

Newsletter



of the



An international sea canoeing association open to all interested in this aspect of canoeing.

Aims:

Promotion of sea canoeing • Communication • Organisation of events and conferences • Safety and Coaching

INTERNATIONAL SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER # 6

NOVEMBER, 1995

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EDITORIAL

Thanks to many of you who have already renewed for 1996. I have again included a renewal form and look forward to the rest of you renewing - I don't like losing members. In fact we usually do very well with an 80% to 90% renewal rate. I am often tempted to advertise the Association but am concerned about the possibility of being overwhelmed so I rely on renewals and a few new members joining through the year which gives us a membership of about 500; most from the United Kingdom but an increasing number from abroad. I am pleased about this as many countries are developing their sea kayaking through instruction, symposiums and newsletter independently of what happens else where. Of course this is great but it increases the usefulness of an international association as we can 'monitor' what is going on world wide. I receive, in return for the ISKA newsletter, national and club newsletters from all over the globe, - most of which are interesting reading. I try and pluck out the most interesting bits so that the ISKA newsletter becomes something of an amalgam and I get a kick at seeing some of our original material being used in other newsletters.

It has been a hot summer here in the U.K. and we still have a national water shortage. As we rely on the oceans to paddle on we can only feel sorry for the river paddlers. There has hardly been sufficient water for the fish.

Talking of fish, tropical sharks and big-game fish are now cruising the British coast. Warm weather and changes in ocean currents have brought ferocious hammer-head and mako sharks from African waters, together with marlin, turtles and poisonous jellyfish from the Caribbean. The most spectacular migrants have appeared around Cornwall. Local fishermen have landed 1,000 lb big-eyed thresher sharks, commonly found off Florida, and a 4 lb sailfin dory, both described by marine biologist as among the most exciting discoveries in years.

Oceanographers put these catches and sightings down to the hot summer and the longer term warming of the north Atlantic which has caused sea temperatures to rise steadily for three decades.

Mako sharks have been reported in the Irish Sea close to St. Davids Head on the SW coast of Wales. One hammer-head shark was spotted by a wind surfer off the Brittany coast and a group were seen not far from Penzance off the Cornish coast. Some tropical species have reached the northern outposts of the British Isles. A marbled electric ray, a jellied octopus and several bluefin tuna have recently been caught off the Shetland Isles. I do not wish to put you off paddling these waters but I understand that Marble rays electrocute their prey with shocks of up to 500

volts!!

Sunfish, normally found south of the azores have been caught in the North Sea.

The biggest risk to humans comes from the several tropical species of jellyfish such as the Portuguese Man o'War, the By The Wind Sailor and the Lions Mane. These tropical species could well become regular visitors to the British Isles if the warming continues. I have heard it said that these changes could indicate that we are about to go into an ice age or a period of global warming - so don't kit yourself out 'till we are more certain!!

I wanted to include an account of the SISKKA (Scottish Sea Kayaking Adventure) event which took place earlier this year - and I will soon. Meanwhile the organiser, Dave Ross wants me to give you early warning of this event for 1996.

Essentially the arrangements are as follows:-

- * probably scheduled for last week of May, 1996.
- * route from Oban, south through Gervellachs, Easdale, Luing, Scarba, etc.
- * cost will depend on facilities eventually determined but not more than £100 per person.
- * you should be a competent paddler
- * it will be mainly rough camping.
- * further information from Dave Ross; 56, Balmoral Road, Dumfries, Scotland

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ISKA Paper No. 5 History of Sea Kayaking @...	£4.00

(The above ISKA Papers are extracts from my book, "A Manual on Sea Kayaking")

All prices include postage and packing, (very reasonable!)

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As I have said many times before -- this newsletter is as good as you help me make it. Please send me contributions in the shape of expedition reports and reviews of equipment/kayaks. Any interesting stories so long as the theme remains sea kayaking. I am waiting to hear from you.

DUNCAN WINNING IN COMPANY WITH JOHN HEATH

I heard that the two major experts on the history and design of Inuit (Eskimo) kayaks were meeting up for the Scottish sea Kayaking Symposium last July, 1995.

I would have given a lot to have been a 'fly on the wall' as they met up and got into discussions about their subject. As second best I pushed Duncans' arm up his back, threatened to cross him off my Xmas card list if he did not send me a report or an account of their meeting.

My threats worked and herewith an interesting account from Duncan for which many thanks.

"You wanted something about John D. Heath, well here goes.

John Heath, the kayak enthusiast from Texas, a gentleman of long acquaintance, telephoned one evening in March. Could I help him? He was coming over to Scotland early in May to do a presentation for the U.S. Navy Seals (military canoeists) at the Machrihanish air base in Kintyre, where they were stationed. This out of the way, west of Scotland air field has the longest runway in Europe.

He was looking for the services of a competent kayak roller (which left me out) and a suitable kayak to assist with his demonstration. Having assured him that I would arrange something I quickly suggested that he might like to stay on 'till the end of May and be one of the contributors to the Scottish Sea Kayaking Symposium on the Island of Cumbrae.

That left us both with something to do.

A competent kayak roller was no problem....my friend and ISKA member, Gordon Brown, was just that and since meeting Didier Plouhinec at the Jersey Symposium last year, he was becoming increasingly interested in Inuit kayaks, paddles and techniques. Indeed he was already making a replica Greenland Storm Paddle out of a nice piece of pitch pine I had found for him.

Unfortunately, our modern glass fibre sea kayaks, although of suitable proportions, employ good fitting seats in the region of the hips while John was looking for a boat more suited to Greenland methods which call for good thigh grip but loose at the hips.

What to do?

Fortunately in 1964 I had measured up a rather fine example of a West Greenland kayak built at Igdlorssuit in 1959 for a fellow club member, Ken Taylor, and still had the drawings. Incidentally, Ken Taylor had been trying to have a kayak built for John Heath at the same time. However, lack of sealskin meant John Heath only got the frame, which he still has.

Anyway, we could build a semi-replica, sized to fit Gordon for Johns' demo. A plywood hull would save time and it would not take too long. Well, that's what I told Gordon and I am always

the optimist.

After about 95 hours of my time, including the drafting and half model work and not a few hours of Gordons' time we had a semi-replica - and it looked good. A mean machine and all in black.

Meantime, back at the ranch, literally, John had re-arranged his holidays. Jessie, his understanding wife, would visit Niagra and the Bay of Fundy without him. The U.S. Navy agreed to the change in his return flight. Rachel, Gordons' equally understanding wife, agreed to having a lodger for most of May and John would have the chance to visit a few Scottish museums to view kayaks, hopefully with me in tow.

So far, so good!

Half an hour after the kayak was finished it was on its' way to a lecture cum slide evening at Glasgow University Sports Ground where Gordon and I were among the contributors. Two days later we were at the Anglesey Symposium. On the Saturday I paddled it around to Rhoscolyn it handled beautifully. Those that tried it were surprised at how easily it slipped through the water, even with narrow bladed paddles.

Back home overnight on Sunday/Monday, just in time to meet John Heath at Glasgow airport and to let him see the kayak before his flight to Machrihanish.

Wednesday afternoon saw Gordon, Austin Kelly and I off on the 335 mile round trip to Machrihanish and Johns' demonstration at Cambeltown swimming pool. The event went well but it could have been better as the kayak did not fit Gordon as well as it should have. My fault, trying to cut corners to save time - we will sort it out in due course.

Commander Kim Erskine, the Seals C.O. was very interested in the kayak and rolled it several times. He was also interested in our Symposium and threatened to come along, complete with a black Klepper, by parachute via a low flying Hercules. Pity he did'nt, that would have been a unique event!!

We were offered overnight accommodation at the Base but worked beckoned in the morning so another night time drive was required.

Eric Stiller, whom we met at the pool was the other main contributor to the Seals event. He is, I understand, the son of the proprietor of the Hans Klepper Corporation of America and has, among his many accomplishments, achieved a 4,000 mile trip (apologies to Eric Totty!) from Sydney to Darwin in Australia which included a 400 mile crossing of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Unfortunately I did not find out till later of Eric's' background. That could have led to an interesting chat. Aha dear! Another opportunity missed.

John Heath arrived back in Glasgow airport on Friday morning and was installed with Gordon and Rachel. Having been involved in a lot of travel and several presentations to the Seals he was ready for some rest.

Come Monday John headed for the Kelvingrove Art Gallery in Glasgow to see Ken Taylors' kayak which is in the care of Antonia Lovelace.. I am not sure if it was a Freudian slip or just Johns' sense of humour but at the information desk he asked to see Veronica Lovelace (the porn. performer!!)

Tuesday saw John and I heading for Edinburgh and the Royal Scottish Museum where Dale Idiens, the Deput Director (Collections) conducted us to the store where the kayaks were kept in specially constructed steel racks, suspended in slings. Most of the kayaks are of Greenland origin in various conditions, plus one from Labrador with a baleen cockpit. John had inspected these boats before and the reason for this visit was to examine the type of joint between gunwale board and deck beams.

Recently John had discovered that prior to the Inuit obtaining 'modern' metal tools, the ends of the deck beams were located in holes in the inboard side of the gunwale boards, the angle between beam and board being maintained by a lashing system. Subsequently the ends of the beams were fashioned into shouldered tenons located in mortice slots cut through the boards at the appropriate angle. This gave a more rigid joint, greater control of the beam to board angle and permitted simplification of the lashing system.

Thus we have means of dating kayaks between 'old' and 'new' methods if only it can be established when the Inuit acquired iron tools.

Most of the kayaks John has seen are of the 'new' type. He hoped that some of the Edinburgh ones would be of the 'old' variety and that the museum records would reveal their acquisition dates and history. Unfortunately, neither was to be the case. Never the less I found the visit of value and although at present the storage conditions preclude a detailed survey, Miss Idiens has indicated that when her new store is completed I would be welcome to do an accurate survey of the craft.

Wednesday was Glasgows' turn again. I had arranged with Dr. Euan MacKie, Senior Curator of the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow to gain access to his new store to inspect three Greenland kayaks held there. John was most impressed. Dr. MacKie and his staff were very helpful; the kayaks and equipment well cared for and the provenance details quickly produced from the computer by a young bare footed gentleman.

One kayak was a particularly fine example at 18' 10" (5740 mm) long and 17" (430 mm) wide and only 7" (178 mm) deep between the keelson and deck beam at the fore end of the cockpit. The stern has a high graceful curve rising about 10 1/2" (267 mm) above the deck level. According to the records this kayak was obtained in the Davis Straits in the summer of 1789 by a Mr. Watson commanding the Greenlandman, "Findlay" and presented to the college by the Glasgow Whale Fishing Company in May 1790.

I measured this kayak in 1988 with the help of Gordon Brown and Dave Clegg from my local Canoe Club (Garnock). Someday I will get it drawn up!

Both of the other kayaks are about 17' 8" (5385 mm) long and from the Davis Straits. One is in good condition and built for a left handed hunter while the other has been badly crushed a long time ago. Both gunwales of the damaged kayak were in two pieces joined by hooked scarph joints just aft of the cockpit. Unusually the cockpit hoop of this kayak was in two pieces joined at either side. All of the Hunterian kayaks had 'new' deck beam to gunwale joints.

The following week John went on safari alone, visiting museums with kayaks in Aberdeen and Dundee. He has promised me details of these in due course. It is a matter of recorded fact that one of the Aberdeen kayaks was paddled into the mouth of the River Don by an Inuit who died two days later.

At the present time John Heath is involved with Eugene Arima of the Canadian Ethnology Service (I think I've got this right!) in the production of a book on kayaks. Eugene is dealing with the kayaks of the North American Arctic and John is doing the Greenland ones. I look forward to getting my hands on this publication. (You and me both Duncan!)

In the midst of all the above I was involved with Gordon, Matt McElroy and Graeme Bruce in the final organisation meetings for our Sea Kayaking Symposium at the Scottish National Water Sports Centre over the last weekend in May"

Footnote

Duncan goes on to say; "The road to hell is paved with good intentions. I have not been able to get back to finish this account which I started a week ago last Sunday so I am forwarding the unfinished article with the full intentions of completing the bit about our Symposium in the near future".

Thanks ever so much for this interesting account of your pre-symposium meeting with John Heath. I look forward to having the rest of your article for the ISKA newsletter as I know our readers will be. Thanks Duncan

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FOR SALE. Nordkapp HM sea kayak. Round front and oval rear hatches. Backstrap. Orange deck and hull, black trim. New, December, 1994. Genuinely excellent condition. Photograph on request. £550.00 o.n.o. Tel. 01970 615386.

From Paul Schur, Wiggo Cottage, 135, Main Rd., Wynbury, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 7LR

Dear John,

I have been concerned for a while that I don't seem to be able to find much information on the physics of kayaking/canoeing with regard to lever systems rather than hydrodynamics. As a paddler has more control over leverage than boat design, perhaps it is important to know what is going on in this department to achieve the best stroke for a given paddler. Do you or any of your readers have a simple guide to the problem? I am not a physicist but am interested in sports sciences so it would have to be reasonably intelligible without excessively complicated mathematics.

The second instalment from Duncan Winning...

"In the midst of all the above I was involved with Gordon, Matt McElroy and Graeme Bruce in the final organisation meetings for our Sea Kayaking Symposium at the Scottish National Water Sports Centre over the last weekend in May.

Our last Symposium had been held at the end of September, 1994, like its' predecessors under the banner of the Strathclyde West Coaching Panel of the Scottish Canoe Association. So why another one soon?

We really felt that the amount of effort involved in running such an event indicated that it should be bi-annual or we would end up doing little else. Also September was a bit late in the year and too close to the equinoxial gales to expect good weather yet again.

What we needed was a move to a Bank Holiday weekend in May. This would permit expansion to a three day event and enjoy what is normally the best paddling weather in the year on the west coast of Scotland. However, there could be problems. The Anglesey Symposium was held at the beginning of May each year and if we were to choose the end of May, two years on from our 1994 event, would clash with the next bi-annual Jersey Symposium. There was no way we wished to collide with either of these two well established and popular events. What to do?

Our solution was to opt for a bi-annual happening at the end of May, alternating with Jersey. It was reasoned that, as with Jersey, we were far enough removed in time and distance from Anglesey and had a large enough local clientele not to impact on that event.

So, we had to bite the bullet and organise this years' event only eight months after the last one to get in step with Jersey. That this arrangement met with their approval can be judged by the large contingent from Jersey who attended at Cumbrae, both as contributors and participants.

Run by the Scottish Sports Council, our National Water Sports Centre on the Island of Cumbrae, is almost ideal for such an event. Situated a mile off the north Ayrshire coast looking across the Largs Channel to where the Scots finally defeated the Vikings in 1263.

Accommodation is available in chalets with meals in the main building or there is self catering. There is ample camping, again with meals available, or you can make your own arrangements at the nearby small town of Millport.

The sandy beach is within yards of the car/canoe park and by utilising the chalet lounges we can have up to five talks/slide shows running simultaneously. There is space in the main workshop area for trade displays and the main lounge is just right for the keynote lecture and ceilidh.

I did say the centre was almost ideal. The Island is very pleasant with lots of things to do if you want to bring along the

family. There is a frequent car ferry service; it only takes ten minutes. However, being a popular place lots of people take their cars over for the weekend and you can have quite a wait in the ferry queue to get back to the mainland and it is not the cheapest ferry in the land.

This year we had quite a comprehensive programme. Ten slide shows, Shetland, Norway, Alaska, Arctic Russia, Channel Isles, Greenland and Holland plus the keynote talk on paddling to St. Kilda. Twenty talks/seminars on such as weather, navigation, night paddling, paddle design and manufacture, sea birds, first aid, tides, canoe sailing, access and wild life, hypothermia, etc.

Eleven practical sessions from technique clinics at different levels, some involving the local inshore lifeboat to fishing and outdoor cooking. There were a selection of demo. boats available, in GRP, roto moulded and vacuum formed plastic from seven manufacturers. A gentle paddle and a more adventurous paddle was arranged for each day; pity the 'May' weather did not co-operate. Of course we had a ceilidh where the company were expected to and certainly did join in. Maybe the bar also helped!

We had participants from the U.S.A., Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, England, Ireland, Wales, Channel Isles as well as Scotland and we had contributors from the U.S.A., Holland, Channel Isles, England and Scotland. The Centre staff, especially the catering people, were a great bunch and contributed a lot to the event.

Was it a success? Well, that's for others to judge, but we had a full house and despite the weather everyone seemed to be fully engaged in enjoying themselves and quite a number made a point of coming to the 'office' to say thank you before departing. Oh! by the way, the Centre is booked for the end of May 1997.

On the Monday afternoon, after the main symposium, a group departed for Arduaine camp site for further activities. Some trained for their Advanced Sea Proficiency around the Cuan Sound, the Grey Dog and the nearby islands, while others enjoyed more leisurely paddling round Shuna, Luing, Easdale, etc.

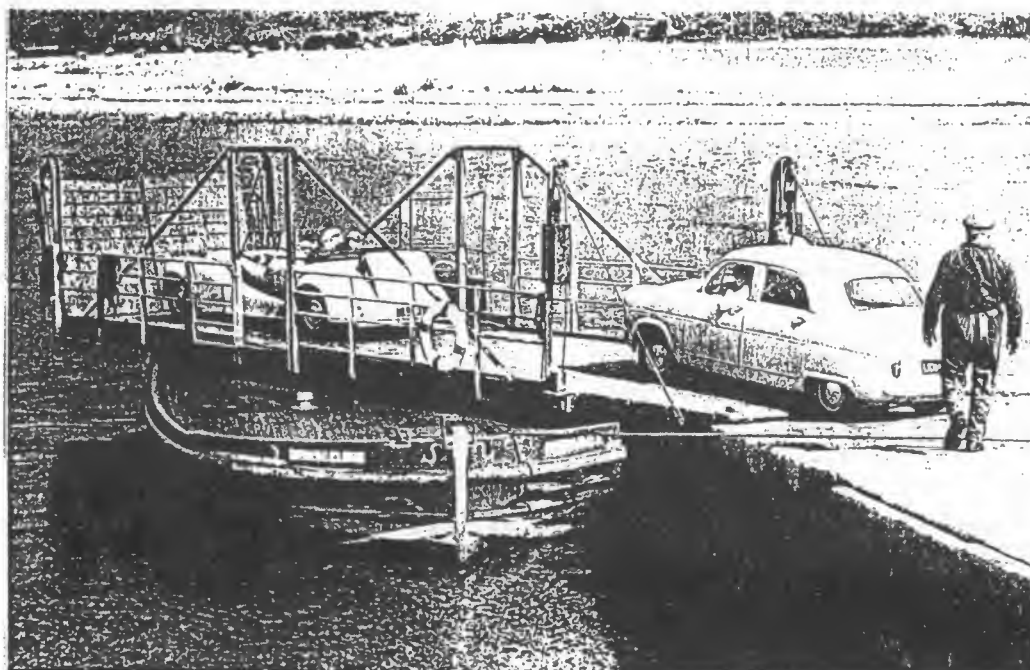
Mind you, one day when the serious training group were experiencing staged events we had a real dislocated knee on Easdale but that's another story!.

At the end of the week there was an Advanced Sea Proficiency assessment, the first organised under the new arrangements. The assessors were themselves being assessed for higher coaching awards. Afterwards there were some happy people and some who did not make it. However, all agreed it had been a worthwhile experience.

Me, I just enjoyed the leisurely paddling, but then I always do.

Turning to the ISKA newsletter No. 4 and Trev. Riches report on his trip to the Islands of Nether Lorn; I can elaborate a little on some of his points of interest.

First, the 'unusual derelict wooden craft' abandoned on the northern end of the Island of Shuna. This is the sad remains of the 'Maid of Luing', the first vehicular ferry to operate on the Cuan Sound between the islands of Luing and Seil. The circular steel track on the deck was a pathway for the rollers of a turntable which was turned athwartships at the slipways on Luing and Seil to permit loading and discharging of cars, etc. Stability during this process would be provided by the disproportionately wide beam. When underway the turntable was secured in the fore and aft position.



Room for one more! Vehicles boarding the tiny ferry "Mamore" at Ballachulish. This pre-bridge scene is from September 1955.

This service commenced in 1953 with Mr. John McAllister as the ferry master. John, an ex-fisherman from Tarbet on the Kintyre Peninsula, is no stranger to paddling having designed and built a canoe (kayak) during the war for clandestine visits ashore to court the young lady who later became his wife while he was serving aboard a French fishing vessel based in Cornwall and employed by the Royal Navy in even more clandestine activities off the occupied coast of France.

Back to the 'Maid of Luing'. She was propelled by a single Gardner 4LW diesel engine of about 45 horsepower. It was not powerful enough to allow crossings when the tidal stream in the Cuan Sound was at full flow - about six knots on the springs - when operations would have to cease for two or three hours.

On her withdrawal from service the 'Maid' was, there is little doubt, acquired by the owners of Shuna for the transport of livestock to and fro the Island, her wide beam and shallow draft being ideal for this purpose. Long after her abandonment, John's son, Peter, also a fisherman, retrieved the gear lever and this memento is now safe with her first master.

Unfortunately I can throw little light on the builders of the ancient structures on Don Chonnuill but the islands of the west have been inhabited from very ancient times and the Garvellochs are supposed to have strong associations with Saint Columba and his Mother. Fellow paddler, Peter Lamont from Luing has made some interesting observations regarding the alignment of the ancient forts on that Island. Indeed, it would appear that a small part of a ridge has been quarried away to allow 'line of sight' between two of them. Peters' first thoughts are that they are part of an early warning system to alert the inhabitants of approaching Roman vessels in search of slaves. who knows! Perhaps Peter will write about it one day.

A more recent temporary resident on the west coast was the author, Gavin Maxwell. However, when he wrote "Ring of Bright Water" I think he was living at Gamusferna on the mainland adjacent to the beautiful Sandaig islands in the Sound of Sleat. Subsequently the cottage was destroyed by fire and his own ashes are buried nearby.

Finally, to avoid confusion for our fellow members in North America. The otters which can be seen on the west coast of Scotland are not sea otters like the ones from the Pacific coast of Alaska, Canada and the U.S.A. They are quite different animals, not sea mammals but ordinary European otters usually associated with inland waters. We are fortunate in Scotland in having a healthy population of these charming shy creatures and a fair number seem to prefer the salt water to the fresh. Come to think of it, rather like some of us.

Regards, Duncan"

* * * * *
PAPA STOUR, SHETLAND, by Dave Powell.

Richs' Islander kayak was still in Bergen, having floated there unmanned (see previous issue of ISKA n/letter) back in January, so I hired a plastic Skerray for him from Dave Robertson at Tayside Canoe Club. We nearly didn't leave Aberdeen - the ticket girl handed Rich a message; "DO NOT TRAVEL", from his wife, Annette. My heart sank as he called his agency on his mobile. It was about a job abroad but he'd missed it. So the trip was still on.

We arrived in Lerwick at 7 am and were somewhat fazed to find no one there to meet us. I suddenly realised we were a day late! Rich made a few calls on his mobile but all the locals were already away. We decided to find some canoe transport and hired a lorry to get us and our kayaks to scalloway on the west side of the mainland, from where we could paddle to Papa Stour.

From Scalloway we cut straight across the Voes past a stretch of sandstone cliffs and sea stacks. Rich was impressed with the skegged Skerray; said it felt like driving a Citroen! He was feeling seasick, so we stopped for a break at a scenic bay with a greaty view of mountainous Foula 14 miles to the west. Rich went for cliff top reconnaissance to see if he could make it round the last headland. The dramatic skerries off Papa Stour lay ahead, and eventually I coaxed Rich across Papa Sound and we found the camp with about 25 kayaks on the beach, and relaxed in the spacious luxury ranch which the canoeists had taken over for the weekend.

Next day we set off in a group of about 15 and paddled round to Christies' Hole. After lunch we left the group to paddle around Papa Stour. There are two superb stacks near Lyra Skerry - The Foot and Lyra Stack (If anyone is interested in climbing sea stacks, phone me on 01382 344097). Once through we breezed along back to the ranch for a rather convivial evening; getting slowly inebriated.

I hope to be back soon for a trip out to Foula. Thanks to Dave Gardner and friends for a great weekend.

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Solo Circumnavigation Of Ireland

22nd June 1995 - 23rd Aug 1995

Nigel A Smith
9 Ash Terrace
off Lightwood Rd
Buxton
Derbyshire

On August 23rd 1995, Nigel Smith a 29 year old lifeguard and previous member of the British Infantry from Buxton Derbyshire, returned to the shores of Scotland after completing his record breaking attempt, to Solo Circumnavigate Ireland from Scotland and back again in his seventeen foot Baidarka sea kayak, completely unsupported by rescue craft.

Leaving Portpatrick on the morning of 22nd June 1995, Nigel crossed the Irish sea luckily to be blessed with good weather. Six hours and eighteen miles later he arrived at Donaghadee, this was the closest port for the crossing and also the start point for the circumnavigation, he hoped to return within forty paddling days.

The good weather was to hold for the first ten days, allowing him to complete the East coast. 20 miles per day was to be the average distance at the paddle, this was to be cut in half once the strong Southerlies and Southwesterlies took hold on the South coast.

His first real experience of big rough seas came on reaching Hook Head, a notorious danger spot which has claimed many lives in the past. Twenty foot waves in no set pattern tossed him around, making every forward paddling stroke a bracing stroke as well. This was not to be the last of the big water, as the huge rolling swell of the Atlantic ocean lay just around the corner on the West coast. The South coast was a terrible place for sea mist, sometimes the only way across the bays, was to set a compass bearing from your chart and paddle sometimes as long as three hours before any sight of land would be made, only true confidence in his compass and navigational skills allowed him to do this sometimes in force four to five winds.

The coastal scenery of West Cork and up the West coast was to prove mindblowing. Stacks of rock seperated from the mainland jutted up some 400 feet above the waterline. Deep dark caves and archways carved out of the rock by the pounding waves of the Atlantic swell, along with the towering 500 foot cliffs of Mower, a tourist was to plunge to his death only days after Nigel had paddled beneath them.

Numerous species of sea birds were to keep him company, on legs which were now increasing to forty miles and lengths of time at the paddle increasing to nine hours. His strength and confidence now pushing him out into rougher conditions up to force six. Seals were a common sight all round the coastline, very inquisitive they would come right up to his sea kayak. He would sometimes catch the odd seal snoozing with its huge head bobbing high out of the water. Photographic opportunities he made full use of.

The highlight of the whole trip was to experience a huge basking shark trawling for plangton, it cut twenty feet across his bow, its massive dorsal fin cutting through the water as its tail swooshed from side to side behind. An amazing sight he said he was privileged to have seen.

The Irish people are well known for their hospitality, it was very obvious only having to sleep in his tent once, the locals made sure that he was always comfortably looked after and that his equipment was secure. Classed as a celebrity by some and a madman by others.

He returned to Donaghadee on the fortieth day as planned, and after kayaking the final leg across the Irish sea back to Portpatrick he fired a white spot flare into the air, this was to end his 1035 mile expedition which he had completed in 250 hours at the paddle. Every part of his body ached as he vowed not to go kayaking again for at least the next month or two.

Without the sponsors which so kindly backed his venture, he would never have been able to start let alone finish the trip he stated. He hopes that the fundraisers of the High Peak Hospice have managed to raise funds through his expedition, and that this worthy cause can benefit from it.

Sponsors: P & H Canoe Company - Lendal Paddles - Safeway foodstore - Otter Controls - Kirk's the Chemist - Buxton Bikes - High Peak Leisure - Trevor Hill Discount Motorstore - Derek Spackman window cleaners - Marlborough College - Navy - Dobie Wyatt - Scott Sports - Orion.

END

The photo below is Nigel at the end of his circumnavigation



COASTCALL
0891 600 266

Call PBO's coastal weather service on 0891 600 266 for an up-to-date report on weather and sea conditions.

If you want to know what the weather is going to be for the week ahead, and the coming weekend, phone PBO's Coastcall Weather Forecast Service. Specially prepared by British Weather Services using state of the art equipment and reporting services, Coastcall is designed to meet the needs of the cruising yachtsman, dinghy and board sailor. To facilitate use the UK has been divided into fourteen separate regions as shown above. A daily forecast is available for each of these areas on Friday, Saturday and Sunday and all English Bank Holidays, commencing at 0600 hrs. On Mondays a comprehensive weekly outlook is provided for the entire UK coastal waters. On Thursdays a forecast for the weekend is provided.

HOW IT WORKS

Select the area in which you will be sailing and then call the special telephone number. A recorded voice will then slowly read out the names of each of the areas starting with Welsh waters. You simply say 'yes' when your region and number is mentioned. You will then get a full weather report and forecast for the area selected.

WHAT IT COSTS

Coastcall call are charged at 36p per minute cheap rate, 48p per minute at all other times. Practical Boat Owner's Coastcall is provided in conjunction with British Weather Services and Cablecom Productions, Cablecom Studios, 35 Hays Mews, Berkeley Square, London W1X 7RQ. Tel: 071-409 1002.

Royal Geographical Society - Expedition Advisory Centre

Bulletin of Expedition Vacancies

Okavango Over 50 Expedition (O/O50 Expedition)

Team members required for a *charity fund-raising adventure expedition* that aims to raise funds for Survival International and Tusk Force and will involve an unsupported 600 km canoe journey down the length of the Okavango Delta, Botswana, in July 1996. Expedition expected to take about 30 days plus 10 days mob/demob. Besides the canoeing, time will be allowed for birding, game watching and fishing. Members must be over 50, relatively fit, have expedition experience and be prepared to rough it. Experience in canoeing or sailing, video photography, first-aid and/or medicine, bird watching and fund-raising advantageous but not essential. Approximate cost £1500.

Contact: Jevan Berrangé, 6 Wheal Josiah Cottages, Gulworthy, Devon, PL19 8NZ. Tel: 01822 - 832027.

TECHNICAL TIPS

Skegs by John Basemore

The February edition of "Wooden Boat" carried an article on retractable skegs by Rob Bryan. I will summarise his ideas and add some of my own.

Quote: "A retractable skeg will help a boat track in windy conditions. While good paddling technique will overcome weather cocking, a skeg or rudder is also helpful. Many factory kayaks come equipped with a rudder. The high cost of rudder, their tendency to mechanical failure and damage, annoying foot pedal controls and questionable aesthetics do not appeal to me."

(Manhandling a kayak with a rudder is at the least awkward, at most, dangerous.)

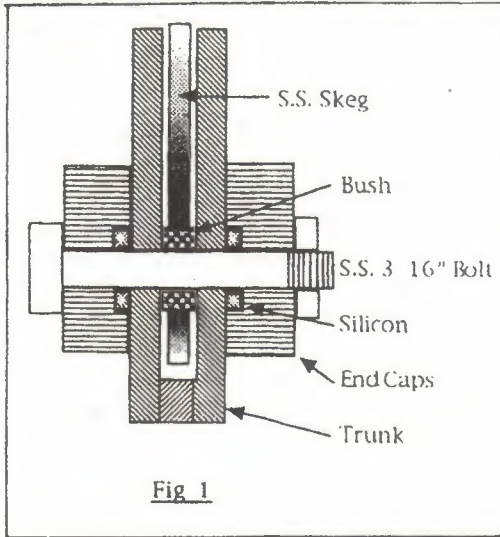
Skeg: "When a skeg is withdrawn into the hull the boat becomes manoeuvrable, but when the wind picks up dropping the skeg keeps the boat on course even in the worst open water conditions. The dynamics of the skeg are appealing. With the skeg fully retracted in a beam or quartering wind the boat will weathercock. Partially lowered the skeg would keep the boat on course allowing the paddler to concentrate on bracing or power strokes as conditions required. Dropping the skeg all the way however usually resulted in the boat heading off the wind. This allows the skeg to be fine tuned to any combination of wind speed or direction."

Years ago I fitted a skeg to "Helen Mary" and I endorse every word of Mr Bryan. He goes on to say how to build a lightweight bond wood skeg. My first retractable skeg was bondwood but I soon replaced it with a stainless steel model. Gravity lowered it and a single cord raised it. A jam cleat held it, which allows for very fine adjustments. Wooden skegs (because they tend to float) must be lowered either by cord, shock cord or added weights. Stainless steel is bullet proof. Aluminium is satisfactory but tends to corrode.

Originally "Helen Mary" had a small inbuilt skeg but still weathercocked, so I fitted a larger permanent one that prevented me going up wind. By whittling away at the skeg I arrived at a reasonable compromise. However I had experienced how easy it was to go upwind without a skeg and the delight of being able to power on the face of waves downwind with a skeg. So I cut a hole in the hull (I think this is the hardest decision of all) and fitted a retractable skeg.

To minimise cargo inconvenience and maximise lateral control I placed it as far as aft as possible. When a wave breaks the stern of a kayak tends to stick up in the air and the skeg is either in the air or froth, either way it doesn't have much grip on the water. Broaching follows unless some very committed paddle strokes are used. Next time I will fit it forward 3 or 4 feet. Frank Bakker has his just behind the rear hatch. The complete unit he has can be had from Peter Carter
(28 Rowells Rd Lockleys 5032 SA Ph: (08) 43 4298). Australia.

The one drawback to a skag is that it can get in the way when loading a boat. However, this can be overcome by the careful placement of hatches, bulkheads, and skag trunk (Fig 1). Unless a bulkhead is incorporated in contact with the trunk, items of luggage can be lost on the far side of the trunk, so two hatches are needed. This can be an



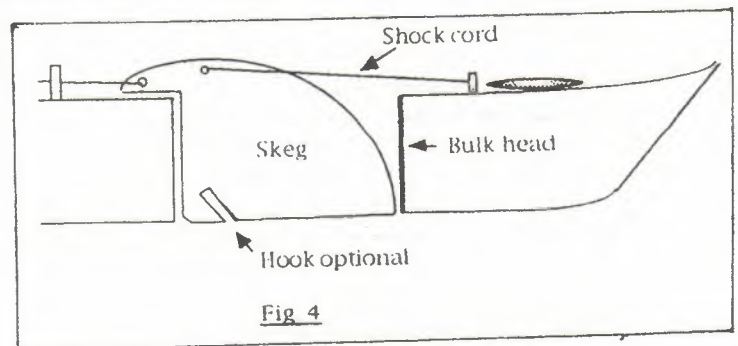
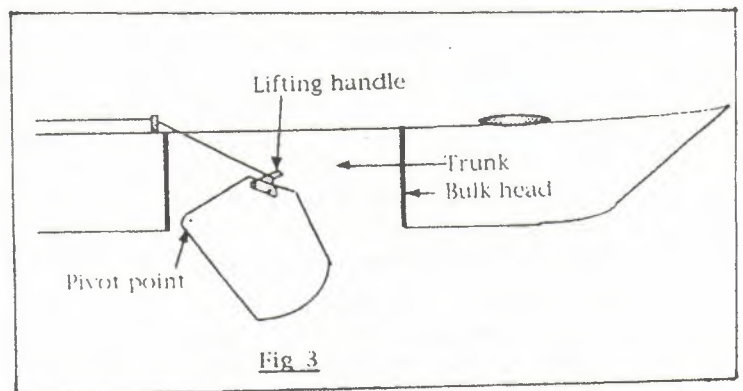
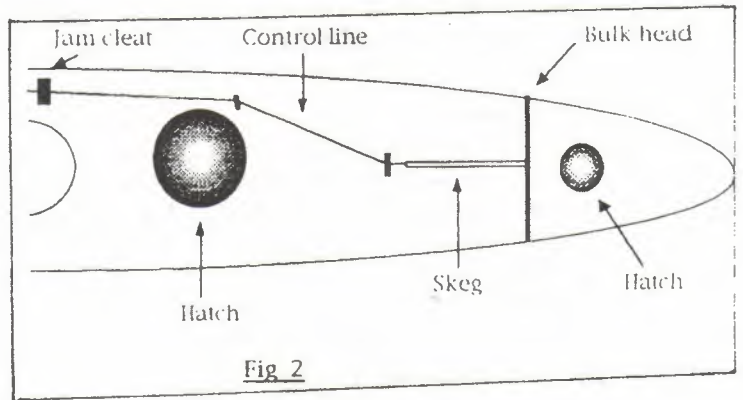
advantage. The tiny rear hatch is ideal for the first aid kit, spare batteries, matches, or small items of clothing, etc. I have such a hatch in the bow of "Nelly Tonkin". Each hatch is a hole in the boat that water can enter. On the other hand each compartment is buoyancy if the boat is holed. Besides, the rear compartment is much longer than the front, so two hatches make sense.

My first retractable skag was the common hook type, kept in place by a plate riveted along the bottom side of the skag. The skag pivoted on a brass pin permanently glassed in the trunk. As simple as possible and worked just fine. However I have made a new skag and put a new pin (Fig 1 & 2) that allows the pin to be removed via the large rear hatch.

The slot through which the skag emerges from the hull needs only to be 1/16" wider than the skag. The larger the slot the greater the water drag. If jamming by sand occurs it may need to be widened a little. I would avoid the protruding handle on Mr Bryans skag (Fig 4). Keeping everything below deckline by widening the trunk where needed is my choice. An eyelet on deck just in front of the trunk guides the control cord to the skag, then diagonally to the side to avoid the hatch,

finally to another eyelet 1" behind the double jam cleat within easy reach of the hand. The cord is tied off between 6 & 9 inches further forward (Fig 2). Lifting the loose end of the cord allows the skag to drop, a simple tug on the the loose end engages the cord in the jam cleat and sets the depth of the skag. Either operation can be performed in a flash. Skegs are effective, simple, neat and robust with no rudder bar or cables to trap your feet in an emergency.

If you don't mind the lifter protruding above the deck or decide to use a bondwood skag then Rob Bryan's model is for you (Fig 4). If you want it out of the way as (Fig 3) you will have to cut the sides away to allow the lifting handle and cord enough room simply add extra bondwood to cover the cutaway.



Too bad John

by Sergio Cadoni

You see, John, it is a tiresome business to make four paddler's schedules meet to afford a major paddling project. It took three years to find the right partners to organise the first non-assisted crossing from Bastia, in Corse, to the Italian island of Elba, and then to the mainland. Here in Sardinia others paddlers were not interested in such long crossing (30 Miles), with no landing in between. And it took three months to arrange everyone working schedule to have holidays in the same period. What a hard working people Italians are...

Anyway last July we made it, in four of us, in a foggy morning with no more than four miles of visibility in the first leg of 20 miles, increasing to nine miles for the remaining three hours to the chosen landing spot. There's not very much to say about the crossing in itself, just paddling hard and avoiding collision with ferries and a few tankers, but what probably is of some interest is how we trained for the crossing and the home work.

The goal...

Was to cross from Erbalunga, a small, quaint village on the East coast of the Island of Corse, which belongs to France, to the sealight of Punta Polveraia on the west coast of the Italian Island of Elba. Erbalunga is four miles north of the city of Bastia. The crossing is a strait 30 miles of paddling with non possibility of emergency derouting or landing. The closest island in between was a good 14 miles abeam from the mid-point of the crossing course. The island of Elba is within visible range of Erbalunga on clear days. The day after the crossing we should have paddled along the north coast of Elba (25 miles), from the sealight of Punta Polveraia to the Channel of Piombino to reach the city which gives the name to the channel itself, to catch then a ferry to go back to Bastia. The channel is no big crossing indeed, no more than five miles, with occasional strong currents.

I went by car from Cagliari, in the south of Sardinia, to Bastia to meet the other tree paddlers, coming with the first run of the ferry service linking Piombino to Bastia in the summer time. Two of them were from Rome and one from the Elba.

The chartwork...

I was in charge of it. No big problem. We have no tides. The course was a strait 87°. With some luck we would have been on sight from the very start. A thorough study of the current tables showed a probable current of 0,6 knots pushing us from the back. The weather is usually stable in the first weeks of July, with mild winds if at all. That was our weather window. I carefully plotted the visible range of all the relevant sealights, worked out with the Pilots all the relevant informations about the areas involved and checked the course of the ferries linking Corse with the mainland to avoid getting into trouble. I plotted a course with an estimated crossing time of eight hours, allowing for a speed 3,6 knots, including ten minutes of rest after each hour paddled.

Have you ever trained alone?

You would cry to find a fellow paddler! The aim was to reach a constant speed of about four knots, and to be fit to stay comfortably in the kayak for the eight hours forecasted. For two months I trained alone in the gulf of Cagliari. I was bored to death. Twice a week I was in the kayak for a two hours non-stop paddling to my maximum speed, or for a good six hours at usual speed without landing, possibly crossing from a headland to another and eating in the kayak with every kind of weather. You see, here the climate is warm, and in the summer it is hot. When you get your training under a blistering sun and 30 C°, the most beautiful things on earth (and sea) are shadow and cool drinks (most beautiful, but unfortunately quite difficult to have at hand in a kayak). I managed to eat mostly fruit (apples, peaches, pears and the like) to get sugar and stay hydrated, sweets, lot of honey, occasionally a Mars bar, and plenty of water. In each litre of water I put two spoons of sugar, a little spoon of kitchen salt and a few drops of lemon juice. Avoid Gatorade: in the long run it feeds you up with it's unnatural taste, and you are left more thirsty than ever longing for good, natural water. The last ten days before the crossing I eat pasta (spagetti and the like) at lunch and dinner to build up a carbohydrate reserve in my body to be burned during the crossing.

But real life is all another matter...

The ninth of July, like the previous day, was hazy or foggy altogheter. A French weather report on VHF channel 65 informed us that we would have had a head wind (a South-Easterly Force 3). No big luck, since the prevailing wind is from the Northwest and it would have pushed us to destination. But at least we would have had some relief from the sun. We started at 06.00 to take advantage of the freshness of the early morning hours from the nice village of Erbalunga, after a breakfast rich in fats and carbohydrates. We agreed that the fastest of the group would have made the pace and kept the compass course until the slowest would have been able to catch up. Two of us took the lead alternatively during all the crossing. Since we had no more than four miles of visibility (we lost sight of Corse after one hour), no correction for current and drift was introduced in the plotted course as already decided: at least, until visual contact with Elba, we would have known on which side we would have been drifted by current and wind respect to the island. For the next five hours, until one of us saw the Elba, I took a compass bearing of the reflection of the sun on the water every hour to check it against our course. To my surprise we were always on course, despite a North-Easterly force 2 in the first two hours and a good South-Easterly force 3/4 for the rest of the trip (love those French weather bulletins).

For two hours we were in the route of the ferries crossing to the mainland. Ships are incredibly fast when at full

speed. You see them coming out of the fog, and you assume to be far and safe. But it is like to walk in a highway: is a daredevil stuff. We decided to let them pass in front of us at due distance. In the while we took advantage of the resting period to drink and to eat.

It is not that you eat that much, anyway. Maybe is because you are so focused on the crossing, maybe is the nervous tension, maybe is the magic to be in the middle of the sea with nothing on sight for hours on end, but you really don't eat that much. Just some fruit, some sweets and a lot of water.

We met a dozen ships during all the crossing, coming from nowhere and going to nowhere in the fog. We never had to contact them by radio.

After five hours of navigation and pure dead reckoning one of us finally saw the highest mountain of Elba, a giant high thousandth meters that all the rest of us misunderstood for clouds above the horizon. The guy had the honour to pay for the beers when we made land...

We guessed that the visibility had somehow improved to nine miles. Anyway making visual contact with land has been a blessing.

And three more hours we took to reach the sealight of destination (we took longer resting periods and a nice swim some nine miles off shore), growing always bigger and bigger, but never as big as we were hoping for. Under the sealight a beach, a bar, shadow and beers. Would you believe that until the very end of the trip, after five hours of navigation in the fog, we were no more than five degrees off course?

All the rest to Piombino is everyday business.

What is the Coast Guard point of view?

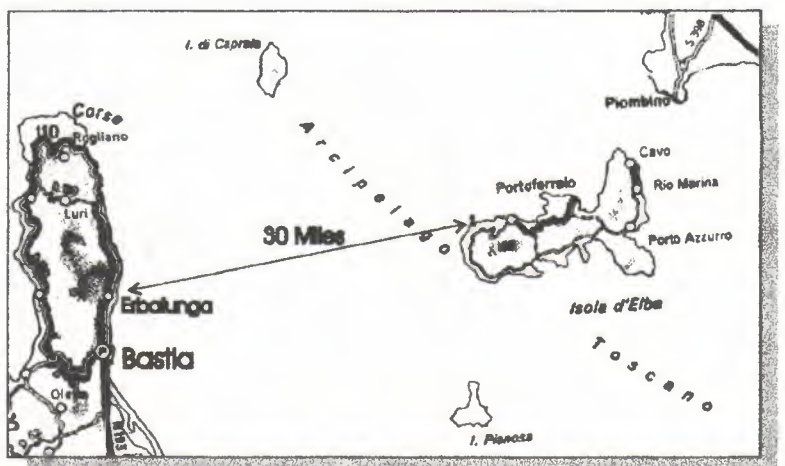
Not a friendly one, I'm afraid. In Italy and in France (a few exceptions apart) there's a limit of one mile off the coast for kayaks. And the law is strictly enforced. Now, as normal citizens we are law abiding people, but as sea kayakers the call of the open sea is too strong. So we decided to take the chance: we were ready to pay heavy fines (and worst) if the Coast Guard had ever intercepted us. This was also the reason we stood well clear of ships: they might be induced to think we were in trouble and to report us to the Coast Guard. We left a detailed float plan to our families with all the relevant telephone numbers to start a SAR. This is quite depressing, but this is the way it goes in the Mediterranean Sea. Take it or leave it. I hope that in the future, as the sport will grow, it will be possible to build a mutual respectful relationship with the Coast Guard, better understanding each other needs and points of view.

The equipment.

We had a P&H Baidarka Explorer and a Sirius, and two Italian sea kayaks: and Island of Sardinia and a Searunner (what a fantasy) made by Qajaq firm, similar to an P&H Orion or so. All the kayaks had three hatches. I enjoyed a Lendall Seamaster paddle and another guy a Nordkapp, the remaining two had ultralight Italian paddles. All the rest is usual stuff: sea anchor, flares (parachute, orange smoke and two star), VHF radio, two cellular phones, spare paddles, repair kit, emergency kit, tow line, survival bag, charts, Suunto deck and hand compasses, flash and strobe lights, WW Expedition lifejackets, signalling mirror, whistle, knives and stuff, stuff, stuff...

After all that training and after that crossing I'm quite fit for some good, demanding paddling. But other paddling friends have to work, and there are the families, so neglected during the rest of the week, and don't forget to fix that stuff at home, and the car, and the cat... The cat?

You see John, is too bad summer doesn't last a few months more. It's too bad that we are always in a hurry to rush to work to earn a living. And it's too bad that we can't get in the kayak and go paddling toward the horizon whenever we feel the call. But I'm already thinking about a nice crossing for next summer, and that's not bad.



Area of Interest

The Dream Team

- Sergio Cadoni
- Gaudenzio Coltelli
- Davide Duranti
- Marco Menichetti



Report on the 1995 Scottish Sea Kayak Symposium

by Donald Thomson, Inverurie, Scotland.

I was having a quiet morning at home one Saturday last October when the phone rang. The conversation went something like this.

'Hello its Gordon. Thanks for your help at the symposium.'

'No problems I enjoyed it'

'We're going to alternate the Scottish and Jersey symposia, and hold it on the May holiday weekend, to try and attract more people from down south.'

'Sounds like a good idea, I quit fancy Jersey next year'

'Jerseys not till 1996. We're having it again in Scotland in May. That's what I'm phoning about. Could you help out again and do a session or two?'

'Yes If you want.'

'We'd also like you to do the keynote lecture on the Saturday.'

One of these days I'll learn! And so it was I was back at the National Watersports Centre on Great Cumbrae on the weekend of 26th to 28th May 1995.

The centre is designed to take 40 people, and there were over 140 registered plus another 20 or so contributors. Most were camping, some were in B and B and the lucky ones were in the chalet accommodation.

The weekend was structured similarly to the previous symposium, with a choice of a 2.5 hr water session or attending two 1 hr indoor sessions morning and afternoon on each day. You could also go for either a gentle or more adventurous day paddle if you wanted. There was normally a choice of 2 water sessions and 6 indoor sessions in each period, and no repeats anywhere in the programs, no mean feat in itself!

Technical and practical sessions were labelled as either beginner or advanced to help people choose, and covered Navigation, Self rescues, Rolling, Making paddles work, Basic Skills, Canoe sailing, Fishing, Advanced Skills, Rescue Techniques and exercises with the Coastguard

General interest sessions included weather, maps and charts, Seabirds, Night paddling, EAR, Tides, Customising your boat, Access and wildlife, First Aid and Hypothermia.

If you wanted to get away from it all and immerse yourself in a trip lecture, you could choose from Mull, Shetland, Norway, Alaska, Arctic Russia, The Channel Islands and Around Scotland - past and present. There was also an exhibition, and shop from several Canoe Manufacturers, including a number of demonstration boats.

If you couldn't find something to suite you all day on each of three days, you shouldn't have been there. Indeed the problem was that you couldn't get to all the ones you wanted to, the choice was so good. Despite all this there were no oversubscribed sessions, although I believe some of the lecture rooms were rather crowded. The Scottish weather, which was best described that weekend in Scot's as 'dreich' probably didn't help, although I still have a suspicion a lot of paddler's don't like the possibility of getting wet on a training session!!

I obviously didn't manage to attend all the sessions, but know from talking to people over the weekend that everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, even those who attended the wet sessions. There was also a lot of discussion, both within the sessions and out with, in the lounge over coffee, or at the bar in the evening. This was particularly so as we had a number of foreigners, some of whom had come straight from the SISKKA meet at Mull. I talked to people from USA, Canada, Sweden, Holland, Germany and France, and I'm sure there were others. This was definitely an International event!

With such large numbers attending, a final total of over 200 including day visitors, the centre was stretched to the limit. I can't say this caused a problem, as there were always centre staff and symposium helpers, complete with teeshirts, to sort things out. Special mention should be made of the chef, who single handed from a small galley catered for all, often in two sittings.

The Saturday evening was the one time when everyone came together, firstly for the keynote lecture, which I did on my St Kilda trip, followed by a traditional Scottish Ceilidh. All our foreign visitors, including those from England, joined in and a good time was had by all. It was almost 3 AM when I got to my bed, having left a merry group of singers after I lost my voice. The sacrifices I go through for canoeing!!

I was disappointed to miss the Sunday night lecture by John Heath from USA on the Inuit people and their kayaks. The heathens in Aberdeen didn't get the Monday holiday so I had to drive back for work. I understand from talking to people later, that there was a tremendous amount of interesting information in it

I could go on about the weekend for as long again, there is so much to say about it. Suffice to say it was a very busy, enjoyable and eventful weekend. If you weren't there you missed yourself. Write it in your diary for 1997, or check up on the Jersey event in 1996.

Finally I think a vote of thanks should go to the organisers Gordon Brown, Duncan Winning, Matt McElroy and Graeme Bruce, who put in a tremendous amount of work on a voluntary basis, plus all their helpers and contributors

See you in 1997.

Since opposing groups first swung clubs at one another, human conflict has largely been over territorial issues, making demarcation lines and succeeding maps and plans indispensable. Today, the rapidly advancing technology of conflict demands maps of ever greater accuracy and detail. The MOD Map Research and Library Group at Tolworth in Surrey has a map for every occasion, as Paul Barnard discovered

The earliest known maps, found on clay tablets in Mesopotamia and attributed to the Sumerians, were drawn more than 4,000 years ago. A thousand years later, Phoenician sea captains knew enough about orientation to sail around Africa. And the ancient Greeks and Romans capably charted their voyages and territorial conquests.

But the first known systematic geographer is generally thought to have been the Greek Eratosthenes who mapped the known world in the 3rd century BC having calculated the circumference of the Earth and the magnitude of the Sun.

Techniques improved gradually over the centuries through Diccardus who first developed meridian lines, Ptolemy, Copernicus and then Mercator whose famous projection is still used today.

However, the real breakthrough came in the middle of the 18th century when Jacques Cassini de Thury and his son Cesar Francois produced an entire map of France using triangulation. This gave us cartography as we know it today and soon the first Ordnance Survey of Britain was begun by military engineers, with the first one inch sheets of Kent being published in 1801.

Two years later the Depot

result he became the first Head of the Topographical and Statistical Department — the forerunner of both the Directorate General of Military Survey and the Mapping and Charting Establishment (MCE).

By this time, a need had been established to hold a comprehensive supply of maps for use in foreign military campaigns. A good knowledge of the local geography and terrain was seen to provide our forces with a distinct advantage over the enemy.

As a consequence, the

collection grew and, as map making slowly developed — due largely to experience gained during the Boer and First World Wars — so did the detail and sophistication of the maps themselves.

But it was not until World War II that the next big advance was made — more extensive use of aerial photography for map making. Again this was largely developed by the fighting services using massive photographic surveys throughout the war years of the 1940s.

Logically this progressed to today's photomapping operations from specially equipped orbiting spacecraft, such as Landsat — a highly effective technique which can provide photographs covering hundreds of square kilometres in one frame.

Today the Directorate General of Military Survey is the principal MOD agency for the production of land maps and air navigation charts for the Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Marines. It controls a number of survey units including the Mapping and Charting Establishment (MCE) at Feltham in West London. (See *Focus*, March 1991.)

LEFT: Storekeepers Peter Murrell, left, and Ted Cole file maps in one of the many map spurs.

"There is hardly a part of the world that we do not have a map for"

of Military Knowledge was set up with responsibility for "plans" and "charts". But at the time of the Crimean War in 1854, the country was ill-served with maps of foreign parts — and it was left to a Colonel Thomas Best Jervis to provide Army officers with maps of the Crimea and Turkey at his own expense. As a

In direct support of this is the Map Research and Library Group (MRLG) which is part of MCE and provides a vital contribution to the overall Military Survey map-making operation.

Located mainly at Tolworth in Surrey, its brief is to acquire and hold all the topographical information likely to be needed on a worldwide basis, and to be able to produce that information rapidly and selectively.

To that end it maintains a library of some two and a half million items with an input of 40,000 new maps a year (70,000 copies or 350 per working day). This makes it arguably the largest and most comprehensive collection of maps outside the USA.

"There is hardly a part of the world that we do not have a detailed map for," said SMCO Charlie Holloway, Head of Map Library Branch. "In all we have over a million individual maps and charts, everything from small scale world cover to large-scale town plans."

The collection is primarily worldwide topographic mapping. Most of the items are in map form but the library includes many other types of cartographic materials — field survey records, air photography, film reproduction material, atlases, books, documents, periodicals and an impressive collection of dictionaries, glossaries, gazetteers and map symbol sheets. These items number about 100,000 with a further 75,000 books and field survey records held in the Geodetic Library at Feltham.

"The MRLG is a dynamic, active and reactive area providing a rapid response service to many customers," said Grade 7 John Holland. "During recent months, most



"Map-making today rarely, if ever, means starting from scratch"

of the effort has been concentrated on the Middle East in support of Operation Granby. However, this has not stopped the other work mounting up and we now have the task of coping with the backlog."

Now that the hostilities have ceased the map collection is being swelled by much interesting Gulf-related material including locally produced maps and battlefield preparation charts. Some may well become important historical documents when the story of the conflict is told.

During normal times the rate of loan demand is about 50,000 items a year — that is an outflow and corresponding inflow of about a thousand a week. But this level of movement involves more than the requirements of MCE, as maps and information are supplied to users throughout MOD and beyond. Customers include other government departments, universities and colleges, MOD contractors, civil engineers and many other approved customers with a genuine need.

"Because our collection is so comprehensive, we keep just four copies of each map and six or each airchart," said Charlie, "and unless the specific requirement dictates otherwise we supply photocopies — up to five in total — in response to a demand. Our new A1 colour copier has been invaluable in this respect.

"Often we have to diplomatically modify people's re-

quests because they don't realise quite what they are asking for. For example, we have had a request asking for 1:50,000 coverage of Africa — equivalent to Ordnance Survey sheets of Britain. Even supposing full coverage existed at that scale, what was asked for would have been so colossal and heavy that the customer would not have been able to handle it!"

When defence attachés, diplomatic and other MOD staff are due to be posted overseas, MCE personnel advise them of the maps available from Tolworth. Equally, they provide shopping lists of maps required. "We try to make these people 'mapping aware', said Charlie. "This helps to keep our collection as up to date and as comprehensive as possible."

Maps arrive at MRLG from all sources including many through exchange agreements with friendly governments and mapping agencies around the world. The first task is to identify them. "In the majority of cases this is quite straightforward," explained Charlie. "It becomes a little harder, however, when everything is in Arabic, Russian or Chinese. For this reason we have staff who can cope with many languages."

The maps then have to be catalogued alphanumerically and cross-referenced according to the many themes of

each map. "Any given map may show several types of information on the same sheet, any one of which may be of interest to a particular user. Equally, we have many different maps covering the same area; these may, for example, be geographical, topographical, topological, or geological; they may show communications, vegetation, gravity anomaly, land use — the list is endless."

Currently, cataloguing and retrieval is by card index. Increasingly, however, this is being replaced by a computerised system allowing faster and more accurate response. It is a mammoth undertaking involving 20 people full time to input the necessary data and is known as Retrospective Data Capture.

"It has been a far from straightforward task," said John Holland. "However, although it will be a few years yet before the process is complete the benefits of a fully computerised database will be immense."

Overall Head of MRLG is grade 6 Norman Leppard who is quick to point out that MRLG is far from just a map library. "A significant part of our operation is the Geodesy Division at Feltham. 'Geodesy' is the science of the shape of the earth and provides the framework on which all mapping is drawn."

He added: "The MRLG brings together all the geographical research elements into one management area."

Map-making today rarely, if ever, means starting from scratch. Whichever territory needs to be mapped or charted for whatever purpose, some level of cartographic or geodetic reference and information already exists somewhere. It may be inaccurate, it is frequently inadequate and invariably lacks the full informative content necessary for the new requirement. But the research division officers duly take it from there.

First they have to check what sources were used to produce the existing map, ascertain whether they were the best sources and if they were properly applied. In most cases the researchers have to unearth additional and better sources, determine how these can be used to improve the new product and investigate the possibility of further sources becoming available in the near future.

Inevitably, those sources and the new maps will in turn provide the base material for the next generation of maps — and so it goes on. It is a cartographic continuum, the map-making equivalent of painting the Forth Bridge.

From John Black, Tonbridge.

Dear John,

.....I should point out that Andy Stamp (see ISKA n/letter, September, '95) has omitted to say that as well as an Operators Licence you need to licence the equipment. When that went up from £12 to £25 per year I gave up because I would only transmit in emergency and one is not likely to get caught listening (although illegal without licence).

Secondly hand held transceivers cannot make BT telephone calls, they need a duplex set, separate transmitter and receiver on different frequencies.

The Coastguard listens on Channel 16 but change to Channel 67 for most things. Likewise they announce on 16 that weather or important navigational 'gen' will be on 67.

ICOM make a waterproof bag for their transceivers which allows you to operate in the wet. It also makes it float. Personally I can't change channels with coldish hands through the bag. It's very useful to know what is going on around you in estuaries, etc.

Cheers for now from one of your OAPs.

* * * * *