

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 February, 2020.

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Letter from the Chair

Welcome to the new 2021/22 season at Maidstone Canoe Club, and what a season it will be with over 200 members already signed up and only 2 months in!

It is fantastic to see nearly all of last year's beginners rejoining and it looks like it will be a bumper year for new members finding our sport as the beginner courses are fully booked up (any coaches who would be able to run a course would be much appreciated). There seems to be a real buzz at the club with paddles happening nearly every day so keep up the good work everybody. As well as the regular paddles it is good to see trips further away such as Annie's Rother and Stour excursions and 2 trips to Scotland with Open Canoe and Sea Kayaks. Whitewater trips are being planned and I hope later on in the year we will see more river running as well as the racing season starting up in full.

So, what next do I hear you say! How about signing up for one of the Explore courses that are running? These will help you progress your skills to the next level. Interested in going further or helping out? Why not join up to the Coaching Development Group (CDG)? We are now implementing a Paddlesport Activity Assistant award that will enable you to run trips from the club - you'll

find out more via the CDG.

Things to watch out for shortly are the relaxation of lockdown restrictions on 21st June (hopefully!) where we may be able to introduce our open paddles again. Also, a club open day on 4th July where we will open our doors to the public to come and try paddling (if you can spare some time on the day there are always jobs to do).

In the longer term we are making progress with the new building and you will shortly see work commencing, so please bear with us. You may see a few collaborations with other clubs as with the Intro to Sea Kayaking and BBQ with Hastings & District Canoe Club. Also, we have quite a number of CDG members progressing to Paddlesport Instructors, coaches and river leaders which will hopefully mean lots of trips and courses later on in the year!

Finally a huge thank you to all our instructors, coaches and trip leaders who have been tirelessly organising all the paddles on the calendar - without them it just wouldn't have happened during lock down, I honestly think we are coming out stronger than we started!

John Simmonds - MCC Chair
chairman@maidstonecanoeclub.net

P.S. It turns out Bradley the seal was a girl all along!!!



2-metre rule explanation. Social distancing during the Spey trip.



BELIEVE ME, MY YOUNG FRIEND, (SAID THE WATER RAT SOLEMNLY), THERE IS NOTHING – ABSOLUTELY NOTHING – HALF SO MUCH WORTH DOING AS SIMPLY MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS. SIMPLY MESSING NOTHING SEEMS REALLY TO MATTER, THAT'S THE CHARM OF IT. WHETHER YOU GET AWAY, OR WHETHER YOU DON'T; WHETHER YOU ARRIVE AT YOUR DESTINATION OR WHETHER YOU REACH SOMEWHERE ELSE, OR WHETHER YOU NEVER GET ANYWHERE AT ALL, YOU'RE ALWAYS BUSY, AND YOU NEVER DO ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR

- THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS



While the rest of us spent lockdown binge-watching box sets and eating crisps, our Club President put on his beret and took up his paintbrush. I thought it was rather lovely!

Bat Paddle

On Friday 14th May and for the first time ever, members of MCC went on a 'Bat Paddle' with Andrea from Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (and MCC Environment Officer). A small group paddled from the club upstream and stopped to switch on the bat detectors at about 9pm. Immediately, the busy activity of Pipistrelle Bats was evident via the buzz from the detectors, and in the fading light, the silhouette of the bats was oftentimes quite evident.

Whilst information about British bats and those being observed was given, the group bobbed about in the water, enjoying the often-unseen life of the river at dusk. Paddling back, the group stopped at Archbishops to watch the bats in the streetlamps. Being insectivorous, our British bats love the water, and the river proved a perfect peaceful place in which to observe them. Andrea from MVCP will arrange a second bat paddle date for MCC members soon. To get on the reserve list please contact Andi.

Andrea Griffiths

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An experience racer uses every advantage to gain speed. Here Catherine uses her tongue to improve aerodynamics.

MyDW K2 Challenge: 125 miles in a month for Combat Stress

Ian Dann and myself started paddling together in a K2 about 3 years ago but never knew that it would ultimately lead to us getting totally addicted to the sport of Flat Water Marathon racing.

This year we had it in mind to attempt the famous straight through 125 miles race from Devices to Westminster (popularly known as the DW). In early 2020, we did in fact compete in 2 of the Waterside Races which are run in preparation for this mammoth race. We completed both of them and certainly managed decent times over the 25 and 35 miles distances, in what were very trying conditions. However, then Lockdown happened and all racing was cancelled.

Like everyone else in the first Lockdown our paddling was completely curtailed and our only training was in our own front rooms with some of the other racers over video messenger. Here we did workouts that focused on the correct muscle groups and our stamina. Then Lockdown was relaxed and we determinedly retrieved our boats from the boat shed and stored them at home – quite some feat when you consider a K2 is 6.5 metres long and a K1 is 5.2 metres long. But we were determined and so it had to be.

During the club closure we would park our cars on the road and carry the boats to the river enabling us to be able to carry on paddling until the 3rd Lockdown. Here I was fortunate enough to be able to keep paddling in my K1 but Ian was not so lucky so back to just the workouts for him.

Bearing all this in mind when I heard

that the DW organisers were planning a challenge for people to paddle 125 miles for MyDW over the months of May and June I suggested to Ian that we should do this and to really challenge us, that we should aim to complete it over 6 sessions. This would mean doing decent mileage on each session. Ian quite happily agreed though I'm not sure he was really listening to me at the time lol. But having been given the go ahead I beavered away to draw up our plan and to rally support. And here is what we did:

Session 1 - 4th April 21.3 miles

Session 2 - 11th April 21.1 miles

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Still looking chipper on session 6 - nearly finished!

Litter Pick

In partnership with SERT, the South East Rivers Trust, we're doing a litter pick on the Medway on Tuesday, 29th June. Please arrive at the club at 9:30am for a 10am start.



Scotland, land of sunshine. (If you ignore the black clouds over the mountain they'll go away.)

Spey by Canoe

Day One

Our trip started in Spey Bay looking out over the Moray Firth, the weather was with us the sun was shining, the wind had died down and the wildlife didn't disappoint either with dolphins jumping within the surf and ospreys actively hunting in the river mouth, this was set to be a great trip.

Our Highland Yaks shuttle arrived with trailer to take us to our starting point at Loch Uvie and I must say this is by far one of the nicest shuttle buses I have ever been in. After a quick stop to Aviemore to pick up a boat for Rowen and Luke we headed off to start our paddling adventure.

After a quick paddle across a loch we saw that the outflow had been blocked and so had to portage and line our boats out onto the river and we set off. The first day of paddling was a slow one with

not much flow on the river, but the snow capped Cairngorms and the sun promised something later to come so we paddled on amongst the tall pines covering the sides of the glen.

Our first campsite was sandwiched between a highland cow paddock on a bend in the river giving us just enough pebbles and grass to be comfortable and would make a perfect spot for a fire above the pebbles on our fire pit. Once the camp was setup and the fire burning well Jacob started our evening meal, a delicious blend of chilli, vegetables, sausage and rice which we ate with great vigour and relaxed by the fire for the rest of the night

Day Two

We awoke with the sun breaking its way through a mist across the campsite all prepared for the day ahead and as soon as we left I found myself stranded on a gravel bank and having to step out of the boat and getting wet feet for the first time. I can definitely say that river was fed by the snow capped Cairngorms. We put in a staggering

distance on day two a total of 36km (22.3m) the river was calm and still with a few small quick sections until we reached loch Insh. Now I'm not usually one for open water and paddling the 1km across did worry me a little at first but I slowly picked my way around windsurfers and pleasure boaters until at last we all made it to the water sports centre on the other side for a well deserved lunch.

Leaving the loch we searched for a known ospreys nest. Ospreys like to nest right at the top of a tree and as we rounded the corner of an island there it was with chick inside, the parent bird came from the back of the island carrying a huge fish and landed in the nest.

Our second campsite we had to search for, the recommended campsite we were aiming for had now been turned into a golf course (of course) so we continued down river to find a suitable site which turned out to be a tussock filled field, finding a flat spot was difficult but not impossible. I had only brought a

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Spey by Canoe

... Cont'd from page 4

small tent so I found it easy whereas Luke and Rowan were sharing a three man but didn't seem to have to much of a problem. We set up camp and started to collect the fire wood for dinner. It was my turn to cook and I had settled on a carbonara with fresh garlic flatbreads made with wild garlic butter. It went down a treat and we all settled down for a good nights sleep.

Day Three

The third day (Monday) started well the river started moving faster and the number of small rapids was growing so I was in a cheerful mood then all of a sudden we stopped under a bridge to find the post office just up the road in a village, which we were informed, provided weary paddlers a decent cup of coffee. This was the day new COVID rulings came into effect for Scotland so we went into the village obeying them all.

Whilst Rowan sent a postcard home we gratefully received our coffees then we all headed back to the boats and back on the river! The rain came and started to fill the boats up making them unsteady, something I'm not used to so the ritual bailers came out. With the rain came the wind and everyone became cold and



Another fine meal cooked over an open fire at the end of a long day. Group cooking on trips adds real camaraderie.

hungry so a lunch stop with a coffee half way through the day warmed us all up. We headed on down surrounded by the oystercatchers flying above our heads trying to draw us away from their nests. But then the clouds parted and the sun arrived to warm us once again.

The rocks breaching the surface had started to get bigger and to top it all off

he heavens opened again which softens the tell tale signs of an underwater hazard so I had a couple of heart in mouth moments whilst dodging the camouflaged sandpaper-like snipers laying in wait. Day three was by far the wettest and a constant bailing routine commenced after each rapid. We were all soaked through but didn't mind because the paddling was such good fun. Finding a good camp spot was proving to be more and more difficult because of the fly fisherman. They have taken every part of flat ground, mowed it so it was in keeping with the fly fishing fraternity and claimed it for their own. However they hadn't counted on the likes of us and we pitched up along a footpath against some stock fencing and now the pressure was on for me (the bushcraft instructor) to find some dry wood after all that rain so we could cook dinner. Luckily I found two dead standing trees fairly close to camp which provided enough fuel so Mark C could feed us a feast of sweet and sour sauce spam and rice. He put everyone to shame however when he brought out the cake and custard (I could have kissed him). It wasn't long before we each had a dram around the fire telling tales about the washing machine and the other rapids we would encounter over the next day.

Just before we headed to bed the river looked higher to me and to prove I wasn't going mad I asked Luke, he was in agreement so we decided to move the boats up the bank a few metres. (Just in case).



Jacob, Rowan and Luke making it look easy at the Washing Machine

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Still snow on the tops of the Cairngorms.

Spey by Canoe

... Cont'd from page 4

Day Four

The fourth day was the day of whiter water. The river had a definite quicker pace to it and the mini rapids were greater in number.

Running through these smaller rapids which just need you to pay attention and not hit any rocks above the water line is fine unless, like me you have the attention span of a goldfish, I suffer from Nature Tourettes and every time I see something interesting I'm hitting this boulder, bracing over there, dodge the tree ARGH! Ben pay attention!! But..... what was that bird.....? It's a real problem.

Anyway we moved through the slower stuff and finally made it to the top of the washing machine. Granted we made the eddy below the one we wanted and had to sort out our approach. All safety measures had been put in place with throw lines just in case but it was a fun bouncy run down for everyone and the sun was shining. Once through we continued down until we reached a fantastic sand bank to have lunch and some of Rowan's famous gourmet coffee. The sun was shining the salmon were jumping and fishermen seemed ... ok and then we continued down to the section of Knockandu for more white water fun. The lines I had been taking on the river had been more conservative up until this point but I've had my canoe for a few years now and I wanted to see what it could do so I was picking tighter lines through questionable features and it didn't miss a beat. Paddling this river for this long had definitely allowed my

paddling to progress a long way in a very short amount of time.

We stopped for another break further down stream as the pace of the river and work involved in navigating it had taken its toll on us. A hot drink, a stretch of the legs and maybe a photo shoot of the club's new poster boy saw us refreshed so we set off to look for camp.

We could see on the paddle down that the fishing industry on the Spey was huge and so lots of the banks had been set up for fishing and instead of the lifesaver rings we have in town along the river they have large landing nets which gives you some idea of the task we had of finding a campsite. We searched for another half an hour which meant we travelled another few kilometres downstream until we couldn't paddle any longer and claimed a site for ourselves. Most of us pitched up along the riverbank but I found a nice spot beneath a cedar to spend the night. Mark H and Rowan prepared the fire site whilst Mark C collected the firewood and I filled the water bottles up using the filter. Luke made a wonderful chorizo rice dish and the whisky flowed until the wee small hours so we could recall our heroism and bravery over the rapids of the river. Whilst sitting there enjoying the last of the sunset we all noticed a bat roost in the woodland and what looked like common pips streaming out. Then a peregrine came barrelling through and snatched one out of the air. I love this river.

Day Five

Now the bigger rapids were behind us we could relax into the last day of the trip or so I thought. When we began on day one we were travelling at 5kph and now as the water comes down to the Moray

Firth we were moving at 10-15kph.

The river dropped dramatically at the base of a pine forest and we moved faster still. The landscape had started to change, we had left the mountains and rolling hills for sheer cliffs either side as the river cut its way out to sea. The flora had also changed, the lupins and deciduous woodland that hugged the shoreline further up the river had now turned to the dreaded giant hogweed and Japanese knot weed with a definite shrub layer. The oystercatchers too had disappeared and little terns started flying past our heads. New hazards presented themselves and it looked as though a very recent storm had sent trees in full leaf toppling over and swept downstream causing blockages to navigate.

We rounded a bend and saw a abandoned house surrounded by fallen trees, I was at the back of the group and saw everyone eddy out to explore the house, not being able to see the size of the eddy I thought it best to find my own so I paddled past and decided to investigate a gravel bar in the middle of the river to see what I could find.

Upon leaving the the house one of our team turned their boat so a rescue was needed but with the amount of training we have all had it was an easy retrieve and everyone was safe, surprisingly no kit was lost so hats off for the tying down skills. All I can say on this is running down a rocky pebbly river bank at full speed after lockdown is not fun and watch out for the hogweed.

With a mile or so to go we all returned to our boats and paddled the last leg still navigating the gravel bars that stretched across the river and picking our lines but then we could see the ice houses at the bay where we started all those days ago and the sea! I had to tell myself to concentrate yet again because if I missed this turning I would be playing in the surf, but we finally got onto the beach ... we had done it.

The feeling of accomplishment when you turn to face the Cairngorms and realise you have paddled down over 1000ft and across 82 miles from the base of the mountains to the mouth of the river is fantastic. It is a trip everyone should do and I for one can't wait to do it all again next year.

I would like to personally thank the club for putting the trip together. A special thanks to Mark Corti, Jacob Baisley, Mark Harris, Rowan Speers and Luke Alexandre for putting up with me teaching them all things bushcraft throughout the whole trip.

By Ben Day

<https://www.woodsmanbushcraft.com/>

MyDW K2 Challenge: 125 miles for Combat Stress

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Session 3 - 18th April, just a short one – 12.3 miles

Session 4&5 - 2 consecutive days

24th&25th April 19.3 & 19.1

Session 6 – 2nd May 32.1 miles

We did it despite our first 21 miler on 4th April causing us both a lot of pain in our backs but by 11th April we were already stronger and on 2nd May we managed a good time of 6 hours and 6 mins which included our stops and the 18 portages.

This was only made possible due to the help and support we received from other club members who were: Steve Rowe (who paddled with us on 2 occasions and notably the 32 miler for the fun of it!); Bryn Price for supporting us by checking in with us at a couple of portages and feeding us hot cross buns and hot Ribena on our first session; then Catherine Dacey, Anne May, Alan Nevard and Roy Rayner for being our support crews along our last session to Tonbridge Canoe Club and back again. They fed us, cheered us on and took photos. Thank you to all of you guys.

Lastly I would like to thank all those who donated to the Combat Stress cause on my Just Giving page where we raised - £365

Catherine Ayling

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River Beult: From British Canoeing

British Canoeing has recently fielded questions regarding the legality of access on the River Beult, a tributary of the Medway.

It has been suggested to us that the river is 'designated as non navigable'. British Canoeing is not aware of any information that suggests that the Beult is 'non-navigable'. We are aware that the River is a SSSI, however this in itself does not preclude the use of the water by unpowered craft.

British Canoeing sets out its position with regards to access on inland waterways in its Clear Access, Clear Waters Charter.

While it is our belief is that there is evidence to support a historic right of access on navigable waterways, there remain differing interpretations of the law that frequently causes conflict between users.

British Canoeing firmly believes that the right of access on our waterways can only be settled by new legislation, or amending existing access legislation. British Canoeing recognises that there are environmental sensitivities associated with certain habitats and at certain times of the year. To that end, British Canoeing is entirely open to working with anyone to promote sensible restrictions to users, where appropriate and - critically - where there is clear evidence to support the need.

British Canoeing is not currently aware of any evidence that should prevent paddlers enjoying the River Beult. British Canoeing acknowledges that many

waters, like the Beult, host valuable fishing interest and that those activities should be respected. British Canoeing encourages all users to share the space with respect and paddle responsibly.

Further to the questions raised about the right of access on the water, British Canoeing has also been made aware of paddlers parking and accessing the water at locations along the River Beult that may involve the crossing of private land. While we believe that the legalities of access on water remain unclear, we do state in our 'Trespass Briefing Note', that landowner permission should be sought in advance of crossing private land to access the water.

It is the nature of our sport that in accessing the water, custom and practice evolves over time and permission can sometimes 'assumed'. We would encourage all paddlers to be responsible and respectful when accessing the water and when parking. If asked to leave by the landowner, paddlers should do so and avoid creating the opportunity for conflict. While Trespass is (currently) a civil matter, aggravated trespass is a criminal offense.

British Canoeing requests that paddlers who are subject to abuse or challenge on any river, to complete an incident report form. This helps keep track of incidents and provides a bank of evidence to present to Government.

Ben Seal, Places to Paddle Manager

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Giving Something Back: Paddlesport Activity Assistant

New paddlers benefit from a huge number of local trips put on by more-experienced Club members, particularly during lockdown. The Club is now recognising these members with the new PAA program - and we'd love your support! To get involved and find out more, speak to Lee, Jacob or the Coaching Development Group (coaching-chair@maidstonecanoeclub.net)

10% OFF COFFEE & CAKE

The cafe at Freedom Fitness is under new management, and to celebrate they're offering 10% off for MCC Members!

Decision Making

Decision-making is at the heart of what we do as paddlers. Once you've got the technical skills at a level commensurate with the environment you're operating in, it all comes down to decision-making.

Should I go right or left? Where should I paddle? Shall we carry on or turn back? Who should I paddle with? And that's great – we make decisions all the time, so we should be good at it, right? Right?

Here's a couple of questions for you – grab a pen and don't read on until you've answered them:

How many red kayaks are there in the boat store – a) more than 12, or b) fewer than 12? Write down the exact number you think there are: _____

How many paddles with yellow blades does the Club own – a) more than 25, or b) fewer than 25? Write down the exact number you think there are: _____

I'd be willing to bet that the number of red boats you chose was around 12 – a few more or a few less. And the number of yellow paddles you wrote down was somewhere near 25 – perhaps between 20 and 30. How do I know that? Because this is an example of a well-known heuristic bias, known as anchoring. When you're asked a question you don't know the answer to, your brain looks around for clues. Because I primed it with a particular number – more than 12 or less than 12 – your brain used this as a reasonable starting point for its answer, and then adjusted from there based on experience and other input. If I'd first asked you if there were "more than 6 or fewer than 6 red boats in the store" then your exact guess would probably have been closer to 6.

But what, if anything, has this got to do with paddlesport?

To answer that, we first need to rewind a little. It's widely accepted that there are two broad ways of making decisions. First there's the kind we make in slow-time – rational, linear – known as classical decision-making. These are the kind of decisions that we typically make when planning a trip. You look at four different weather forecasts, pore over ukriversguidebook.co.uk, and your Google search history is full of phrases like "what is the average speed of an recreational kayaker" and "best pubs near River Avon". You've plenty of time to think, you gather all the information you need, and you try to make a balanced decision.

Then there's the other kind – decisions made under time pressure, often with incomplete or unreliable information. Is



Thinking, Fast and Slow.

the weather deteriorating? Should we stop for lunch before the next stretch or afterwards? These tend to be more intuitive, more gut-feel, and are known as naturalistic decisions. (These two strands form the basis of the book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, which every professional coach I've met over the last few years has recommended). The brain tries to match the existing situation to a pattern it's more familiar with, and this leaves it vulnerable to a number of common traps – heuristic biases that all of us are prone to.

Here's a few of the common ones which most frequently come up in adventure-sports incident reports:

Commitment

Few of us get to go paddling as often as we'd like. This is doubly true of away

trips. Weeks of planning and hours of travel time can go into a trip – but what if the conditions aren't what we expect when we arrive? There's more pressure to paddle, and good decisions can be harder to make.

Scarcity

On those rare occasions when everything comes together – the conditions are perfect, we've got plenty of time and a great group – evidence shows we're prepared to stretch boundaries to make the most of the opportunity.

Social Facilitation

Having other people around makes us feel safe. This is why new paddlers often like to watch someone else run a rapid first. We're more likely to expose ourselves to risk if we've seen other people do it – or even simply if there are other people watching.

Expert Halo

This comes into play with groups that are used to being led, or if there is a strongly-hierarchical group dynamic. Group members are unwilling to offer their observations if they don't align with what the "expert" – leader, coach, self-proclaimed bossy-boots – is planning. But it's just as likely that you've noticed something they haven't. A coach may be concentrating on a multitude of factors and might not have noticed the thundercloud forming overhead.

Anchoring

We looked at this above with our red boats / yellow paddles example, but it applies more widely. For instance, by "anchoring" our attention to a deteriorating

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Decisions to be made on a rapid in the Swiss Alps. What biases are coming into play?

River Medway Litter Pick

As part of a community engagement event for Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) who are working in partnership with the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) on their Preventing Plastic Pollution project, Maidstone Canoe Club members joined a River Medway Spring Clean event on Wed 12th May.

MVCP had a small group of volunteers collecting litter from the towpath whilst MVCP Senior Partnership Officer and MCC Environment Officer Andrea, together with Geoff O, Lisa, Catherine, Paul and Geoff L, paddled up towards Tovil and then down to Allington, collecting litter from the river itself.

Well done everyone who helped. It was a lovely day but also hard work. Overall, the combined effort resulted in over 28 bags of rubbish being collected!

MVCP, for the SERT PPP project, will be running another event on Tuesday 29th June. Contact Andrea for details.

Andrea Griffiths, Environment Officer
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Catherine checking the pockets of the Levis she found in the river.

Decision Making

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weather forecast, we might fail to notice that one of our group is starting to flag.

Familiarity

We perceive familiar environments as less hazardous than novel ones – we tend to downplay the risks when we're operating in areas we know well. The more experienced you are, the more likely you are to fall into this trap.

Confirmation bias

A well-known cognitive effect where we assign more weight to facts which agree with our preconceived viewpoint (or plan, or decision) than those which contradict it. Particularly prevalent in political discourse, but also of significant impact in adventure sports.

These intrinsic biases come up again and again as contributory factors when things have gone wrong in adventure sports. And they don't work in isolation – they merge and mix and come together in complex ways to skew our decision-making. The good news is that there are a few things we can do to minimise their

impact.

Firstly, simply by being aware of them we can negate some of their effects. By recognising that we are susceptible to these heuristic traps, and examining our gut-feel decisions with them in mind, we are less likely to fall into them.

The second thing we can do is to engage in what the coaching literature likes to refer to as "reflective practice". This just means that we devote a little thought after the event to think about what went well, what went less well and – critically – why. This doesn't only apply after an incident – after all, just because nothing went wrong doesn't mean what you did was right! By critically examining our decisions (and those of others) we will hopefully give our brains more accurate patterns to match to in the future.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is we can engender a social environment where people feel empowered to ask questions and challenge decisions. Questions like "have we considered X" and "why are we doing Y" should be a regular part of your paddling group's culture – they need respectful consideration and deserve thoughtful answers.

Good decision-making can be the difference between an epic day out and merely having an epic. Hopefully the above will help us all have more of the former and fewer of the latter. Happy paddling!

Mark Corti
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For more on this, try Thinking, Fast and Slow, plus a bunch of scholarly articles by Loel Collins & Dave Collins - "Decision making and risk management in adventure sports coaching" is a good place to start.

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