

# NEWS LETT ER

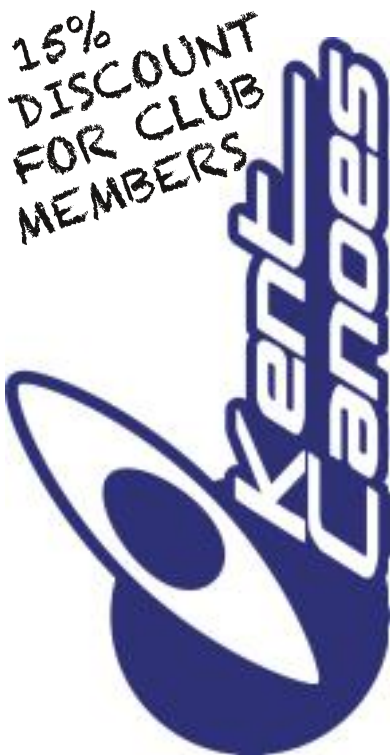
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The success of this newsletter relies on contributions from **YOU!** If you've been on a trip, in a race, or just have an opinion or some news you want to share, please send it to [newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net](mailto:newsletter@maidstonecanoeclub.net)

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 February, 2020.



Mark Corti, Editor  
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View from the afternoon. Beachy Head lighthouse one sunny Monday.

## Letter from the Editor

**I**t's been a wet Autumn so far, and the ground is saturated.

Even a small amount of rain is causing levels to rise, which is great for the whitewater crowd, but not so good for everyone else! Still, there's plenty of paddling going on. The Monday Paddlers are out regularly, and the race team is training hard for the Winter Series and others. Those who have committed to the epic endurance event which is the Devizes-Westminster race are working hard on their training plans, and a few hardy souls have even taken the Club SUPs out a few times!

As you can see from the articles in the newsletter, we've had a busy time over the

last few months, with lots of trips, coaching, races and other paddling shenanigans. If you haven't been out recently, hopefully this will inspire you to clear some time in your schedule and come for a paddle!

We've also taken over the lease for the scuba club building next door, which is excellent news and secures the future of the Club for the foreseeable future. This has been the culmination of a great deal of hard work on the part of the committee, so next time you see one of them - say thank you!

As always, there's plenty going on over the winter - keep an eye on the website!

See you on the river!

Mark Corti  
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*Not the usual territory for K2 paddlers, but a bit of determination goes a long way!*

## Descent Racing at MCC

**I**t used to be almost a tradition for Maidstone Canoe Club paddlers to enter the two easily available major descent races, the Exe Descent in the South West of the country, and the Liffey Descent in Ireland.

Also raced was the French river more commonly known for pleasant touring in summer, but raced in high water in early spring, the Ardeche.

What is a descent race? Simple really, start at a chosen point on the river and get down to a finish point as fast as possible using your choice of craft – closed cockpit polyethylene white water kayaks (normally loads of entries paddling for fun), composite white water racing canoes and kayaks, or ICF specification K1 or K2, or a variety of touring canoes. I don't think there has ever been a high kneeling canoe.

The Exe Descent started above Salmon Ponds Weir at Tiverton and finished in Exeter, and the Liffey, 200m

above Straffan Weir and finished in Dublin. The description offered in the programme for the 16th International Liffey Descent 1975 is as follows:

"The International Liffey Descent, which also enjoys the exalted title of the Irish Open Long Distance Canoe Racing Championships is undoubtedly the premier event on the Irish Canoeing scene. From its very humble beginnings in 1960 it has grown from strength to strength and has gained the reputation of the toughest race of its kind in the world. In its 16 year history it has earned the admiration and respect of top class paddlers from all over Europe and as far away as America and South Africa. This is not surprising when you consider that in the 17.6 mile long course the paddlers will encounter no less than 10 weirs, a half mile long section of rapids, a 500yd long portage, and in between these obstacles, the constantly swirling and treacherous water of the River Liffey – in

flood and at its angriest. These superb conditions are made possible by the E.S.B. who release an estimated 30 million tons of water through the Liffey Hydro Stations to bring the river up to flood level."

The Exe Descent, by contrast, varies with natural water levels and has 8 serious weirs, and not having a dam release of water can be a raging torrent after rain on Exmoor, or a bony river bed. Needless to say, GP boats have a great time on both high and low water, but out

*Cont'd on page 3*





# An Adventure to Marsport

**You may well be thinking 'what is Marsport'?**

Well Marsport are a small family owned Canoe/Kayak shop which was established in 1980. Their premises are ideally located right by the River Thames at Reading and they are well known for supplying Open Canoes and Racing Boats. According to Craig of Marsport they purchased the rights and moulds from Gabo for a range of K1 and K2 boats and having the designs started to manufacture these designs under their own name. Catherine and I have been paddling a Marsport Condor which we purchased second hand and recently Marsport replaced this design with their own, and renamed it the Phantom.

When considering which racing boat is best suited to a paddler there are a few factors to consider and one of these is stability. Stability comes in ratings and although a lot of these boats look quite similar, on closer observation you will notice hull designs vary along with other factors (such as weight, construction and seats) all affecting how stable a boat is and therefore boats are given a rating between 10 (being the most stable) and 1 (being the least).

This particular event was a demo boat day for racing kayaks and was set up like a kind of trade show with a range of suppliers and manufacturers coming to Marsport with a variety of boats for people to try out. It was a great opportunity for Catherine and me to have a go in a number of different boats all in one place on a beautiful part of the river Thames.

Along with Marsport the other makes available were Vajda, Elio, Kirton and Nelo. Our primary aim for the day was to try out the new K2 Marsport Phantom due to it allegedly having a better turning circle than our Condor but with the same

stability rating of 8. We then made the most of it by trying out various other K2 boats including the Vajda CivitCat and the Kirton M50. In addition we had a try at a couple of K1's each, leading Catherine to purchase her second hand Elio Puma, all 8kg of it; this compared to the weight of a large whitewater Pyranah Burn 3 with a claimed dry weight of 21kg.

The first boat we took out was the Vajda CivitCat in a Kevlar construction with stability of around 8, weight unknown but felt lighter than our Condor. So after adjusting seats and footrests off we went out from the landing stage and downstream and quickly getting up to speed. This boat ran beautifully, was really smooth and we were able to get a

good turn at speed out of it. However the turning suffered the same drawbacks as our Condor in so far as it takes quite an effort to get it to turn; partly down to us but also this boat like ours has a pre-skeg allowing the boat to run in a straight line nicely but a bit of a pain to turn. Due to its lightness and stability however it would be a great boat for beginners or long straight endurance races such as the well known DW.

Next we picked the Marsport Phantom with stability 8 which looked like standard glass reinforced plastic construction and would be around 20 kg. The design of this is radically different to the old Condor, more cigar shaped, has lost the wide deck behind the 2nd paddler; has the rear portage handles in nice recesses near the back of the rear deck and on each side of the boat meaning that whichever side you are on it is easy to

*Cont'd page 5 ...*



*The Marsport Shop, with lots of shiny new toys outside!*

## Descent Racing at MCC

*... cont'd from page 2*

and out racing K1 and K2 boats can suffer on the sections between weirs and on the weirs themselves (it is a matter of pride to shoot everything). I have written off a K2 on the first weir on the Exe, and, after a clean finish in 1974, a K1 on Wrens Nest Weir (No.6) on the Liffey in 1975, but have also had great results, finishing on both rivers.

Unfortunately, the Exe Descent is no more. The difficulties of organisation of the race with safety cover, police, first aid congestion on narrow lanes, etc. etc.,



*Paul Newman on the Liffey Descent, circa 1966.*

forced a cessation and a much missed event.

The Ardeche claimed the boat of the crew from Maidstone in a rock garden near the start when boats were bunched with nowhere to go. A short but sweet experience.

For the placid water paddlers on the Medway in narrowish linear racing boats or comfortable touring boats, bear in mind there is a whole lot of variety out there, waiting to be sampled.

*Paul Newman*

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## Midweek Paddlers

**It was Mike Lambourne's suggestion in 2018 to set up a group of Maidstone CC members who are free to paddle on weekdays,**

partly because he divides his Sundays between canoeing litter picks and the grand-children, so was missing out on the opportunity to paddle, thus the midweek paddle group was formed.

In truth we found that Monday was the best day for us, so we are really the Monday paddlers. Many of us who signed up are retired but we do get some people who do shift work or take the occasional day off work and the school holidays. We have divided our paddles between river and sea, which usually means the

Medway or Kent and East Sussex coast. The Medway estuary has often been the venue as it offers some reasonably sheltered sea paddles and some good tidal assistance between Allington and Rochester, although getting out at low tide at Rochester can be a bit muddy, for good reason we sometimes refer to it as the Mudway. We paddle mostly in crossover kayaks or sea touring kayaks but have ventured into SUPs, which, as suspected, was not for me, at my age I struggle to stand on one leg to put my socks on. Our venture into open canoes met with disaster for Mike and I at the Sluice weir canoe pass, unfortunately the flow was a bit too strong when we decided to come down and I was filming it on my iPhone. Our river paddles often finish near a pub which is very convenient for lunch but on sea paddles we normally

take a packed lunch. We have not been limited to canoeing as some of us cycle and have done rides on the Crab and Winkle trail from Canterbury to Whitstable and the Cuckoo Trail from Heathfield to Eastbourne, both very enjoyable. Although many of us are reasonably experienced paddlers we would really encourage any club member who is free to join us to come along, don't worry if you are just starting out, we are very happy to adjust our plans and distances to suit all. We now normally get things organised using WhatsApp so if you would like to join us please email me [geofforford@gmail.com](mailto:geofforford@gmail.com) or Mike [mlambourne250@gmail.com](mailto:mlambourne250@gmail.com) and we will get back to you.

*By Geoff Orford*



## Remembrance

**I retired Fridays some time ago and have now added Mondays so that I can join the Monday Paddlers.**

This week we had a sea paddle planned which I was looking forward to until an alternative for the day was arranged.

Monday was Remembrance Day, and

instead of a sea trip I found myself attending the 3rd of five funerals in the last 3 months.

I am sure many of us will have lost touch with good friends just because our lives are so busy.

Talking with people at the wakes I so often hear people say "I kept meaning to get I touch again" and "It's been years, I really should have phoned."

Staying in touch has never been easier but two of the recent friends I have

lost I drive past their homes several times a week and each time say "I'll phone them when I get home, or call I next time I am passing."

On this day of remembrance let us make a resolution to look up old friends not wait till meeting at the next funeral and saying sincere words but too late.

*By Jeff Skipper*  
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*Paddling uphill is hard work, even in a lightweight new boat.*

## An Adventure to Marsport

*... cont'd from page 3*

grab a handle. After the essential adjustments we jumped in and off we went. Again it was an easy and smooth boat to paddle with a good turn on it and we were able to get a good speed out of it with a lovely neat turn; this being due to the fact that this hull design has done away with the pre-skeg – whoo hoo.

Now we went off to see what was at the Kirton Stand (Kirton is a British company). Here we came across their brand new M50 demo boat; the M stands for Mirage and 50 is for their half century of manufacturing racing kayaks. At this point it is worth knowing that Catherine and I had once paddled the club's Mirage but found it a little too tippy, but this did not deter us from wanting to try it out and with a stability of 4/5 we decided to give it a go. This demo boat is a gorgeous black and orange seamless construction of about 16kg; weight being very important for the lighter paddlers especially when portaging so hence our being keen to give it a try. Our first touch of this slender boat was to lift it off the stand and wow we could tell this was a light boat; we gently placed the boat on the river, and with a little bit of trepidation pushed off the side. However we were pleasantly surprised, this boat felt more stable than the manufacturers rating would have you believe and from the first paddle stroke we could tell this was a fast boat, we were up to speed far quicker than any other boat we have ever tried. Turning was impressive and we both came off the water awestruck and excited – we'd confidently paddled in

a bit of wash in a 4/5 stability boat, we were both so smitten that we did have a second go later on in the day just to make sure it hadn't been just a fluke.

In between the K2s we tried some K1s too. Catherine went off to try a Nelo – Nelo is one of the largest canoe manufactures in the world and deemed to be one of the best. Catherine tried the Viper 46 and was very impressed with its stability, weight and handling; however it comes with a comparable price tag and there are not many on the second hand market yet. Myself I went for a Marsport Epsilon (this is the same model as the Club's boat with the nickname Plums and Custard) it was with a fantastic black finish and a very distinctive red sparkle, unfortunately I could not get the seat far enough back to be able to sit in it.

Catherine went off again to have another go in the second hand Elio Puma and although found it not as stable as the Nelo decided it was just too good a boat at a good price that she bought it there and then despite having no V bars – but hey Marsports fortunately sell them too. It was at this point we decided to

*Cont'd page 6 ...*



## Paddling Responsibly

**O**ur club regularly runs river clean ups.

By far the most persistent rubbish found in the trees and along the banks has been plastic bags of all sizes. These are apart from the recyclable motorbikes, pushbikes, shopping trolleys and the like.

However, we have prevented some long term pollution of our river and probably the sea, with particles of plastic from the degrading bags, and we feel good and righteous about it. I am not sure what happens to the rubbish when taken away by the waste disposal operators from the council.

Daydreaming around the subject I was becoming more aware of our use of the words "plastic boats". Sometimes used unwisely to refer to specific types of paddling craft (plastics) – unwisely because unless you paddle a retro wooden canoe or kayak (which may still be glued with a form of "plastic" adhesive)



– we all use plastic in our boats.

Composite boats have a matrix of glass fibre, aramid fabric or carbon held together with polyester or vinylester or epoxy resins – all types of plastic.

Our "Tupperware boats", using polyethylenes of various types and the hard plastics used by some touring boats are more obviously "plastic".

Plastics vary in their ability to be recycled and we all hope our boats will be part of that recycling. But, taking a worn out/split/damaged boat to the tip, in my experience, results in the carcass being placed in general waste because the system cannot accept the bulk of a boat to be converted to bottles, more plastic bags, car bumpers, etc....

This got me thinking a bit more. My poly boat weighs around 30kg. The average plastic bag weighs around 5.5gm. So, I am paddling the equivalent of around 5454 plastic bags. Will it end up in the sea?

*By Paul Newman*

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## Exe and Barle

**T**his years Exe & Barle trip was interesting.

Firstly a big thankyou to John Simons & Matt Simmons for all the organising. The rivers were absolutely in torrent and John, after looking at the rivers at various points had to tell the majority of us he would not allow us to paddle, a tough call considering the distance we had all travelled. Not allowing us to paddle sounds a bit extreme but as most of us were very occasional, gentle white water paddlers it was definitely the correct call.

We were rather unhappy having driven so far but calling on lots of local knowledge found a canal at Tiverton, the Western Union Canal. Not white water or even gently moving water but the weather was kind to us and we enjoyed a 10 mile paddle and as some of us were in white

water boats it was a good work out. Highlight of the day was a barge being pulled along the canal by a beautiful Shire horse. Hopefully photo attached.

Meanwhile John and his band of intrepid paddlers did 2 runs on The Barle and from all accounts had a fantastic day.

Another look at the water levels and the flow on Sunday morning and John was happy to allow us on to The Barle. Not everyone took him up on the offer and as I stood at Tarr Stepps waiting for the car shuttle I was feeling very apprehensive.

I don't remember many of the features and this is more a big thank you for John taking the risk allowing me to play, and Matt who I was paired up with, they both gave me huge encouragement and taught me loads.

I managed 2 swims, the first while breaking in and the next when I nearly missed a mainly submerged rock which

just caught the back of the kayak and sent be a swimming again. Thanks also to Richard and Tom who both helped chase down the escaping kayak and helped me back in when I was re united with it. And hot chocolate from Tom.

I was fine while paddling and really enjoyed the day but did get really cold while waiting for others to be rescued so it was decided that I should get out just before the end, I was sad to not finish but was frozen and shivering and managed another out of boat experience while trying to get off the river.

Big thanks to all on the trip, we have some great people at the club. Special thanks also to Mark H for all the driving and being an all round great guy.

*By Jeff Skipper*  
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*Norman adding "Shire Horse" to his Christmas list after paddling his whitewater boat for ten miles on a canal.*

## An Adventure to Marsport

*... cont'd from page 5*

have another go in the Kirton M50 and our second outing was as awesome as our first and we have both decided this is the correct boat for us..... sorry Marsport we came for the Phantom, and do not get me wrong the Phantom is a great boat and we would recommend it along with all of the K2s we paddled but they were out-classed for us and our ability by the M50.

So having had a great day and having stayed nice and dry we decided to try one last boat. This was a private boat on loan to Marsport for people to try out and was

a Marsport Wrath with a stability of 3/4 all dressed up in RAF colours. We knew it was a bit ambitious for us and we had watched other K2 crews try to paddle it earlier in the day and seen a number of them have a swim so what could go wrong! Well we got it setup for us and got in it and I thought it felt quite stable however as we pushed off for some unexplained reason Catherine started to giggle and the next thing I knew was that we went plop and that was us swimming too - oops, oh well it was a good time to

call it a day at that point.

The whole event was a great day out and a fantastic opportunity to try out different boats experiencing them and comparing and finding out what was good for us and what boats we could then recommend to the club or other members in future.

We would like to thank Marsport and their team consisting of Craig Hill, Richard Lovell and Pip Ede for making the day possible, and for laying on such a nice sunny day :)

*By Ian Dann and Catherine Ayling*  
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*Chilly paddling in Chile.*

## Nice Day

**A**nd it had started out as such a nice day, I reflected.

Barely a cloud in the sky. Not a breath of wind to disturb the still dark waters of Seno Ventisquero. When we'd set off this morning, the dark flanks of the mountains, snow-capped and steep-sided, had been reflected in the water's surface, the spreading ripples of our near-silent passage causing them to shimmer and fracture in the sunshine. Fantastical ice sculptures, smoothed and shaped by wind and sun, had drifted lazily across our bows, their sinuous shapes contrasting strongly with the jagged angularity of the peaks framing the skyline. We'd reached the head of the fjord just in time to see the long fingers of sunshine touch the glacier, chasing the deep mountain shadows briefly back to the deep valleys and making the ice flow with a blue, otherworldly light. As the warmth of the sun began to penetrate the fractured jumble of ice blocks, the glacier shifted and rumbled, a million tons of frozen water awakening after slumber, stretching and groaning. We paddled closer, slipping easily through a loose brash of ice as the glacier came to life. Great monoliths of ice shifted and split with booming cracks that echoed between the mountains. A cascade of crushed ice slid into the water, making the brash rise and fall in long oily swells.

The wind came without warning, a mass of cold air like a solid slab, sliding out of the mountains and down the glacier and over the water beyond. The

great mass of floating brash began to move, propelled by the sudden breeze. Ice chunks began to bump together, a sussuration of knocks and clicks as the ice thickened, the water between becoming ever more choked as the ice was pushed along by the wind. We turned and started to head back to the sailboat, our mothership here in the waters around Tierra del Fuego. At first, we pushed easily through the ice, avoiding the larger blocks and pushing the smaller slush aside.

A short distance in front of the glacier, the fjord narrowed, the steep walls closing in so that, from above, it resembled a rough hourglass. As the ice was pressed through the constriction, it was compacted further, forming a dense pack. Forward progress was exhausting, every stroke a struggle to get the paddle between ice blocks and into the water, every metre gained requiring a metre of ice to be pushed aside. For a while I forged ahead, breaking trail for other paddlers, rocking my kayaking from side to side to form a channel, the lateral waves from my rolling kayak helping to keep the ice clear for a short while. For the less-experienced kayakers in the group, it was still too much, the precision required to nudge large blocks aside eluding them in the difficult conditions, the wind pushing their kayaks around. I made the call to raft up, stabilising the kayaks through the crush of ice until we'd passed the constriction. The morning's sunshine was a distant memory, and the wind had picked up to around 20 kts, making us shiver in our boats. Without the exercise of paddling we were chilling off fast, but at least we were making good progress, the shoreline sliding past at a

fast trot. As we passed the narrows, the ice began to break up and we heard the welcome buzz of the Zodiac. One of our group retreated to the safety of the RIB, disappearing back down the channel with the kayak towed behind, while the rest of us continued on.

Now the ice had dispersed, the sea was being whipped into a steep chop, and even the limited fetch from the end of the fjord was giving enough waves to surf down. My boat had neither rudder nor skeg, and as I fought to stop it burying the nose into the waves it turned beam-on again and again, making me fight it every inch of the way. Surfing brought its own problems, not only the possibility of digging in the bow, but also of hitting one of the sizeable lumps of ice that bobbed in the water – with, at this speed, unfortunate consequences.

The steep cliffs offered no respite for several kilometres, until eventually a narrow beach, little more than a boulder-choked crack in the rocks, provided some shelter. We shared the last of our energy bars and a few mouthfuls of water, laughing with exhilaration at surviving our struggle against the fickle elements without mishap.

The yacht was only a kilometre away now, and a curve in the land provided moderate shelter from the wind which had strengthened to a Force 7. Back on board, hot chocolate liberally laced with rum warmed our numb extremities, chasing away the chill before raising the anchor and heading off for tomorrow's paddle.

*By Mark Corti*  
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# Featured Upcoming Events

Please see the website for full details of these and other upcoming events, trips, tours & training. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter to be notified when new events are added to the Calendar.

## **Friday, December 6th - Sunday, December 8th: Adventure Paddler's Weekend**

Party weekend at the Dart for whitewater paddlers from across the UK. Dawn-til-dusk paddling plus videos, talks and a legendary raffle at the disco afterwards! Contact [mark@maidstonecanoecub.net](mailto:mark@maidstonecanoecub.net) if you're coming.

## **Saturday, December 7th, 7pm: Christmas Party**

A magical wonderland awaits upstairs at the Club! Always a fun night out, mince pies, buffet and great company. Please book online so we can cater accordingly.

## **Saturday, December 14th, 7:45pm: Pool Session**

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

## **Sunday, January 19th, 7:30am: Hampton Court to Richmond**

A glorious paddle past one of the most famous castles in the world, on the most famous river in the world. Meet at the Club early doors - 7:30am - and drive up. We plan to return by 15:30.

## **Sunday, February 16th, 8:30am: Tonbridge to Yalding**

Approx 12 miles, please meet at the Club.

## **Saturday, February 22nd, 7:45pm: Pool Session**

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

## **Every Wednesday, 5:30pm: Regular Paddle Session.**

## **Every Friday, 6pm: Race & Fitness Training**

## **Every Sunday, 9:30am: Regular Paddle Session.**

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