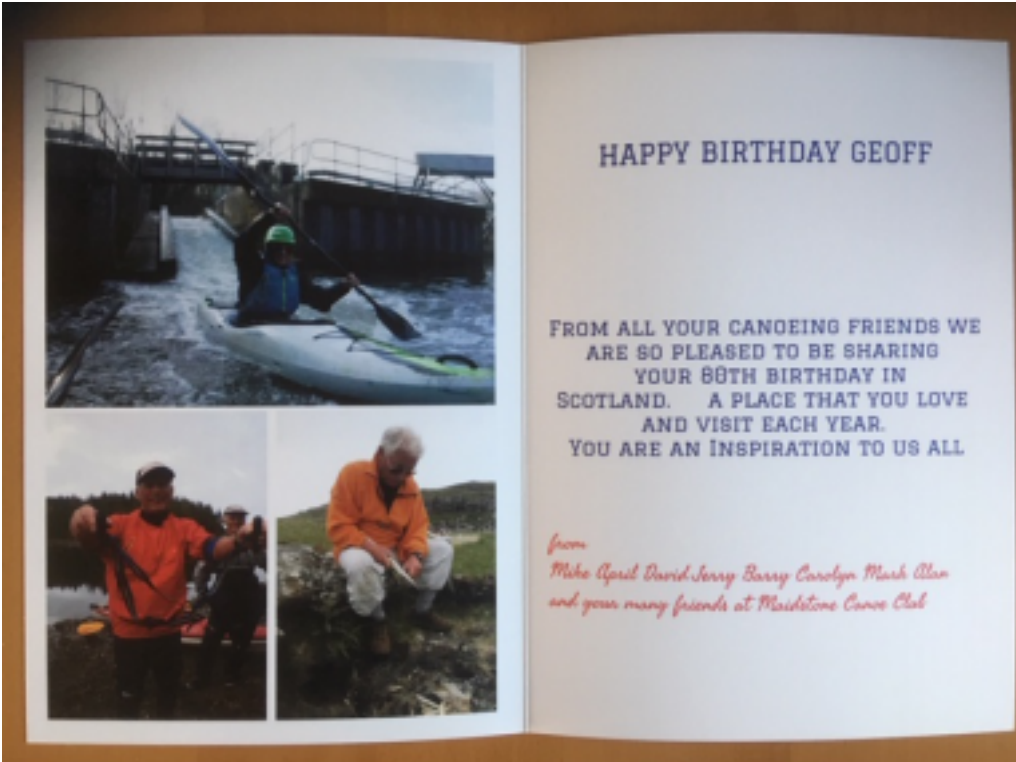
Geoff's 80th Birthday in Scotland

When I joined Maidstone Canoe Club in June 1986 the first person I met after Paul Newman was Geoff Orford.

Geoff was an active member of the club back then and during the next 33 years Geoff has continued to be the backbone of the club. His contribution is enormous:- membership secretary, treasurer, committee member, the organiser of many trips and tours, IT race controller of the Maidstone Marathon, organiser of the clubs annual sea kayaking trip to Scotland, photographer, the list goes on and on.....

Not only does Geoff carry out these jobs in a modest manner but nothing ever seems too much trouble, he might be helping a new members or even an older one that need his help or advice. He always treats people evenly and with respect whatever the situation. He has over the years introduced many thousands of members to canoeing and to Maidstone Canoe Club. Even when he moved to Redhill his commitment to the club is such that he is prepared to makes

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Geoff's 80th Birthday in Scotland

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the round trip from Redhill to Maidstone every time he attends the club. Geoff still works one day a week and recently set up a wood turning facility in his garage. He is always developing gadgets to help with his canoeing or camping.

On my first trip to Scotland in May 2017 Geoff stated that he wanted to spend his 80th Birthday in Scotland whilst on his annual sea kayaking trip. Last week, 18th May 2019, I had the pleasure of sharing with Geoff his 80th Birthday. A card from the club was presented on the day and a number of presents including one from his Canadian canoeing friend Hazen. Catherine made a cake which was transported by Mark and shared with all the members of the group.

What made the day magical was a pod of dolphins that spent an hour playing with the group on that day's paddle. Not even the rain could dampen the spirit and excitement caused by the dolphins swimming and jumping around the kayaks. A fitting Birthday present for Geoff - a very special club member and remarkable man.

By Mike Lambourne

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Pool Sessions

2019

The pool is warm, clean and fun! Come along for a splash around. Coaching available on request - learn to roll, improve your brace, practice rescues, or just have a paddle! All pool sessions are at Larkfield Leisure Centre, ME20 6RH. 8pm - 9:30pm - clean boats only, please! Please speak to Lee if you need to borrow a Club boat.

Saturday 15th June
Saturday 13th July
Saturday 24th August
Saturday 7th September
Saturday 19th October
Saturday 16th November
Saturday 14th December



An absolutely magical day with these fabulous creatures.

professional Meet a paddler

Rob Davis runs the South East Kayaking paddlesport company, and is a familiar face out on the water. We caught up with him en route to a coaching trip in Essex.

Mark: So, how long have you been paddling?

Rob: I'm 49 now ... I started paddling when I was in the Scouts, about 12 or 13. So 36 or 37 years. Seriously paddling, probably about 30 years.

Mark: What kind of paddling do you mostly do?

Rob: Primarily sea kayaking, but I paddle whitewater kayaks, open canoes, and I've just done a day of SUP paddling.

Mark: At what point did you decide you wanted to make a career out of paddlesport?

Rob: It's probably been a hankering for a long time. I coached for a long time voluntarily, and I was probably in my

early 30s when I decided I wouldn't mind making a career out of paddlesport.

Mark: It's a tricky question because you've done so much paddling, but is there a particular moment or a particular trip that stands out for you?

Rob: A particular moment would be having a basking shark swim underneath me when I was on a trip to the Isles of Scilly in 2010. I was out there on a trip organised by Sea Kayaking Cornwall, and I was paddling along chatting to Jeff Allen, and I said "aren't we getting a bit close to those sharp-looking rocks?", and he said "that's no rocks, that's basking sharks!". They swam underneath us, I could literally have reached down and stroked it's back. I was in an 18-foot sea kayak and his head and tail were well beyond opposite ends of the boat - it was a biggie!

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

Rob: Being outside in the fresh air. Introducing people and developing

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Rob Davis playing in some surf in between coaching sessions

professional Meet a paddler

... cont'd from page 3

people's skills in that environment.

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

Rob: That's a difficult question to answer, because everyone's different! I would say know your main discipline that you want to practice, but have a few other disciplines that you can work on as well. And don't expect to be a millionaire out of it!

Mark: You're also the Rockpool sea kayak representative in this part of the world. Can you tell us about that?

Rob: About three years ago I went totally independent as a sea kayak coach, and we had some connections with Rockpool kayaks. I'm now the Rockpool demo site for those boats in the South East. We've got a fleet of demo Rockpools – currently we've got a GT, a Taran 16, a Menai 18, and an Isel available to try, and we can get others in if requested.

Mark: Do you mostly coach sea kayaking?

Rob: No! I coach river runners up to their Explore Award, touring kayaks up to their Touring Award, I also coach Open Canoe, and I also coach SUPs.

Mark: What is it about paddling that makes it special for you?

Rob: The freedom. Being out on the water and being under your own power. The wildlife and the scenery that you see. The wildlife you can get up close to in a kayak is so much more than you can see if you're in a power boat or something. You can just sit there and drift and the



wildlife will come to you.

Mark: And why do you enjoy coaching?

Rob: Seeing lots of people really enjoying it, really getting out there and enjoying the sport. The happy faces when you go away, and the team-building that you get, especially with school groups. You see the youngster who perhaps is not so involved with the "in group", and at the end of the session they're part of the "in group" and their smiles just don't go away! Likewise with adults – last Saturday, I took a group out to the Goodwin Sands, and you should have seen the smiles on the people's faces when they saw the number of seals out there, when they stood on the sandbank in the middle of the English Channel.

The happiness that people get from it.

Mark: And how do you maintain your own love of paddling? How do you stop it becoming "just a job"?

Rob: It's difficult to do it, but by getting away and paddling for myself! Getting away and paddling with my friends, by doing courses to develop my skills, or get away and paddle with peers who are at the same level I am, and pushing myself on trips as well. I was paddling with some coaches from Kayak Essentials on one of their weekends, and that's how I maintain my interest as well – working alongside other coaches.

By Mark Corti & Rob Davis

<http://www.southeastkayaking.co.uk/>

North Wales Easier Whitewater Trip



In July 2017 I took part in a beginners' course at MCC which quickly led me into flat-water Marathon racing.

However in order to build on the paddle skills learnt in my one star I decided to move on to my two star award with Mary Cutts coaching me. Those of you who know Mary well will be aware that she is a keen whitewater paddler and there you have it - this is partly why I have got into Whitewater paddling alongside my Marathon racing. Ian Dann, my K2 racing partner is also a keen Whitewater paddler so it is not too surprising to find myself signing up to some of the Introduction to Whitewater events that MCC put on and this is how I

ended up going on the 'Easier Whitewater Trip' to North Wales.

However, do not be fooled – Whitewater and easy are not words which are synonymous but with the excellent care and guidance of the coaches and experienced paddlers on our trip a great time was had by us that are classed as 'novices'. On this trip that consisted of Fraser, Alex and me.

The trip began on Friday with everyone travelling at different times in various car shares. The lucky ones, including me, were able to set off early on Friday morning and this allowed us to have an afternoon paddle at JJs Mile End Mill on the River Dee. This was fantastic as I got a quick refresher on skills such as ferry-gliding, eddying in and out and practising a couple of drops. Thank you

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North Wales Easier Whitewater Trip

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to Mary coaching me and Ian's support and encouragement. We then joined the more advanced paddlers namely Michaela, Burt, Nikki, Bill and Jon. They were having a fabulous time playing on some really scary looking water, dipping, surfing and turning their boats – way out of my league but allowing me to be the camera person and getting some lovely shots of them all showing off their skills in this beautiful location whilst the sun was shining despite being early March.

It was all too soon time to get off the water and off to the bunkhouse at Cerrigydrudion. Well this did not go quite as smoothly as it should have due to Burt having misplaced his car keys. It took all of us about an hour of searching all the bags and cars and anywhere we could think of several times before they were finally found deep within Burt's change bag and a sigh a relief was heard from all of us.

Arriving at the Tyddyn Bychan bunkhouse which was tucked away in some beautiful Welsh countryside, we found Paul already there and having grabbed the best dorm confirming the old saying 'the early bird catches the worm' and luckily we too were part of the early brigade. At this point I think it is only fair

to describe what a bunkhouse is, as if you are new to this like me, then this will be helpful. A bunkhouse is a house where the bedrooms are full of bunkbeds!!! Ours had 2 bedrooms (10 and 8 beds); 3

i.e. Fraser, Alex and me with Ian supporting across a field to the 'put-in' and off down the lower Tryweryn we went with an immediate small drop which we all successfully executed. Mary led the way putting me behind her tailed by Ian and Fraser and Alex and Mark following on behind. The river run started really well and Alex, the youngest in the group



Happy faces after a successful run down the infamous Chainbridge Hotel Rapid on the River Dee

showers; 2 toilets and a large kitchen diner. Being in a room of 8 beds, privacy is limited and I have quickly realised that in the kayaking world privacy is considered an unnecessary luxury. Having said this, we all got on amazingly well with a lot of tolerance and for me I was happy to have got home with all of my many belongings – a bonus! The group were great and showed me the ways of 'dorm' living such as how to get changed discreetly on a high bunk.

Saturday morning started at a leisurely pace with a cooked breakfast provided by the bunkhouse in their lovely breakfast room. There was a lot of talk as to where it would be best to go due to the vast array of abilities in the group. Nikki had found out that there was a 'release' at the Tryweryn River; again a new term for me. A 'release' is where a river is supplied by a reservoir and at times can be too low to paddle on, but then there are times that the water held in the lakes above are 'released' into the river below. These times are announced on the internet by the National Whitewater Centre and this is a kayaking centre which sits on the Tryweryn near the town Bala and has facilities including changing rooms with showers; car parks and a café. The other advantage of the Tryweryn River is that there are well defined sections with different levels of difficulties where the lower section from Bala is easier than the Upper and was ideal for our mixed group.

Once at the centre and all kitted up, Mary and Mark led the beginners group

at the age of 11 and accompanied by Dad Mark, is an absolute natural showing all the promise of a future expert. Needless to say he went the whole weekend without a swim. The same cannot be said for Fraser and me who enjoyed the cool feel of the water as we plunged into the river a couple of times in the course of the day. It was me who set the pace for this having taken the first swim on approaching some rocks and over-thinking it – much better to just go with instinct. Though Fraser, always the true gentleman, quickly followed obligingly so as to make me feel better I'm sure.

On capsizing and once in the water my recollection is to remind myself to pull off the spray deck; grab the paddle; lift my legs up in front of me and off down the river I go. When having capsized in moving water it is exactly that, moving, and off you go with your bottom often bouncing off the rocks – fortunately with no damage. This continues until you can get rescued either by swimming to the side as soon as you can make an eddy or by grabbing onto the back of a speeding kayak coming to get you – thanks again goes to Mark, Mary and Ian who rescued us, our boats and anything else that had fallen out.

Still, the Lower Tryweryn is a lovely river and a good challenge for paddlers that have had a few training sessions on moving water. It put us through our paces and really focused me after my second

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Whitewater Adventure

Mary Cutts, mild-mannered chair of our Coaching Development Group by day and whitewater coach at the weekend, has put together a series of sessions which will take you on a whitewater adventure! Start with the Explore Award - the award previously known as 2* - to get some kayak fundamentals, before exploring the basics of moving water skills on the safe environs of the River Stour in Canterbury. Finally, a whole weekend of coaching at probably the finest introductory whitewater location in the UK, Mile End Mill on the glorious River Dee.

**Explore Award - Currently full, more dates to be confirmed
Moving Water Skills - Aug 17th
Intro to Whitewater - Sept 7-8th**

Sign up on the website - start your adventure!

Monday is Washing Day. NO! It's Monday Paddler's Day!

For over a year a group of paddlers look forward to Mondays for as the majority of the population start the working week, we go paddling.

We paddle approximately every second Monday depending on commitments and communicating by our Whatsapp group. The aim is not to paddle from the clubhouse, we use sea kayaks, day boats, ww boats depending on where and when we paddle, paddlers of all abilities have joined the group developing their skills. It is not just for the retired paddlers its for anyone free on a Monday, days-off, self-employed and public holidays all boost numbers adding to the interest.

The social side of the group is equally important having taken in a couple of cycle rides plus a day's free tour of Chatham Dockyard, courtesy of David. Since Keith has joined the group we have had a number of convivial pub lunches with more planned!

Our last trip was on the 6th May, "May Day" being a public holiday the paddle was from Queenborough to Darnet fort and back 15 miles, see the attached photographs. There is a lot of wildlife on the Estuary as was enjoyed by the 9 paddlers that made the trip. The weather was overcast but with little wind and the right tidal flow it made a great day out with good company.

Other trips completed: Ramsgate to Sandwich, Tonbridge to Yalding, Allington to Rochester, Eastbourne to Birling Gap, The Strand to Rochester to list a few.

Where will you spend next Monday?

If have a spare Monday and would like to join us, please join our Whatsapp group and enjoy - <https://chat.whatsapp.com/DOMq7wvOMmkIFDlxbq1x6L>

Best

Wishes

Mike Lambourne

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River Clean-Up

For many years Maidstone Canoe Club has participated in efforts to clean up the banks of the Medway by collecting rubbish using our kayaks and canoes.

Often these have been organised by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership which is one of a number of similar projects covering Kent and supported by KCC, have a look at their website at www.medwayvalley.org. Our river clean up on 14th April this year was part of a River Clean Up campaign by British Canoeing but again we were encouraged and supported by MVCP who lent us their pickers and organised the collection of the full rubbish bags we deposited at Allington. Other canoe clubs, WAM and Tonbridge were also taking part, so our stretch of river was the one we normally paddle on Sundays and Wednesdays between East Farleigh and Allington. I collected the pickers from the MVCP office at Allington Lock and prepared them by tying a length of string to the handles, important because the pickers don't float. About 25 of us set out from the club armed with pickers and bin liners and headed towards Maidstone. The plan is for individual to paddle close to each bank and pick out all the plastic bottles,

bags, wrappers, cans etc., sometimes hidden deep in the vegetation, which includes brambles, and transfer this into the bin liner using the picker. When a rubbish bag becomes too full to handle on the deck it is passed on to the canoes. This year the river was very much cleaner than in previous years and it took quite a lot of searching to reveal all the hidden bits of rubbish but between us we gradually managed to fill a good number of bin liners. It is difficult to cover the whole stretch in one morning's paddle, so we turned back before Tovil. I had it in mind to complete the bit from East Farleigh to Tovil on the following Sunday, which we did, and again the river was surprisingly clean. Either people are getting more conscious of messing up the environment or our clean ups are having an effect. Many thanks to all those club members who took part, there will be more opportunities do your bit later this year and next.

By Geoff Orford

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Jeff with a huge smile on his face!



Many hands make light work ...

Meeting with Helen Grant, MP

I first contacted Helen Grant about the Clear Waters, Clear Access campaign in December last year, writing to her and requesting her support for British Canoeing's campaign to improve and clarify the access situation in England.

Her letter, while polite, was far from encouraging, repeating the official government line that locally-negotiated Voluntary Access Agreements (VAAs) are the best solution.

As anyone who's been yelled at by fisherfolk or come around a corner to encounter a barbed wire fence across the river will tell you, VAAs do not work. In fact, when I spoke to Ben Seal, the Places to Paddle manager at British Canoeing, he challenged me to find a single VAA that was working, anywhere in England. I needed to do some research on this before going back to my MP, and I learned some interesting things.

Locally, the Medway has been paddled above Tonbridge since time immemorial – certainly no-one I spoke to could remember when it was first done. Tonbridge CC ran a trip for many years from the source back to their clubhouse in Tonbridge. Each year, some hard-working Tonbridge volunteer would write to all 29 landowners who they'd identified using the Land Registry, and ask them if they objected to a canoe trip down the river. For many years, there was no objection. Then, one year, a local angling Club objected to the Penshurst Estate, and the Penshurst Estate then objected to Tonbridge Canoe Club. The trip was cancelled, and has never run since. This was paddling in the closed season for fishing, in reasonable flows (so no chance of damaging fish spawning beds) – there was no defensible reason for the objection. This is a tale repeated up & down the country – it's just not practical to get permission from every landowner on a stretch of river, and in any event the landowners don't actually own the river – they own the land either side, they own the riverbed, but they don't own the water, and they almost certainly don't have the right to stop someone floating on it. This has strong parallels to footpaths – can you imagine having to get permission from every landowner every time you went for a walk on a footpath? And if a single one objected, you wouldn't be able to go for a walk?

The Countryside & Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 gave the "right to roam" over huge tracts of uplands in England, and when it was first mooted it evinced

huge protests from landowners. Their arguments exactly mirror those currently surrounding access to rivers – worries about other users of the land, protests about impact of increased use, about liability, and concerns about wildlife disturbance. These arguments have been proven false – there are few conflicts arising because of this shared access arrangement. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives huge amounts of freedom to roam and camp over most of Scotland – and importantly, explicitly includes waterways in this right. Just think about that for a second: Scotland, world-famous for trout and salmon fishing and with a huge industry surrounding them, allows access to canoeists across its rivers. Most of Europe manages the same. England does not. There are few conflicts arising from it. It's clear that shared access to rivers works well in other countries, and not just in places like Canada & Nepal where there are vast tracts of wild country.

It is important to note that these access laws – CROW, Land Reform (Scotland) – are underpinned by the phrase "responsible use". This isn't a charter to turn up on some bit of river in a jetski and start a fire on the riverbank. In most cases, other legislation has been strengthened to make this explicit – for instance, the Wildlife and Countryside Act increased penalties for disturbing wildlife when the CROW Act was introduced. In specific cases, such as the important Spey Fisheries, individual codes of conduct for canoeing have been introduced, which have been incredibly successful – but only because they're set against a legislative backdrop that enshrines a right of access.

The main opposition to shared access in England comes from English fishermen – Keith Dacey, a keen Maidstone paddler and also an angler, wrote an article in this magazine a short while ago on this topic. Fishermen claim that kayaking impacts on both fish stock and on fishing success. Luckily, the Environment Agency compiled a comprehensive research report on this very thing. It's called "Effects of Canoeing on Fish Stocks and Anglers, W266", it's 68 pages long, and the best bit about it is that I've read it so you don't have to! The key findings, set out in plain English, are stark: "This study indicates that canoeing does not harm fish populations ... objections to allowing shared access on the basis that canoeing causes damage to fish stocks are untenable". And regarding the act of fishing itself, "anglers referred to a

'quietening of the swim' following disturbance ... others observed an increase in 'fish activity' after canoe passage". The evidence was too mixed to draw clear judgements – there is no clear effect on angling. The main impact is that fishermen have to temporarily pull in their lines and share the river. In Scotland, they're happy to do this if you're courteous. In England, that's a lot less true.

Armed with this knowledge, I met Helen at her constituency office on Friday 17th May. She previously served as Minister for Sport and was knowledgeable about the competitive side of kayaking, which gave a good foundation for our discussion. After talking through the issues described above, she agreed that the current access situation required improvement. The fact that shared access to rivers has been shown to work in other places, particularly Scotland, was a particularly positive point. While stopping short of promising support for any future legislation in this area, she was broadly encouraging and certainly better-informed than before our meeting. She's writing to the under-secretary with responsibility for waterways, and also said that she would do further research when legislation is put before Parliament, and attend any debates on it. In an age of political disillusionment, it was nice to feel that I'd made an impact on what happens in Westminster.

The access situation is getting worse rather than better. Currently, there are only 1,400 miles of uncontested waterways in England – out of a total of around 46,700 miles. That's less than 4%. As a country, we can do better. Please do write to your local MP, and better still – meet with them. It works.

By Mark Corti. A meeting with an MP typically lasts 20 minutes, so it's not a big time commitment. If you'd like a copy of the notes I prepared for my meeting, please drop me a line.

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Helen Grant, MP, opening the Elite Training Centre for Sprint Canoeing at Dorney. 2015

North Wales Easier Whitewater Trip

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swim. I was now determined to stay upright and beat every feature and drop that I was faced with. The acronym PLF was in my mind every time I was faced with a wobble and found myself shouting out loud 'you are NOT going to fall in' and it all became very exhilarating. Happily I managed to stay upright to the end of the river run.

Saturday evening most of the group went off to have an Indian meal at Abul's Spice in Corwen where they happily had to take their own alcohol. They all returned having enjoyed their supper.

Sunday morning started very much as Saturday except for having to pack up all our gear in the cars which was done remarkably quickly. The weather was very damp and drizzly but as kayakers paddle in water it really does not dampen the experience and it did stop raining for the majority of our paddle. This time it was decided the 2 groups would split up and Robert joined our group this time. The plan was to complete a run on 2 different rivers and we started on the River Glaslyn. This time we had to change at the side of the road and then the drivers kindly doing the car shuffle that is always essential on these trips. We were at Llyn Dinas Lake, a beautiful lake nestled amongst the Welsh hills and a truly lovely start to this river run despite the dampness and low clouds. Mark and Mary had chosen it as it was a good beginner 2/3 graded-river. The river was gorgeous and led us down to Aberglaslyn. Mark led the way this time.

We had paddled for a good length of time having navigated around many rocks and drops and were relatively near the end and all feeling really pleased that we hadn't had any swimmers despite some quite challenging rocks, when yes the inevitable happened. This time Fraser going in for a swim a fraction ahead of

me, however when Mary described the area as going through a 'rock garden' we felt a little less despondent. Fortunately we were expertly rescued by all the experienced paddlers which when there are 2 boats, 2 paddles and 2 swimmers in the water at the same time can be a challenge in itself; Alex patiently waiting in an eddy something he did a few times during the weekend. On one such occasion Alex put himself in a safe place and then got wedged on a rock. He was told to wait whilst everyone and everything else had been recovered. Then his Dad called him down and without having anyone's line to follow he navigated the river and line to the next eddy with pure ease – well done Alex.

Once arrived at Aberglaslyn we all got off the river and Mark and Mary went off to get the van whilst Ian and I took a short walk down to see the next section of the Glaslyn River – awesome but years of experience required to paddle that part! We then all piled into our respective cars in our paddling gear for quickness; ate lunch on route and arrived at Horseshoe Falls on the river Dee. Here the car park is at the top of a long, steep grassy bank. Now remember I told you it had been raining, well now it was drizzling again so our next challenge was to take our boats down this bank – here I excelled and remained upright all the way down and am the only one who can boast this having watched all the others slide down at some point on their bottoms either being pulled or pushed by their kayaks but all smiling at the end of it. Unbeknown to me though Fraser decided that he would drive one of the cars to JJs where we would be finishing the run having decided he had paddled enough for the day.

Fraser choosing not to paddle this river unsettled me a bit and I felt that my swimming companion was gone so now



the determination and challenge of staying afloat in the boat was set. I also asked if I could be nearer the back of the group this time so Mary led Alex in the front. Being nearer the back of the group enabled me to feel more confident as I was able to see more of the others and saw how they handled the features. This was clearly a good move as we all got back having stayed upright including Mary, Mark and Robert who all expertly paddled down the Serpents Tail to Alex's enjoyment of watching his Dad doing so – Ian, Alex and I had successfully portaged over the rocks instead. Arriving at Mile End Mill, Alex with youth on his side, wanted to do a couple more drops – being content with what I had just achieved and feeling somewhat tired I decided to quit whilst I was ahead and ferry-glided over to the get-out point with Mary.

Once back on dry land it was lovely to get changed back into warm dry clothes and after a nice hot cup of tea and snack we were all homeward bound and arriving home having enjoyed an amazing experience in expert hands; with positive feedback from everyone in the group stating how much they had appreciated the weekend. I can really say I am looking forward to the next one.

By Catherine Ayling

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