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Summer 2009 • Issue 63



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Cover — Stuart Trueman departs Tidal River

It was a window of opportunity that you could have waited all year for, and when Stuart realised how good it was, he went for it. It was amazing how calm and collected he appeared as he prepared to leave, when you consider the magnitude of what he was doing.

Bill Robinson

Comment	4
Point Lonsdale to Gunamatta and return	5
Bass Strait direct crossing	6
Is my VSKC grade current?	8
French Island circumnavigation in a day	9
Pimp my boat	10
George's Crack	11
The development of paddle wheels	13
A novice at the Prom	14
2008 Annual General Meeting weekend	16
Merricks Lodge ... where's that?	17
Port Davey & Bathurst Harbour	19
Instructor training weekend ...	21
Safety — whistlin' up a STORM!	21
Kayaking some Kiwi jewels	22



16



19



5



6



14



22

What's happening

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the VSKC and we have kicked off in style with our largest AGM ever held. Over 100 members attended the three day event at Merricks Lodge and I would like to thank many people including key note speakers, everyone who presented workshops, organised trips, ran competitions and displayed kayaks or equipment.

Special thanks to our founding members, elder statesmen and our out-going committee members – notably Les the ex-prez for doing a wonderful job. This is also a chance to formerly welcome new members both into the committee and into the club.

The AGM provided plenty of fun including inaugural events like Inuit spear throwing, stand-up paddling and a sculling display organised by Richard Rawlings, as well as the opportunity for members to show off their sense of survival in the pool rolling competition, hosted by Peter Treby and won by Julian Smith.

Dave 'Crocodile' Winkworth again impressed us with paddling tales from up north with a showing of his recent multi-day paddle from Karumba to Darwin. We broke tradition with Saturday night guest speakers who were not paddlers – Glen Singleman and Heather Swan, who both

held us spellbound with Heather's story to partner Glen in the *Guinness Book* record of the highest base jump – an extremely inspiring and gutsy story.

As usual we have members doing trips to and from Tassie, the first by Stuart Trueman taking off just after the AGM to become the second person to paddle directly and solo from the Prom to Tasmania (story within).

We hope to consolidate the future of skills development within the club with an initiative by Terry Barry to expand the assessor and instructor group and build on the strong Level 3 membership we now have.

This will give rise to more paddles and events at all paddler levels and ensure a strong trips calendar for all to enjoy.

Raia Wall and Neil Brenton will be working towards keeping a full trip calendar, so Level 3s, expect to be invited to put up your favorite paddles to enable other members to participate with you and enjoy.

The water is warmest this time of year, so get out and enjoy yourself, practicing your skills as well as paddling our coast, bays and waterways.

Have fun and return safely.

Peter Costello
President

The Ed. says

The first issue of *Sea Trek* for 2009, a new year of paddling opportunity has begun.

A few interesting expeditions are in planning stages for 2009. We are fortunate in Australia with the endless paddling possibilities on tap.

Adventure is wherever you find it; this issue takes in the full spectrum of our sport, ranging from Stewart's solo epic to a cast of thousands at the AGM, club trips, training and everything in-between.

Thanks to all contributors to this issue. Without your input, *Sea Trek* cannot happen.

If it's about the VSKC and sea kayaking, we all want to know about it, so keep sending the good stuff in.

Enjoy this issue, Tony C

Killer whales off Bells Beach January '09 photo by Andy Miszczyk, Torquay Angling Club



Loch Ness Monster sighted off Rip

Participants:

Tina Rowley sparkly jumpy Dolphin Nadgee;
 John Evertze toothy Nadgee;
 Tony Chick skull and crossbones Nadgee
 and
 Greg Murray butch baby blue Nadgee.

Predictable primo winter paddling conditions on the West Coast have been replaced by the typically windy conditions of summer. Locally, last winter had uncharacteristically consistently small swell, with many quality paddles in most weeks. More recently there has been a fair bit of paddling in less than pleasant conditions.



3 January threw up a combination of conditions which opened up a few different, (for us) possibilities. John got his evil mind to work, tomorrow's normal training paddle out of Torquay is off, we are seizing the moment, getting up at 5.30 am and heading over the east coast from Point Lonsdale.

Oh yeah? All the ducks were in a row, slack water at PPH 7.00 am, slack incoming 3.30 pm, with small dropping swell left over from a big blow the day before, light northerly backing round to SE in the arvo. Perfect!

The rip crossing was uneventful, just the way I like 'em. Paddling just inside the Heads, even on slack water, there are a couple mildly turbulent patches. Looking about three kilometres offshore of the Heads, as usual, serious water with standing waves, no place for a kayak.

On reaching the other side, a bunch of seals were spotted slacking off. doing a fair impersonation of the Loch Ness monster.

Paddling wide around the surf at Spooks, we headed further eastward, hanging outside of the breaking surf and inshore of the bommies, not a problem standing up but not breaking on the high tide. Eight hours before the afternoon slack water. Four hours paddling, lunch then four hours back.

We had no real agenda; reaching Gunamatta at the four hour mark at a fairly casual pace. The surf was a bit big to land easily, the consensus being that nobody wanted to risk not being able to get back out again and also unable to clearly see the rocks in the surf, a lack of local knowledge, so raft up for lunch in the kayaks it was.

I'm sure many VSKC crew regularly paddle this stretch of coast, I imagine it would be really good on a dead flat day and getting in closer for a better look.

We arrived back at the heads three-quarters of an hour too early for slack, still ebbing but safely doable by staying close to the surf and cutting through the rocks. Hanging in eddies of Corsair Reef. Ferry gliding behind one fast flowing rock shelf, I was directed by the white water types in the pod to make sure I didn't lean into the flow and catch an edge. Yikes!

We passed behind the outside peak at Corsair surf break which was just starting to fire, a boat load of surfers waiting for the tide to start turning. John and Greg hung in the break to catch a few, both getting wet as it was starting to get hollow. Tina and I choose to paddle to the beach to hang for thirty minutes before doing the lazy ferry glide back to Lonnie.

From a West Coasters perspective, this is not a day trip that is often possible, nor one easily planned in advance. It was a pretty good day out really.

Greg Murray, the lunch break kayak stabilisation monitor



I'd been paddling for six hours and could no longer see the hills of Wilsons Promontory, I'd have to paddle for a further twenty-six hours before seeing land again.

Crossing Bass Strait directly is a long paddle.

In Melbourne, a few days before, the weather forecast was foremost in my mind as I attended various talks, meetings and demonstrations at the Victorian Sea Kayak Club AGM.

I had to decide whether to proceed with the plan of catching the ferry from Melbourne to Tasmania on Sunday night then paddle north on predominant south west winds or head off to Wilsons Promontory, the southern most point of mainland Australia, then paddle south to Tasmania on the forecast of northerly winds. I put my money on squeezing a few days of northerlies out of November and headed off to Wilsons Prom.

Once at Wilsons Prom, with a good forecast, I relaxed, now all I had to do was paddle for two days.

What's that? Relax! When I was planning to paddle 215 km across one of the world's most violent stretches of blue water!

It may seem difficult to understand until you have an appreciation of the preparation and planning that is necessary just to get you to the starting point of these trips. Getting to the shore with everything ready and favorable conditions is quite an

achievement in itself. The feeling of relief intensifies for the solo paddler who is responsible for all aspects of simply giving themselves a chance to attempt their goal.

I don't intend to run through the catalogue of expedition preparation, it is a personal journey of learning, with each lesson allowing you to ensure future success. Experience is the key to develop this area of sea kayaking, start somewhere manageable then take it where you want to go.

The loud crack at 3 am signaled the tent pole breaking. "Well that's a good start", I thought and rolled over for another couple of hour's kip in a rather limp looking tent.

I loaded and set up my Mirage 580 sea kayak, then walked it down the beach on a nifty set of wheels with the help of Bill Robinson from the VSKC who had come down to see me off. A quick check, a photo then I said my good byes and jumped in the kayak. My timing was not good, the sea ran away and didn't return, leaving me high and dry looking slightly silly. Bill was sympathetic, took a photo, and helped me re-locate further down the beach and then I was away.

The weather was 10–20 knots NNE, stretching itself to 25 knots if it tried. As land slipped away, the wind decreased as the influence of the Prom was reduced. I got into a rhythm and pace I could maintain and tempered all the built up confusion of feelings which were directing

me to catch every swell and blast off into the distance.

When I returned to work I was asked "Tell us the exciting things that happened on your trip!" Then it dawned on me that one of my objectives was to ensure that nothing exciting happened. Planning to take the excitement out of a trip could answer the question of 'Why sea kayaking doesn't appeal to the younger paddlers' and raises the question of 'what am I going to write about'.

Well I invariably get asked how long it took. I realise that open crossings are becoming more common, so I took a GPS to record my track to see how my pace was affected during the paddle, with the intention of sharing this info with interested paddlers. I took a look at the distance after ten hours, the next time I looked, at dawn, the batteries had died. No GPS. No saved track.

After ten hours I had paddled 80 km, 8 km per hour. That is the one and only reading I got from the GPS.

From this I managed to imagine the following calculation as I paddled through the night:

At 0530 in the morning I would have been paddling twenty-two hours. Twenty-two hours at 8 km per hour is 176 km.

That left only thirty odd kilometres to Tassie, I will be able to see the hills soon after dawn! After all, I could see the



departure hills for approximately forty kilometres.

It actually took ten long hours from 5:30 am to 3:30 pm to see land after dawn.

I had concocted a formula to give myself the answer I wanted, as each hour passed many conflicting thoughts fought the facts as to why I wasn't on the beach yet. Not least of these was my ability to hold a compass course for twenty-six hours while bobbing about on the ocean. As it turned out, I was 3-4 km to the west of Stanley when I first saw land. Not bad, I thought.

Well, I was happily ignorant of my flawed calculation during the first light of dawn and I was mightily relieved to have paddled through the night without falling asleep.

I pushed the hatch cover on after putting away some food, then in slow motion lost balance and rolled over. I hastily grabbed the paddle and attempted a brace, with the paddle at the wrong angle, it sliced through the water like a knife, down I went.

I tried a roll, got my head out the water and then back down. It took another two goes to realise that the two bladders of water loose in the cockpit had shifted and were both starboard. Their combined weight conspired to make me lose my balance as I came up from what would normally be a successful roll.

On the fourth go (I think) I noticed a strange light. Oh, shit! I thought; hope that's not what they talk about in near death experiences! Nope, just my head torch still on. Anyway with the possible consequences of failure to roll up affirmed I gave an extra effort, and up I came. The first thing I did was empty one of the bladders; after all I'd be able to see land soon.

Just after that I was wrapped in sea fog, 'Just my luck' I optimistically thought 'I'll probably run aground!' Then I paddled passed a tennis court. At first I didn't think too much of it but then I realised that it wasn't a grass or clay court but water, I nodded knowingly to myself, pleased that I still had the mental capacity to recognise that a tennis court in Bass Strait was a mirage based on the fact that it wasn't grass or clay.

The fog didn't really clear and formed banks of clouds. Each one looking like it held land within, but as I approached it would dissolve to reveal another cloud bank in the distance, equally promising. But after half a dozen disappointments, I'd become jaded and considerably slower as fatigue took hold.

Then I cracked.

I was sure that I remembered seeing some batteries in the bag I'd dropped in the for'd hatch. If I could get these then I could get the GPS working and ease my mind. Out I jump; the water didn't register as being too cold at first. Being careful not to flip the kayak as I had stuff loose in the cockpit I didn't want floating off. Off with the hatch, now I could feel the cold water. Fantastic, found the batteries. F***, they were AAA; I needed AA for the GPS.

Reluctant to do a re-enter and roll and loose what's in the cockpit, I decided to do what all instructors abhor the 'cowboy rescue'. Basically launch yourself onto the kayak, swing a leg over sit in the cockpit and get your legs in, sounds easy. After half a dozen goes and various bit of kit floating off, losing a shoe, ripping my trousers and almost castrating myself after getting tangled in my tether, I was in.

The water had made me cold, I thought I'd warm up with a quick paddle; I took about eight strokes before I slumped over the deck exhausted.

Half an hour later, I saw the low lands of North West Tassie, the higher ground was hidden in the clouds. Three hours after that I was on a beach looking back across the water, thirty-five hours after leaving the Prom.

I thought a couple of nice looking birds on the beach would welcome me. But as I got out the kayak, doing an impression of a wobbly legged Bambi, one walked away totally unimpressed to check out some interesting crustacean, the other did a crap and flew away.

I'm not sure if swimming with your kayak after multiple failed attempts to get back in is what my work colleague meant by 'exciting'. It certainly didn't feel 'exciting' at the time, more like a worrying wake up call to the degenerative effects of cold water. Anyway it gave me something to write about.

I'd like to mention the assistance I was given in preparation and logistics of this and other trips. When we think of the benefits of kayak clubs we think of training, guided trips and boozy camps.

But what we have is a huge resource of people with an appreciation of all things kayaking. I unashamedly tap this resource when needed to solve problems to get things done. The list of those who help is long, but I'd like to single out Mike Snoad of the NSW Sea Kayak Club, Bill Robinson of the Victorian Sea Kayak Club and Bob Bush of the Maatsuyker Sea Kayak Club.

I would also like to thank Mirage Sea Kayaks and Lendal Paddles.



If you have a level 1, 2, 3 or instructor qualification with the VSKC, what do you need to do to remain current?

The answer is pretty simple, you should be regularly paddling on trips, both club and private, with peers at your grade or above so that your skills remain alive.

The VSKC relies on members 'self assessing' for trips.

This means that if you are in any doubt about your readiness to participate in a club trip, you should talk about your concerns with the trip leader well in advance to turning up on the beach. If you have doubts, you probably shouldn't be on the trip.

It is vital that you never over-estimate your level and falsely represent your skills as higher than they are.

For example-

'Simon Sinker' has been a long term club paddler, a veteran of a number of blue water trips in difficult conditions. Mr Sinker met a new lady friend around two years ago and his interests changed. He hasn't been paddling since. He really likes the idea of the Nadgee coast trip posted recently; he has a grade

3 certificate. The trip is posted as grade 3.

Should he go? Is he still a current grade 3?

The answer is obviously no. Your grading remains current as long as your skills remain current. Simon Sinker simply needs to put in a bit of time on the water to regain the skills he may be a little rusty on, not to mention his paddling fitness. Otherwise he is likely to be a liability to the group if conditions on the Nadgee trip get tough.

The same goes for all of us as well as Mr Sinker. Have a good understanding of the grading description of the trip you are intending to participate in. Are your skills current? Perhaps you may need to mentally down grade yourself until you get back to the level you were at when you were assessed for your grade. That is self assessment and it relies on one thing that all sea kayakers should have an abundance of – *good judgement*.

And don't forget the trip leader may wish to see your log book to verify your experience if they don't know you to well. So please have it in the car when you come along.

See you on the water.



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Pat McCormick won the AGM photo comp. with this entry. Babs, Bruny Island



Participants: Bill Zomber, (plastic thing) trip leader; Julian Smith, Nadgee; Jurgen Weller, Nadgee; George Appleby, Pittarak; Dave Stewart, Mirage Double (sharing); Ian Stevenson, Mirage Double (sharing) and Pete Dingle, Nadgee.

The seven of us left in six craft at 7.30 am from the boat ramp near the Lang Lang caravan park, still debating whether this or the beach at Jam Jerrup, 500 m south, was the best place to land at across mud flats in ten to twelve hours time.

The logistics for getting the anti-clockwise circumnavigation leave little room for error. You need to get several things right for this trip:

- allow for a full day (at least twelve hours) of daylight paddle time for the sixty-eight kilometre journey.
- critical that you work the tides correctly
- get through the northern drying areas at high tide; the vast mud flats are not a place to get stuck.

For anti-clockwise travel, given our starting point, reach Tortoise Head before the start of the flood tide; to avoid a head current in North Arm, and to gain a tail current in East Arm.

This means, picking a day when the high tide is early in the morning (HT 0745, 2.68 m). Bill had done his homework well; Saturday 6 December was the day.

The forecast was of concern, however. Friday forecast was for 'Winds W-SW 10-15 knots tending W 15-20 knots during morning, then increasing to 20-25 knots by early evening'. The early morning weather forecast on ABC radio 774 was for the SW change to come through 'about 4.00 pm'.

We decided it was worth going for; the westerly wind was currently 5-10 knots and if the predicted cold front came through, it would assist us with the tide and provide an extra boost.

We started off westerly. The 5-10 knot head wind for the first eighteen kilometres proved a challenge; Julian informed us we were only averaging about 5.5 kph, even though we were paddling quite hard. I was wondering about the wisdom of having the double up front setting the pace, but it forced us to keep going strongly.

We needed to keep going hard if we were to reach Scrub Point in time to turn south to gain the remainder of the ebb tide to Tortoise Head.

We had a twenty minute shore break on Barrallier Island, Ian and Dave explaining to this ignorant in-lander the geographical highlights of the area. A few of us were feeling pretty stuffed after our three and a half hour hard slog into the wind, and welcomed the break.

South we scooted down Middle Spit Channel non-stop to Tortoise Head with Julian and George getting considerable advantage from their sails, arriving there for lunch at 1.00 pm, just fifteen minutes after low tide (0.77 m). Perfect timing.

George went wandering to see what botanical and zoological highlights he could find, the rest of us just nattered over lunch.

We'd come some thirty-six kilometres from our start point, just over half way, Bill said. Myself, and a few others, were feeling pretty stuffed at this stage, but we knew the rest would be easier with wind-with-tide to assist us on our easterly leg. So far, our timing was spot-on.

After a forty minute lunch, we were off again, weaving our way to avoid the shallow water. To our surprise, the wind dropped; the sails stowed. We noticed the fine weather cumulus clouds were clearing to leave very large blue holes in the sky.

Warm hats were replaced with sun hats, paddle cags came off, people were sweating. Within two hours though, the cloud cover increased, some low level scud appeared, one shower cell just nudged us, followed not long after by a cluster of them to our west and north.

The wind soon picked up – sails up for those with them – though I noticed Bill had a sail but never used it. Was he being the true gentleman of a leader and offering not to use it out of respect for those of us as who did not have sails? I was impressed by his consideration.

An hour or so later, at 4.15 pm precisely, the SW front hit us (how does that weather bureau get it so right?), when we were just past McLeods on southern French Island.

Dispute still rages as to what the wind speed reached; suggestions were around 20 knots, but I reckon it was more 25-30 knots. In no time at all there were white caps everywhere. The group started to spread apart a bit; not a good time for a capsized in the rough conditions, but people

were looking out for each other, we were within whistle distance apart if anything did go wrong, and two people were riding shotgun at the rear as protection.

I know I was one of several who had arms that were feeling pretty tired by now and awkward on response. If someone got separated from their boat in this stuff, they would be hard to see.

With obligations and responsibility to the rest of the group in mind, the surfing was too good to miss out on, and we all had a great time. We were rocketing along at over twelve kilometres per hour, I think Julian said. The blow only seemed to last about thirty minutes as we pin-balled in behind Spit Point for a five minute shore break at 5.00 pm, before heading off, making use of the now decreased tailwind to get us to Stockyard Point and then back up to Lang Lang. We arrived back at our start point at 5.30 pm, one and a half hours before high tide, with a beautiful sandy beach landing – no mud flats to cross. You beauty – what perfect timing.

Well led Bill. Thanks for a fantastic trip.

Footnote on wildlife: This was not the trip to be exploring the wonder of French Island and its reputation as a migratory bird colony, but all birds that did cross our path were identified by George.

Bill pointed out a seal (presumably fur?) to us in North Arm. Julian indicated that the strong tidal flows make the water murky, particularly in the mangrove watershed area, so marine life is awkward to see.

It would be great if the wildlife experts on this trip, George, Dave and or Ian, could lead a nature guided trip here in the future.

George and Julian showing us how sailors do it



Pimp my boat

Introducing a segment featuring your kayak related brainwaves, modifications and tips. Be the envy of the VSKC and strut your innovation in the next edition.

To kick things off and setting the bar low –

Roof roller

Kayak too heavy? Got no muscles or friends to help lift that barge? This is for you.

A DIY removable kayak roller to suit any hard core expedition support unit, in this case, slightly pansy Corolla. Using basic hunter gatherer skills, (if it's free, it's for me) and a hammer to bash aluminium into shape, (don't do this on the car), this is a grade 0 project.

The construction needs no more explanation than a photo. Hooks into the crack between rear door and roof.

Materials required for rolling your own.

Three metal strips, aluminium is ideal.

Consult your local tip.

A boat trailer roller. A hefty \$12 new, but I'm sure one can be found unattended somewhere. A metal tent pole for the roller axle. A length cut from the Woollard's *Laurence of Arabia* tent would be perfect.

Rubber padding, visit the kid's trampoline, add a couple of bolts. Job done!



The back saving roller



Anglesea to Kennett River and return trip report

Participants: Tina Rowley, Russell Blamey, Phil Dyer, Bill Dwyer, David Lee, John Evertze, Richard Rawling, Rodger Bellchambers, George Appleby and Tony Chick (trip leader)

This trip was planned as an out and back overnight camping trip. An opportunity for a bit of ocean mid-distance paddling in a loaded boat. At approximate forty-five kilometres each way, this would fit the bill, no car shuffles and no hassles.

Starting at Point Roadknight boat ramp, a few were paddling loaded kayaks for the first time. A fifteen knot WNW wind was forecast later, so all were keen to get as far down the coast as possible before this hit.

Unfortunately the pod had not paddled five kilometres before the wind kicked in, cross-offshore, sometimes in our face, the swell was small, by sticking inshore close to the back of waves and close to cliffs paddling was not too tough.

Unfortunately as the wind increased a combination of being unfamiliar close to waves, drifting offshore with the wind and a tendency to pick the shortest straight line rather than the easiest route resulted in group spread and several using far more energy than required. This was quickly sorted out.

The pod continued past picturesque Airey's lighthouse. Like all lighthouses, its best view is from the water. Next up the Fairhaven stretch was a bit of a slog for five kilometres.

Unfortunately, Bill Dwyer, in a borrowed boat, having given it a good shot, had to be put on tow. John and Russell drew the short straw, doing the ten kilometres tow into Lorne at a cracking pace that left most of the pod kilometres in their wake.

The two pods regrouped at Lorne River where Bill withdrew, paddling up the river to stash his boat and hitch back to Anglesea for his car. We scooted off across Lout Bay in the increasing offshore wind to the pier and lunch in the shade.

The remaining paddle to Kennett got progressively calmer as the cliffs got higher. Late afternoon was spectacular, with tropic like colour and water clarity in close.

Near Wye River, half the pod followed George into a narrow gauntlet at the base of a cliff, it must have gone for near fifty meters, the seaward rock being higher than a paddler, all who enter disappear. We locals have paddled this section of coast many times and did not know this existed. Now discovered, this gauntlet is known as "George's Crack".

Wye River saw the pod split again, those needing beer and those who had it, Wye River pub is the closest you can get to a paddle through bottle shop, but it does have a surf landing. Beer stashed below decks the pods regrouped five kilometres later at Kennett River Caravan Park, just across the road from the beach.

Tents up and beers going down, the day was capped off by a pleasant evening

of polite conversation and debate. George entertained, demonstrating his "slow food" theory on his Trangia.

Sunday, on the water at 9.00 am. The wind was turning to WSW, a tail wind as forecast, perfect for an easy push home. The leg to Lorne went by easily, several of the pod again disappearing up "George's Crack" en route.

Following lunch break, this time inside Lorne Point out of the wind. Was the leg from Lorne to Airey's Light, directly down wind, today ideal to take the offshore and direct route. This crossing is fifteen kilometres, getting maybe three kilometres offshore mid way. With the sea about a metre or so with fifteen knots, ideal for some of the pods first experience running with ocean swell offshore.

A good time had by all, Phil Dyer and David Lee gunning down swells like they're skipping ocean racing yachts. Group spread offshore was held tight, experienced paddlers circulating through the pod. A bit of rebound and surfing past Airey's, then onto the home stretch.

On rounding the surf off Point Roadknight, Tina decided if Phil wanted her to sign off his log book he may as well get out and swim too, save getting the pen out twice. So forty-five kilometres and into the cruel sea he went.

All considered any trip without a car shuffle is a good trip; all came out of it smiling. Bill regrouped and recently cracked the forty plus kilometre barrier on an open water day trip lead by Tina.

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I began looking seriously at a trolley system for my Nadgee kayaks about seven years ago. It fitted with my philosophy for the continuing development of the Nadgee Expedition into an increasingly capable solo tourer while still performing well as a day boat. The development was slow but each trip without a trolley system made me more determined to have one!

On a solo paddle to Cape York in 2005, I had several portages of over half a kilometre, which just plain wore me out in the hot weather. It was a trudge up the beach with the water supplies, then the food, then the camping gear, then the kayak on the shoulder. And that was only the beginning! All the food then had to go back into the boat to keep it safe from dingoes and rats! The next morning I had to repeat the whole damn exercise for the launch!

Also on that trip, I had a very windy launch, one day which could've ended in disaster. I carried the kayak down to the beach in a strong wind and returned for a couple of loads of gear. As I walked back to the beach with a load of gear I watched the wind rolling my kayak over and over along the beach! No, there really did have to be a better way to do these things.

Tides in the Gulf Country, before ...



I looked at the various trolleys on the market. There were some problems with them though. All were made as multi-fit units. All were too heavy. Some were difficult to fit to laden kayaks. Some had unsuitable wheels and some fitted to the stern of the kayak, thereby placing too much weight on the bow when lifted.

Taking some ideas from Queensland paddler Kate Yeomans who used a trolley system similar to the paddle wheels on her Nadgee for her Brisbane to Cape York paddle a few years ago, I produced a few sets of paddle wheels for testing.

My "crash test dummy" (sorry Sandy!) was WA paddler Sandy Robson. I fitted a set to Sandy's kayak when she passed through Tathra a few years ago on her long trip north. Sandy carried a lot of gear and the paddle wheels were to prove invaluable for her, especially in Queensland waters where the tide goes out a long long way in places. (see Sandy's testimonial). In total, Sandy tested three different paddle wheels models for me.

The early paddle wheel units were aluminum, then came a combination aluminum and stainless steel unit and finally I settled on a design of super strong thin-walled stainless tubing. Things were getting expensive but the design was finalized now!

The heart of the paddle wheel system is the lightweight epoxy glass tubing bonded across and through the kayak behind the seat. A crank-shaped strut with a non-pneumatic polyurethane wheel attached, plugs a few centimeters into the tubing on each side. Lifting just the stern of the boat lets the wheels and

struts drop vertical where their arc of travel is limited by cords. Zip up a length of webbing tight on the aft deck and you're ready to go.

When stored on the kayak, the struts with cords attached are placed in a dry bag in any hatch. I move mine around depending on the gear in a particular hatch, including the bow hatch, as the stainless steel will not affect the compass. The wheels lock quickly together and strap down securely over the rear hatch. Big dumping waves will not move them. They can of course also be stored in the rear hatch.

The total weight of the wheel system is just over a kilogram. There is nothing to wear out, except perhaps the wheel bushes and they are easily replaceable. There are no dissimilar metals and nothing to rust either.

The paddle wheels' system was designed for the Nadgee series of kayaks, but it can be easily retro-fitted to just about any composite kayak.

Now, consider the possibilities of this system: you arrive at a concrete boat ramp to launch. Prepare your kayak back in the car park with as much gear as you like. Fit the paddle wheels and wheel your kayak effortlessly into the water at the ramp until it floats. Remove the paddle wheels, store the parts and paddle away! No scratched hull! Arriving back at the concrete boat ramp, fit the wheels while the kayak is floating, and walk it up out of the water.

On a solo tour, wheel your boat to the shops in coastal towns for re-supply.

Landing on a beach, wheel everything up to your campsite in one trip. No dragging the kayak, no worn keel lines. Too easy!

In September 2008, I completed a paddle from Karumba in the SE Gulf of Carpentaria to Darwin. It was a long trip and my paddle wheels got a real workout, but they worked incredibly well. I wheeled my kayak over kilometres of beach, over mud and yes, over reef too, with three weeks' food and forty litres of water aboard.

I was able to easily launch pre-dawn on reef shores by wheeling the kayak to the water over reef until it floated, store the paddle wheels aboard and paddle away. I could also land on windy reef shores by hopping out of the kayak onto the shallow reef, fitting the paddle wheels and wheeling the kayak up the reef to find a camp site. Ask yourself: how else would you land (fully loaded) on a shore like that without damaging your kayak?

No more long shoulder carries of my kayak for me.

And after! It's out there somewhere



I had always rather fancied having a go at kayaking. Like most, I had seen images in travel magazines of a soulful and reflective lone paddler gliding across a mirrored surface somewhere north of the Arctic Circle, at one with both the elements and himself.

So when a friend said he was selling his Apostle, it seemed that celestine forces had converged and that all preceding events in my life had simply occurred to bring me to this point.

One test of the craft and I was convinced. I borrowed another from Bill Robinson and dug out my old camping gear in readiness for "The Prom". Our happy team, we band of brothers, was drawn from the far flung corners of wildest Victoria. The Surf Coast crew; that trio toughened in the swell and seas of the wild waters beyond Port Philip Bay where lurk dragons. Some say they did fall off the edge of the world but managed to paddle back.

The Wooley Bugga; dedicated to his craft, had brought George's new boat but refused to give it to him as it was just above the promised weight. Being the perfectionist that he is, John chipped away at the problem, mostly using the rocks of Norman Island. A new shining and beautiful machine was later delivered at the AGM to a beamingly happy George

Wilson's Promontory in August can be a cold and bleak place, but I must say that I like this style of exploration.

During the day, we are bold and intrepid voyagers, venturing where no others dare and braving the wilds of the ocean. By night, we bravely suffer the hot running water of the shower block, sustained only by the meagre bottles of wine foraged from the trunks of our rustic four wheel drives. Ah! Communing with Nature and one's fellow man.

And so to sea we went. Off the beach and into the washing machine called rebound, around to Squeaky Beach and out to Norman Island where we beached (rocked) for lunch. And if we thought getting onto the rocks was fun, getting off required some timely assistance from John and Terry, sending us one by one out to the safety of deep water. Then they got out, Terry by lying on top of his boat to quickly escape the swell.

Paddling in an ocean swell at the base of the enormous, sheer face of rock which is the south end of the island is an impressive experience. As the more adventurous played perilously close to the rock, I practiced my slap strokes and yearned for a lower centre of gravity. A run downwind back to the beach for some fun in the surf and back to camp.

Rollicking yarns around the camp fire (Trangia burner), then a front came through which blew out the next day's paddling, so an early return.

It intrigues me that kayaking rests on the interface of worlds; at the same time being in and above the water, being away from yet connected to the land. Paddling on this edge means that at any moment you can step, or be pushed, from one realm into the other.

Certainly I was pushed, without ceremony or warning, from the realm of air into the world of water. Now, I've done a bit of sailing and spent some time on boats and most of it involves quite a bit of effort put into staying dry. So the philosophy of deliberately getting wet goes somewhat against a well established grain of some forty years.

But old dogs and new tricks might happen. I love the way kayakers embrace the element of water, like a halfway house between scuba diving and sailing. Be a part of the water, not removed from it.

And what about that solitary paddler on the fiord with playful whales and unicorns silhouetted against the skyline? Well I think a trip to the Prom is as good a place to be as any.

A stunned VSKC pod off Norman Island., after witnessing the CEO of Maelstrom Kayaks durability testing his product by crash landing into Caffyn Cave, moving Norman Island off it's foundations in the process. (The kayak survived)





Tina and glamorous assistants at Ingoldworthy Reef

It is a bit of a misnomer to call this highlight of the VSKC event calendar an annual general meeting. It is much more. I mean, get 100+ sea kayakers family and friends together and the inevitable networking, conversation about trips and boat set up and general celebration of the sport we all love is palpable.

Throw in some paddling opportunities, fascinating talks, information sessions, workshops, photo competition and commercial displays then you really do have all the ingredients for a cracker weekend.

This AGM represented the thirty year celebration of the VSKC's history and so it had special significance.

The 2008 AGM weekend was held again at Merricks Camp, with activities commencing on the Friday night. Many members and friends dashed out of the city and tried to avoid the crawl down the commuter clogged roads. Others arrived late at night, and yet more the following morning.

Those there on the Friday night were able to join in for a meal at the Flinders pub, and then catch a great talk by Dave Winkworth about his paddling exploits in Northern Australia. The talk covered two paddles which together took Dave and his paddling mate from Karumba to Darwin, covering a distance of approximately 2500 kilometres. A really top effort, considering the known risk factors in such a paddle.

The weather on Saturday was pretty ordinary, with quite strong S – SW winds and chilly conditions. Three paddles were offered. One group of mainly Grade 3s, led by Tina Rowley ventured to the Flinders Back Beach to do battle with the pretty sizeable sea that was running.

Another paddle for Grade 1s and 2s, led by Terry Barry, left from Flinders pier and headed out past West Head. The third group led by Peter Costello was for novices and saner paddlers in the quieter waters around Point Leo.

Well, well, the Grade 3 paddle was a wild ride with the reef on the back beach closing out by the time we got back in (having decided it was sufficiently unpleasant to seek coffees as an alternate option).

Yours truly was dumped out of my wooden boat, promptly lost the boat off the tether and duly found myself on the rear deck of Julian's boat hanging on as he surfed me back to my sodden craft. Great practice! John Evertze was trashed and got a mouthful of "juice". The rest returned to the beach and enough was enough.

The paddle off West Head found themselves in bigger seas around the point and I hear tell that a couple of people were tipped out, again some useful assisted rescue practice. At least that is Terry's story!

I gather the paddle off Point Leo was the most enjoyable of the lot, but in the end the chilly conditions also drove everyone back to camp early for the next round of

activity.

After a quick lunch, the inaugural Inuit technique demonstration was put on in the camp dam. Muddy, cold water but clean.

Four paddlers (Rawling, Costello, Murray and Della), went through some traditional Inuit activities including hand paddling and harpoon throwing. The competitive spirit emerged with Grant Della's rudder getting pulled off the back of his boat in an over zealous manoeuvre by Greg Murray! A dubiously qualified judging panel on the shore awarded points for style and performance with president Costello reigning supreme on the day. We will be back!

Next followed the inaugural rolling competition, held in the pool with guide ropes on the boats. This proved popular with nine paddlers entering to see who could do the most rolls in thirty seconds.

But before this started, past president Earl de Blonville, boasted that he could have a novice roller rolling inside ten minutes. Pat McCormack "volunteered" and Earl tried his best. In the end not quite making it but I reckon a lot of people learned a fair bit about what it takes to get rolling.

The winner of the competition in the end was Julian Smith with a total of fifty points awarded by the judges. Top effort and will be repeated next year.

Then we got into the AGM proper and as is often the case with AGMs, ran over time due to a late start given the activities above and some passionate conversation as several issues were talked through. What is it about AGMs that draws out passionate debate – always seems to happen!

Decisions from that meeting are reported in the meeting minutes.

A real highlight and a core purpose for this particular AGM was the fantastic achievement of the club's thirty-year history presented by Les Bognar, the outgoing president. Les put a huge effort into getting a club history together and presented the highlights.

It was also great to have quite a number of past presidents and other notable members in attendance. This included past presidents Earle de Blonville (founding president), Steve Weston, John Basemore, Ray Musgrave, Julian Smith, Peter Treby and Larry Gray (who in the end was an apology).

Also present were founding members Harry Simpson and Paul Snellgrove. I am sure that newer members were fascinated to hear about some of the key developments over the past thirty years, and how this has set the club up for a great next thirty years. A huge thanks to Les for pulling this together.

Then it was on to dinner, and the racket from networking and socialising was deafening and hard to stop when it came time for the after dinner presentation. This year we were privileged to have Dr Glen Singleman and his wife Heather Swann give an absolutely fascinating talk on what it takes to conquer fear.

In their case, they have made a name for themselves base jumping around the world. Glen was the instigator, but what was very powerful was Heather sharing her journey to be able to join Glen on this adventure and conquer her fears in so doing.

They now make a living out of motivational speaking on the back of their base jumping exploits. We were all just spell-bound with their story, and the parallels with expedition sea kayaking were very strong. Great stuff!

Roll around Sunday morning and the weather had improved with the wind dropping and the sun shining and it was time for yet more interesting activities. Several commercial operators had interesting displays including Rafta Kayaks, Flat Earth Sails, Nadgee Kayaks and Fitness Lifestyle. Mick McRobb from Flat Earth sails had donated a sail for the photo competition and the winner of the competition was Pat McCormack. Well done Patrick for a great photo down at Bruny Island in Tasmania.

Some great demonstrations were held. There was the Trangia cooking workshop organised by Terry Barry – with some great concoctions emerging and duly eaten! There was also the fiberglass repair workshop run by Bob Mitchell, which was also very useful and it was great to see such an expert at work.

Given conditions had improved, interest in a paddle was ascertained and about a dozen paddlers stumped up for a 'blowing out the cobwebs' paddle from Shoreham Beach to West Head and back. It was great to have Stuart Truman along from NSW. Because a few days Stewie set off on his solo, non stop crossing of Bass Strait – his trip report is elsewhere in this issue.

So all up, a great weekend and roll on next year. A decision was made to move the AGM next year to Anglesea at the Eumeralla scout camp, where a range of padding options will be on offer. So this will be another adventure and we shall see what emerges to top the 2008 celebration of sea kayaking in Victoria. Cheers!

AGM Kayak sandwich





AGM action



If it had not been for the NSWSKC Rock 'n' Roll last year, and the generosity of the event sponsors Roaring 40° S Wilderness Tours, who provided the major raffle prize of a three day trip for two to Bathurst Harbour in South West Tassie I would never have visited the area.

Day two we departed Forest Lagoon past the Celery Islands and up the brackish tan coloured waters of Bathurst Narrows under the shadow of Mt Rugby with its bush gullies, button grass ridges and rocky out crops.

Passing Joan Point and the dingy that has been provide for bushwalkers travelling the Port Davey Track to cross Farrell Point, we paddled to Balmoral beach and landed on the white pebbles that glistened like sparkling wine bubbles in the sun light.

Departing the beach we made our way through Bathurst Channel into force 3 to 4 winds before turning into Bramble Cove and our next campsite. After setting up camp and then being served a delightful lunch, we explored the cove which had been the site of a whaling station in the nineteenth century. Nathan and Dan guided us around the area, pointing out the areas of historical significance and

furnishing us with areas history. After entrees and dinner, provided by the guides, we watched the sun set behind the Breaksea Islands that protect Bathurst Channel from the swells rolling up from Antarctica into Port Davey.

Day three greeted us with force 1-2 conditions and a 0.5 to 1.0 metre swell; that is to say amazingly perfect for the location. The pod of five kayaks made its way to the Breaksea Islands, where we paddled through the gauntlet and then headed NW across Port Davey to Whalers Point. Virgin looking (slightly bushy and untouched) flora rimmed the shore line like a laurel wreath before the button grass covered hills rose behind like the head of a bald man.

Crossing Bond Bay, we encounter force 5 head winds that ceased when we arrived at Curtis Point where we stopped for a break; typical. Pushing on, we landed at Settlement Point at the head of the Davey River and set up camp for two days. Settlement Point had been the site of a nineteenth century ship building community that harvested Huon Pine for their operations and export.

Living in this isolated part of the world with its contrary weather and unforgiving

seas was certainly in the age when ships were wood and men were steel. To replenish our fresh water we paddled up Blackwater Creek until we got to a waterfall. Here to cool off in the 30° C day, we swam and then sat around in the fresh water creek above the water fall.

Day four we paddled up the Davey River trying to find any signs of Huon Pine regrowth, of which there was little. The banks of the river were lined with multiple varieties of flora and the waters were populated with black swans, ducks and sea eagles.

Entering Davey Gorge, we continued up to the second set of rapids. Here we played around in the Sea Bears as though they were a white water boat. Returning back down the gorge, we had lunch on a sand bar surrounded by variegated green vegetation and fresh water that rippled over dark tannin coloured pools. Back at Settlement Point we all sat on the beach eating Greek dolmadies, drinking red wine and watching the clouds float on by before the guides then provide another tasty meal made from fresh rations.

Day five was an early start since the forecast, that was only available by satellite phone, was for force 6 conditions increasing to force 8 in the evening. It is here where the knowledge and experience of the guides was put on display as they were well aware of the vagrancies of forecasts in such a location.

The operators of Roaring 40° S, Kim Brodlieb and Ian Balmer, have chosen their guides well; for example Nathan Wedding also runs sea kayaking trips in Norway and is starting in 2009 to run trips in Vietnam and Croatia and Turkey in 2010.

On this trip, Nathan was mentoring Dan, so between them they formulated a sound plan to get us back to Bramble Cove before the weather isolated us at Settlement Point. Heading up to Curtis Point, Dan made the decision for us to cross Payne Bay and head for Berry Head. Here the coastline consisted of small cliffs dotted with sea caves. We sheltered behind Mavourneen Rocks and stretched our legs before paddling to Kathleen Island, then past Boil Rock and into North Passage between Mt Milner and the Breaksea Islands.

In Bramble Cove, we explored the rocky coast line and even paddled into a sea cave that was incredibly deep to the point where by I could not see Greg's headlamp or kayak ahead of me as he and Helen kayaked deeper into the cave and around the corner.

After setting up camp at Bramble Cove, we went down to the beach and watched the wind rip up the waters of Bathurst Channel and then some went on a walk up Mt Milner. By evening the rain had set in and the guides cooked our gourmet meals, garnished with individually plucked parsley, under the tarp and even in the rain while



the rest of us sat under the shelter, eating snacks and drinking red wine.

In fact, Pam accidentally brought along a bottle of 2002 Moondah Brook shiraz which she graciously portioned out to those who brought along chateau cask. During this time of delightful indulgence, Greg's tent flooded and wet his bedding; unfortunately much to everyone's amusement.

Day six forecast was for NW swing to SW force 8 conditions. Fortunately for us the force 5-6 wind was on our backs as we paddled and surfed along Bathurst Channel. At Balmoral Beach, a squall came through and pelted us with hail before passing and leaving us to bask in warm sun light before the next squall pelted us again with hail.

Passing through Bathurst Narrows we just sat in our kayaks and let the breeze propel us along into Bathurst Harbour and then after a short punch into the wind we landed back at the standing camp at Forest Lagoon.

Day seven after breakfast, we took a short paddle across Forest Lagoon to Claytons Corner where we landed and ascended Mt Beattie to take in the panoramic views. From this vantage point we could see across Bathurst Harbour to the Ray Range and Spiro Range in the east.

To the north was the Rugby Range and to the north east the Western Arthur Range. The view to the west showed us where we had been kayaking over the last five days; along Bathurst Channel to Port Davey.

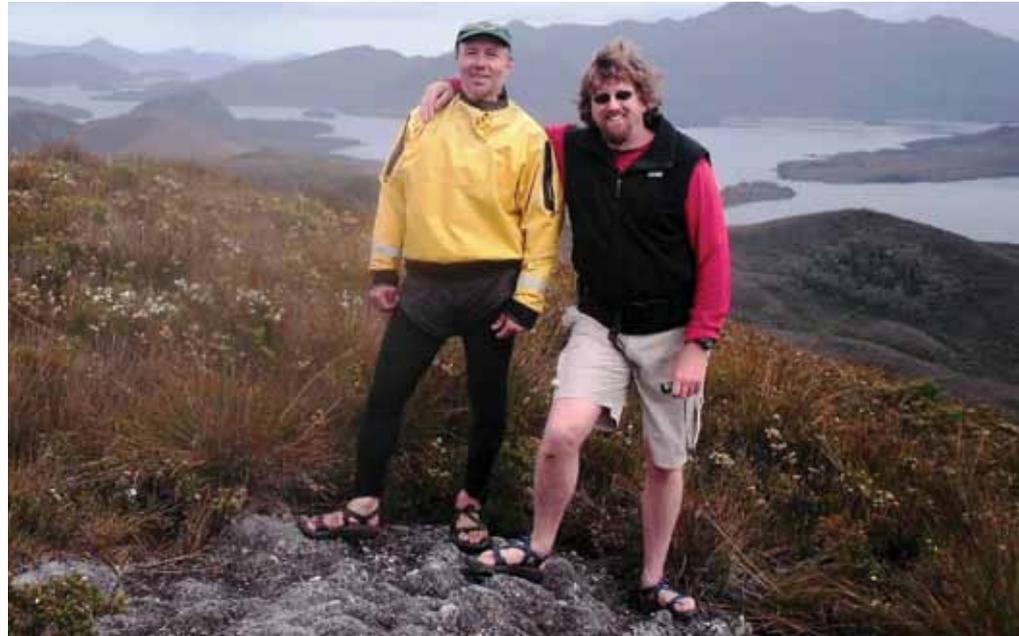
To the south through the Melaleuca valley laid the Maatsuyker Group of island. On return to camp, we loaded the kayaks and headed the five or so kilometres up the Melaleuca Inlet to the airstrip.

After repacking our duffle bags, we loaded the aircraft and headed east back to Hobart. After taking-off, Bathurst Harbour lay below, quiet and inviting. As we flew over this World Heritage Wilderness Area, the landscape with its ranges, valleys and rivers unfolded beneath us with no signs of roads or dwellings. After landing back

in Hobart, the guides drove us back to our hotel where after a shower and change, we went to the pub and reminisced about the past seven days and planned our future return.

Wash up: get some fellow sea kayakers together and go on a seven day tour. If you have a friend or partner who is not into the outdoors but would like to see this World Heritage Wilderness Area then a three day trip would be a most valued experience.

Winners are grinners! Phil and Greg



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On the weekend of the 17 – 18 January, a group of twelve senior paddlers, comprising of a mix of club instructors and those invited to prepare to become instructors, gathered at the Patterson River canoe club house. This is an impressive double storey building, with kayak storage, toilets and showers at ground level and an upstairs large open plan room, part kitchen, part gym and part meeting/social room.

This venue offered the additional option that those of us from out of town could camp upstairs on the partly carpeted floor. It is a great facility and many thanks to Patterson River Canoe Club for making it available to us at a very reasonable rate. It's good to see co-operation between clubs; we also share the Jubilee Park pool with this club for rolling nights at Frankston.

It's not often that a group of senior paddlers get together with a focus beyond just paddling. So in the first morning session; we took the opportunity to revue the standards for the level 1 and 2 grades.

Vigorous discussion took place on some points, resulting in some minor changes to level 1 and 2. Time did not allow us to get far into Level 3 but that will be addressed at later meetings. We also discussed club standard boat fit out, what constituted competency and maintaining currency of grade.

This last issue provided much debate over the two days: having achieved a level, how long should that grading stand? If you haven't paddled for a year are you still a grade 3 for instance? How many trips and

at what standard are required to keep your grading? Should it be on log book entries, by a signed statement on the membership renewal form or some other method?

All options were felt to be too labour-intensive for our membership officer and since a big part of our club ethos is self-evaluation, we decided to leave it as is, with no currency limit, but please give it some thought as it's something that will need on going revue.

Throughout the weekend, we had various sessions on: personal strengths and weaknesses, learning styles and teaching methods, practical paddle skills, communication/explanation and demonstration techniques and on water small group workshops. The candidates for instructor level were then invited to draw up a personal learning program, aimed at identifying their strengths and those areas on which they needed to work.

This is the final phase of establishing our in-house training system, whereby members can progress from Grade 0 to instructor; this will ensure renewal for club leadership roles and maintain our standards of paddling safety.

Including the new trainees, our group of instructors is not large and instruction may not be available on demand. All members of our club are expected to be self starters and the best way to acquire skills is in your boat out on the water.

Go on trips and ask the paddlers around you, how do I do this or why did you do that? Get known to the trip leaders,

they will be more comfortable taking you out on more advanced trips if you have paddled with them a few times. It's also a great way to develop a peer group to plan trips of your own.

Another instructor training weekend is being planned, but in the meantime training events will be appearing on the web site. The sessions will be run by the trainees under the supervision of an instructor, so please look out for these and get involved.

Bringing a group of senior paddlers together for a critical revue of our current practices and to intake such a group of accomplished paddlers to become instructors, is a very positive move for our club. We look forward to handing out their certificates at the next AGM.

Like all good club events, the weekend included a lot of good social interaction; a trip to the Indian restaurant at Patterson Lakes (highly recommended) and left us feeling that we had achieved a lot.

Thank you to all those who attended and gave up their time, some traveling long distances, with a special mention to Dave Winkworth who made the fourteen hour round trip from Tathra.

Safety — whistlin' up a STORM!

by David Winkworth

"OK guys, we're going for a day's paddle so we'll just check our safety gear. Let's see ... radio, EPIRB, spare paddles, towline, flares, yep that's everything."

Hang on a minute, what about the whistles?

Whistles are a sometimes overlooked safety item for sea kayakers but in terms of *avoiding* a full-on incident, they are indispensable.

But not just any whistle is good enough. The ones supplied with some pfd's are junk. Sea paddlers need a loud one!

Sea kayakers should never underestimate the power of the open sea environment to stuff up their plans for a day's paddle, and part of that environment is wind, wind, wind.

Wind will blow away your voice or your kayak (if you fall out) and possibly your call for help or attention. A truly loud whistle has much, much greater penetration of the wind than your voice. Don't rely on the "fingers in the mouth" whistle either, you could be in the water or hanging onto a deck line with both hands!

So, what sort of whistle? The very best ones for the sea will obviously be made of plastic — no corrosion and should not rely on a captive pea for noise as these may not work when wet. The two best and loudest whistles for sea kayakers that I have seen and used are (in order) the STORM and the FOX 40. They are seriously loud and belong with every sea kayaker.

OK. Where do you put them? The most logical place is on the paddler's person and the garment that is always worn and mostly worn on the outside is the pfd. Mine hangs by a loop of shock cord on my pfd shoulder strap — always accessible quickly and the cord is just long enough to stick the whistle in my mouth. Nothing

gets in the way!

In the NSW SKC fifteen years ago, I bought a box of STORM whistles with club funds and the club sold them. I still see them hanging off the pfd's of those who bought them way back then.

A cheap attention-getter. You bet!



Boats: Eco and Necky plastic double kayaks (rental).

Weather: calm and up to 20+ knots northerlies, seas to 1 m.

New Zealand can rightly lay claim to being a sea kayaking mecca. It has the marine scenery, it has the challenge, it has large numbers of kayak rental outlets and it has more roof top kayak carriers per head of population than most places!

There are many jewels in the sea kayaking crown of NZ, but genuinely notable are the Abel Tasman National Park, Marlborough Sounds, Fiord Land and (of course) the big daddy – circumnavigation of either the North and/or South Island.

Our desire for time to check out museums and non-marine attractions rendered Fiord Land off the agenda this trip. My desire to be able to continue kayaking with Helen's blessing rendered a circumnavigation well and truly off the agenda, permanently!

That left the other two jewels, and on our recent New Year holiday we gave both a good bash, albeit sampling what is on offer and plotting a more serious return expedition (sorry darling!)

The Abel Tasman National Park is in the NW corner of the South Island, located between Tasman and Golden Bays. The northern tip of Golden Bay is the Farewell Spit, featured recently in Justine Curvengun's *This Is The Sea 4* DVD. Farewell Spit is the northern most part of the South Island and was an intriguing place to visit.

The Abel Tasman National Park has a marine coastline of approximately sixty kilometres, all readily paddleable. It is a sublime place with a deep turquoise sea, limestone cliffs and magical forest right down to the waters edge. You can easily straight-line across bays, but more delightful by far is to follow the intricately convoluted coast into the stunning beaches and bays.

There are numerous places to camp, and the whole area is a national park of world significance. There is one of the best coastal walking trails in the world (seriously), and another nearby in the Kahurangi National Park (The Heapy Track). But it is the kayaking we came for, and a magical kayaking experience was indeed had.

We camped at Moteuka because nearer the park area was too crowded (this worked

well). But the main kayaking centre and gateway to the Abel Tasman National Park is at Marahau (approximately eighteen kilometres north). We checked out numerous rental outlets at Marahau, all of whom said they were booked out.

I got despondent and thought it was not going to happen. We also visited a small local operator, Kahu Kayaks. They were closed on New Years Day, but when I called them that night I got a quintessentially kiwi greeting "Yeah, we were closed today, how lazy is that eh". But what a gem Kahu turned out to be. They had a boat (double), "sweet as" and we just had to be there at 8.30 the following morning.

The boat turned out to be an Eco Niizh, which is barge-like compared to my Nadgee, but it moved along pretty well, is an ideal hire boat as it is virtually unsinkable and, well, it is plastic (boy they are heavy!). Our host from Kahu was Steve, one of the founders.

They have been going for three seasons after having worked at the bigger rental outlets and stopping having fun. I had taken along some kayaking gear (mainly clothing and sun protection, etc), but Kahu had all the main gear.

First up we got the boats loaded on land at the depot and then the fun briefing. As a VSKC sea proficient paddler, I know the drill, but fair is fair and I went through the drill with all the newbies. Steve had some great lines, such as an impromptu rendition of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* doing the arm gestures that foster shoulder rotation for correct paddling (great visualization).

I was less taken with the analogy of the hand bilge pump to a microphone to talk to seals with! Anyway, Steve went through all of the usual pre-trip briefing stuff, including a good demo of how to both get back into the big doubles. It was interesting to note that all NZ hire sea kayaks carry flares.

Then we helped throw the boats on a trailer that was pulled by a tractor, because the tidal range is large and at low tide when we left there is a lot of sand to get over. Once on the water we were away, and left Steve looking after the others in the group. Some were novices on a day paddle. Others were paddling to a location to camp and then a "water taxi" would bring their boat back

and they were going to complete the walking section. This is a popular option, and is one reason why Abel Tasman National Park is such a viable location for sea kayak operators. They have the tourist magnet, they have lots of boat traffic to and from the park and they have the climate.

On our trip started out benign, but by the afternoon it had risen to a stiff approximately twenty knot northerly. This wind is pretty ordinary in this area because it blows parallel to the coast line and makes it gnarly across larger bay openings.

This was consistent with the forecast we had heard, and I was a little surprised that beginners were out in this unescorted (but in reality Kahu had their own water taxi scouting kayak locations all day).

We paddled for five kilometres to Adele Island (see map), and then followed the sublime coast – Appletree Bay, Stillwell Bay, Observation Beach, The Mad Mile, Te Pukatea Bay, Anchorage and Torrent Bays and onto Pinnacle then Tonga Islands.

The beaches were stunning, with golden sand and were very inviting for pulling in (especially Te Pukatea Bay), very similar to Wilsons Prom in many ways but the sand here is quite golden. We gunned the so called "Mad Mile", which is full of reefs and quite exposed (on the way back it got pretty gnarly and the big double was surfing along with aplomb).

At Pinnacle Island we met the local "sea ambies" (we have a gorgeous golden retriever, Amber and goldens and seals are very alike!). We got a great display with one sitting up only metres from the boat. We then paddled onto Bark Bay just south of Tonga Island (in the marine reserve) and stopped for lunch. As forecast, the wind got up after lunch and we shot back at a cracking pace.

We scooted in behind headlands to get respite from the wind and enjoy the scenery and take photos. I was shocked to bump into the male and female duo from our group still heading to Bark Bay to camp and they were only just crossing Anchorage Bay pushing into a strong twenty knot northerly, the paddler at the front would have been hating every minute of that!

All up, we covered approximately twenty-five kilometres. With stops, etc, we were on the water for six hours. Steve met us when we got back to Marahau and the whole pick up back to the depot was quick and easy. We had a really great day, memorable, fun, a bit of challenge and with service that brings a smile.

Kahu Kayaks is a good option for hiring stuff and does not "suffer" the rigmarole of the bigger companies. Bear in mind that it is a condition of the NZ sea kayak operators code of practice that they will not rent to solo paddlers. There must be at least two paddlers in a party, so that means two single kayaks or one double. There are guided trips available, but the "freedom rentals" are easily arranged.



Most boats are plastic, but I did see 'glass ones which tend to be rented only for multi day trips. The cost of our day out was NZ\$110 (ie two persons taking a freedom rental @ NZ\$55 each).

The second jewel in the crown was paddling Queen Charlotte Sound out of Picton. Part of the Marlborough Sound area, this is in the top NE corner of the South Island. Picton is where the ferry comes in from Wellington. It is a very picturesque spot indeed. The Sound is really impressive, yet without the raw power of Milford Sound.

Again, a major attraction here is the Queen Charlotte walking track (seventy-one kilometres), a world class and major draw card. Sea kayaking on the inner Sound is more sheltered than at the Abel Tasman National Park, but when the wind funnels down a sound and out into a main channel, it can be fierce and we encountered a solid one metre chop on the return water taxi ride (more later).

We got into Picton late and had to organize a kayak trip the same day, otherwise the likely early start meant we would have missed out. This time we opted for a fully organized trip (albeit self-catered), and we wanted to mix kayaking with walking a section of the Queen Charlotte track (which is easy to do and is known as 'multi-tasking'; every permutation of portage for luggage, walking, mountain biking and/or kayaking the track route can be catered for).

We booked with the Adventure Company at Picton, and arranged to meet on the main wharf at 7.30 the following day. Again, a big plastic double was the go (a Necky Amaruk), but we had to get to it first.

We grabbed a water taxi ride of approximately five kilometres across to Torea Bay, and then were met and taken by mini bus up over a spur to an area known as Portage (which is resort area for walkers and others, there are several of these along the track). We met up with "JD" our guide who was still a bit sleepy I reckon, because after the mandatory safety briefing (this time by DVD), I had to point out that the front hatch neoprene inner cover was not secured (we would have gone without that if we were newbies relying on our host).

It was also interesting to note that we were not asked for emergency contact details on the intentions form (hmm). Anyway, we

got away fine and JD held onto our walking clobber in the van (which we picked up when he met us after the kayak trip). One point worth noting is the crappy rudder set up in the big Necky, with pedals that are next to impossible to get a size 10.5 foot onto in sandals. In the end, I went bare foot but numb ankle syndrome soon set in.

Our trip this time was down Kenepuru Sound. We had three and a half hours to get to Broughton Bay, but it was only approximately ten kilometres as the crow flies, so we explored the other side of the Sound a fair bit. The water was very calm and we flew along.

The scenery was very impressive, but not as raw as Abel Tasman. The tree line comes right down to the waterline, and the bays, beaches and rock gardens are sublime. The tide was rising (it lifts approximately three to four metres), and once we got further down the Sound, the water became cleaner as the rising tide pushed up.

I sampled some mussels raw off the rocks, very tasty, much to Helen's horror! We understood that JD wanted to meet us at Broughton Bay at 12.00 at the "big white flat building". Only problem was that said building was at Te Mahia Bay, one bay short of where JD intended us to be.

Ironically, we had paddled down to Broughton Bay to kill time (approximately one kilometre) and then returned to the building location. This is something they have to get better organized on because whilst we had maps, the coastline is tricky to read and novices clearly find it so (there have been times JD has had to go out in a speed boat to find wayward paddlers!).

Anyway we finally found each other, which was important because he had our walking gear and lunch, and had to transfer us up a steep spur by road to start walking the track. We had to complete the eleven and a half kilometre section of the walking track in under three hours, in order to make our water taxi connection at Anakiwa.

This was done with twenty minutes to spare, but we had to keep moving. The track passes through forest, fern glades and open areas in this section. It was quite muddy in parts, but the marine scenery was never far away and we saw many kayakers on the water (as we had been doing in the first half of the day). We also encountered many mountain bikers as the track is dual purpose! The water taxi trip back was lumpy because a stiff chop had set in. It took forty minutes to get back to Picton.

We were not met at the wharf, which is something the Adventure Company guys could have done to wish us bon voyage and check all was OK. All up we paddled approximately twenty kilometres and walked eleven and a half kilometres for the day.

Our investment for this trip was NZ\$105 each (bearing in mind the extra transport for this trip). Their freedom rental rates are NZ\$50/day/person for single day hires, but lower for multi day hires.

So we have sampled two jewels of the Kiwi sea kayaking crown, both perfect bookends, and a great adventure for couples. After that we scooted to the East Coast to drink wine and see whales, and did both!

Sea kayaking in New Zealand in the areas we went to is "choice eh" as the Kiwis say. Gear hire is "sweet as", except solo paddling. Most boats we saw were plastic, with very few if any 'glass rental boats (although we did spy some big Sea Bear glass doubles). Any serious expedition requiring glass boats would require some forward logistics if renting.

The rental outlets are well organized and professional and I am sure would be pleased to assemble a trip for whatever you wanted. This would be a good option for an organized VSKC trip to NZ (count me in for starters, e.g. Stewart Island or Milford Sound).

One way or another we will get back to these areas for more serious sea kayak expeditions, but I suspect Helen will more attracted to shore based options in this instance!



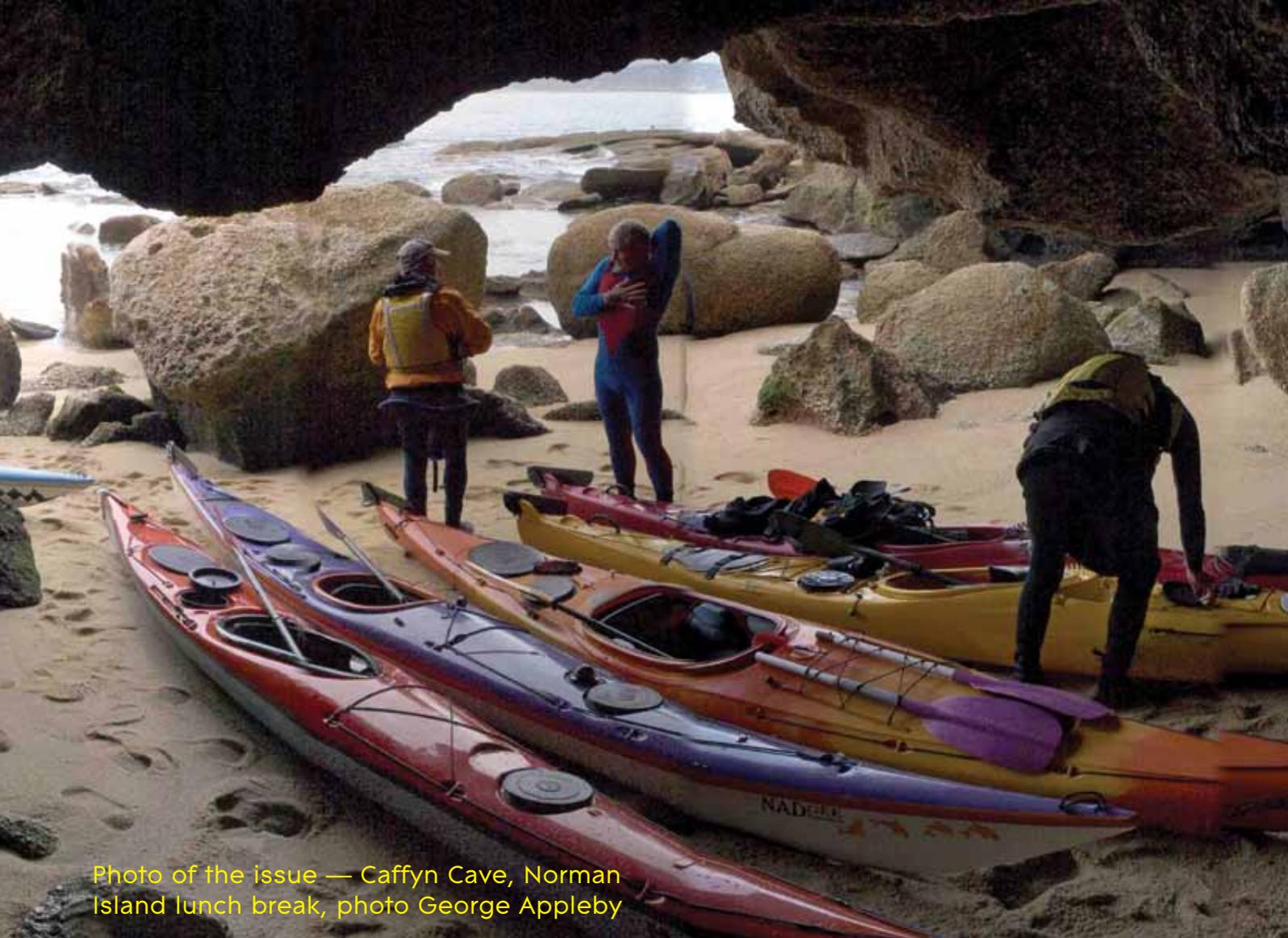


Photo of the issue — Caffyn Cave, Normans Island lunch break, photo George Appleby

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