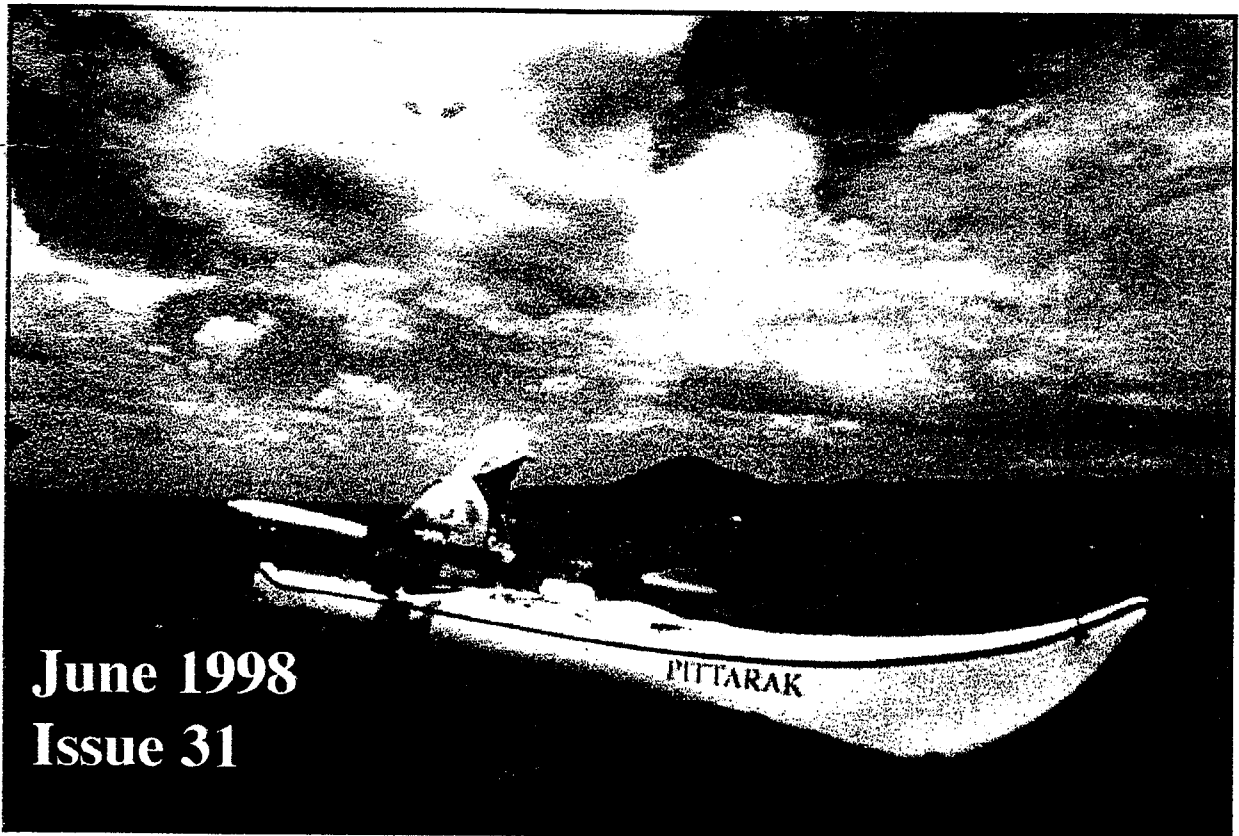


Sea Trek



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The official newsletter of the Victorian Sea Kayak Club

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June Issue

No 31

Keep sending the articles. On disk would be great.
PC or Macintosh – disks will be returned.
Please send all articles to Chris Sewell.
6 The Grange Bairnsdale 3875.
Fax (051) 568759

Deadline for next issue July 15

Committee 1998

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Apologies for the late delivery of this issue of Sea Trek. I have moved onto bigger (?) things and now produce the VCA Paddler magazine - note the advertisement in this issue. Ian Hill's article has been held over to the next issue and we have not given descriptions of John Hyndman's photographs - sorry John. Next issue we promise.

This is my last issue. Thanks Chris and Ray for your patience.

Michael Loftus-Hills

Club news

New Members

We welcome the following new members:

Georg Sajer
18 Hosken St Reservoir 3073 Phone: (H) 9350 6270.

Shawn Ramraj
2/9 Glenroy St Hawthorn 3122 Phone: (H) 9818 5469,
(W) 9658 8839.

Robert Davis
8 Fenton Crescent Frankston 3199 Phone: (H) 9781
5131, (W) 015 800156.

Leith Warren & Jamie Cummins
35 Lohr Ave Inverloch 3996

Michael P Johnson
RMB. 2422 Portland 3305 Phone: (H) 5526 5263.

David Thompson
7 Ian Rd Mt Martha 3934 Phone: (H) 5988 4424

Club survey

Ray Musgrave gives a summary of the recent club survey.

The averages to what people perceive their level of competency to be to what they would like to achieve is about 62%. This appears across all areas. The result is we will run a couple of weekend courses comprising of probably three sessions a day.

Dry: coastal nav, getting out a boat & self, day and overnight trips- what to take, how to pack etc. Safety on and off the water, Risks and dangers Tides and Weather. Wet: Basic strokes, paddling with wind, current and waves, negotiating surf, landings on unfriendly beaches, self and peer rescue.

There are probably quite a few more items to be included but this will give you some idea of what is intended.

To quote Pete Dingle "The teaching of judgement should be an integral part of any training session, for judgement is the sea kayakers greatest safety aid I believe. Hence it being vital for it being included in the training weekend."

At the present time the first one will be in Aug/Sept some time. The exact date is not known yet. If it ends up between the editions of Seatrek I will notify members by flyer of the exact date. Queenscliff looks likely for the first one. The second one will be held in conjunction with the AGM, the second week in November at Flinders.

Paddling Agenda

Disclaimer:

The Victorian Sea Kayak Club is a group of people who enjoy paddling open waters. We organise trips to help members and visitors share this activity, and are pleased to be able to share our accumulated experience with those who are interested in taking up the sport. However, we do so on a voluntary basis only, and any person taking part in a club trip, or using club equipment, or acting on advice from a particular club member or office bearer, does so entirely at their own risk. In particular, trips listed in the Club's published programs will often have some indication of the expected difficulty or exposure that can be expected, and/or an indication of experience required of a participating paddler. That is why the trip organiser must be notified if you wish to partake to see if the trip will suit your skills level. If a person turns up for a trip without notifying the organiser they have the right to say no. Also if the Kayak does not meet the minimum requirements for a trip, plus safety equipment, a refusal to participate will apply. This advice is given in good faith, but because there is no such thing as a completely safe trip, as even the most sheltered and protected waters can become dangerous in adverse weather. Such weather is not always predictable, adverse changes can occur suddenly, even with the best information at the time available, conditions can be misjudged.

WESTERN PORT BAY

Date: Sunday June 28

Contact: Mike Cromie 9878 4582.

Where: Warneet to Tooradin and return to Warneet.

Time: 9:00am at the Jetty or Yacht club at Warneet. (Melway 142. E/11).

Distance: Warneet to Tooradin and return, approx 25 kilometres.

Comments: This paddle will suit most people wishing to have a look at one of Melbourne's better waterways. A reasonable degree of fitness is required its not a strenuous paddle but tide and wind can make it interesting. See how other paddlers set their boats up it a great chance to meet and talk to other members.

If you have any doubt about your ability or want further information please contact Mike Cromie

PORT PHILLIP BAY

Date: Sunday 12th July 98.

Contact: Bill Robinson (H) 9787 4704. (W) 9787 3444.

Where: Canadian Bay Boat Club. (Melways 101.D/10.)

Time: Meet 10:00am at clubhouse.

Distance: Depending on the day will head either towards Mornington or Seaford, and return to Canadian Bay. Approx 22 kilometres round trip.

continued next page

Trip convenors: We need your trip reports!

Information should include participants, weather encountered, tide and wave conditions. This will help the club in formulating skills training by collection of such information. If possible persons whom paddle on non club trips please write a report. This would also be appreciated.

Ideas for trips?

If you would like to run, or have ideas for a trip from May to the end of the year, please contact: Ray Musgrave ph: 5975 2414 Julian Smith ph: 9776 9583 or Therese Pollard ph: 5152 1533

For Sale

Icefloe "CYAK"

A stable and strong expedition boat designed by Derek Hutchinson. Very good condition.

Always stored under cover.

Yellow deck and hull. Electric Pump. Compass. Excellent deck ropes.

New hatch covers. \$850.

Ian Dunn (03) 9584 7682 (H), (03) 9252 6062 (W)



Paddling Agenda

Comments: This paddle is aimed at novices who wish to pick up a few clues and ideas from other paddlers with a strong emphasis on sea kayaking safety. One of the best ways to learn about sea kayaking is to get out and do it. Forward strokes and support strokes can be shown plus rescues at sea. These will be done near the boat club for those wishing to partake. Showers and BBQ facilities are available at the clubhouse at the end of the day.

MANNS BEACH to KATE KEARNEY ENTRANCE, SHAOL INLET or MC LAUGHLINS ENTRANCE

Date: Saturday 25th - Sunday 26th July.
Contact: Ray Musgrave 5975 4214.
Where: KATE KEARNEY ENTRANCE, SHAOL INLET or MC LAUGHLINS ENTRANCE
Time: Meet 9:00am at the car park at Mann's beach boat ramp.
Distance: Longest distance 10 kilometres.

Comments: The idea is short paddles with plenty of fishing in between from the kayak or on shore. There are a couple of excellent places where a deep channel flows past a good camp site so set up an early camp and fish. Those that wish to explore may the waters are relatively sheltered but low tide means lots of sandbars and mud flats. No great paddling feats are planned mainly fishing. Plenty of insect repellent is required, as sand flies are prevalent. For any further information please contact Ray Musgrave.

PORT PHILLIP BAY

Date: Sunday 9th August 1998
Contact: Ian Hill H 9786 6580 .
Where: Sorrento-Heads-Sorrento (10 Kilometres round trip) or Elwood-Altona-Elwood (14 Kilometres round trip)
Time: Meet 9:00am. At designated place

Distance: Depending on the day and which way the wind will be coming from a decision will be made and intending paddlers notified on where the paddle will be and where to meet. You never know your luck at Sorrento you can meet up with the Dolphins. If the wind is blowing from the North quadrant it can get very rough hence the Altona alternative. Suitable for most paddlers novice upward.

WESTERN PORT BAY

Date: Saturday 22nd / Sunday 23rd August 98.
Contact: Ray Musgrave. H 59 75 2414
Where: Corinella - French Island (The old prison) at Freeman Point-Corinella.
Time: 10:00am at car park at pier at Corinella
Distance: Corinella to Freeman Point (4kilometres) the same on return.

Comments: This paddle will suit most people wishing to have a look at one of Melbourne's better waterways. Can arrange accommodation on Saturday night for those who wish at the Mc Leod Eco farm (formerly Mc Leod Prison Farm). Rates are reasonable \$25 / double, \$65 /bunk style accommodation sleeps 5? There is a restaurant, if one does not want to cook and BBQ available for them who want to do their own cooking. Saturday will be a leisurely paddle over can go up to Spit Point and have a look at the Northern end of French Island not often seen by man (or person to be politically correct) on foot and return to Mc Leod in the afternoon. Sunday a late start and back to Corinella. Suitable for all paddlers dependent on weather of course, but relatively sheltered on this side of French Island. For those wishing to avail themselves of the amenities at Mc Leod I must know at least a week before the trip to arrange things.

Accommodation details: Single Cell \$15(no electricity) 2 persons in a cell \$25 (no electricity) Bunk style, 6 persons \$45 (electricity) camping by lake \$5.
Please contact Ray Musgrave if you have any questions.

**Have you
thought about
contributing to
Sea Trek?**

**Subscription details
see back page**

Trip reports



New Intertidal Regulations for Port Phillip Bay

From April 1, 1998 there will be new regulations to further protect the intertidal strip around Port Phillip Bay. Collecting of marine invertebrates in the intertidal zone (in waters less than two meters in depth) will be prohibited.

The intertidal zone (a moving boundary from the maximum high water to a water depth of two meters) is a precious ribbon of land providing habitat for a select range species capable of surviving both wave action and the drying effects of air and sun. Because of its accessibility, the delicate balance of animals and plants in this zone can be readily affected by human disturbance.

The new regulations, almost an extension of existing shellfish regulations, will prohibit the collection of marine invertebrates such as abalone, sea urchins, crabs, mussels and periwinkles from this zone, as well as from structures such as piers, concrete pylons or jetties whose waters are under two meters in depth. Strong penalties for collecting shellfish and other marine invertebrates in Port Phillip Bay will be enforced. The use of fishing lines to catch cuttlefish, squid, octopus and of course fish will still be allowed. Sandworms can continue to be collected, but only by using a bait pump.

Paddler

The Victorian Canoe Association publishes Paddler magazine six times per year. Subscribe to Paddler now!

Contribute to Paddler and spread the word about Sea kayaking.

Contact the editor
Michael Loftus-Hills
9329 7679
Email: lofty@netspace.net.au

Trip Reports

South Channel Fort - Sorrento.

Sunday 15th February 1998: Sorrento - Popes Eye - Mud Islands -

By Frank Masci

Participants:

George Appleby - Pittarak Nautilus
Laurie Atkins - Greenlander III
Rex Brown - Ocean Explorer
John Fazio - Arctic Radar
Ian Hill - Pittarak Nautilus
John Hyndman - Greenlander IV
Frank Masci - Greenlander III (club boat)
Ray Musgrave - Greenlander IV
Tina Rowley - Arctic Radar
Bill Robinson - own design
Julian Smith - Skua (on loan)
Peter Steven - Dagger Magellan
Frazer Yendell - Mirage 19

With John Hyndman as trip organiser, a contingent of thirteen keen paddlers were ready to face an overcast Sunday with an uninspiring predicted top of 19 deg. We met on the Sorrento foreshore at about 9.30 am during which a brief shower had passed. The forecast was for light sth/easterlies tending to the sth/west in the afternoon with sea breezes to 20 knots. A base swell building to 1-1.5 meters in the afternoon was expected, typically 0.5-1 meters above average in the Port Phillip Heads - Sth Channel region.

After a quick briefing by John Hyndman, whose noted expertise in organising tide and weather conditions saved us a great deal of time and anxiety, we were on the water by 10.00 am. The plan was to paddle with an outgoing tide to the Popes Eye Annulus, lying approx. 6 km off Sorrento in a NW direction, then approx. 5km NE to the Mud Islands for lunch. We were then to head off in a sth/easterly direction for about 5km to the Sth Channel Fort, and finally completing the circuit with a 6km paddle back to Sorrento, taking advantage (hopefully) of the slack period straddling lowwater.

Everyone enjoyed a relaxed paddle to the Popes Eye, with intermittent sunny periods and the sea relatively calm. This calmness however was interrupted by an unexpected (to me at least) set of 1.5-2 meter waves trailing behind the Sorrento to Queenscliffe Sea-Road Ferry. The Popes Eye (also known as the Annulus Reserve) is a small semi-circular ring of bluestone of area about 0.5 sq. kms. This was originally constructed as part of the Port Phillip Bay defence fortifications and now forms an artificial reef, providing a haven for marine life. It has been classified as a Marine Protected Area since 1980. The

Popes Eye also provides a rookery for hundreds of Australasian Gannets, supposedly the only Gannet Rookery in Port Phillip Bay. These majestic birds showed no aggression nor timidity, being somewhat ignorant of our presence. Some of the chicks (distinguished by their bluish-grey appearance), appeared comparable or even larger in size than the adults, presumably due to their larger plumage.

An unwelcome change in sea conditions to swells of approx. 1.5 meters was encountered on our NE trek to the Mud Islands. Some of us began to feel the strain and were looking forward to a lunch stop. The fact that these 'low-lying' islands remain invisible to the naked eye at distances greater than 2km was also discouraging to our psyche. Soon after spotting them however, the paddling pace picked up considerably. It seemed everyone longed for a break after the 2hr paddle against the tidal flow from Popes Eye.

The Mud Islands span an area of approx. 5 sq. kms and are surrounded by a vast expanse of shallow sand flats extending to more than 3km in all directions. These Islands are not some ordinary muddy extrusion overridden with rotting seaweed as their name may imply. They appear to be made up of a myriad of shells deposited over eons, and saltbush is the main vegetation. As witnessed by others on previous paddles, the place is known to provide a haven for bird life: swans, terns, pied cormorants and especially seagulls. The Islands however seemed relatively quiet (at least prior to our arrival), suggesting most of the bird species were on migratory ventures this time of year. After a relaxing lunch break and some light conversation, we headed sth/easterly to the Sth Channel Fort.

The swell increased to almost 2 meters with a breeze of approx. 15 knots blowing from the South. The wind caused considerable problems with the steering of my rudderless (club) Greenlander, which had an annoying tendency of orienting itself perpendicular to upwind. My exhaustive corrective strokes were noticed by John Hyndman and Ray Musgrave, and thankfully a tow line was connected from my bow to John's boat to aid steering.

The South Channel Fort is a conspicuous artificial platform built on an approx. 50 meter square base of bluestone blocks. This is a relic from the 1880s whose purpose was to defend Melbourne from a feared Russian invasion which never occurred. The one meter thick cement dwellings which served as observation posts are fed by an intricate network of tunnels and are remarkably still intact. A close look at the gunnery platforms and corroded gun placements immediately conjures up images of the fort in operation. Together with the numerous other forts guarding the bay entrance, one would never know how effective the defence would of been, since a real onslaught never took place. Nonetheless we should be thankful of this, as the continued existence of these well preserved

Trip Reports

historical landmarks would not of been possible otherwise.

After half an hour or so exploring the fort, we headed back to Sorrento. A gale reaching 20 knots and a 2 meter swell made the return trip most interesting. I had no hope of getting across without a rudder, and remained tethered to John's boat for most the leg. Most of us became separated due to the severe swell. I recall ploughing through the huge crests and becoming continuously buried into each following trough losing sight of everyone. At one point, we had to find our way across the Southern shipping channel where the courses and speeds of three huge container ships had to be negotiated. Once committed to a path, one needs to paddle furiously as the speed of these huge monoliths can never be underestimated. The 6 km return leg was laboriously slow, taking about four hours to complete. We all came through unscathed, arriving with the usual sense of satisfaction one gets when conquering a horrid swell.

A pleasant paddle was had by all, some lessons learnt for the new members regarding equipment and some more grey hairs for those wiser folks. The trip provided an excellent opportunity to experience the rather complex tide and weather patterns of the Port Phillip Heads region.

A special thanks to John for organising the trip and to those experienced paddlers for maintaining group morale under adverse conditions.

Snake Island Circumnavigation

by Brian Wallace

March 14-15

Brian Wallace - Pittarak

George Appleby - Pittarak

Robert Dewhurst - Pittarak

Glenn Evans - Self made strip cedar boat

Upon meeting at Port Welshpool we hung out in a shelter shed for some time while some passing showers went by, then it was into packing the boats.

With the incoming tide and a strengthening SW wind, we elected to go with the flow and head around the back of the island first. We all made good time as we surfed our way down the channel. Glenn had hardly to put a paddle stroke in with his sail up while George was seen putting in a fair percentage of correction strokes in his rudderless Pittarak (bet I know what he's buying before the next trip).

While nearing the eastern end of the island, Rob spotted (and was quick to lay claim to) a large tackle box on the beach. After much shaking and probing (and some appropriate words), it was opened and relieved of its booty of fishing tackle. It was then Glenn informed us of two boats that had tipped over the weekend before while negotiating the Port Albert bar and had lost everything on

board.

After finding a well grassed and sheltered camp spot for the night, a combing of the nearby beaches for more treasure proved successful with Glenn returning with a rod and reel and a box of large shark hooks and traces (which should prove useful on the kayak) A walk was also undertaken across to the ocean beach where it was now gusting about 25 knots from the SW. We all hoped it would moderate before tomorrow.

The next day dawned overcast with a light SW breeze. After having breaky with the local tribe (sandflies), we hit the water on the end of the outgoing tide. we were sucked out through the Port Albert entrance into a lumpy 1 metre sea. Upon reaching Bentley Point we decided to head across to Entrance Point on the top of the Prom. With the tide now running in, it was good paddling across and into Entrance Cove. We had lunch sitting on a huge pile of sea weed.

The remaining paddle up the channel was now on glassy calm water all the way to the finish at Point Welshpool. This was one of those rare trips where wind and tide was always in our favour all the way round - a rare occurrence in deed.

Brian Wallace

Mallacoota to Eden

April 4 - 7

Brian Wallace - Pittarak

Rex Brown - Ocean Explorer

Ian Dunn - Skerray

Alan Cross - Pittarak

Roger May - Spectrum

After meeting at 'coota Friday night, the car shuffle was undertaken The end result being a car and trailer were left at Boydtown near Eden.

While packing the boats the next morning, Rex seemed travelling pretty light and was packed in no time at all. the others were seen stuffing stuffing their boats to the max and then returning items that couldn't fit back to the car.

With the boats packed, we headed off on the last of the outgoing tide down to the entrance where the odd bigger 2 metre sets were really dumping on the shallow sand bar. Everyone made it out on their first attempt, except Roger. He had two swims but made it on his third attempt.

With a SW swell of 2 to 3 metres and a strengthening SW wind, good time was made to Gabo Island where a walk to the lighthouse was undertaken. The Gabo Island Lighthouse is one of the tallest in Australia and the red granite from which it is made is reputed to be the hardest in the world. It is indeed a superbly built structure. Apart from Gabo having having a resident caretaker, it is also the home to Australia's largest colony of fairy penguins.

Trip Reports

With the wind now blowing at around 20 knots, we headed off to the northern end of the island. The waves that occasionally break on the spit that links Gabo to the mainland.

It was then a fairly quick trip to Cape Howe where we landed through a moderate surf. I missed Ian as we crossed each other whilst surfing the same wave and Rex was seen getting rather vertical while backing off a bigger one.

After setting up camp we walked across to the nearby state border cairn then marvelled at the huge sand dunes in the area. Sitting around the campfire that night, a rustle was heard in the nearby bushes. Torches were flashed and there was a 5 ft diamond python heading straight for Rex (Rex loves snakes). It seemed to be docile enough and just slithered off. I think everyone checked to see their tents were zipped up after that.

The next day dawned fine, but with the surf now at 2 - 2.5 metres, we elected to move down the beach a little. Everyone made out okay. Ian and Alan got some major air time over some bigger ones. With a 2 metre southerly roll running along the coast, we had to paddle well out from the cliffs for most of the time. Several salmon were caught along this area after a school of them were seen leaping out of the water.

Much of coast line is within the Croajingalong (Cape Howe Wilderness),

Nadgee Wilderness Area or the Ben Boyd National Park. (Please note camping permits are required along this section - ed.). The Nadgee stretch is mostly made up of very red layers of rock, but is also dotted with sandy beaches, lakes, small inlets and sea caves - a sea kayakers delight.

On arriving at Merrica River the entrance was found to be closed, so we carried our boats across and into the inlet before paddling across to the camping area.

The next day greeted us with a calm sea and no wind. We headed across Disaster Bay and then followed the rugged coastline out to the Green Cape Lighthouse. The obligatory photos were taken and another lighthouse rounding was mentally ticked of the list. After negotiating a bit of tidal movement around the point, the seas were a lot calmer. Hence much time was spent poking in and around the many small bays and caves. Ian was seen shooting a gap between the rocks when halfway through, waves from four different directions hit him all at once. He quickly backed out.

Rex was also being quite verbal as a couple of bigger ones rolled through while he was in a sea cave.

Many sea eagles and a few albatross were spotted along this part of the coast. After a lunch stop at Bittangabee Bay, it was onto Mowarry Point where camp was made in a small bay with a nicely grassed camping area littered with 'kangaroo eggs'. Another fine day again



Trip Reports

greeted us as we headed for Boyd Tower. Once around its point, Eden appeared and we knew the trip was as good as over as we paddled towards Boyd Town. We planted our boats on the immaculately kept lawns of the Seahorse Inn then proceeded to litter with the contents from our boats.

All that then remained to do was to fuel up on much needed junk food for the trip home.

Brian Wallace

Walkerville

Saturday 25 April 98 -

Ian Dunn (Skerray), Brian Wallace (Pittarak), Gary Smith (Apostle)

This weekend was originally planned by Ray Musgrave, however he was unable to attend. We met at the Walkerville CV park on the Saturday morning. At this time of year, and perhaps because inclement weather was forecast, the CV park had just a handful people in it. Our campsites were nicely protected spots amongst tea-trees, and within 100 m of the water's edge.

A low pressure cell was developing in the Tasman Sea, and the wind was initially from NW (giving flat water in the lee of the coast) but was forecast to veer around to W before a wet front from the SW was due to hit overnight. A strong wind warning was current for this part of coast.

Walkerville marks a change in the nature of the coastline; to the west it is rocky until beyond Cape Liptrap; to the east is a long, low (and windy) surf beach. Directly across the bay, the mountains and islands of Wilsons Promontory stand beckoning; Tidal River is an enticing 32 kilometres straight-line distance away. (Anyone interested in a direct crossing?)

We decided Cape Liptrap would be easier to reach before the wind went to SW. We were on the water at about 12:30pm after putting our tents up, and paddled the limestone coastline. Immediately out from Walkerville is the 12m high Bird Rock. It features a hollow right through, and when conditions allow, and if one's timing is right, it is possible to pass through. By day's end, we had each performed this curious form of Russian roulette. Close by, are the remains of the old lime kilns - the limestone quarry was the original reason for Walkerville's existence. The quarrying ceased in the 1920's and the 100 m long jetty then gradually fell to ruin. Some piles from it are still to be seen in the water.

We hugged the coast which gradually veers due west, and we were increasingly exposed to a stiff head-wind. At the Cape itself, and beyond, the sea was quite bumpy.

We went out far enough to look down along the coast towards Inverloch and Cape Patterson, but turned and enjoyed the assistance of a tail wind on the way back. We stopped off at the lime-kiln ruins and pottered for a while and eventually got back to our campsite at dusk.

Overnight there was rain and in the morning a stiff SW wind was blowing. Having reached the prime feature of interest on the Saturday, we were left rather targetless on the Sunday. We mutually decided not to don our wet gear to paddle in the rather unappealing conditions, but to explore the coast independently. Gary went on a local foot-track around the coast, Brian went down to Cape Liptrap to see it from the landward side, and your scribe drove over to Inverloch (after missing his intended turn to Cape Liptrap).

Inverloch

Sunday 26 April 98 - Inverloch Ian Dunn (Skerray), Robert Furmston (Arctic Raider)

While watching some wind-surfers ripping across Anderson's Inlet at Inverloch, a car pulled alongside with an immaculate Arctic Raider on top. Robert Furmston had been unable to make it to Walkerville the day before, but - despite the conditions - was keen to at least get his boat wet today. We launched from sand just beside the boat ramp there and paddled into the teeth of a rather strong wind.

The main point of interest was not so much the trip - which was a brief foray on the wind-swept Inlet - but the relative performance of the Skerray and the Arctic Raider. Both boats have similar hulls - with more-or-less the same rocker - but with the Arctic Raider being a touch narrower. The most significant difference was that the Skerray features a drop-down skeg, while the Arctic Raider has a rudder.

Upwind, and across the wind, the boats seemed quite evenly matched. Robert expressed amazement that I needed to use so little of the skeg (about 50 mm) to balance the boat. However, when going directly down-wind, it seemed to me that the Arctic Raider was tracking slightly better, though there was little in it. The Skerray was yawing a bit on the following waves until I tried a fraction more skeg.

We briefly swapped boats, but I was a bit too loose in the Arctic Raiders' cockpit to conclude anything useful in these high-wind conditions. Robert, on his part though, said he liked the overall "feel" of the Skerray and that it handled rather like a "white-water" boat. After swapping back, Robert demonstrated a better than average ability with some of the neatest rolls in rough water you could hope to see.

Sea Kakak Symposium

Just what does it take to get to sea symposiums?

*7th Anglesey Sea Symposium - Observation From A Couple of Kiwis. by Roy Dumble
(taken from The Sea Canoeist Newsletter: Issue 73
February - March 1998)*

Well, O.K. the fact that they were in Wales and Scotland meant a bit of travel, but bomb scares? Buried in the London A-Z we had just got onto the A40 and heard on the radio that it had been closed courtesy of the IRA! 10 hours of sweltering in an atypical May heat wave later we were crossing the Menai Straits and heading into Anglesey, north west Wales. Two years of planning suddenly coming to fruition. Typical of a bank holiday weekend, the sun soon gave way to rain, then hail, then snow. the prospect of getting wet here was not inviting - and most of the kayaks here were short, round bottomed and tippy. we had fun trying them all out but were more than pleased that we had gone to the trouble of shipping our own Southern Skua and Blue Marlin across from New Zealand.

WORKSHOPS

The symposium was held at the Anglesey Sea and Surf Centre - just out from Holyhead. It had its beginnings as a Nordkapp reunion weekend but has developed into a broad sea kayak symposium. we got the feeling of expectations of knowledge through assumed previous attendance and although communication and some on water management was not great, there were some interesting workshops and presentations. Kayak trim, glass and plastic repair demonstrations and some interesting day trip destinations were well balanced with theoretical workshops. Although there was little in the way of new concepts, they gave us the opportunity to catch up on important local considerations such as weather, sea states and coastguard operations. In fact our coastguard workshop was cut short because of the nature of the weather in our area. winds approaching Force 8 were keeping the officers on their toes, with 10 call outs by midday alone. It made us feel glad we had chosen a shore based option! The most spectacular workshop/demo was a helicopter rescue using a Wessex from the navy. Simulating a lost kayak, and a medical emergency, various bods were winched up into the chopper, whilst many others took the opportunity to test their stability under the downdraft of the huge machine. The ironic part was that 100 metres away from the exercise, a lone paddler had capsized by the chopper and was unable to get back into his kayak. Luckily the wind was onshore because it was 20 minutes before he made it to shallow water! The keynote speaker,

Sam Cook, was part of the first sea kayak expedition to Greenland. He gave an interesting slid presentation on both the trip and the development of the Nordkapp which was used for the first time.

SKEGS

One of the key reasons we travelled over to the U.K. was to network with the sea kayak fraternity and discover first hand the differences in their sea kayak culture. the most obvious difference is in kayak design. Many kayaks are short with a minimal flat section in the hull. Rudders were non existent, although about half of the kayaks had skegs, some of which were adjustable. We had interesting discussions, comparing our kayaks with theirs. I supposed you like what you are used to but, I don't know there was just something aesthetically pleasing about our kayaks which were missing from any other boat there. We had ample opportunity to try their boats out and came away wondering why they persist with skegs or even worse, with nothing. To adjust the skeg, you have to take one hand off the paddle and they seem intent on finding a design that would minimise this - but not eliminate it. Railing the kayak was a necessary skill to assist turning but also into maintaining straight line paddling. Every change in course and wind shift would require adjustment of kayak and skeg trim. Many people we spoke with had a begrudging acceptance of this when ever they went paddling, but would happily pronounce it was only a problem when the wind was not from directly astern or on the nose. I don't know about you, but I find this to be quite a large percentage of my paddling time! "Why not use a rudder?" we asked. "It would certainly make the kayaking much less wearisome." Many would look at us quizzically and shrug or say simply, "We don't use rudders here." One learned kayaker with BCU qualifications dripping from his drysuit made a most profound reply... "If we had rudders, people would use them to steer with!" Hilary and I looked at each other then slowly nodded, confessing that, yes, that's what we did with them. I had to sneak a look at the Oxford dictionary to confirm the definition of a rudder, a breathed a sigh of relief that we had got it right during all these years of paddling!

CULTURE

But their outlook on rudders is a key concept in coming to understand their sea kayaking culture. With restricted access to rivers, let alone wild water like New Zealand can offer, kayakers take to sea. Surf kayaking was a big sport in the 60's and 70's (and is only recovering its numbers today). It didn't take long for some paddlers to take these surf boats along the coast in search of adventure and what they found were stretches of coast that were more like white water conditions. And what's more, it was free access! The large tidal range in some areas

created overfalls and races that enabled these paddlers to strut their stuff - the only difference it being a marine environment. Gradually, kayak design changed to suit this environment. Today, sea kayaks in the U.K. fall into one of two design ranges - traditional and shorter play boats. The shorter play boats enable comfortable paddling to get to the technical water they seek, while allowing a performance edge over the longer touring kayak. Rudders however, remain heresy! The purist will not even use a skeg! BCU & NVQ's

Commercial operations are nonexistent in England and Wales. The club scene is very strong and has a long tradition. the BCU reigns supreme, although we we heard numerous rumblings of discontent with the push to change their training and assessment scheme over to the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ's) system. They have about one year left to requalify into the NVQ awards and there is no recognition of prior learning.

Some assessors have the system tied up and are making money but the majority are having to commit money and time, and are questioning their future involvement (does this sound familiar?).

Alongside the tradition of the BCU there is a long standing fascination with 'cold climate paddling'. Greenland And Scandinavia are on most paddler's destination lists. added to a historical interest with traditional Greenlandic kayaking, there is the draw of isolation that

these destinations offer the intrepid English paddler. Any combination of good weather, weekends and holidays draws crowds of people to the local coast, so Greenland becomes an attractive place - even if it is covered with ice and snow.

Perhaps the most interesting distinction with the U.K. sea kayaking culture is their attitude to the physical nature of it all. Club instructors/leaders have an expectation of taking new members and visitors on long paddles to find either wildlife, isolation or races and overfalls. Little consideration is made on route planning to suit the beginner, which is compensated for by an expectation of leaders to be towing paddlers home. And beginners go out with an expectation of being towed! Mind you, out of this situation they have developed great towing hardware and systems!

I think the whole English macho relationship to sea kayaking was best summed up for us by the editor of Paddlers International, Peter Clark. as he stooped looking into the mechanics of our rudder systems he said, "There's something about the English. everything in life has got to have a goal and be a challenge. If it scares them shitless - so much the better. They're very arrogant about it."

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