

100th EDITION

NEWSLETTER

of the



Advanced Sea Kayak Club

AN INTERNATIONAL SEA CANOEING CLUB
OPEN TO ALL INTERESTED IN THIS ASPECT OF CANOEING



AIMS Promotion of sea canoeing - Communication - Organisation
of events and conferences - Safety and coaching.

ADVANCED SEA KAYAK CLUB

NEWSLETTER 100

NOVEMBER 1993

John J Ramwell
5 Osprey Avenue
Westhoughton
BOLTON
Lancs
BL5 2SL

Editorial

Well, here it is ... the 100th Edition in its distinctive blue colour. Quite a mile stone, I'm sure you will agree.

So what's new since our last editorial? Not a lot. The next big step in the enquiry into the Lyme Bay tragedy will be the Coroners Inquest. I am not aware of a date being set for this. It is not wise to pre-empt any of its findings, but then I never took awards for being wise. It is, after all, no clever guess that there will be a recommendation about safety standards and codes of practice that will affect all who lead, coach, instruct canoeing, particularly on the sea. Standards will also probably be set for Outdoor Education Centres. Anyway, enough crystal ball gazing, we shall wait and see. Meanwhile, a quote from the Half Year Conference of the Association of Heads of O.E.C., "An update was available from Frank Perry, Advisor for Cornwall. He believed that there were those who thought that legislation may be needed to bring a compulsory framework of registration for those working with school groups. A view expressed that damage to the outdoor education at one centre was damage to the whole sector".

Whilst running an Advanced Sea Kayak Assessment weekend for a group of Dutch paddlers based out of Nigel Dennis's Centre 'ASSC' on Anglesey (thanks for the wonderful hospitality, Nigel) we stopped for lunch under the cliffs close by South Stack. The weather excellent, Margaret's (Maslen) fruit cake even better and we were enjoying the break from a hard mornings paddling when I thought the sky was falling in; climbers above had dropped a rope so they could absail down. It occurred to me it could easily have been a rock, and me with no hard hat!!

The SEA KAYAKER Magazine is now available from V.C.P. (0602 614995), Nottingham. The cost is £3.20 per copy, per quarter inc. p & p. Annual subscription is £12.80.

The B.C.U. Sea Touring Committee Symposium is scheduled for 2/3rd October 1993. I have been asked to provide a presentation on our B.S.E.S. to Arctic Russia expedition, - so will see you there. Details from Dave Evans, Calshot Activities Centre, Southampton Spit, Hants.

USA - Canoe Hire at Risk (Thanks to Stuart Fisher and 'Canoeist')
A jury in Pennsylvania have awarded damages of \$800,000 against a canoe rental company when a client drowned after they had failed to warn of the risk of death or serious injury and had not provided lifeguards and life saving devices at all 'public bathing places', that is, all along the river. The company reckon they would need 450 lifeguards for their 10 km stretch of river!! The case is being seen as setting an important precedent which could destroy the canoe rental industry in the USA as it exists today.

And finally

ASKC RENEWAL TIME is here again. I have enclosed a seperate renewal form to allow you to subscribe to the ASKC for 1994.

As you know, postage has gone up. Paper and ink has also increased in price. Reluctantly I must push up membership subscription by 50 pence.

If you are going to renew, and I sincerely hope you do, then please do so promptly. You need to let me know if you do not want your name and address to

appear in the 1994 ASKC Members Address List.

Until the 101st newsletter, January 1994. Meanwhile I would like to wish you all a HAPPY CHRISTMAS and calm (or interesting!!) horizons (depending on your wishes) in 1994.

Good luck John Ramwell.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Dear John

Thank you very much for the latest issue of your newsletter. It had in it lots of information about flares.

What you write falls almost exactly into what I reported when I ran exercises at sea with the co-operation of the R.A.F. and the Coastguards - with one exception.

You do not mention the hand-held maroon. You point out the difficulty of getting people ashore to see and take note of a flare out to sea, saying that in one case you were the only one to take action. We learnt in our exercises that if we wanted people to see and take action we had to attract their attention, loud and clear. One or two people (including some coastguards!) queried whether we were legally allowed to loose off maroons in an emergency, so I went to the Coastguard H.Q. in London and asked. The answer was an emphatic "Yes, we are allowed". The firing of a gun is a distress signal. What is a maroon?

Pains-Wessex make a very good hand-held maroon, the same size as their other signals, the ones that last a minute.

I strongly recommend any organisation or individual who runs or goes on trips to sea to carry one of these maroons. When the bang is heard, people will look around to see what made it. Then they will see the flare or smoke and take action.

May I mention one snag with the parachute signals. If the cloud cover is thick and low, as it usually is in "accident-prone conditions", they disappear into the clouds and aren't seen. Better to have the long-burning smoke or flare, according to whether it is day or night. And the maroon for both occasions.

By the way, all this is mentioned in the Canoe Lifeguard video tape, This is due to come out just as soon as Chris Hawkesworth is able to make it available. It will be available from Colin Broadway of Mobile Adventure in Leicester.

Yours sincerely - O J Cock MBE

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Dear John

I have just received the Newsletter No 99 and thoroughly enjoyed reading it. I was interested in many of the articles but particularly the ones on flares. I have always carried them on all trips to sea. I now wish to purchase a VHF radio as I feel that they are now an essential piece of equipment for my sea trips. Often, when I have contacted the coast guard recently before a trip, they tend to ask me if I am carrying a radio and I usually feel a little inadequate when I have to say no but I intend to get one. I wonder if you have any useful information from members of ASKC about suitable radios for the sea canoeist.

Yours sincerely - Robert Strickland, Winchester.

By John Palmer

There may be some people in the outdoor world that still have not yet come up against N.V.Q.'s. Once they come out of hiding they too will quickly be confronted by the dreadful initials. Whether you like it or not they are here to stay and the sooner everyone gets to grips with them the better. Unfortunately I suspect that most of us know more about the structure and performance of Japanese No plays than we do about the working of N.V.Q.'s.

The analogy has been made between N.V.Q. and a juggernaut, with the associated images of people desperately clinging on with their finger tips or trying to leap on board before it disappears into the distance. I prefer to compare it with learning about computers. It is a whole new world of initials and terminology and once you start you are on a very steep learning curve. In order to smooth the way I have produced my definitive guide to N.V.Q.'s. I hope it will help the reader to understanding this new and intricate initiative.

What is N.V.Q.?

The initials N.V.Q. stand for Not Very Qualified. It is possible to be Not Very Qualified from level 1 right through to level 5, which is Not Very Qualified at the highest Level although level 5 is still only in the development stage. It was felt some time ago that the British Qualification system was very piecemeal and uncoordinated. It was decided, at the highest level, that a whole new system should be developed so that everyone could be Not Very Qualified no matter what they did, particularly at a time when we were going to be in competition with so many other European countries. The Construction Industry saw the advantages immediately and decided that as many of their workers as possible should be Not Very Qualified. In fact everyone who is remotely connected with the British Construction Industry will be meeting early this spring in a small portacabin in the West Midlands in order to review the introductions of this important initiative. So important is this new idea that the Prime Minister himself, John Major (at the time of writing) is determined to set an example by being Not Very Qualified at all for his job as the country's leader - that is how important it is!

On The Job

In order to be very Not Very Qualified the candidate has to be observed and often assessed 'on the job'. Now there has been some confusion over this term and many people, quite frankly, are concerned about their performance 'on the job'. Very often they have no one with whom they can compare themselves and their colleagues are rather reluctant to tell them whether they are very good 'on the job' especially when they are getting a bit passed it. However performance 'on the job' is an essential tool for weeding out those not up to the required standard. A Cabinet Minister recently resigned because he was observed 'on the job' and his performance must have been so poor that he decided himself that he was not up to it. I hope there will be no more confusion over this term and in future when any reference is made to 'on the job' assessment the implications will be quite clear.

Assessors and Verifiers

I have, in passing, made reference to assessment and the question will, no doubt, have been raised in your mind 'Who does the assessing?'. The obvious answer is, of course, an assessor, but it is not quite that simple. Most situations will require an 'on the job' assessor (remember that term?) and an external assessor to assess the 'on the job' assessor and a verifier to assess the assessor. These people will of course have to be carefully trained and there is a whole system to ensure that they have Not Very Qualified status as assessors. The higher you are the more Not Very Qualified you become.

These assessors cannot be expected to do all this for fun. After spending years becoming Not Very Qualified they will expect some payment as a result and it will be reasonable to assume that anyone who wants to be Not Very Qualified will have to pay for the privilege. Not only will you have to pay to be considered Not Very Qualified you will also have to pay to find out what you are supposed to do.

Consultants

The reader will by this time have realised that N.V.Q.'s are something of a minefield. Have no fear there are consultants just queueing at the door to help you find a way through the whole business. Consultants are people who have either lost their jobs or have been made redundant. This makes them eminently qualified to advise other people, who are actually employed, how to do their job properly. These people are called consultants because immediately someone rings them up they consult a huge price list to see what they can get away with charging.

A.P.L.

Because this is a whole new system it is likely that it will take some time before everyone is Not Very Qualified. In order to bring everyone into the scheme there is something called A.P.L., Accreditation of Prior Lying. By carefully amassing documentary evidence of how good you are at your job you can be awarded and N.V.Q. at any level from 1 to 5. Since you have to be able to show that you are quite perfect at what you do for a living it is quite clear that Accreditation of Prior Lying is a most useful means of going about it.

I hope that this has cleared up some of the mystery surrounding this whole topic. If there is still some confusion or help is required please do not hesitate to contact me at Honest John's Consultancy Services. The Job Centre, Llangollen.

x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-

Dear John

I thought that in amongst the grim epic tales of bravado and daring do, this humorous tale might lighten this months load. During a recent 'around Malta charity paddle' the following capsized has to be a clincher for the best swim award of the decade. The group were - by Maltese standards - very well prepared. Including an armed forces patrol boat as well as the escorting launch. Anyway having made it halfway around the island one of the doubles decided to change crews, (note: lots of enthusiastic people but few boats) putting them about half a mile astern myself in a slalom boat (PBK63) and another double of unknown origins! Paddling along in a flat mirror smooth calm. Just before Ghar Lapsi which is a lovely piece of coastline. We espied a couple on a low cliff, who, we discuss as to whether the young lady is topless. This in itself is technically illegal here, however this is a very remote spot. Unable to ascertain any bare breasts from our distance, we paddle on determined not to back-track. About two to three minutes or so pass and we hear air horns, and whistles going off all over the place, and turn to see the other double (Duncan Winnings superb "Gantock") the wrong way up with the patrol boat circling.

Only later do we learn the whole truth. Just as they were passing the couple, Mark in the bows notices that the lady has returned to a more relaxed pose, so relaxed in fact that she is stark naked! He turns to Mark in the stern and asks if he's seen the 'hedgehog' on the cliffs. To which both Marks turn to try and catch a glimpse! With obvious results. Now these chaps are bobbing around in 37 m of water getting rather anxious about anything else that casually swims by! Up comes the patrol boat who's captain enquires as to what happened. On being told that an errant 'hedgehog' was to blame, makes not one but two 360° circuits before assisting the chaps in the water. The Moral - be careful where 'hedgehogs are concerned' From C & R Wightman

Dear John

Keep up the good work on the newsletter which seems to be arriving more frequently recently, or maybe time's just passing quicker.

Anyway I thought I should comment on a few things I picked up on in the recent newsletters.

Sumburgh Head seems to be in the news in a number of ways just now. Both the Braer disaster and Tom Smith's 'Nearly an Epic' article reminded me of a trip we did in 1988 from Stromness in Orkney up through the Orkneys, across to Fair Isle and on to Shetland. We crossed from Fair Isle to Sumburgh Head on a calm sea with a large Atlantic swell (2 m or so) running W to E and arrived early at the 'Roost' the tide race off Sumburgh Head.

The crew of Sea Shepherd and Fair Isle ferry/mail boat had told us the Roost was wide and unpredictable but should be O.K. In the event it took us almost 2½ hours to cross the 3 mile wide race in failing light. During that time we crossed 6 or 7 different streams and at one time went backwards despite working hard not to be picked up by 3 m cresting seas running with us! It was an interesting experience, and although we never felt we'd overstepped the mark, it was difficult to imagine the seas, had the conditions not been calm. My experiences in the Roost made me sympathise with Tom Smith. It's no place for inexperienced paddlers. The rescue of the crew of the Braer in storm force winds in these waters seems to me an incredible feat, as were the efforts of the tug and salvage vessels in such conditions.

The coastguard statistics for 1992 make interesting reading as always. More incidents in Scotland than I'd like, but quite a few 'all well'. It would be interesting to conjecture if the public are becoming more aware of canoe groups and 'potential problems' or we're just more visible because of the increasing popularity of our sport and such reports will become more common.

The 'concern for canoeist' at St Kilda intrigues me. If it was the lone paddler who did the crossing in 9½ hours, the concern was rather premature, or has the account of my 1991 trip prompted others to try?

One last point. I must take issue with your editorial in the March Newsletter when you mention the Sony PYXIS GPS receiver. The Sunday newspaper you read which says a third party can track your position if you use a GPS was wrong! It is possible to transmit the calculated position from a GPS receiver, but only by adding a standard transmitter module, and the logistics of doing so for a number of units is horrendous. GPS is a passive system i.e. there is no communication from your receiver to the satellite. My company are the UK leaders in this sphere for applications in the North Sea Oil industry, and I can assure you it's not easy. Unfortunately as is often the case with new technology there are those who will stretch the truth. GPS has a huge potential, but its use must be kept in perspective.

As a help to your readers I will put together some notes over the summer for a later newsletter.

Happy paddling

From Donald Thomson, Inverurie

* * * * *

From ARTEMIS, 6541 17th Ave., NE, Seattle, WA 98115, U.S.A.

"BAJA IS WAITINGCome experience the soul-balancing alchemy of hot sun and warm bluecrystalline water in a magical desert land.

Trips depart from Loreto to either explore the nearby islands and beaches of the Sea of Cortez or to travel across the peninsula to Magdalena Bay for grey whale watching.

No previous paddling experience is required, only to be reasonably fit and possess a spirit of adventure.

We provide experienced guides and single fibre-glass kayaks with gear. Bring your own camping gear. Meals are shared. 200 dollars reserves you a place, balance due 30 days before departure. Seven days 400 dollars.

February 10-16; 18-24th and Feb 26th-March 4th

Dear John

A quick letter about two recent trips of great contrast which may be of some interest to readers.

The first trip, this June, was to the Outer Hebrides with John a work colleague, in two plastic Prijon Seayaks. John is mainly a mountaineer and a rock climber of "E" numbers (always bad for you) who fancied some get-away-from-it-all paddling with a dash of commitment and some spectacular scenery. I have wanted to paddle the Southern most tip of those islands for quite some time so with six days off together we headed for Oban and the Caledonian - Macbrayne office. How about this?

Two adults with a car, canoes on top - return £156.50

Two adults carrying canoes on to ferry - return £156.60

Yes ten pence cheaper to take the car. Unfortunately we couldn't do that because the return ferry was fully booked.

The evening glow at Castlebay, Isle of Barra, made it tempting to stay but we had walked off the ferry carrying the boats and dressed to paddle. The local brew would have to wait until our return.

Reaching Sandray was so satisfying as the last hints of light faded in the North west. A small sandy beach on the Northern coast, level sheep-grazed grass, fishing boxes for windshields and seats and ruins of deserted crofts concocted a mixture which makes this game so special.

On the following day, the 0555 forecast wasn't brilliant but the immediate sea state wasn't too bad so we threw all the kit into our boats, crossed the sand of Pabbay against a flooding tide and made it to Mingulay late in the morning. With visibility down to about half a mile, drizzle in the air and bags under our eyes we simply put up the tent in another superb setting and slept for about four hours. The tides were then okay for a trip around Berneray and Barra Head and possibly Mingulay too depending on the swell on the West coast. And this is just what we did in a fantastic brooding atmosphere.

The trip back to Castlebay via a different course was slightly anti-climatical but on Vatersay we met some enchanting people. We had camped at Eorisdale, another wonderful deserted community, and in the morning two old men appeared. It transpired that they were brothers who had both spent their first twenty years in the house nearest to where our tent now sat. The four of us spent over an hour basking in the sunshine hearing story after story of crofting life fifty years ago and how it all came to an end.

Our ferry back to Oban left at 0930 on the Sunday morning which meant Saturday night out in Castlebay. It was my second Saturday night out on those islands in the summer, the first being in Stornoway about three years ago.

It's now mid-July and Jo, my wife and I are just back from a week on the Isles of Scilly, a trip we've been promising ourselves for some time now. Given fair conditions expeditioning in the Scillies is pretty straightforward and probably recommendable for any person or group cutting their teeth. There is habitation and shops on five of the islands and there is a ferry taxi service between them so that if you get completely trapped there is a way out. All the inhabited islands have official camp sites and the going rate seems to be £2.50 per person per night.

The special atmosphere of the "Fortunate Isles" as the tourist board calls them is more apparent in the stillness of a hot summer's day where the water is shallow and crystal clear above golden granite sand. It's the nearest I've felt to paddling in the tropics! Of the inhabited islands St Agnes was our favourite probably because it is the least developed and from the West coast there are magnificent views out to Bishop Rock lighthouse and the Western Isles. The pub, the Turks Head, overlooks the sea, serves brilliant home made pasties and is open at 10 am so it's a lovely place to while away some bad weather which we did for half a day playing scrabble and supping coffee.

Offshore highlights for us were Men-a-Vaur and the Garden of Maiden Bower, beautiful islets with their own piece of magic. The 1:25000 OS map shows that nearly every rock has a name, often a strange mixture between Cornish, Breton and Tolkien! The chart is very useful for the tidal atlas insert in the top left hand corner and tide tables can be bought from chandlers and news agents on St Mary's. To our greatest relief we encountered no midges. Altogether a lovely trip.

FROM: Phil Eccles, Porthmadog, Gwynedd

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

FOR SALE

NORDKAPP: Beautiful example. Full expedition rig. C-trip rudder, Lendal foot pump Whaler pump. Three hatches. HJ tubes for self rescues. Diolen hull - very light. Yellow deck. Orange hull. Best offer secures. Can deliver in N W and Wales. Phone 0766 513295. Genuine sale.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

FOR SALE:

ISLANDER: Thoughtfully modified version. New seat, new seams, strengthened keel. Sunken BDH behind seat accessible from above. Electric pump. expedition rig. Red deck, white hull. Best offer over £350.00. Tel: 0766 513295. Can deliver N W or N Wales.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Dear ASKC

Yorkshire Television have asked me to devise an adventure series of programmes to be made in the North of England. We feel that there is insufficient attention paid to adventure sports in this country and television just seems to cover the major expeditions overseas. We would like to show northern viewers the possibilities of adventure in their own patch and bring out some of the interesting facts about the region.

Each programme needs a good central character who we follow on a personal challenge. S/he may be an expert in your specialised sport. S/he may have experience of expeditions abroad or may have a strong link with the North of England. We will have scope for some dry humour.

The adventure would need to take place within a time span of 6 to 48 hours so that we could film it thoroughly. Production may start in twelve months time.

I would like to see our adventurers have a secondary reason for making the journey. For example: mountaineers and hang gliders tend to be keen ornithologists, equestrians and trail riders follow ancient routes with historic events attached to them.

Would you be kind enough to put forward some names for me to have a talk with. I am enclosing a short questionnaire with a few detailed notes and would be obliged if you could return it to me. I will be on the telephone number below if you would like to have a talk about the project.

From: Mike Akester Film Associates
26 Oak Hill
Woodstreet Village
Guildford GU3 3ER

Tel: 0483 234479

BUT I NEVER MEANT TO HURT ANTONELLO
(Trust the Synoptic chart ...)

BY: Sergio Cadoni, Assoc. Italiana Kayak da Mare

Antonello paid me a call almost after six months had passed since the last time we had paddled together. A strong and fit paddler, during those past months he went through a lot of surfing. Now he was fancying a nice trip to the Islands of La Maddalena, in the Bonifacio Straits between Sardinia and Corse.

The Straits are sadly known for the inclemency of the wind. The morning breeze can easily reach and exceed force 5 Beaufort, due to the Venturi effect in the narrow channel between the islands. Because of local geography, the prevalent wind can suddenly change its direction and start blowing from a totally opposite one. It's a very technical sea, but rather nice to paddle.

The weather forecast was reassuring, as was the synoptic chart, with mild southern winds along the coast of Sardinia and north-easterly along the south coast of Corse. We took to the sea with a good south-easterly force 4, and started to cross from Porto Puddu to the island of Lavezzi, nine miles away. The wind was pushing us nicely from three quarters aft. With our surprise 1 mile off Lavezzi the wind suddenly changed to a robust force 5 north-easterly, or at least that was our educated guess. We were favourably impressed by the accuracy of the forecast. After a while we landed for a good lunch. In the afternoon the sky became overcast with a couple of showers. The island was beautiful, ripe with seabirds and white sandy beaches, pristine waters and a picturesque sealight. In fact, Lavezzi is a natural reserve, and it's very well protected by the French authorities. From there is clearly visible the south coast of Corse, with its high white cliffs, and on the other side the north coast of Sardinia offers an impressive view. A radio call to Pertusato Radio Station confirmed a S.E. wind due to increase up to F.5 in the next day. We wondered about this N. easterly blowing upon the island.

Anyway, in the afternoon we crossed to Razzoli, only 4 miles away, to admire its rose rocks and to set camp for the night. On the arrival we were hailed by the S.E. wind (again), and landed on the island of Budelli, another nature reserve, just in front of the meeting of the islands which form the archipelago. The landscape was beautiful, with a near tropical appearance. A golden sunset kept the morale high with its reassuring glow. Only a lonely sailboat was anchored in the middle of the bay. Should all this have warned us? We found shelter from the wind, and after a good dinner went to sleep. On the next day we would have toured the islands and then crossed back to the starting point, in front of the island of Spargi where we had left the car. But At 2 am a strong wind started pounding against our tent, and we had to provide some reinforcements. At 6 we were under a full North-westerly force 7! No weather forecast (neither the French nor the Italian) had ever mentioned such a possibility, and due to the force of the wind they should have done. At 7.30 it was a full force 8 N.W., later confirmed by the weather report. No way to cross to Spargi and then to the chosen landing due to the heavy breaking seas.

We thought our only option was to cross to the north point of La Maddalena main island, find shelter along its east coast, and paddle to its harbour to catch a ferry bound to Palau. From there it was only 5 km to the car. It took an hour to complete the 6 mile crossing, checking carefully every incoming wave and bracing almost continuously upwind, allowing the current to drift us to La Maddalena. No time left to have fear. The height of the waves was really impressive, and so was their speed. At the north reaches of Maddalena we started to surf in this heavy sea to avoid being smashed against its cliffs, or at least we tried to avoid being pushed to surf speed by the big breaking waves, with some success, truth be known, but not as much as we hoped for. Finally we turned on the east side of the island to discover being exposed to the wind abeam anyway, and we had to battle for three hours to cover just five miles. During all this time we wished we had had a good forecast, and a reliable one!

Energies started to drain quickly away. We had another three miles to go and we were now confronted by a gutsy F.9 (estimated, but later sadly confirmed ..) After some more battling we understood we were making no headway. The kayaks, one Baidarka Explorer and one Nordkapp, were totally out of control. The sea was all white, raging with foam. So we had to land. From there an excruciating portage to a parking lot where we found some locals with two vans who gave us a ride to the harbour. We were asked about what had happened, and to our answer they stared at us in obvious disbelief. Much better this than shaking and run off the road. I think we could complete the crossing and land in a civilised place thanks to the great performance of the boats. The kayaks behaved wonderfully, and so did the narrow blades of the Schlegel Ozean paddles we were using. I won't bet money on normal spoon blades in a similar occasion.

On the way back home, Sergio said "I wanted some nice paddling, even some demanding paddling, but I never, ever expected anything like this ..." (me neither to be honest ...)

At home, "Have you got yesterday's forecast? It said South westerly strong breeze" I was a little worried. Strong breeze? Uh

x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x

Dear John

In the last copy of the ASKC news letter you had an article in which you said 'there are no NVQ's available in teaching, coaching and instructing outdoor education.'

Have you read the National Occupational Standards, Sport and Recreation ILB, NVQ/SVQ structure

Level 3

Outdoor Education and Training level 3

10. Sport and recreation Outdoor Education (13 units)

11. Sport and recreation Outdoor Training (13 units)

Other units cover things like management and coaching.

The main point about NVQ's is that it is a system devised by the MSC (industry) not the DES (education). As someone involved with education, don't be surprised one day to find there has been an NVQ written for sea canoeing and you didn't know anything about it! Soon there is going to be a lot of discussion about all this but by then it will be too late.

On a different tack, I liked your comments on flares. As a regular solo paddler and mountaineer, I would be grateful to anyone who helped me out of a tight spot, but the only person I could expect to make the effort for me is myself.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Smee, Talbrager, High Street, Tideswell, Buxton, Derbys, SK17 8LD

P.S. For further information contact Pat Mee on 061 446 2259 who is the area panel representative for Manchester/Liverpool, or get a copy of the latest yellow 'outdoor S/NVQ Update' pamphlet.

An Experienced Paddler Lost

By Ron Casterline - Riva, Maryland

On January 2, 1993, the body of Phillippe Venoit Voss, age 41, was found washed up on the beach known as Kentmorr, Kent Island, Maryland. Clad in blue jeans, a shirt and a blue wind breaker, Phillippe had drowned nearly a month earlier. His empty, overturned touring kayak, life vest held to its deck with shockcord, had been recovered 100 feet off the same beach on December 6, 1992.

By 5 pm on December 5, 1992 an extensive and costly Coast Guard search and rescue operation was underway, as a friend of Phillippe's had reported him late for his planned arrival at St Michaels. The friend outlined Phillippe's plan to cross the Chesapeake that day from Bembe Beach to St Michaels - a distance of over 20 miles. Phillippe had expected to arrive by 4 pm. Last contact with him was by phone at 9 am that morning as he was preparing to leave his apartment.

Conditions on the Bay were as predicted. Gale warning: NW winds increasing to 30 to 35 knots with higher gusts. Waves building - 3 to 5 feet. Scattered snow showers with occasional reduced visibility to less than 3 nautical miles. At Thomas Point Light the water temperature was 46 degrees Fahrenheit; high tide 2:09 pm Eastern Standard Time. Anyone who stood on the beach where Phillippe set out that morning knew it was windy. The sky was partly cloudy; the air was crisp. Phillippe had been here before -

Phillippe, a native of France, had found sea kayaking while in this country and in his 30's. It is here that he purchased not one kayak, but two; because he so enjoyed paddling he had a second boat for his friends.

An experienced paddler, of some ten years, he had crossed the Bay before. He considered himself an adventurer. Various outdoor activities kept him fit; he was in good health. Phillippe liked cold weather especially when kayaking and had often spoken to his friends of his paddling exploits. A self-taught paddler, he had mentioned knowing of methods to right a kayak by use of strokes - however, if he had mastered these skills himself - he never demonstrated or practiced them with friends who had paddled with him.

An aspect of his perspective and personality may be glimpsed in an interview he supplied a newspaper reporter about a similar crossing he had made on a cold and windy February day. Despite Coast Guard warnings for small craft to stay off the Hudson River due to 30+ knot winds and below freezing chill factors, Phillippe paddled from New Jersey to New York City to win a dinner bet. His most revealing statement about this exploit was - "It was so beautiful, that I forgot it was so dangerous."

Roommates and friends all tell that Phillippe relished taking risks. Their observations characterized Phillippe as not one to prepare or check into things like weather forecasts before such an attempt. His experience and knowledge of open water conditions were not equivalent to that of an accomplished sailor.

Phillippe endured a seven mile crossing that morning which brought him within sight of Kentmorr Beach. He was soaked from the spray from the wind driven waves. He was cold as the chill factor was zero degrees Fahrenheit and he was lightly dressed. His ability to paddle or even to reason was probably impaired and as the fetch lengthened and he approached the shallows the conditions worsened.

Here Phillippe lost control and wound up out of his boat without his life jacket. He died quickly. Due to the cold water and weak currents his body lay on the bottom for a month. Phillippe had played on the watery highways for 10 years, navigating the obstacles, dodging the dangers and delighting in the adventure.

On December 5, 1992, he boldly set forth onto the water's equivalent of the

interstate and into the path of the wind - nature's 18-wheel, big rig, runaway monster truck.

Beware, all those who venture forth on open water.
Experience is not enough.

- Expand your knowledge
- Grow and practice your skills
- Make careful decisions concerning the risks on open water
- Reach others with the message: Caution and safety first! Through words, deeds and example.

Sea kayakers need to be practiced and knowledgeable mariners as well as skillful paddlers in sea-worthy craft.

To Phillippe, a fellow paddler, God's rest.

6TH INTERNATIONAL SEA KAYAK WEEK ILE DE RE 1994

From Christian Gabard; 10, Rue Simon-Letoile; 92260 Fontenay aux Roses; FRANCE

Dear John,

This is to inform you and all members of the A.S.K.C. that in 1994 I will be organising, here in France, the 6TH INTERNATIONAL SEA KAYAKING WEEK. As usual this event will take place at the Ile de Re which is near La Rochelle, from the 4th to the 12th of June, 1994

During this week, all European sea kayakers are invited to paddle together around the Ile de Re. We shall discover its' coast, the island itself and the villages as well as the local wine and food. We shall compare the different means and methods used in Europe to ensure safety in sea kayaking.

Just as in 1988 and 1990, you and your members will be welcome at the "Aile du Peux Campsite"

For information and to register your interest, contact-
"Paris-Kayak International"
c/o Christian Gabard,
10, Rue Simon Letoile,
92260 Fontenay-aux-Roses,
France.
Tel; 33(1) 46 60 72 12.

Nigel Dennis of the A.S.S.C., Anglesey, writes;

"I am writing to inform you that kayakers paddling around Hoyhead or crossing Holyhead Bay from North Stack to the Skerries, need to be aware of the new Stena Sealink Sea Cat. This vessel is not very high and travels between 30 and 40 knots.

This vessel leaves and arrives at Holyhead as follows;

Arrives : 08.50/13.50/18.50/23.50 Departs 00.30/09.30/14.30/19.30

FOR SALE Venturer Sea Kayak. Blue deck, white hull (kevlar reinforced); two bulk heads and VCP circular hatches; rear 'Chimp' pump; deck lines; original seat replaced with comfortable foam seat.

Good condition, price £250 o.n.o.

Bill Lodge on 0924 493526 evenings/weekends (West Yorkshire)

Dick Whitehouse, 8, Cranworth Crescent, Chingford, London E4 7HN, writes to ask "I would particularly like to know of a suitable cottage for rent on the Outer Hebrides; how to get back in the event of not being able to paddle; has anybody used RDF equipment on that crossing or others; plus anything else of use. We will be using two sea doubles and due to family commitments, the trip cannot take place until 1995 at the earliest. "

THE EXPEDITION ADVISORY CENTRE

at

THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

This month the Royal Geographical Society celebrates the 40th anniversary of the ascent of Everest - one of the major highlights in its 165 year history. It is worth remembering that through the opportunities offered by his leadership of this historic expedition, John Hunt has gone on to do immeasurable service to the development of youth exploration in the UK. Amongst his many achievements was his guidance in the formation of the Expedition Advisory Centre founded in 1980, the result of a partnership between the Royal Geographical Society and the Young Explorer's Trust, who shared Lord Hunt as their President at the time.

Since then the Expedition Advisory Centre has grown from strength to strength, having been fortunate to secure long-term funding from Shell International Petroleum Company. The Centre now provides information, advice and training to some 600 groups a year who plan an overseas expedition.

The Centre's primary focus is expedition research at school and undergraduate level. However, the Centre also assists adventurous projects, such as mountaineering, caving, underwater and canoeing expeditions; and to a limited extent independent travellers.

Many of those who approach the Centre have already been on an expedition either at school, or between school and higher education with organisations such as the British Schools Exploring Society, Brathay Exploration Group or Raleigh International. But for those who are new to expeditions, and are excited by the challenges offered, the Centre produces a list of over 50 organisations who regularly recruit fee-paying volunteers in their booklet JOINING AN EXPEDITION (Price £5 incl. postage and packing).

The EAC year very much follows the academic calendar, with the PLANNING A SMALL EXPEDITION SEMINAR HELD EACH NOVEMBER IN LONDON. Here delegates have a chance to mingle with some fifty speakers and advisors, during two days of lectures, workshops and exhibits, many of them fresh from their own expeditions. For those who are unable to attend, THE EXPEDITION PLANNER'S HANDBOOK AND DIRECTORY is the key reference book on logistics, fund-raising and possible projects and research opportunities. Specialist chapters discuss the key issues of legal responsibilities, insurance and limiting the impact of expeditions on the environments they visit. (Price £12.95 incl. p and p).

Once a group has decided where it is going and what it hopes to do there, the Centre can provide NOTES FOR EXPEDITIONS TO AN INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY (Country factsheets) which include information on permits and permissions, possible projects, useful contacts in the UK and the host country (both institutes and individuals), a recommended reading list including guidebooks and fieldwork information, and details of past expeditions and their report. Personal advice is also available on a one-to-one basis through Planning Tutorials with one of the three members of the EAC staff, two of whom have experience of working with school and youth groups. For those who are already experienced expedition organisers, the Centre maintains a number of other resources such as the collection and abstracts of past expedition reports held by the RGS map room, some 3,000 reports of projects organised from 1965-present, and details of projects currently being planned. This enables groups to benefit from past experience and network with other groups. As expeditions are increasingly recognised as an important vehicle for stimulating learning through challenging activities in new and stimulating environments, the EAC is well placed to assist.

For further information on the EAC, and details of its publications and training seminars contact: Mrs S Winser, Information Officer, Expedition Advisory Centre, 1 Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR. Tel: 071-581-2057

OTTERS DON'T MIND THE NEW BRIDGE TO SKYE

Curtains of rain drew shimmering veils across the West Highland landscape as I urged my aged estate car to the final summit of the south Loch Carron Road.

Our plan was a three-day paddle in the Inner Sound to Skye via the Crowlin Islands, Longay and Scalpay. While we were packing our boats at a launching spot to the east of Plockton, the rain eased. By the time we were paddling westwards it was fair.

There was a brightening in the western sky and to confirm the improving weather, the boiling cloud in the impressive Applecross corries was rising by the minute. Threading the islets to the north of Plockton we spied a ripple in the water ahead - an otter! Next moment the little hunter dived. Had he spotted us and taken fright? Not a bit of it. A few moments later his whiskery face surfaced with a small crab in his jaws. Rolling on his back, the otter deftly gripped his catch in his forepaws and proceeded to scrunch into it.

Drifting with stilled paddles Dave and I watched in fascination, letting the ebb-tide carry us ever closer to the otter. As we drew level on either side the otter suddenly sensed he wasn't alone and crash-dived. No doubt if we'd skulked around the islets we'd have sighted him again, but time was passing and a fair push across the wide mouth of Loch Carron lay between us and the Crowlins. Besides, though we didn't yet know it, we were heading for another treat.

It came in mid-loch. The first porpoise looped from the water about 200 metres to our right. As if by magic more appeared and, in whichever direction we looked from our skimming craft, there were porpoises performing graceful curves. But time was wearing on, and since the porpoise school appeared to have business down at the Kyle and our course lay northwest, we gradually parted.

The Crowlins had plenty of rocks and skerries for cormorants, shags and seals, but ne'er a flat patch of turf for our tents. Defeated, we retreated to the mainland and set up camp amid the ruined crofts at Uags.

Our crossing of the Inner Sound next day was pretty uneventful with nothing except the inevitable curious seal following our wakes and the odd startled auk sent thrashing across the surface on stubby wings and wildly-drumming webbed feet. Fortunately the scenery more than made up for a lack of wildlife. On our return crossing via Pabay, we were escorted through the Pabay skerries by the largest flotilla of seals I've ever seen, swirling, snorting, diving and splashing within feet of our boats.

Once out in the Sound the porpoises returned and through the mist we could see the workings of the new Skye bridge. These have been the scenes of protest by Green groups, who claim disturbance to otters in the area, but our next encounter just along the coast from the bridge site seemed to scotch this theory. Close inshore, not far from Duirinish, we caught a glimpse of four otters - an adult and three cubs - scampering over the rocks and into the sea. We stopped paddling and let wind and wave carry us closer. Mum and two of the youngsters, perhaps sensing strangers, made themselves scarce midst the tangle of kelp and boulders.

Not so cub number three. He climbed ashore only yards away. Snug in a cleft of rock he eagerly tucked into the small fish he'd caught. All the while we drifted closer and closer until I could have touched the otter with my paddle tip. Then without a trace of panic the wee fella slid neatly into the water, dipped under my kayak, resurfaced and swam the whole length of Dave's boat before diving out of view.

Incredible! My closest encounter with a wild otter.

TAKEN FROM: The Sunday Post, July 11, 1993

RIP CURRENT

A rip current is a narrow seaward flow of water resulting from the breaking of waves on a beach. They are most strongly developed on long, exposed sandy beaches facing an open ocean. The name rip current was proposed for this phenomenon by Shepard (1936) and now seems to be generally accepted.

When waves run up a beach they eventually break, and the momentum imparted to the water carries it further up the beach to above mean water level. When its energy is spent, the water tries to return under the influence of gravity to mean water level, but often, before it can do so, another wave has broken and more water surges up the beach. The result is an accumulation of water in a quasi-stable position above the level of the sea. The volume of this water increases with the arrival of yet more waves, until at some particular point on the beach the head of stored water becomes greater than the upthrust of the oncoming waves, and water begins to flow seaward at this point from the top of the beach. Once started, this flow reduces the wave effect at that part of the beach and the current gathers momentum as it runs out to sea. The stored water may flow along the top of the beach for as much as several hundred yards, before returning to the sea as a fast narrow current, or rip. As it flows, it hollows out a deeper channel through the beach just as a river cuts its own valley, thereby making its travel easier and establishing itself in that position.

The maximum speed of a rip current can be much greater than that of a swimmer; very few accurate measurements have been made, but in moderate conditions with waves having a deepwater height of up to about 10 feet, rip currents on the Cornish coast of England have been observed to reach an average surface speed of nearly 5 knots when measured over several hundred yards (Draper and Dobson, 1965), while Popov (1956) reported 10.6-knot (5.5-m/sec) rips at the surface under severe storm conditions.

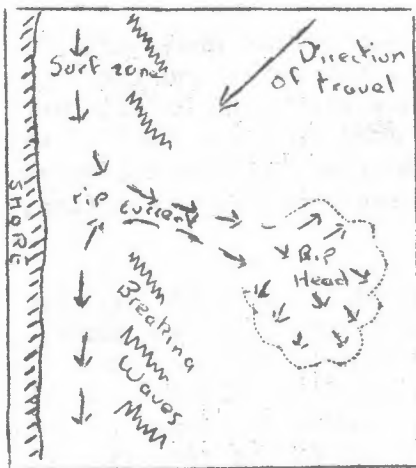


Figure 1 - Schematic representation of waves, longshore current and a typical rip current (adapted from Shepard and Inman, 1950)

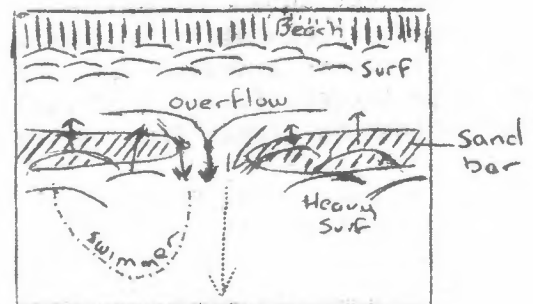


Figure 2 - Breakers with concomitant currents on a sandy seashore with sand-bars (Kuenen, 1955). Note how a swimmer carried out in a rip current should try to go with the current and not against it. (By permission of John Wiley & Sons, N.Y.)

The plan of a rip current, as in Figure 1, looks like a huge tree lying with its roots on the shore, its narrow trunk stretching through the

surf zone and its branches spreading out beyond. The width of the central "trunk" of the rip can be quite narrow, perhaps only a few tens of feet, but the effect of the current can sometimes be detected up to a mile or more from the shore.

If waves approach the shore obliquely, the resulting discharge of water up the beach has a longshore component, which results in the establishment of a longshore current in the water at the top of the beach. A pertinent comment concerning such cases was made by Inman and Bagnold (1963): "The waves discharge water into each unit length of the surf zone. So, assuming the resulting longshore current to be so confined, the velocity of the current would, were it not for the existence of outward-flowing rip currents at discrete places, go on increasing indefinitely with distance along the shore. On this view the existence of outward rip currents is inevitable." When a longshore current is established, the rip-feeder currents become asymmetrical, as shown in Figure 1. In some cases, rips may have permanent positions on a beach, because of local topography, but more often it is the direction of approach of the waves on any particular day which governs the positions of the outflows. The flow of water in a rip current may be continuous, particularly under heavy wave conditions, but with smaller waves it may be intermittent, continuing only until the store of water on the beach is exhausted and resuming later when the waves have again piled up enough water for the situation to become unstable.

The carriage of sediment by rip currents means that they are a factor in the shaping of underwater topography. Sand and other materials are swept up from the beach by the swiftly flowing current, and are re-deposited out at sea below the area where the current disperses and decays, thereby helping to construct offshore bars.

The distribution of speeds within the rips is imperfectly understood. In some cases it is suggested that the swiftest flow is at the surface, but Popov found the highest speed to be at the sea bed, where it was about twice that at the surface. Where the surface speed was 5.5 m/sec (10.6 knots), it was 10.8 m/sec (20.8 knots) near the bottom.

Rip currents are difficult to identify from a beach, but from a height it is often possible to locate them because the current sweeps up sand which yellows the water and acts as a natural tracer. Also, their presence may be indicated by waves breaking out at sea; if a rip current is present, it can cause a narrow sequence of breaking crests out beyond the normal surf zone as it runs into the oncoming waves.

The name "undertow" is commonly used to describe some current which, by implication, runs out to sea from a beach and is entirely below the surface. No such current has been shown to exist, and it seems probable that undertow is a misnomer for either backwash or rip current; another name used in some areas is sea puss.

L. Draper

HORSES FOR COURSES.

I thought that I would attempt to present the viewpoint of an ordinary recreational paddler on the ongoing debate over safety in sea kayak design. I cannot claim to have been paddling for decades, nor have I done a solo circumnavigation of Antarctica. However, I am an active and enthusiastic sea paddler. I own and paddle two very different types of kayak, a Sea Tiger, which as you probably all know has a pod or whatever else you want to call it, a retractible skeg and is short and broad and a Vyneck, which is long, narrow and tippy. I have had a great deal of enjoyment out of both boats, which is after all what it is all about, and vary my paddling between them depending on conditions and whim.

Like most sea paddlers I have met, I would consider myself a fairly independent person and I do not very much like being dictated to as to what sort of boat is or is not safe for me to paddle. The marriage of kayak and paddler is a very individual one. One paddler may regard a particular design as the most wonderful thing since the invention of cornflakes and have complete confidence in paddling the boat in all conditions, while an equally competent paddler may write it off as a pig.

A comparison of the Sea Tiger and the Vyneck illustrates some of the fallacies in adopting a dogmatic position on safety in design. My Sea Tiger came complete with a sticker declaring, I think (I took it off because I found it embarrassing), that it was the safest, most versatile Sea Kayak afloat. Hence, I suppose, only an idiot would venture out on the water in anything else. Reality is a bit more complicated. My experience of the Sea Tiger, and I emphasise "my" as others may feel quite differently, is that it is comfortable, manoevrable and relatively stable in most conditions, but not all that good in a following sea. It needs the skeg to keep it going in a straight line with a beam wind and without its help needs a lot of effort to overcome weathercocking. Tuning the skeg to suit the conditions can a bit of hassle and too much can undermine stability. My skeg has not always performed when required and I have noticed similiar problems with people paddling other boats fitted with retractible skegs of a different design. Overall the Sea Tiger feels a bit sluggish to paddle in comparison to the Vyneck, a bit like the difference between riding a roadster bicycle and a racer. On the positive side, it is very easy to get in and out of and in all the conditions where I have tried it out remains surprisingly paddlable even with a lot of water in the cockpit, although I have been told that it can become uncontrollable under these circumstances in some sea conditions. It can be emptied very quickly and this is certainly an asset in a rescue and makes it a reassuring boat for a novice.

In contrast, the Vyneck needs rather more skill in handling and is certainly not a boat for the novice. At first it feels alarmingly tippy and a friend with many years of sea kayaking experience commented that with " this boat you can get excited on a kiddy's paddling pool". However, the effort needed to

master it is rewarding. The boat is quick and seems to require the minimum of effort to paddle. It is highly directional in all conditions unless the loading has been misplaced and is excellent in following seas, surfing well and predictably in contrast to some other boats which seem to broach all too easily if not constantly handled. There is a bit of knack to turning it which requires leaning it well over, but in this way it is feasible to do very sharp turns. However, I have found it difficult to turn if sideways on to surf, a situation where the Sea Tiger can usually be manoeuvred without difficulty. The initial instability of the Vyneck is compensated for by high secondary stability. It can be recovered from being knocked over on to its side with a support stroke and its heeling movements are predictable. It is very responsive to balancing with literally the seat of the pants, hip movements and foot pressure and virtually all of the time I am able to keep my legs out straight even in turbulent sea conditions. As one is balancing it all the time, there is arguably less chance of being caught napping by an unexpectedly large or breaking wave. An imminent capsize in the Sea Tiger seems less predictable.

So which is the safer boat ? I would argue that it is not a particularly valid or meaningful question to ask. There are plusses and and minuses on both sides. Whether one design is safer than the other depends on the complex interaction of a number of factors, including the prevailing sea conditions, the nature of the trip being undertaken, the paddler's level of ability in different conditions and his personal relationship with the particular boat. It is axiomatic that a paddler wears a kayak rather than just sits in it. I suspect that a boat which is a good fit in every sense for a paddler is a safer one for him (or her). Some people may continue to find that the Vyneck's tippiness undermines their confidence and that, I think, may make it a less safe boat for them to paddle. Some people find the Sea Tiger unaesthetic and do not perceive it as a " proper " sea kayak in the Eskimo tradition. That does not worry me and I find it neat and functional in its own way, but if a paddler really does not feel at home in it for that reason, then I suspect that he will not establish the close relationship with the boat which leads to a safe partnership. Good technique and familiarity can compensate for adverse handling characteristics in a kayak, and that can be said for one well known and popular design which shall remain nameless !

May I make a plea on behalf of the common paddler to the expert protagonists involved in the debate (or should I say bitter conflict) to be a bit more tolerant. This is a very individual sport and hopefully will remain so. I suspect that a variety of designs will persist through the nineties and beyond, offering different solutions to the problems of safety and enjoyment. I doubt if the pod will become the norm, but I think that it has very definite virtues and hope that it will remain available, perhaps in a wider range of hull designs and with more flexible arrangements for adjusting for footrest length. I am not a boatbuilder and I would not wish to challenge the acknowledged expertise of Frank Goodman who has made such a major contribution to seakayaking design , not the least being the design of efficient watertight hatches (I

wish I had one of his large hatches on the Vyneck and Sea Tiger). Perhaps it is tricky fitting pods, but the fact is that they manage to do it for the Sea Tiger and sell the boat at a competitive price. If you want to be completely safe, then don't take up sea kayaking or rock climbing and certainly don't drive a car or cross the road or eat meat orJust sit at home and die of boredom. As a sea kayaker or if one is involved in any other risk taking recreation, one should not ignore all considerations of safety, if for no other reason because one may put other people at risk in trying to rescue one but I think that it is unhealthy to become obsessed with it. Each individual needs to weigh up the factors involved, drawing on the advice of others where available and then I would suggest should make his or her mind up. However hard you try you will probably get it wrong sometimes and in doing so learn, hopefully not too painfully. There may be some absolutes in safety in sea kayaking, such as that it would be silly for a novice to go out alone in a gale without flares, but there is a big grey area in between.

If you publish this, I expect that I will get bashed up by the combined forces of Nick Padwick, Frank Goodman, Peter Carter et al, but at least it will unite them. I suspect that they are all nice guys really. They can't be all that bad if they are sea paddlers !

Peter Lyne