

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 September, 2022.



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Better late than never! The fabulous Santa paddle 2021 - and it's only just over six months until the next one!

Letter from the Editor

This edition of the newsletter marks the ten-year anniversary of my tenure as editor.

Since then, (almost) every quarter, you - the fabulous members of Maidstone Canoe Club - have shared your paddling adventures with our community and beyond. Trips local and international, reviews on gear new and old, random musings and even the occasional piece of poetry - all have made it into the newsletter. Circulation is now comfortably over a thousand, comprising current and past members, local paddlers, plus the many hundreds of people who have enjoyed our beginner courses over the years, keeping in touch with the local paddling community. It's reflective of Maidstone Canoe Club itself - not just in sheer size, but also in the breadth of the paddling we do and the depth of expertise within the Club. As I write this, the Maidstone Hasler race is only just over, the sea-kayaking

expedition to Bute has just returned, and one of the two whitewater groups heading to Slovenia has already left. In this issue alone there are tales of SUP paddling in Fuerteventura and rafting in Romania. Club members are heading to Austria, Greece and elsewhere. And the stories that make it into the newsletter are only half of what goes on!

Maidstone Canoe Club is a very special community, filled with people who enjoy their paddling and are selfless in helping others to enjoy theirs in turn - giving what time they can to lead trips, help on the new building, deal with the inevitable paperwork, and smooth out the wrinkles that a large community like ours generates. The stories that you tell in this newsletter form a small but vital part of the glue that holds this community together, and I remain incredibly grateful to all of you for sharing them with us.

See you on the river!

Mark Corti, Editor
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Maidstone Cross Continental

Late in 2021 Georgi suggested that a white-water rafting race took place in Romania each year.

It was advertised as sunny, easy and a good laugh. Carolyn "Milky" Hawkes, Emily Lock and I signed ourselves up and so began a trek across Europe and for most of us a trip into the unknown. Late on a Tuesday night in April we all met up to load up the van and ensure we had everything. The unknown factor ensured that Carolyn came prepared with a large amount of what can only be described as stuff, gallons of water but surprisingly very little milk. Over the coming days we would discover that a steady stock of milk was very important to Carolyn. With all packed we returned home for one night before the cross-continental trip began.

Early on the Wednesday morning we reconvened at Georgi's house to set off on our way to our first stop outside of Brno in the Czech Republic. Google maps put this part of the trip at around 12hrs which meant we would hopefully get there in time for a decent nights sleep before the second leg of the journey to the river Mures in Romania. We made our way quickly to the euro tunnel, into France and before too long we had progressed into Belgium where our first stop for a rest break was required. To our dismay this rest stop like most of them encountered required payment to use the facilities. Obtaining some euros Carolyn and Emily

squeezed through the turnstile together so more than one penny could be spent. From there we circled around Brussels and progressed into Germany.

With no radio stations playing anything decent an 80's tunes playlist was pumped out to keep us awake however the back street drivers did grab a couple of naps. Some hours into the journey the estimated time of arrival started creeping backwards whilst the fuel gauge crept lower. With little to nothing other than the flat lands of Germany sprawling into the distance on a never ending autobahn, we started to plan the next stop for fuel and food. Having faith that Georgi's van fuel/ distance to go gauge gave an accurate reading of 250 miles a service station approx 200 miles away was planned in. Some 100 miles later and upon checking the gauge again, Georgi then told us he always drives on a full tank and had never really tested the accuracy of the fuel gauge. The gap for error had decreased. 100 miles to go, 120 miles read the fuel gauge. I recall someone (not sure who!) saying it would be "grand" and to ignore the next services. 75miles to go 80miles now on the fuel gauge, the orange warning light for fuel came on and the air con was switched off. Another services passed. Surely no bother to eke out a few more miles, red warning light for fuel on, eco driving mode engaged. At this stage the person who had consistently said it would be grand

was admittedly slightly concerned. The Bulgarian answer was that we could still run the last bit as it wasn't actually all that far. Five miles out and with zero on the gauge all our fingers were crossed. It was probably quite fortunate that the slip road for the services was a gentle downward hill into the station which allowed the diesel fumes to get us there without the need for the Bulgarian running option. With the tank refilled we also refuelled our stomachs at the diner located at the same stop. Currywurst and schnitzels washed down with a German beer calmed the nerves and we set off for what would be the last leg of our first days travel.

Even with keeping the fuel stops to the minimum crossing Germany took a lot longer than anticipated and appropriately the 80's music mix shuffled in "hallelujah" just as we crossed the border into the Czech Republic at 21.40 local time. Our accommodation was showing up as still being some two and a half hours away. At least we knew had a enough diesel to reach our lodgings for the night.

We followed the sat nav which took us along ever smaller gravel roads towards our accommodation. At this stage with it being well after midnight and in a small rural very dark Czech village, we inadvertently passed what we assumed was our unlit hotel. We turned back at the next passing point and parked up outside and exited the van. The night was still with cool fresh air (the air con went back on when we had refuelled!) and the odd flicker of car lights in the far distance our

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The benefits of months of technique work and hours in the gymnasium are becoming obvious to the Maidstone Canoe Club International Raft Team.

Santa Paddle

Forget Rudolph – it was a group of all weather paddlers who had the red noses when they held went on their Santa paddle on a bitterly cold December night.

About 30 members of the club decorated their kayaks with twinkling lights, Christmas trees and reindeer for the festive event on Tuesday, December 21.

Most dressed as Santa in coats, beards and hats for the 30-minute paddle from the club to Allington Lock, where they were greeted by Jon Lock and his daughter Emily, who served up mulled wine, mince pies and other snacks organised by Claire Bennett.

Then, with ice forming on their boats and a deep Santa chuckle of “row-ho-ho”, they headed back to Santa's Grotto aka the clubhouse.

By Christina Bailey



Santa visits Allington. Rudolph tried to follow on the Club SUPs but it went less well than expected.



Maidstone Cross Continental

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only solace that we were not alone. The glazed hotel door was locked firmly shut as we peered into a dimly lit lobby that had no apparent attendance. We rang the door buzzer which gave no audible ring, then the two phone numbers on the door, one rang out the other didn't connect. Minutes passed, the exhaustion from the days travels only adding to our muddled thinking of what were now some very limited options. We pressed the bell again

and knocked loudly on the glass door, praying for someone to appear. And after several minutes had passed someone did. A rather sleepy pyjama'd owner rounded a corner into the lobby looking surprised as we all cheered in relief. So with a long day behind us we got our heads down for some sleep and set our alarms for day two of the cross continental.

Day two of our travels would see us leave the Czech Republic and head

Save A Life

Do a first aid course. You never know what's around the corner. It's not just PAAs, coaches and river leaders that need to know this stuff! We're running a course at the Club - help keep us all safe. Book online via the website.

Saturday 16th July

through both Slovakia and Hungary and into Romania. Fuel gauge roulette was outlawed, electronic toll road taxes were purchased in advance for the three countries and aggressive Hungarian drivers were for the most part avoided. With fuel in Hungary being cheap the last station prior to the border was chosen as a stopping point. As we would find out we would have to stop there regardless as the Hungary toll check police directed all traffic into that same petrol station. As the tolls were electronically checked we were also asked for the vehicle registration document to confirm the correct toll was purchased. This document, a necessity for travel in Europe, was unfortunately several hundred miles away in Kent. This sudden realisation only made the looming Hungarian/Romanian and Schengen zone border all the more concerning. As, apart

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SUPers on Tour

... was the WhatsApp group name we called ourselves.

The four of us are relative newbies to the club, Anj having joined in 2020 and the rest of us (Jon, Claire and myself) joining the year later.

We had become friends during several club paddles and had gone out a few times together to places like Whitstable, Hythe and Joss Bay. Anj was a seasoned SUPer and had her own board, but the rest of us had only been out a few times and were still novices. Strangely enough, we had not all been out together on paddle boards together.

Jon was sold after his first go on a board (despite spending more time off it than on it) and suggested we go on a long weekend in the Canary Islands in March. So we booked our trip to Fuerteventura and got together over a Nepalese takeaway to sort out final arrangements.

We arrived at our All Inclusive hotel in Jandia Playa mid afternoon and

immediately headed for the bar, ordering a glass of bubbly to celebrate the start of our venture and this was closely followed by a few cocktails. In the morning we loaded up our boards on the hired SUV and headed out to a nearby harbour, Puerto de Morro Jable. It was fairly sheltered within the harbour, but as soon as we left it we were having to contend with strong winds and waves, but it was

still great fun. The island is well known for its windy conditions, and it wasn't about to disappoint!

We decided to keep the boards inflated and strapped them to the roof of the SUV. The boards had other ideas and did their best to leave the roof by twisting sideways thus creating wings and converting our little SUV into a private air-

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Pool Sessions

Skills such as rescues, capsizes, as well as improving stability with braces and rolls, inevitably involve getting wet! And lovely as the River Medway is, practicing this stuff in a pool is easier, more effective, and a great deal nicer! The Club has exclusive use of Cranbrook pool every second Tuesday (see Calendar). It's a short 30-minute drive down the A229, and is easy to find with plenty of parking. We can only keep hiring the pool as long as it's well supported - use it or lose it!

Tuesday Evenings - Book Online
www.maidstonecanoeclub.net

Maidstone Cross Continental

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from the uk/France border, it is the only other border checkpoint on our journey and Georgi warned us that Romanian officials may not be as forgiving as the Hungarian toll police. We fuelled up, ate a decent meal which rewarded Carolyn with a free pizza slice voucher (this was to be reclaimed on the return journey) and then we tentatively moved the few miles toward the border check point.

Georgis nerves grew as we approached. He had experienced Romanian border issues previously and knew they were likely to raise the paperwork as an issue. We all sought to put a positive spin on it and as we rolled up to the booth I rolled down the window and provided all the passports and paperwork we had to hand. The border official worked through them and then demanded the vehicle registration form. We feigned some surprise and said we provided all the paperwork. He then asked again and we said that in the uk it is electronic system and not needed to accompany the vehicle at all times. With an air of menace, he kept our passports and told us to park up just past the booth. Minutes passed and other vehicles were now progressing through the booth. We were unsure of what to do next when an authoritative thump of the drivers window startled us. The thump was an actual uk vehicle registration form being pressed against the window at us. Alongside the official shouting "THIS IS VEHICLE REGISTRATION THAT YOU MUST HAVE". As quickly as he appeared he disappeared back to his booth. The tension grew as to what would happen next. After what seemed another long break but which was probably only a few minutes Georgi was summoned to somewhere away from both our van and the officers booth... which presumably was out of all the checkpoints cameras views. In preparation for this rendezvous, Georgi had advised that he would not take his wallet in case the official was looking for money. This was indeed part of the conversation but without a wallet to hand the official fortunately lost interest and let us on our way. Passports and paperwork returned we decided to stop at the next town to stock up on supplies and relax.

The town of Arad, just 15 or so miles from the border, contained a Lidl just off the motorway and so was as good a place as any to stop and stock up. Delicacies such as sheep head with eyeballs were on sale but we focused on bbq food, beer and some milk for Carolyn. Georgi still shook from the border experience decided that for the first time ever someone else

could drive the van. This was so he could have a beer to recover but only after I was seen to be a reputable driver. We had just left the car park when Georgi opened the first of several cans and started his own little party for the next 5 hrs of driving. It would have been a shorter drive but Georgis thimble sized bladder and several beers required a rather large number of rest stops. The last stop he required was no more than 150m from the camp site so it was decided that Georgi could therefore walk that last section himself.

At the camp site there was a scattering of people already there and as the night was already upon us we setup camp in the old market stalls/bungalows. As Georgis comrades from his Bulgarian club started to arrive the welcomes and introductions along with the drinks began to flow on what was a bitterly cold night. Tomorrow was the race practice day so we all enjoyed the night if not the cold.

We woke and prepared a breakfast on the bbq with talk of a potential new Bulgarian recruit to our group of four. June was then introduced. June stood at well over 6ft tall and could only be described as a bit of an Eastern European animal. With the extra power he would provide we all thought we were in with a chance. The practice run was roughly the first half of the course. The run proved challenging as the water levels were a metre down on the levels two weeks previously and the power that June brought was unfortunately over compensated by his considerable ballast. In the competitive heat of international white water rafting this would mean that as quickly as June was hired he was fired by our team leader, in favour of less weight and greater buoyancy on shallow waters.

Race day came following a slightly subdued but warmer night around the camp fire. The starting time was 2pm and 150 competitors gathered at the starting point. There were numerous categories for the race depending on the boat being raced. Our rafting group contained ten competitors and as it is the slowest group we were the first to depart. The race comprised of a 50m dash to the river and a 24km paddle with a mid race portage. The usual time for the race was approx 2.5hrs. From our practice and knowledge of the reduced water level we were expecting a slower more onerous paddle. The key was a good start and having shuffled around our starting position we all hoped for a mid placed finish. The starting whistle was blown and we sprinted ran kinda quickly, to the put in. With limited space for all participants the revised



Free pizza is an all-important part of the dietary preparation for the race.

position we took paid dividends with a clear entry whilst others tussled for position. We set off and into second place. Hopes buoyed by the good start and ignoring the shouts from the teams behind us we settled into our own pace. We sought to run the lines from our previous practice to avoid beaching the raft. This was successful and combined with the lesser ballast (no June!) we had fewer stoppages. As we started to tire, we reached the mid point portage in second place. Georgi, who was in no mood for time wasted, demanded a sprint to the offered tea and ROM bars and back to the water.

With our quick portage the second part of the race began promisingly as just ahead of us we could see the first place team. We had lost sight of them for a good deal of the first part of the race. Behind us there was no other team in sight. We began to gain on the first place team. Following their lines to avoid any potential grounding issues. Then we noticed that they also had a support kayak in front guiding them to the correct lines but also a punctured raft which was slowing their progress. We maintained our momentum, overtook them and surprisingly we were into first place. However with no kayak support offering guidance on lines and on the part of the course we had not practiced the previous day we encountered some grounding issues with various team members having to jump out of the raft to dislodge the craft or pull it along to a larger flow of water. Our issues helped out the trailing teams and soon there was a group of three behind us. Yet for a period of time due to a good run of lines we maintained our lead.

Then in a 50/50 choice of line we got stuck. Really stuck. Badly enough stuck to ask Carolyn and her dodgy knee and

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As far as I'm aware, this is the first time the Maidstone International Rafting Team has reached the podium. Next stop: Paris 2024!

Maidstone Cross Continental

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ankle to jump out of the boat also. In retrospect probably a bad idea as Carolyn floated along and almost under the boat rather than repositioning it. We all jumped back into the raft but two of the trailing teams had overtaken us and from there we were unable to catch them. With energy reserves running low, stashed lucozade and the portage Rom bars were consumed as we looked out for the hotel just before the finish line...somewhat like a mirage we really did think we spotted it on a couple of occasions only for it to be a completely different building. This error combined with what was now over three hours of constant paddling led to some choice words and frustration. However we all powered on and finished in third place out of the ten competing teams. A much better result than we all initially thought possible.

Exhausted but happy we were treated to Bulgarian chilli and rakia (Bulgarian fruit brandy/rocket fuel) which got us in the mood for the following party with award ceremony, band and DJ sets that

went well into the night.

The following day we awoke and packed up our gear for the first leg of the journey home. The Hungarian/Romanian border was navigated with more ease as the Hungarians were only interested in checking for refugees in the boot that was packed with yet to dry soggy paddling gear. The scene of the toll police was revisited so Carolyn could get her free pizza slice and then it was a short trip to our accommodation in Bratislava. The accommodations basement carpark was small crowded and had more than its share of electronic barriers of which none would work. Having attempted to physically lift a barrier and it falling off its mechanism the next couple of barriers we decided we had better ring security to help with our access. We parked up and settled down in the apartment for the evening with the Czech Republic hit "Basrardi 3" on the tv in the background.

The next day would be the end of Emily's journey with us and the start of her own further back packing European

tour. We all took an early morning walk around the historic city centre and up to the top of the hill to Bratislava castle. Following the walk we had a good breakfast at a local café, which served up English tea and milk (Carolyn) as well as their hot chocolate which was literally a glass of microwaved chocolate. We waved goodbye to Emily got back in the van and headed through Austria, Germany, Holland and Belgium to arrive at a late hour into Calais for the euro tunnel. After a short wait we boarded and arrived back in Kent in the early hours of the morning. Tired we said our goodbyes, spoke once more of the open ended invite from the Romanian organisers to return for a white water kayaking trip and also the suggestion that next year Maidstone Cross Continental could possibly win not just the rafting race but perhaps some other categories. Overall the trip had been full of incident, challenging, humorous but most of all enjoyable. Roll on 2023.

By Larry O'Connell

SUPers on Tour

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plane. When we stopped to bring them back into position, we noticed the roof had buckled under the weight...good job we took out the insurance excess waiver! As it happens, the roof popped back out when the boards were removed. Still, a lesson to be learnt from trying to carry 4 paddle boards on a car roof without a roof rack or bars!

That evening was spent in the bar playing a game called Backpacker while consuming copious amounts of brandy and coke, mojitos and tequila sunrises...but not all mixed of course!

The next day we thought we should find a resort on the east side of the island which would be sheltered from the wind. We found the perfect spot - a place called Costa Calma. As the name suggested, its got to be calmer there, or so we thought. Well the wind and the tide were not in our favour and we were getting further and further from the shore...sort of heading to Africa to be honest! A friendly lifeguard came out to us on his ski jet and asked if we were ok. We said we were and continued paddling for shore. After about half an hour we were no closer and the friendly lifeguard and a couple of his mates came our and 'suggested' taking us back. We reluctantly accepted. It did actually take about 5 minutes at full throttle to get back, so we hadn't realised how difficult it would have been for us to do that on a paddle board with an off-shore wind. Live and learn as they say!!

On our final day, we packed up and headed towards the airport, stopping off en-route for one final paddle at Caleta de Fuste. Jon and Anj doubled up on one board and Claire and I on another with a kayak conversion fitted and we paddled to the far side of the bay where we did some snorkelling. It was the perfect ending to a great weekend.

By Greg Carapiet



Possibly Africa in the background.



Photo taken before the drinking game "Backpacker". Sadly no photos are known to exist of the game itself.

Bewl Water

Bewl Water is the largest body of inland water in the South East and is a fabulous place to explore. It's privately owned by Southern Water and is thus rarely paddled by Maidstone Club members. We're extremely grateful to Bewl Canoe Club who have invited us to join them on

Sunday 26th June

We're returning the invitation by hosting a paddle for Bewl Cane Club on

Saturday 16th July

See calendar for details

Going It Alone

One of the great benefits of coaching others is that your paddling premises are constantly challenged.

Every paddler will look at things in their own way and bring their own individual life experiences to the session. They'll ask questions you never thought of, and – hopefully – force you to re-examine unconscious beliefs and unquestioned assumptions. So it was during a recent Explore Award training session when one of my students asked "Is it always frowned upon to paddle alone?"

"Yes," I replied firmly. "Less than three there never shall be." I added, nodding wisely, because a coach should have a trite and slightly sanctimonious homily for every occasion. A little voice was nagging in my head. "But ..." I added lamely.

But indeed. My first canoeing experience as an adult (I paddled as a Scout, but then lapsed for twenty years) was a solo expedition in Algonquin National Park, Canada. I'd known I would have some time to kill at the end of a work trip to Toronto, so I took an hour's lesson on Bewl Water before I left, which was where I heard the term "J stroke" for the first time and was told about something called "trim". I hired a canoe and paddle from an outfitter at the trailhead and set off on my own for four days in the wilderness. Wolves, bears, eagles – it was fab, and I had a wonderful time. By the time I came back, I'd mastered the J stroke and figured out why trim was so important.

Since then, I've regularly paddled solo. When I first joined Maidstone, the regular Wednesday evening paddles only ran during the summer. I didn't want to let my newly-burgeoning skills and fitness slip, so I just kept turning up, paddling to Farleigh or the Malta, rain, sleet and snow. It was dark, cold and occasionally wet, but I loved it – a chance to reset midweek, to let my mind float free while my body worked hard.

As it happened, on the day before this particular Explore Award course I had been out for a little mini-adventure on my own. I'd been wanting to visit the Thames



Perfect conditions at Red Sands Forts

Forts – those War-of-the-Worlds anti-aircraft platforms rusting away off Whitstable – for ages, but had never found the right group at the right time to do it. The most sensible route takes advantage of the tides running past Sheerness, and it's about a 16-mile paddle – 8 miles out and 8 back. If you get the tides right, you can get a little boost both ways. On this particular date, the tide times worked for a 9am start, the weather forecast was calm and clear, and I took the day off work and had a fantastic paddle. Five miles offshore, amongst the eery desolation of the derelict gantries, the warning bell on the shipping buoy tolling mournfully against the shrieking of gulls and kittiwakes, the kayak rising and falling on the swell beneath me, was a really special experience and all the better for not being shared.

So why was my immediate reaction to my students to tell them not to paddle alone? Solo paddling can be a wonderful experience – assuming everything goes to plan. The margins for error are slimmer. When I planned my trip out to the forts, I considered all the things that might go wrong, and tried to mitigate them. Fog? I had a compass on the boat, a spare in my BA, plus a phone with maps already downloaded. Unexpected wind? I plotted some escape routes, and I have a clear idea of what strength winds I can paddle in. Falling out? I've got a good roll and

am confident in my self-rescue techniques. And so on. Finally, I had a couple of means of calling for help – VHF, phone, whistle. It was still less safe than going with competent friends, but – to me – the rewards of being alone on the ocean, only the gulls for company, outweighed the extra risk. And that's the key part. Solo paddling is an intensely personal thing – weighing the journey against your personal skills and experience, weighing the potential negative outcomes against your personal appetite for risk. Your assessment will be different to mine. But this has to be set against a backdrop of sound prior knowledge – a solo paddle is not the time to discover (for example) that swimming in cold water is harder than you'd thought.

And that was the "but" I found myself lamely explaining to my Explore Award students. Paddle solo, if you want to. Take risks, if you like. But only do it within the environments you understand, and only take the risks you've calculated in advance. An Explore Award holder should be competent to assess this for themselves.

Happy Paddling!

By Mark Corti

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What's On?

There isn't space to mention all the trips, events, courses and sessions going on at the Club in the next few months, but here's a smattering to whet your appetite:

Bulgaria wild camping trip (2-5th June), Canterbury Stour (4th June), Slovenia whitewater trip (6-10th June), FSRT course (11th June), Midsummer Moonlight Paddle (14th June), Open Day (18th June), Tidal Awareness session (20th June), Kent Canoe Demo Day (3rd July), Estuary Breakfast & BBQ (9th July), Paddlesport Instructor course (30-31st July).

By the time you read this, more trips and events will have been added to the Calendar! Keep an eye on the website or our Facebook & Twitter feeds to make sure you don't miss out!