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SeaTrack

Summer 2012



Issue 75



VICTORIAN SEA KAYAK CLUB

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EDITORIAL



The November 2012 Paddle Fest annual gathering was a terrific weekend for the many club members who attended. The venue was great, the weather favourable and the program fun and interesting. This issue of Sea Trek includes a range of insider and outsider reflections on that weekend that I'm sure you will enjoy.

This edition also features a remarkable expedition trilogy of Scotland by David Golightly, Heather Torbet and Stuart Cunningham. David and Heather enjoyed a wonderful six month trip back to their homeland during the middle of 2012 and David's three articles (together with a fantastic Paddle Fest presentation on their Croatian segment) provide a rich and most interesting insight into what sounds like some wonderful sea kayaking destinations.

It has been fantastic having articles from three new contributors to Sea Trek for the first time not to mention regular contributors. I hope this will encourage others to submit an article or two for subsequent issues. The deadline for articles for the next issue, by the way, is March the 15th, so let me encourage you to get cracking. Best wishes for the New Year.
Bob Fergie (Sea Trek editor)

Happy New Year



The 2012 committee met for the first time on December 3rd. Much of our time was spent looking at the year ahead and the many tasks we have set ourselves. We have been ambitious! We have since followed this up with another meeting on January 21st.

Planning is well advanced for the visit of Nigel Foster and Kristen Nelson. We hope this visit will prove as valuable as all our other overseas visitors. If you missed out on a group workshop with Nigel you can always book a private session. I also hope as many of you as possible will take advantage of Nigel's presentation on 'Paddling With Bears' at Mordialloc. Please get behind this event by coming along.

The committee spent some time considering all the survey results following the AGM and have elected to run the next AGM at the Gippsland Lakes. The weekend will have a healthy mix of skill-based workshops, paddles and socialising -- not a full on Forum as was earlier flagged.

Places are filling for the Wilderness First Aid course in April, but there are still vacancies. Please email terry@shadexbinds.com.au to register.

We hope to have guidelines in place for life memberships in the near future and are well underway with organising an appropriate ceremony to award our surviving founding members. You will be notified of this as details are finalised. We also intend to make minor changes to the 'Model Rules' under which the club operates in order to facilitate smoother running of official club business. A 'Special General Meeting' will be convened for this purpose.

Both Robin Boundy and Neil Brenton have been busily finalising a trip and training calendar of events for the rest of the year. These now appear on the trips calendar and I urge you to look carefully and plan your paddling year ahead. Naturally there will also be plenty of other trips posted so do keep an eye on the trips calendar (see page 27)

As I flagged at the AGM we are trying to organise a get together with all the other Sea Kayak clubs in Australasia and are in the process of setting a date and contacting clubs. This is an exciting initiative that we hope will enable positive partnerships to be developed.

Vojin has also been very busy building a new look VSKC website. We envisaged this coming online later in the year. It is an exciting step forward in taking control of our main form of communications.

All of this along with planning the AGM weekend will keep us very busy throughout the year. In the meantime I hope you are taking full advantage of the warm water at present. See you on the water

Terry Barry
VSKC President

NIGEL FOSTER AND KRISTIN NELSON

by Raia Wall

In February 2013 The Victorian Sea Kayak Club will be privileged to have the exceptional sea kayaker and coach, Nigel Foster visiting us and conducting coaching sessions for club members. Nigel is regarded by his peers as



"Mr Elegance" -- one of the finest and skilled paddlers in the world.

We have organized half day classes covering directional control, directional control in wind, forward stroke, surf and one that he calls Discovery Learning.

Cost per group session is \$65.00 per half day and classes will be limited to a maximum of 6. There are also limited opportunities for paddlers to book one-on-one sessions with Nigel and Kristen during week days. Cost per hour is \$75.00 for one-on-one sessions or \$50.00 for two people. If you are interested please contact me at raia.wall@hp.com.

We have also organised an entertaining evening on Friday 8th February at the Mordialloc Sailing Club where Nigel and Kristen will present "Stepping Stones" Baffin Island, Ungava and Labrador (Kayaking with Ice Bears).

Charges are \$20.00 single, \$35.00 family (non VSKC members \$30 each) payable at the door. VSKC member please bring a plate of food to share (drinks from the bar). 7pm for an 8pm start.

Please book for this event via email raia.wall@hp.com

Islands of Mull and Skye, Scotland

It had always been a long term post-retirement goal, and it was the dream and intention of old paddling buddies David Golightly and Brisbane based Stuart Cunningham to return to their roots and once again paddle on Scotland's loch-indented and island-strewn west coast, a paddling destination which matches its hype as well as its reputation for fickle weather.

A gap of some forty odd years had passed since these two old Venture Scout Leaders had first planned and executed a two week long sea kayak expedition in Scotland, in fact well before the days of fibreglass sea kayaks, thermal gear, dry suits and indeed experienced advice. In their favour however was the old Scots Law principle of 'no-trespass', in other words provided you obeyed fundamental rules such as shutting gates and keeping away from livestock, you could camp virtually anywhere and with 7,000 thousand kilometres of coastline there was plenty of choice on offer.

The basic tenet of freedom to roam has in fact been strengthened in more recent legislation thereby removing any doubt or ambiguity about this important right of access for paddlers and walkers alike. The initial stretch retirement target of 2011 for this trip came and went, as did intentions to retire. However in June this year the pair finally met in their home county of East Lothian about 25 km east of Edinburgh to finalise plans and to test paddle the two recently purchased Northshore aptly named 'Atlantic' sea kayaks. They are entry level expedition boats well priced compared with the Australian market.

The 5.20 metre long plastic craft came equipped with the usual circular forward and day hatch covers, as well as a large oval hatch in the stern. Commensurate with custom



and practice in the UK, neither boat was equipped with a rudder, opting instead for fitted skegs.

The chosen location for the maiden test run was Yellowcraig Beach out into the Firth of Forth and round the Island of Fidra. In a blaze of brilliance David decided to adopt this island name for his kayak.

Naming your sea kayak in Scotland was a tradition in the sixties so why not continue it, after all this was allegedly a return to the good old days! Not to be outdone Stuart promptly named his kayak 'Gull Cry', reckoning it was a multi-media approach with its hint of sight and sound!

The maiden voyage was a great success with Stuart pulling off a well executed heel-hook style rescue, extricating David from the Firth of Forth waters in an exercise to prove the pair could still flex their aging frames enough to get themselves back into a kayak. Boat modifications then took over, with the all-important fitout of cockpits taking priority in an effort to match the factory boats with the odd shaped derriere's about to paddle in them!

Weight restrictions while travelling by air from Australia forced some innovation in regard to what gear could be carried but fortunately with adventurous and active friends

and family members still living in Scotland, access to good quality tents and other camping gear was readily available. This kit supplemented Stuart's longer-term plan of potentially returning each year for a paddle or a walk, so his purchased kit included a Trangia, a flysheet, and other sundry gear.

Essential safety gear such as VHF Radio and flares were borrowed from one of the old members of the 1970 Venture Scout Unit now running outdoor pursuits for Edinburgh University

Stuart wisely took from Australia his Mk 1 self-designed, self-built sea kayak trolley, a move much appreciated later by David and Heather on the paddle trips they undertook. While still in Brisbane Stuart also manufactured a battery operated bilge pump, which could be moved from kayak to kayak, it also went to Scotland.

Both paddlers were somewhat concerned about the hypothermia risk with summer seawater temperatures expected to range between 13 C and 15 C. Each paddler chose a different solution for their immersion survival kit. Stuart opted for a farmer John style wetsuit while David decided on a Chillcheater Drysuit which he then planned to take back to Australia with him. As

it turned out, cold water immersion became less of a problem than the lads thought, albeit they managed to avoid any issues despite what turned out to be a poor weather pattern for the entire northern summer. Stuart had carried out all the pre-planning and rather than return to one of the old haunts, a paddle around the coast of the Island of Mull was selected. External constraints had reduced the number of expedition days down to seven, which of course truncated any opportunity of flexibility to sit out bad weather. And bad weather was exactly what awaited the pair as they finally arrived at the launch site at Loch Buie on Mull.

The journey from the south of Scotland to Mull is an adventure in itself with two separate ferry trips and a road journey through the iconic and mountainous Glen Coe included in the half day trip.

Timing as they say – is everything! The two paddlers turned up on Mull just as the BBC Met Service were forecasting all sorts of dire things including two Atlantic low pressure systems making their way east towards the relatively exposed Scottish west coast. The selected campsite of course faced southwest thereby giving Stuart and David a good sense of the rough seas and strong winds lurking around the corner. Launching was not an option, especially with a degree of nervousness associated with the chilly waters and unfamiliar boats.

Having been used to balmy Whitsunday Islands and Moreton Bay paddling trips since returned to sea kayaking some eight years previously, the duo were probably more wary than warranted, but a conservative approach was called for on this occasion. So walking became the pastime for a couple of days while they sat out the inclement weather. Unfortunately the notorious Scottish ‘midge’ also came out to play in what was for this flying biting pest ideal conditions – rule one, wear a head net!

Luckily the pair were able to move by car and the advantage of choos-



ing an island location proved itself by identifying an alternative launch site providing relative shelter and the opportunity to get all the way around at least one of the outlying islands.

So on the third day Stuart and David set off for the Sound of Ulva at the junction of Loch Tuath and Loch na Keal where looking south the large bulk of the island of Ulva provided sheltered access. For those interested in Australia’s history and its Scottish roots, this is the island on which Governor Lachlan Macquarie started and ended his days; in fact a visit was paid to the Macquarie Tomb (a joint project of the NSW Government and the National Trust for Scotland).

Finally the opportunity to get on the water arrived and the pair lost no time in doing so under the curious gaze of a boatload of ‘Twitchers’ or bird enthusiasts heading for the Treshnish Isles out to the west of Mull. The paddle plan involved heading east through the narrow confines of The Sound of Ulva and then turning west for a distance, or if feasible to continue around the entire island group of Ulva and Gometra.

Fortune favoured the paddlers and the break in the weather allowed David and Stuart to finally achieve the long held ambition to again paddle among the seals, skerries and ‘tangle’ (seaweed) of Scotland’s western isles.

It was a wonderful experience as they wandered in and out through rock gardens as well as the odd sea cave. Excitement mounted as they passed by the nearby island of Little Colonsay where off to the south lay the famed rocky stump of Staffa. Its historic cultural connection with the composer Mendelssohn. His Hebridean Overture was reputedly inspired by a visit to the huge Fingal’s Cave on the south side of the island.

Staffa was indeed one of the targets the pair had built into the trip planning. As it transpired however, a larger craft loaded with other visitors transported them to Staffa a few days later when they enjoyed a walk into Fingal’s Cave and along the high cliffs admiring the wonderfully coloured Puffins. They were totally unconcerned about human presence would land at one’s feet and sit contentedly while eyeing off a natural predator, the common seagull.



The many rocky skerries and the indented coast of the south coast of Mull continued to grab Stuart and David’s interest. As a lunch

break loomed they identified one of the few local natural sandy beaches in the distance. Paddling ashore to land, lunch was enjoyed while admiring what was now a 270 degree view of the outlying west coast islands. They stretched from the iconic Iona in the south (with its links to Saint Columba and the beginnings of Christianity in Scotland) clockwise around to Fladda in the Treshnish Isles in the northwest. The pair stayed awhile and contemplated their next move. Should they return the way they had come or should they push on into the west in an attempt to get around the island of Gometra back into Lock Tuath?

Unfortunately the timing of the paddler's arrival adjacent to the natural gap between the islands of Ulva and Gometra precluded an attempt to slip through the narrow rocky dividing cleft which reputedly is only achievable by sea kayaks at high tide. Later the pair had a closer look through the narrow slot when viewing from north to south and they agreed that it certainly looked feasible, an adventure for another day perhaps?

With the wonderful benefit of a sunset around 10 pm and armed with a renewed confidence now that they had finally managed to get onto the waters of the west coast, they opted to go for the latter option knowing that as they rounded the exposed western extremity of Gometra, they were likely to meet more challenging conditions.

As it transpired, the weather and sea state were relatively benign. This allowed the lads to work their way around the west coast of the island and back into Loch Tuath without any problem at all, just as the evening sun dipped lower and lower over their shoulders and out beyond the Outer Hebrides, just visible on the far horizon across the notorious west coast waterway called 'The Minch'.

As Stuart and David continued on their way back to the launch site at the eastern end of the loch, they were overtaken by the same

tourist boat which had taken the bird watchers out earlier that day. Cameras again came out as the twitchers snapped off some pictures of the paddlers as they finally arrived at Oskamull. It was a glorious evening as the paddlers landed and stretched their stiff old muscles before loading the car and making their way back to the campsite at Loch Buie.

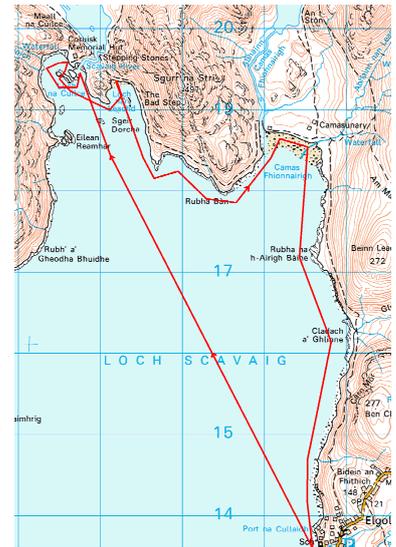
It had been a very satisfying 40 km day to close off their first day on the west coast for forty-one years!

The next day the fickle Scottish coastal weather again prevented doing anything meaningful and that night David and Stuart finally lost patience with Mull and decided to head for the Isle of Skye and in particular to attempt one of the most sought after paddles in Scotland – into the mouth of the Black Cuillin, the most sought after summer and winter climbing ridge in the British Isles.

As the pair crossed from the mainland town of Kyle of Lochalsh onto the Isle of Skye, they stared at the mountains ahead to try and gauge the likely weather pattern, to their dismay the mountain peaks were covered in cloud, this did not cheer the pair up but onwards they continued down to the South of Skye and the wee village of Elgol the planned launch site on Loch Scavaig with the view to end all views looking north to the Black Cuillin of Skye.

Miraculously just as Stuart and David motored down the side of Loch Slapin the cloud lifted and the day took on a brighter note, at long last a positive tone buoyed the conversation. Sure enough, on arrival early in the morning at Elgol the pair lost no time in taking in the view north to the Cuillin Ridge and the dark recesses of Loch Coruisk - they were finally going to get on the water for a planned overnight stay at a remote site!

David decided to have a go at emulating Jeff Jennings from Tasmania, by capturing some video footage on his newly acquired GoPro Hero



waterproof camera, hoping to get good footage of the approach to the Cuillin he experimented and fiddled with the camera and its kayak mount to ensure some measure of success.

It was a perfect day, the sun shone as the paddling friends made their way north out of the shelter of the little stone breakwater on the two hour trip which was ahead. Plenty of banter and recalling of events and incidents from past west coast paddles filled the time, Eventually they rounded the group of skerries and the resident inquisitive seal colony, to arrive at the small jetty at the foot of the tumbling burn which drained Loch Coruisk into the sea loch. It was low tide and landing anywhere on the rocky shore was fraught with danger from trips and falls on the slippery seaweed, generally a feature of Scottish sea lochs.

There was no recognised campsite on the rather unfriendly shore. Nevertheless they landed and looked around for a favourable site. Giving up after a lengthy search, and once again in the kayaks, they turned bows eastwards past the mouth of the burn and around the corner where they discovered a stony beach that had some camping potential albeit on a rocky base. Yes it was a poor substitute for the usual machair or grassy wildflower back-of-beach groundcover which is common-place on the Scottish west coast.

Prior to landing, however, David

and Stuart gazed at a well known Skye climbing boulder called ‘The Bad Step’. It is a natural obstacle for walkers and climbers seeking to access the Cuillin Ridge from a walk along the shoreline from Cumasunary and Elgol. Just then they observed a lone climber attack the rock from north to south. David remarked that he seemed to be rather higher up the rock face than the traditional route lower down which followed an inclined crack, albeit coming with a fair degree of exposure above the foreshore and the uninviting cold waters of the loch.

To the paddlers horror as they looked on the scene from some 100 m away, the climber slipped and fell, disappearing behind the boulders of the local gabbro, a very rough surfaced rock. Stuart and David paddled over quickly to the spot, convinced that they had just witnessed a climbing fatality or at least severe injury. To their surprise however, the young lad emerged some minutes later dazed and blooded but apparently uninjured.

The paddlers stayed with the climber for some time however, fearing a concussion or delayed reaction to the fall. Eventually the lad staggered to his feet and continued on his way along the foreshore path heading south.

Turning again for the selected camping spot the paddlers landed



and quickly set up camp on what they thought was a safe spot well above the high tide level! It later transpired of course that it was a narrowly judged location and the rising tide coming across what was a peninsula rose to within a few millimetres of the groundsheet on one of the tents.

Stuart and David settled down to what was their first night in over forty years camping from kayaks in Scotland. The weather continued to be fair allowing full enjoyment of the scene with a lovely dinner washed down with a suitable rouge vino for the occasion. After dinner David and Stuart headed on foot deeper into the island and its surrounding arc of impressive mountain ridge. Eventually just as the sun began to set (it was after 10 pm by this time), they enjoyed a wonderful view to the west over

Loch Coruisk and the sharp arête of the Cuillin range.

Waking the next morning from an unfamiliar sleep on a rocky base David and Stuart organised themselves for the return trip to Elgol. Passing the scene of yesterdays ‘near-miss’ climbing accident they decided to contour the shoreline as they made their way east then south while enjoying the magnificent seascape views of Canna, Muck, Rhum and Eigg away to the south. These islands form what is known as The Sma’ Isles or Inner Hebrides, each of which is a paddling destination in their own right, albeit rather weather dependent given the exposure to the west.

Eventually and without incident, David and Stuart arrived back at Elgol and loaded the car for the journey to Perth where they had arranged to meet Heather who by now was no doubt raring to get on the water herself, but that as they say ‘is another story’!

This had been a most enjoyable paddle and was followed a couple of weeks afterwards with a fitting reunion of the ten or so Venture Scout Unit members who had been taken on a west coast paddling and camping trip by David and Stuart in 1971, a life changing experience for the young men involved and one in which they still talk about today.





EAST LOTHIAN, SCOTLAND

In the County of East Lothian the small Scottish town of Dunbar proudly and justifiably boasts John Muir (1838-1914) as its most famous son. He is the man credited with the creation of the National Parks system in the USA and in his adopted State of California like his compatriot Ronald Reagan, he has a state National holiday held in his name! Following his emigration to the new world in 1849, his subsequent environmental protection achievements have cemented his legacy in the American physicc. The USA based Seirra Club describes John Muir as:-

America's most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist. He was one of California's most important historical personalities. He has been called "The Father of our National Parks," "Wilderness Prophet," and "Citizen of the Universe." He once described himself more humorously, and perhaps most accurately, as, a "poetico-trampo-geologist-botanist and ornithologist-naturalist. Famed documentary film maker Ken Burns said, "As we got to know him John Muir ascended to the pantheon of the highest individuals in our country; I'm talking about the level of Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, and Thomas Jefferson, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jackie Robinson -- people who have had a transformational effect on who we are"!

Closer to home and to the immediate east of Scotland's capital, Edinburgh, John Muir's life and times are actively pursued in his Scottish home county of East

Lothian. A number of physical and community initiatives attest to John Muir's memory. For example the John Muir Council buildings in the county town of Haddington, and a coastal park, statue and museum in the town of his birth – Dunbar, a seaside town on the curve of the Firth of Forth as it meets with the North Sea.

One specific memorial of interest to the writers is a coastal path stretching from the East Lothian border with Mid-Lothian to the easterly border with Berwickshire. This initiative was designed to allow walkers to connect with the land and sea border through a network of paths easily accessible at multiple points along the sixty kilometre route.

Three years ago whilst on a trip to Scotland, David Golightly persuaded his nephew Keith McLaughlin to get into a sea kayak for the first time and accompany him on a multi-day journey from west to east

along the coast of East Lothian and in effect contouring the John Muir Way. The alternative unofficial title for the salt water version was born – 'The John Muir Sea Kayak Trail'. The John Muir Museum staff in Dunbar were so taken with the completed three day adventure that they featured it in their website at that time.

It was no surprise when Heather expressed an ambition to repeat the coastal voyage while on a 2012 northern summer trip to her home town – Dunbar!

THE BASS ROCK

Before tackling the coastal voyage however the paddlers agreed that a shorter trip might also be fun, so it was with a careful eye on the weather they were able to identify an opportunity to fulfill one of Heathers great ambitions – to get out to and around the 400 foot high volcanic plug called Bass Rock perched sentinel like off the East Lothian coast between Dunbar and North Berwick.

The selected launch and return site was Seacliff, a local beach known by followers of British paddler Brian Wilson as the final landing site of his 1985 trip around Scotland. He has been



immortalised in his book 'Blazing Paddles'. Coincidentally page 127 of that book contains a photograph of Brian Wilson taken by Dennis Rewt, one of David and Stuart's 1970's Venture Scouts. He is now the Director of Outdoor Education at Edinburgh University.

And so on a beautiful summer's day David and Heather took the short drive from Haddington to Seacliff and prepared to launch. For the first time in Scotland Stuart Cunningham's magic trolley design came to the fore with a 300 m sand dune and beach walk from car to water's edge. This wonderful piece of kit made life so much easier for the aging pair of paddlers.



Bass Rock looked magnificent when viewed from the beach. The huge vertical rock shone in the sunshine from the coating of guano deposited by the colonies of birds, particularly gannets or *Sula Bassana* as they are known in the scientific world. Year after year they use the rock as their nesting place. Bass Rock has an interesting history having at various stages been used as a prison to house the Scottish Covenanters ('men of the cloth' of the time), and as a WW11 observation site attempting to counteract the enemy threat to military establishments located deeper into the Firth of Forth and nearer to Edinburgh. Curiously Bass Rock also features in that great classic story by Robert Louis Stevenson – Kidnapped, in which he located hero Jamie Balfour's prison.

Today Bass Rock is famed as the location of one of the largest gathering and breeding sites of the gannet and tourists visit by boats

out of North Berwick to witness the massed gathering of these magnificent birds. The locally established Scottish Seabird Centre (www.scottishseabirdcentre.com.uk) provides a focal point for those keen to view these birds from the mainland via the various webcam's installed on the rock.

So with local beach-goers gathering for the hoped for spectacle of one or both of the paddlers falling in, Heather and David set out for Bass Rock on a calm blue sea under a sunny sky – it was perfect (who said they don't get a summer in Scotland!).

Slowly making their way out towards the westerly edge of the rock, Heather practiced her new found skills of life onboard without the aid of a rudder. Fortunately the conditions were forgiving and no problems emerged. Soon the paddlers were 'up close and personal' with the impressive bulk of rock as thousands of gannets wheeled noisily overhead in an effort to protect their offspring from the perceived human threat far below them.

As David and Heather rounded the western perimeter of Bass Rock a seal popped its head above water level just a metre from Heathers kayak and quite unperturbed stared Heather down in a game of brinkmanship.

Given the benign conditions it wasn't difficult to continue around the exposed northern perimeter out of sight of the mainland before making their way around the eastern edge threading their way through the outlying rocks and skerries. A huge sea cave exists at this point and is reputed to be navigable by canoe or by swimming at certain stages of the tide.

Now back on the Seacliff side of Bass Rock the paddlers were now directly underneath the automatically operated lighthouse, an important navigational aide to the many vessels making their way to Scotland's principal east coast container port in Leith.

The circumnavigation complete, Heather was then taken aback by David's suggestion that they should now make for the seaside holiday town of North Berwick some 5 km to the west. Pleased at this confidence building decision, Heather lost no time in heading after David and they really enjoyed the journey back to the mainland coast to find a suitable landing spot for lunch. Afterwards the pair continued west and into the harbour at North Berwick for a well-earned break.

It was well into the late afternoon by the time Heather and David turned east to contour the coast back to the launch site at Seacliff, they deliberately paddled close to shore and in and out of the reefs to give each other maximum opportunity to play at being canoeists!

The weather continued to favour the paddlers as late in the day they finally rounded the last headland to see the launch site ahead of them, a sixteen kilometre day on the water was almost complete and Heather had realised a long held ambition to paddle around Bass Rock.

THE JOHN MUIR SEA KAYAK TRAIL-STAGE 1 Fisherow to Longniddry

The Bass Rock trip under their belts so to speak, David and Heather turned their sights on the possibility of getting an adequate weather window for a coastal paddle of the entire county – in effect the John Muir Sea Kayak Trail! For his part David had completed this journey twice before, the first time in the nineteen sixties when with Stuart Cunningham they succeeded in completing the paddle in a single day – they were fit in those days!

David again managed the trip in 2009 accompanied by his nephew Keith as previously mentioned. On that occasion however it took three days for the trip. Heather's target was to emulate that same time-frame. David, however, suggested that this might be a bit ambitious and in any event he suggested that the coastal voyage would poten-



tially be much more rewarding if they took their time and aimed for a four day trip.

It was with this agreed plan that the pair arrived at Fisherow Harbour near the western boundary of the East Lothian county, when to their disappointment they faced a long carry over a spring tide low water before they had any chance of getting on the water. The water's edge seemed like miles away!

Heathers suggestion of double-decking the two kayaks on Stuart's Mk 1 trolley proved only partially successful as they had no obvious means of stacking the kayaks without sustaining damage. Eventually they paddled away from the border with Mid-Lothian, the county containing Edinburgh, Scotland's historic capital city just visible in the distance.

Soon after departure the paddlers' past the ancient, indeed oldest still operating, horse racing course in Scotland at Mussleburgh. The estuary of the River Esk created a natural sandbank obstacle to the south. Past the river mouth and heading east David and Heather firstly piloted for the twin harbour fishing villages of Cockenzie and Port Seton some couple of hours paddle away.

En-route, the old mining town of Prestonpans was visible to the south. This original salt pans area was also famous as the site of the battle of Prestonpans--the first significant battle between the highland rebel troops led by Bonnie Prince Charlie when he defeated the government army led by Sir John Cope. The battle took place

in September 1745 – a staggering two hundred and sixty seven years before David and Heather paddled past the battlefield behind the town of Prestonpans.

The twin villages of Cockenzie and Port Seton have wonderful harbours which at one time, sheltered vast fishing fleets dating back to the economic powerhouse days of Scotland. Today, with the herring all but fished out, these old harbours generally contain mostly small workboats and pleasure craft. First however the paddlers could not ignore the vast structure of Cockenzie Power Station which David could remember being built in the mid to late 1960's. Today they are all but fallen out of use due to more efficient and modern stations within the Forth region. Paddling under the load-out jetty that day showed promise as the sun continued to shine and the winds remained light.

After obligatory visits to the old harbours and with the industrial western region of the county receding behind them, David and Heather continued to enjoy the rock gardens and beach-watching. Afforded by the decision to take their time, keep the daily distances short and enjoy the journey this was no doubt as John Muir would have intended. Lunch was taken on the beach at Port Seton, still a popular Firth of Forth holiday resort for Glasgow and district folk.

After a break and again afloat, the paddlers continued east towards the planned finishing point for the day – Longniddry, located in the heart of the county's many golf links. This included the home of

the 'Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers' – Muirfield, often used as the venue for the British Open.

The selected stopping point featured the essential road access where David's brother Allan had volunteered his assistance as the car shuffle resource as well as safety back-up, an offer much appreciated by David and Heather. This proved to be a very satisfying fifteen kilometre day in beautiful conditions. It was a much different story to David's last trip along this section of coast with his nephew some three years before. Then the water temperature was a shivering eight degrees.

THE JOHN MUIR SEA KAYAK TRAIL-STAGE 2 Longniddry to North Berwick

On 9th August 2012 a couple of weeks after completing stage one of the coastal journey along the East Lothian boundary, David and Heather found another promising weather outlook in what was not so far a wonderful British summer. This stage had the potential to be a highlight of the entire four stage journey as it passed by some of the best coast on the route.

So it was with wonderful anticipation for a memorable day that the paddlers set off from Longniddry Bents and edged around the first of the reefs and skerries which feature so often along this stretch. A new vista opened up now as the kayak bows turned a few points south and east to take in the group of islands which lie off the coast. This change in heading also left behind the relatively industrialised upper reaches of the Firth of Forth and looking astern the views were of beautiful coastline ringed with the exclusive golf links previously mentioned. In addition and out to the north across the expanse of the Firth, the Fife coast and its many fishing villages sparkled in the morning sunshine.

David and Heather were buoyed by the conditions and again took full advantage of the long daylight



to take their time by meandering through the skerries looking out for seals and other coastal wildlife. There are many varieties of seabirds prevalent in the generally colder waters of Scotland's east coast. One significant obstacle now lay before the paddling pair - the vast expanse of Aberlady Bay, one of Scotland's most important nature reserves, made famous through the writings of local scribe Nigel Tranter. However, with an exposed surf beach from bay point to bay point it demanded respect. This ensured the paddlers remained well out to sea before reaching the beginnings of Gullane village and a lovely little beach in this popular holiday town which had been selected as a suitable lunch stop.

Relaunching after yet another relaxing stop it wasn't long before they were around the next obstacle, a large reef located at the eastern end of Gullane beach. Soon the paddlers arrived abreast of Yellowcraigs beach and the offshore island of Fidra with its ruined 12th century chapel. This was the island where Stuart and David had taken the two brand new sea kayaks out

on their maiden voyage only a few weeks before. Heather was thrilled to finally see this lovely wee island up close and even more pleased to be escorted by a lone seal as she made her way to the cliff underneath the beautifully proportioned 1885 lighthouse. Like the Bass Rock it is an important maritime warning light for ships heading in and out of Leith and other Firth of Forth Ports.

Fidra soon gave way to new islands such as Craigeith and The Lamb as the paddlers continued east towards North Berwick and a meeting with David's brother who again was lined up for the inevitable car shuffle. This time however they were also going to be met by Heather's brother Martin, wife Elaine and their family. Heather's nephew and niece had been promised a serve of post voyage fish and chips with their aunt, providing she successfully negotiated her way ashore.

As late afternoon approached, the unmistakable sight of not only Bass Rock some distance ahead but also the land based volcanic plug of North Berwick Law (or hill), hove

into view. The two hundred metre high hill formed a backdrop to the lovely popular town of North Berwick which thanks to the presence of a direct rail link to Edinburgh was a favoured commuting location for young Edinburgh professionals.

As they made their way along the shoreline David and Heather were soon distracted by a yell as Heather's niece Kirsten and nephew Alistair waved from the landward edges of the reefs. The welcoming parties were early and determined to accompany the paddlers as, close to shore, they slowly threaded their way through the local sailing fleet taking part in a twilight regatta.



Finally after another fifteen kilometre glorious and enjoyable day the two kayaks 'kissed' the beach adjacent to the red sandstone harbour wall and another stage of the John Muir Sea Kayak Trail was complete!

THE JOHN MUIR SEA KAYAK TRAIL- STAGE 3 North Berwick to Dunbar

A potential period of settled weather presented an opportunity to knock off the final two stages of the coastal paddle in two consecutive days. However adopting the adage of 'One step at a time', David and Heather prepared to launch at North Berwick West Beach on Sunday 19 August. After storing the car in a suitable spot they quickly launched and got into stride while rounding the local skerry called 'The Sisters', adjacent to the Scottish Seabird Centre.

After turning east and with the now familiar bulk of the distant Bass



Rock in direct sight, the paddlers headed closer to the shoreline of the East Beach to allow the exploration of the beach line, reefs and skerries while slowly continuing to towards the destination for this penultimate stage – Heather’s home town and birthplace of John Muir - Dunbar.

A glance at any map or chart will clearly indicate that this particular stretch of coast is even more reef strewn than usual. Local skerries with magical names abound, such as The Leithies, Leakmorran Ness, Podie Craig and of course ‘Gin Head’. David and Heather made the most of the rock garden experience in the sunny, calm weather until soon the impressive partial ruin of historic and easily defended Tantallon Castle dating back to 1350, loomed large on the cliff top. Incidentally the Times of London in 2008 reported a recently discovered image of a ghost occupying the castle, very similar to a photograph taken thirty years earlier!

Just after Tantallon Castle an intriguing little harbour called ‘The Gegan’ sits tucked away in the rock face. Carved out of sandstone, this rarely visited and relatively unknown local haven is now just home to one small and rapidly deteriorating fishing vessel. From a sea kayakers perspective, however, it is not to be missed, albeit there is barely space to turn around once one commits to entering the harbour. The paddlers were now back in familiar territory as Seacliff beach was spotted around the next reef, this of course being the launch site for the Bass Rock trip of a few

weeks previously. Continuing on without stopping David and Heather rounded the outlying skerry, St Baldred’s Boat, before tackling the two kilometre long reefs west of the lovely Ravensheugh Sands Beach, the planned lunch stop for the day. After lunch and getting back into the kayaks the paddlers rounded the St Baldred’s reef to see for the first time the destination for this stage – Dunbar, still some four kilometres away to the south-east.

On David’s two previous trips along this stretch of coast the sea conditions had precluded an opportunity to paddle into the estuary of the River Tyne. On this occasion, however, full access was possible to sea kayakers. So leaving the last of the reef behind they quickly located the river estuary and began an exploration of the river which some miles upstream passes through the town of Haddington where David was born and raised.

Getting back out of the estuary into the bay proved more of a challenge as the paddlers struggled against an incoming tide racing through the narrow entrance of Tynemouth. Finally emerging unscathed, however, David and Heather traversed the long beach of John Muir Country Park before reaching Belhaven Bay, a popular Sand Yachting venue back in the sixties. The bay now also lends its name to a well known locally brewed beer ‘Belhaven Best’.

Heather was well into very familiar landscape now. She constantly pointed out local features and man-made structures and her childhood memories came flooding back as they journeyed underneath the low red sandstone cliffs leading into the final approaches to Dunbar. Around the next corner and above the rocky escarpment stood Heather’s family home. It looked over what was the local outdoor swimming pool prior to its removal in the 1980’s. Her visit coinciding with a high tide, Heather was thrilled to be paddling over the area where the swimming pool once stood and where she had experienced many happy days.

Continuing on, the famous ruins of Dunbar Castle stood above the entrance to the ancient harbour. Built in 1070 and sited on the ‘invading route’ between England and Scotland, the castle was subject to many sieges over its tumultuous





past. The most famous was when Black Agnes, Countess of Dunbar, successfully defended the castle against a besieging English army in 1548. Another claim to fame for the castle was the two day stay of Mary Queens of Scots in 1566.

A tour of the inner (Victoria) and outer new harbour was mandatory. So David and Heather slipped through what can often be a treacherous deceptively narrow entrance and continued deep into the outer and inner harbours 'just to see what was there'!

Finally the paddling pair emerged to navigate themselves through the reefs which lie seawards of the harbour wall and round into the east beach where again, in the early evening sun, the usual welcoming party waited for the 'old canoeists' to complete another great day in fortuitous glorious summer weather.

THE JOHN MUIR SEA KAYAK TRAIL – STAGE 4 Dunbar to Dunglass

Monday 20th August presented a great opportunity to complete the border to border trip. Sunny calm weather with benign seas was again forecast for what was in essence the most exposed section of the coast. It involved moving out of

the relatively sheltered south-east curve of the Firth of Forth and into the North Sea.

A quick start was feasible as the kayaks and gear had not even been unpacked from the day before. As they readied themselves for the launch from Dunbar's east beach David and Heather were excited in the knowledge that all being well, the final length of East Lothian coast would be completed in the next few hours.

Soon underway David and Heather waved to old friend Ian Hastie in his new house above Dunbar Golf Course. There he looked straight out over the reef to the paddlers as they slowly made their way eastwards and towards the Cement works perched over the natural deposit of limestone which fed the lime kilns year after year. Behind the cement works, the site of the 1650 Battle of Dunbar was visible. This was the unfortunate battle where the Scots army suffered a significant defeat by Cromwell's forces, a defeat which forever changed the face of history in Scotland.

Soon the impressive white circular tower of Barns Ness Lighthouse was in full view in the bright sunshine and the paddling pair made good speed as they headed for a

suitable lunch stop. The intention was to pull in at Skateraw Harbour, a place which evoked happy memories of joint Scout and Guide camps in the nineteen sixties. Unfortunately they mistook another beach for Skateraw, so lunch was taken in a less comfortable spot. This navigational accident was discovered as soon as the paddlers set out again after their rest.

Skateraw forms the western perimeter of Scotland's newest nuclear power station Torness. This was a major 1970's project which David's father had helped construct before his retirement. Torness is also the home of the Dunbar Life Boat which is sheltered here so as to provide an all-weather, all-tide mooring and exit point when called out to ships in distress. After a visit alongside the lifeboat David and Heather rounded Torness Point and headed on the final few kilometres to the county border with Berwickshire at Dunglass Burn.

The weather was so good it allowed close quarter paddling with the wonderful arches and caves which feature in this area of geological significance. Continuing past Bilsdean Creek, David and Heather finally arrived adjacent to the spot where Dunglass Burn emptied into the North Sea.

Suddenly the realisation dawned that the journey was over – they had successfully traversed 'The John Muir Sea Kayak Trail' for the first time. All that remained was to retrace their paddle strokes north-westwards to Thorntonloch Beach Caravan Park where again David's brother Allan and Heather's sister-in-law Elaine waited patiently with a celebratory bottle of bubbly and a congratulatory and suitably worded card.

As the four sampled the champagne in the sunshine, David and Heather reflected on their good fortune to snare four beautiful paddling days for this sixty kilometre voyage along 'their county coast'!



David's plan to take Heather paddling around the Scottish Loch's of Carron, Kishorn and the islands of Rassay and Scalpay to the immediate east of the Isle of Skye, fell in a heap with a phone call from his mate Stuart Cunningham and the words – 'hey Dave I think you need to reconsider your plan, I'm there at the moment and the area is bereft of landing and camping spots'!

So commenced the urgent search to find an alternative location for what was Heather's first opportunity to paddle a sea kayak in her native Scotland. Firstly David reconsidered the options previously 'on the table' before he and Heather left Melbourne at the beginning of May 2012. These options included the Summer Isles and the Sound of Arisaig south of Mallaig, the first was ruled out given the logistics of the long drive in and out, and the second ruled itself out as unlikely to fulfill what was planned as a week-long trip.

A visit to old friend Dennis Rewt's office at Edinburgh University Outdoor Education Complex where he is Deputy Director solved the problem. Every year Dennis takes a group of university students to the island of Berneray in the Outer Hebrides. So it was no surprise when Dennis strongly recommended that we head to The Outer

Hebrides or as its also known, 'The Western Isles'. This long chain of mostly interlinked islands form a natural barrier for Scotland's mainland west coast in that it takes the brunt of the Atlantic seas having a fetch of over five thousand kilometres from the east coast of the USA. It was for this reason as well as other preconceived ideas that David was reluctant to take Heather into this sea kayaking area.

Dennis however pulled out his 1:50,000 OS Map and pointed out that Berneray, located just off North Uist and connected via a causeway, had plenty of sheltered areas where paddlers could safely travel and camp. Sure enough when

studied closely there was indeed plenty of opportunity on Berneray.

Decision made, David and Heather started to plan and work on the logistics of getting to and from the Western Isles which are well served by Caledonian McBrayne, the Scottish Government backed ferry company who cross 'The Minch'. This is the name given to the waterway separating mainland Scotland from the Outer Hebrides. For their purposes David and Heather chose the route starting on the north-west coast of Skye in the town of Uig and landing in North Uist at Lochmaddy.

Many of these crossings are booked well in advance in the summer season and visitors are well advised to do the same. In fact a couple of weeks later David and Heather were themselves caught out with an unplanned attempt to get from the southern Skye port of Armadale to mainland Mallaig only to be turned away at the ferry ramp!

So on Sunday 15th July David and Heather arrived in North Uist and made their way across the causeway onto Berneray where they headed for the east beach adjacent to the local Scottish Youth Hostel. This was a small white painted stone cottage overlooking the Sound of Harris and the ferry route





connecting Berneray to Harris, its more mountainous neighbouring island to the north. The paddlers selected a site and promptly set up camp on the machair, the typical west coast ground cover, backing a one kilometre long sand beach. After setting up, the kayaks were unloaded and made ready for a foray onto the waters of the Western Isles for the first time.

This was an interesting time for Heather in particular in that it was to be her first time in a sea kayak in Scotland. More challenging, however, was the absence of a rudder which her kayak back in Melbourne is equipped with. The first day's weather was lovely with a dry and warm day forecast. So after launching from the lovely white sand beach David and Heather travelled north keeping the island on their left. After a time the beach gave way to reef and cliff as they slowly made their way around the north end of the island and for the first time stared at the wide open space of the 'Atlantic Ocean'. It was a particular seminal moment for David as he imagined what this narrow, three kilometre wide gap between Berneray and the outlying island of Pabbay would be like in less favourable conditions!

Continuing west around the coast the presence of seal colonies and seabirds kept the journey interesting as did getting used to the feel of the kayaks which at this stage were proving just right. Friend Stuart Cunningham from Brisbane had carried out all the research

on which kayaks to buy given the intent by both Stuart and David to invest in kayaks and to store them in Scotland for further use in what was hoped to be long healthy retirements. Stuart's recommendation of the Northshore Atlantic (a modestly priced plastic boat equipped for touring) was appreciated and the two paddlers found themselves to be comfortable among the minor tide races at each headland and reef.

Now the northern tip of the island of Boreray out to the west came into view as did a couple of other isolated small islets, all set in what was a deep blue sea stretching over the far horizon. Having reached the last of the reefed coast and with the long sandy west facing beach around the corner it was decided to return to camp and plan the next day's paddle.

So back through Caoias Phabaigh they travelled continuing to enjoy the favourable conditions as they now had the benefit of great views out over the Sound of Harris to the mountains of Harris and the exposed cape of Toe Head visible twelve kilometre's away to the North-East. Out of the light westerly winds now, they headed back to the east beach and the welcome site of the camp nestled beneath a small step-down to the beach which provided shelter from all points except due east.

Plans for the next day were drawn up and the likely weather studied for any signs of change from the

day before. As a result David declared that a trip to the south towards the causeway and an exploration of the outlying skerries would be fun, a suggestion which Heather accepted. She had become quite comfortable in Stuarts bright red kayak which he had previously christened 'Gull Cry' in the tradition of Scottish paddlers naming their craft.

Prior to launching however and after a lovely breakfast the paddling pair walked along to the Youth Hostel some 500 m along the beach to refill water containers. Dennis had advised this was possible and acceptable provided we asked for the wardens approval. Heather's first experience of a youth hostel was not a pleasant one as the small common room fell into silence as we entered. A group of 'alternative folk' stopped what they doing and eyed us suspiciously – 'were these two here to disrupt and break up our cosy close-knit little group'? They need have no fears of that as the paddlers recognized a lack of welcome and beat a retreat to the external water tap to fill containers and get back to camp.

Whilst the winds had moved to the south-west they remained light and soon David and Heather were again out on the water and headed south past the youth hostel and through a gap in the reef at Port Ludaig which while on-shore later they viewed at a different stage of the tide as it raced through the narrow aperture.

On this occasion however it made for a smooth passage and the paddlers curved around the coast making their way in and out of the various bays and harbours en-route south. One particular little harbour intrigued with its colourful craft of workmanlike lobster boats sitting alongside various pleasure boats behind the ancient stone built sea walls. Now adjacent to the wee village of Borgh where the week long annual Berneray Festival was centred, they continued around the next rocky point and suddenly the man-made causeway connecting the island to North Uist came into view. Rounding the first junction the paddlers quickly retreated as

considered a 'bit cool' for them! Taking a break in the afternoon David and Heather drove to the Borgh Community Hall. Spotting a sign for the Berneray Week Sheepdog Trials they paid their dues and parked the car among the Gaelic speaking locals as shepherd and dog competed in the task of manipulating three or four wayward sheep through a series of maneuvers into gated pens in a timed event. This aimed to test communication between man (and one lone female shepherd) and dog. It was highland life at its most basic. It proved to be a fascinating short stay for David and Heather as they begun to appreciate the skills

create impromptu concerts or evenings complete with recitations of poetry, singing (in Gaelic), usually unaccompanied in what was known as 'mouth music'.

In addition, dancing was popular at these gatherings and it is the dancing that survives today in modern society all over Scotland. Today the focal point is a Ceilidh Band comprising fiddle, drum, accordion and even possibly a guitar. So it was to one of these gatherings that David and Heather made their way that evening. The hall quickly filled as the local families arrived en-masse to enjoy an evening of dancing that helped to close any generation gap that might exist. The evening focused entirely on Scottish Country dances--modern rock and its ilk had no place in the Berneray Hall! A great night was had chatting to the local folk interspersed with a few Scottish country dances.



the Harris bound ferry emerged from its slipway to turn around and head over the Sound of Harris.

David and Heather themselves turned around at this point and 'straight-lined' on a route to take them back around Rubha Mhainais and across the next bay to Port Ludaig with its now familiar white painted YH around the reef at Baile. The seas were kind as the paddlers arrived back at camp to find a few locals swimming in water that both Heather and David

required to not just win the competition, but also to simply be good enough to take part.

Later that day David and Heather decided to immerse themselves further into local highlands and islands life by going back to the evening dance. Known in Scotland as a ceilidh, the tradition traces its roots back to when isolated communities had to make their own entertainment. With the absence of any communal gathering space they met in each other's home to

On Tuesday 17th July 2012 and after a check of the BBC Met Service David and Heather decided to go further afield. A plan was hatched to go out across the Sound of Harris to the island of Killegray some four kilometres to the north-east. By the time the paddlers launched it was sparkling in the morning sun. The pair headed firstly for the closest shore-line on the island then turned north to track around the island in a clockwise direction. Now, with the kayak bows headed due east, the nearby island of Ensay which was abreast to the left of the paddlers as they made their way through Caolas Sgairidh under the considerable influence of an easterly running tide. It was at this point on the island that the only residents lived, demonstrating once more how few of these isolated islands have any habitation at all.

Reaching the eastern skerries, David and Heather really enjoyed another paddle through the 'tangle' of the reefs and the presence of a large seal colony which were inquisitive of the paddlers making their way through their territory. As the paddling pair turned around the southern extremity of reefs they spotted a suitable beach for a



lunch stop. They paddled ashore followed all the way by a number of seals, particularly incurring the wrath of an old bull who took exception to their presence. Finally the kayakers had the opportunity to stretch aging bodies and to rest comfortably while eating lunch in what was still a wonderfully sunny day. David remarked about the good fortune they were experiencing compared with the poor unfriendly weather he and Stuart met as they arrived on the island of Mull just a few weeks before.

During lunch however the wind velocity increased slightly and changed direction giving David and Heather an against the wind paddle due west back to Berneray. With a cloud cover hiding the sun now, the paddlers quickly cooled down while relatively immobile over lunch. Donning additional gear David and Heather launched to head for home. The challenge of paddling without a rudder now manifested itself with Heather struggling to keep her kayak under directional control. As a result she was using more energy on course correction rather than forward progress which really frustrated her.

After a struggle across the sound however the pair finally beached

their kayaks close to their campsite and after changing and settling down to a pre-dinner drink they reflected on what for them had been a great day afloat, particularly the experience of paddling around and down Killegray with its large seal colony.

The forecast weather the next day did not suit getting out, so David and Heather took the opportunity to take a car drive down the islands of the Outer Hebrides until they reached as far south as they could without getting onto yet another ferry. This was a wonderful drive as one island after another was explored from what was an excellent road system albeit mostly with the aid of the Scottish Highlands system of passing places. When they reached the ferry terminal at Ereskay which serves the even more remote island of Barra they met another couple of paddlers who were from Aberdeen and were also exploring the Hebrides for the first time. David advised that he and Heather were planning to paddle out into the large bay south of Berneray the next day and promptly issued the Aberdeen couple with an invitation to paddle together.

As it transpired the windy weather the next day precluded getting too

far out but a nice day was had exploring the area ringing the shoreline with its lovely sandy beaches of Traigh Lingeigh and across to the western side of the causeway. Out now to round the more exposed point at Rubha Bhoisnis a roughish tide race caused some concern and forced a retreat after taking in the sight of the three kilometre long stretch of beautiful white sand of Berneray's west beach.

Making their way back to the launch site near the ancient burial ground, David and Heather met a Swiss family who were camped for a few days and who offered to look after the kayaks for the night in readiness for what was an island visiting plan the next day. The Swiss Carrer family invited David and Heather to visit them in their country if the opportunity arose, which it did and in mid- October they caught up near Interlaken and spent a lovely day together in one of Europe's grand mountain areas.

On Friday 20th July David and Heather again made their way across the unmade roads to the campsite at the south facing beach at Eilean an Dunain. It was a beautiful day and the forecast had again turned favourable for the plan to get out to the offshore island of



Boreray which had as its backdrop the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Before long the Aberdeen paddlers Gerry and Jackie appeared having decided to take up the invitation to paddle together for the day.

Sunny skies and a light breeze greeted the paddlers as they made their way out on the four kilometre crossing to the north-east point of Boreray. The intent was to take a look at conditions on the more exposed side of the island before deciding what to then do. As it happened they had little trouble negotiating the turbulence as they rounded the north-west extremity of the island and commenced the paddle down the west coast of what is only a two kilometre long island. The paddlers thoroughly enjoyed getting close to the rocky coast as they meandered south before gently curving around the south coast of the island to reach the shelter of the inner shore and the prospect of lunch on a lovely mainland facing beach halfway up the length of Boreray.

Gerry and Jackie were delighted with progress, explaining that without other paddlers for company they would never have attempted going around to the weather coast of the island. All of us were enjoying what continued to be a beautiful day as we landed on what unfortunately turned out to be a fly

infested beach at Traigh na Luibe. Curtailing lunch due to the airborne pests the four paddlers decided to head for the top end of the west beach on Berneray. Assuming success this would close the link in what for David and Heather would complete a paddle around all of Berneray from when they had arrived nearly a week earlier.

The view across the myriad of islands looking north and northeast toward Harris was truly stunning and typified why visitors were drawn time after time to this island chain. Fortunately the wonderful conditions allowed a gentle enjoyable trip back across the five kilometre crossing to the target beach site. When reached they turned south and contoured the sandy beach



line. They even landed for a break and to remove a layer of clothing in what had turned out to be a day of increasing temperatures. They then continued back to the point at Rubha Bhoisnis to finally negotiate the last of the rocky foreshore back to what was scheduled to be David and Heather's last day of the kayak trip.

As David and Heather drove away across the machair, they decided to pay a visit to an old friend of Dennis Rewt's where they were connected through Dennis's twenty-one sea kayaking visits to Berneray to date. The lady in question turned out to be Australian by birth who as a young nurse had answered a call for a job opportunity in the Western Isles many decades before. Still there Gloria is now a key figure in local life and whilst now retired from her District Nursing role is still actively involved in many boards and committees on the island. Now running Burnside Bed & Breakfast, Gloria revels in meeting travellers from all over the globe.

David and Heather's time in the wonderful Western Isles was over but future visits were forecast, perhaps even an island hopping cycling trip up the entire chain, but this is Scotland at its most exposed and visitors have to be very lucky to coincide a holiday with good weather!



It would be fair to say that I come from a different generation than most of our club members. I also own a fantastic specialists paddling shop servicing hundreds of different paddlers representing different genres and skill levels. Consequently I have developed a perspective on what current paddlers are like, and some insights into what future paddler may be like.

These days I mostly see two different types of paddlers.

Type A paddlers are often trying new things that their skill levels and knowledge aren't up to. Further, they often are either unaware of or seriously underestimate potential risks in paddles they take on.

Type B Paddlers, on the other hand, are well experienced and comfortable with their level of skills/knowledge. However they have little motivation to develop beyond this through training and practice.

Both of these paddler types can be dangerous, putting themselves and others in dangerous situations.

Ironically, it may be that contributing to this danger/risk are the advances in boats, paddles, safety equipment (and there is impressive gear available as I well know from the stock we carry in our shop). The problem is that beginner paddlers may go out and push their limits quicker than would have been possible thirty years ago. There is a danger, I think, when beginner paddlers assume that their 'great' gear substitutes for skill training and experience.

On the flip side I have heard experienced and respected sea touring paddlers say things like, "I may not have a very pretty roll but I get up every time". Invariably you hear later that they did end up swimming, or worse. It seems to me that they were probably kidding themselves by thinking that their roll was adequate in the first place. More than likely if they had practiced and refined their rolling skills they may have saved themselves from getting wet feet.

The truth is that even the best rollers are 'between swims' given the ever-present possibility of being caught out in unexpectedly bad

conditions that push us beyond our limits which raises another important question. How do we say to other kayakers that we believe they are out of limits?

As paddlers we are naturally kind, caring and obviously good looking inside and out, which makes us the type of people that want to include anyone who wants to be involved. But if we see someone during a surf session clearly being out of their depth and in danger of hurting themselves and/or others we have a responsibility to do something.

Yes we could give them a few pointers and a lot encouragement and praise but would this be enough in big surf? Probably not! The right thing to do would be to strongly advise them to stop and wait for safer conditions better suited to their competency.

John Robinson (Sea Kayaking Illustrated) writes, "There is a Fine Line between Hardcore and Stupidity", and that before "we try something sketchy, ask yourself "if I die trying this, will I feel stupid?" While I agree with Robinson, I also think that there is a mutual responsibility too. We need to be willing to step in when we see others about to try something beyond their present level of ability.

Glenn is an accomplished whitewater and sea kayaker who last year won the VSKC open mens rolling award. With his partner Brett Kennedy he is a Director of the new and impressively stocked Gippsland Kayak Company shop in Bairnsdale. (Ed.)



VSKC PADDLE FEST REFLECTIONS 2012

Surf training

by Jac Renzenbrink

I had no idea which paddle to do on the Saturday morning of the 2012 Paddle Fest. I really enjoyed the Cape Woolamai paddle last year, but now wanted to do something a bit different. I also knew that I did not want to go near any mud and the tide was going out that morning. I looked at the numerous paddle sheets and bingo, Dave Winkworth had a training paddle scheduled in the surf at Smiths Beach. And he knows what he is talking about! Feeling brave I added my name to the sheet. There were now three names. By bedtime on Friday this number had not increased, so I felt some anxiety as to whether this would go ahead. I also noticed that Julian Smith's paddle had no takers at all. Why was this – were people worried they could not keep up with him?

On the day, with great relief, I saw that more names were added and Dave said he had six, an ideal number. In our quick briefing before departing camp he said he would be in a wet suit, watching out for us. I thought this was excellent because if I got stuck in my Penguin sea kayak and buffeted upside down in the surf, he could drag me out.

Now it turned out that not only would we have Dave watching over us from the water, but Terry Barry

was also going to assist Dave in the water. AND we also had the assistance of Raia Wall, Neil Brenton and Peter Dingle on the beach. Our group was in good hands indeed.

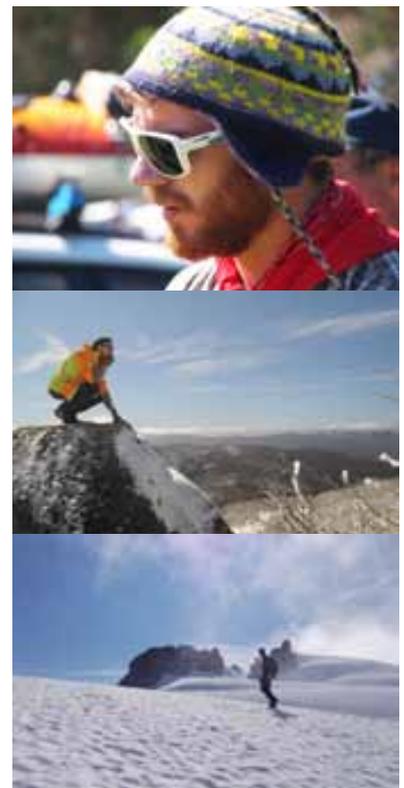
It turned into a fantastic session for me. After invaluable tuition on the stabilising “low brace”, and being reminded that even a small spent wave still has enough energy to do some damage, we entered the water. The adrenaline was running as were the relentless waves. All at once we trainees were stroking into the surf (the easy part), with low bracing controlled broaches into shore. We were having some close calls with other boats, and were, as expected, wet exiting all over the place. A wet exit meant dragging the kayak into the shallows to empty the water out and taking the opportunity to neutralise the oxygen debt. This surf bracing was very hard work for a retiree! I had three awkward wet exits and only once managed a strenuous correction back to the vertical using my paddle in the sand as a prop.

But when I applied the Winkworth technique successfully I was stable and coming in comfortably. I have witnesses who can vouch for this. Both Raia and Terry saw some of my successful efforts. I feel that I have made a “breakthrough”. My guess is that the others in the group were equally pleased with themselves. Thank you Dave et al.

The 2012 Victorian Sea Kayaking Club through the Eyes of a Mountaineer

by Evan Howard

I have to admit that I had no idea what to expect by coming along to the 2012 VSKC AGM. This is a good thing. It's a technique that I have refined over the countless trips in to unpredictable situations



and terrain. These situations, for myself, will almost always involve a couple of common factors, which include either large areas of wilderness or mountains and then a route line drawn on the map going up and sometimes over or through all the contours. So, by not knowing what to expect I leave myself open to the full experience which always makes it interesting, and interesting is stimulating, and stimulating is rarely never fun....at least after the trip!

For myself there were a couple of personal stand out highlights over the weekend worth mentioning.



My first highlight is all about gear.

Now, gear, we would all agree is a vital part of any successful trip. My personal kit for the mountains can be recited back to anyone interested (or not), in listening to me spout numbers about lengths, weights etc. that may or may not actually matter. To top that, I have met many other mountaineers who are much, much more gear nerdy than myself. But Kayakers....now I am impressed. Not only is the knowledge of regular adventure gear encyclopedic but the numbers and dimensions and other unique specifications regarding all things kayak related are far above my simple land lubber comprehension and it was exciting to be apart of! My hat (or helmet) comes off to you all.

My newly revised list of gear nerdyness now reads like this:

1. Sea Kayakers
2. Sea Kayakers again (for good measure)
3. Ultra Lightweight Hikers
4. Mountaineers

With this obvious and understood deep connection with ones own gear it was to my great excitement that I heard whispers spread through camp about Bob.

Bob was going to destroy his hand made kayak to show how strong a skin on frame can be. Now at some point in my outdoor pursuits I have made much of my own kit. I could not imagine destroying any of it on purpose. So, to have someone else volunteer their gear was a dream come true. I have a feeling that these thoughts were shared by a few other members judging from the body language as we all gathered to watch Bob take his first swings at the offending Kayak.

Mob mentality was quickly setting in when I heard that the objective of this demo was to remove the skin off the frame so that the frame could be altered - NOT completely destroyed. Bummer! With all the oils and laquers and finish (incredible craftsmanship Bob) it would have been a once in a lifetime sight to see it ablaze. So Bob, if



you're not happy with the alterations.....

My second highlight is all about the trip.

Given that I have spent more time thinking about kayaks on fire than actually sitting in a real sea kayak, I asked Mick McRobb for advice on which trip to join. I was also borrowing one of his boats, the Nadgee Bombora, a top class boat which more importantly he has up for sale. These factors combined and I found myself in calmer water. Not in massive surf taking jumps and grinding rocks while doing 180's like one is skiing. That's what ocean kayakers do in the surf, right? I must say a huge thanks to Mick for letting me use this boat.

An old mountain man once told me that 'in any situation if you can't be calm, then act calm' This was great advice which I translate roughly to 'if you can't be good, then look good' which applied brilliantly to my current situation. I had on my face copious amounts of zinc oxide and was holding my paddle wrong face forward until that was pointed out to me. But in Mick's boat I felt like a 12 year old boy with a brand new pair of Air Jordan Velcro high-tops. In other words, I felt like a million bucks which made the trip great fun as I learned the basics. Next lesson we hit the jumps! I can't wait!

One last thing I found while chatting with folks over the wonderful weekend is how many members had drifted naturally into sea kayaking from other outdoor pursuits. Bushwalking, Caving, Canyoning

and Mountaineering. I'm another who can now be added to that list.

Seriously though, I can't wait to do some 180 d rock grinds in the surf... maybe next trip with a boat that's not for sale.





It was like a sea skills assignment come true ... Ahhh, well, hmmm, just a few differences... Instead of a pod of four sea kayaker's there was about a hundred; we didn't circumnavigate Phillip Island, unless you could count the collective effort of the hundred paddlers; and we had a base camp rather than moving on each day.

The 2012 Victorian Sea kayak Club Paddle fest HQ was set approximately in the middle of the 20 km long Phillip Island. A spate of windy spring weather exhausted itself on Friday leaving the weekend with glorious sunny paddling days. For me it was a trip down memory lane having spent most of my school holidays and many weekends as an islander, well, at least one resident friend awarded me the title of a "near islander", a major promotion from the 'touro' class.

Luckily, the swell was kind enough to allow for trips from and to some of the southern coastline which is constantly battered by Bass Strait swells. On Saturday I joined a group of level 3 paddlers led by Peter Costello for a south coast trip. We started paddling from Kitty Miller Bay which is a shallow bay flanked by reefs and as per my sea skills assignment it was not a guaranteed safe landing or launching place. Our launch involved waiting and timing to get out between the bigger sets. Gerard was first to tackle the danger zone. He encounter the froth of an oncoming breaking wave, his bow was pushed shorewards, he capsized and rolled up graciously, a bit of a brief high brace before stylishly peeling off the blue water shoulder to continue

his journey out. Having noted Gerard's experience I choose a different line.

Once out of Kitty Miller Bay Pyramid Rock could be seen. Due to its shape, Pyramid Rock is not just any semi-detached rock island, it's a local icon which can be recognised many kilometres away. The water between the Pyramid rock and Phillip Island was looking a bit too rough, so out to sea we paddled around the rock. Once on the eastern side we could get closer to the dark chocolate coloured pyramid sitting on a platform of strawberry coloured granite.

Our landing was at YCW beach, a surf beach where some the sting of the dominant south west swell is reduced. During the morning's car shuffle time I noted large spilling waves breaking across the length of the beach, I hoped it would not get any worse with the falling tide. Upon landing we spread out to allow space for mishap. Lulls don't last forever, I side surfed towards the shore glad it was a spilling wave. The biggest challenge of the day was getting the sea kayaks down and up the treated pine stairs between the car park and beach. Turning a five metre kayak around landings with 90 degree bends involved getting the sea kayaks up

to shoulder height and some three point turns. It was completed efficiently with no-fuss teamwork.

Meanwhile, my husband Alan was on another trip led by Robin Boundy on a more sheltered side of the island from Ventnor. With the outgoing tide they experienced speeds of up to 11 km per hour. As they approached the Nobbies the north westerly facing shoreline is affected by south-westerly swells coming from Bass Strait. Coupled with a strong outflow and mixing of currents caused waves that Alan described as paddling uphill. By the time they turned around the tide was close to its lowest point thus the opposing current had lessened.

On Sunday the cumulus clouds were more spread with a gentle North Easterly wind. It was too good not to get out for a paddle. Alan and I both went to Cape Woolamai with at least two club trip leaders and many other happy paddlers. It was a magical day. I have many memories of Cleeland Bight. It was where I had attended the local SLC 'Nippers', where I learned to windsurf and sail. As a kid it was a major expedition to walk along the beach, past the dunes to the old granite quarry. As an adult it is just as magical to paddle the same shore, however



you do it at high tide and you can get even further than the quarry and then into a sea cave! Pink granite boulders capped with orange lichen with a blue green sea, blue skies above the highest point on Phillip Island and good company--what more could you want on a paddling trip.

There were four quality presentations, on Friday night a Whitsundays trip presented by Jeannine Strohbeck and Bob Fergie, a trip that presented its biggest challenge early on, in rough conditions caused by strong currents.

Then Neil, Raia and Rohan presented collectively on their Vancouver Island, Canada trip. Highlights for me were the sea otters and the tiderace near Discovery Lodge, a location where you can hire performance Nigel Dennis designed Romany kayaks.

On Saturday Tina and John Evertze presented a Vanuatu expedition where they used three piece Valley Etain sea kayaks. A very interesting trip with long inter-island crossings that were usually windy. Volcanic islands, lush vegetation supporting small local communities, getting tribal elder permission to camp and the cultural tradition of land diving made for a very interesting and varied presentation.

David Golightly and Heather Torbet, an older sea kayaking couple, gave a presentation about a commercial sea kayaking trip in Croatia with its amazing towns set on and into towering limestone cliffs and its series of small rocky islands. The Adriatic coastline is impressively vertical, rocky and rich in history with many sheltered islands providing calm seas.

Alan and I were warmly welcomed by Terry Barry as NSW guests and received many good tips from Victorian Sea Kayak Club members on places to go as we returned along the coast to Sydney. We were advised of camping options and contacts for the Corner Inlet area. We camped on Snake Island which allowed us to explore the northern

coastline of Wilsons Promontory. Granite Island supported a large colony of Pied Cormorants. We timed the tides well and had two good days before the westerly winds picked up making for an interesting crossing back to Port Welshpool. Conditions were on our the beam, the wind on port and the incoming tide on starboard.

For the rest of our travels back to Sydney the wind was generally too strong for open water paddling however it was lovely just to see the coast. We both agreed that the entrance to Narooma Harbour was amazingly rough thus best visited on foot rather than assuming a safe landing. We also bumped into David Winkworth and paddling friends at Mallacoota Inlet having spotted the conspicuous signs of

sea kayaks at the campsite. Dave announced that the days of seeing a sea kayak and being guaranteed to know them were gone, nonetheless the reality is that you will know at least one paddler in any one group you meet.

The VSKC hospitality and advice made our trip much more enjoyable. We look forward to welcoming members of the VSKC to a future NSWKSC 'Rock and Roll' event.





To supercharge your kayak simply add a sail! Wow, look at the speed you can now achieve. Imagine covering over a 30 km trip in three hours or less, or paddling 70-80 km a day without too much long distance training. Alternatively use your energy to get to a destination then simply turn around and sail home. No problem, what could go wrong!



Well it turns out that Mother Nature often has a way of knowing you have a sail fitted and gives you a head wind more often than not. She doesn't necessarily follow the weather forecaster's predictions either I've noticed! Add to this the chance of a breakage or malfunction of your sail rig and maybe this whole idea is not as good as it first seemed.

Kayak sailing has grown in popularity in recent years, driven in part

by the easy access to commercial kayak sail rigs (you used to have to make your own!) and also influenced by tall tales and true stories of adventurous journeys completed in relative ease by kayakers using sails.

In my opinion this has led to many kayakers fitting sails to their kayaks before they have fully mastered their kayaking skills. Personally I love sailing my kayak and it has enabled me to undertake long distance trips in short time frames. However I have never taken for granted being able to use my sail on any paddle I have planned.

I didn't fit a sail to my kayak until I was already a level 3 paddler and was confident that my kayaking skill level was adequate.

If it's not obvious let me be clear -- a sail introduces many additional complications to kayaking.

Loose cords are a definite hazard in many situations; a stowed sail adds difficulty to rolling as trapped water weights the sail down.

If you capsized when your sail is deployed it usually results in a wet exit unless you are compe-

tent enough to roll up. This takes practice and even then I don't rely on being able to do it. You need to practice a wet exit, quick stowage of the sail and re-enter and roll skills. Remember this will need to be practiced in rough windy conditions - that's when you will need it!

Survival time in 10 – 16 C water is 1-3 hours, exhaustion can occur in as little as 30 minutes. This does not take into account being chilled before you end up in the water (shortening the survival time significantly). How long will you be fiddling around in the water getting sorted out before you can roll back up?

All too often I am noticing low skill level paddlers fitting sails to their kayaks. In my opinion they are taking a short cut in the development of their kayaking skills. Learn first how to properly handle your kayak. Develop the necessary paddle fitness. Then if you are still keen, fit a sail and be prepared to learn and practice the skills necessary to be safe while kayak sailing. After all you can't drive a supercharged car on a probationary license, why paddle a supercharged kayak until you have the skills?

Sailing adds another dimension to sea kayaking, it is fun and can also add safety – if you are heading for a destination into the wind and can't make it you can turn around and have a sail assisted return. BUT only if you are experienced enough and have the necessary skills.



FOUNDATION VSKC MEMBERS HON- OURED WITH LIFE MEMBERSHIP

During the November 2012 AGM Life membership was bestowed on all surviving foundation members of the VSKC.

Earl de Blonville
Steve Watson
Allan Bernardi
Peter Newman
Paul Snelgrove



Sadly, the sixth member of the foundation group, Harry Simpson is no longer with us.

2012 PADDLE FEST PHOTO COMPETITION WINNERS

As in past years, there were many excellent entries in each of the four categories. The winners by popular choice were:

Anne Woollard (Action)
Terry Barry (Flora and Fauna)
Grant Stewart (Humor)
Bruce Downes (Sea Scape)

Many thanks to the generous sponsors who provided terrific prizes for each of the winners.



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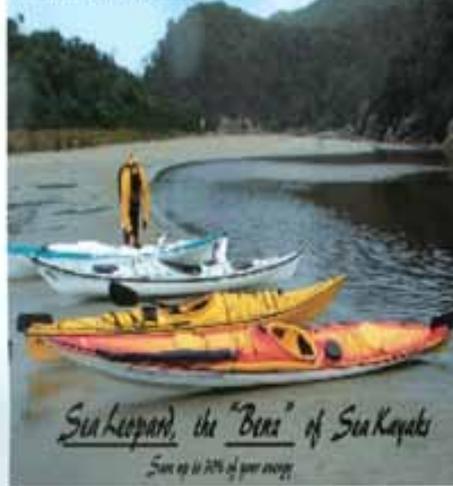


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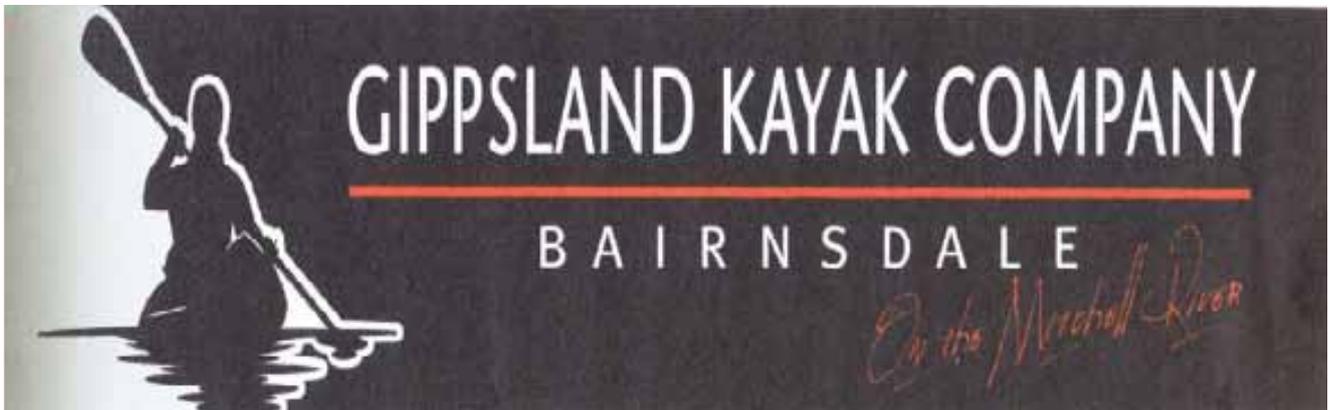
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2013 VSKC TRIP CALENDAR by Neil Brenton

Dates	Location and Leader	Leader
12 Jan	Shoreham Beach	John Woollard & Greg Murray
26-28 Jan	Twofold Bay	David Winkworth
8 Feb	Mordialloc Yacht Club	Nigel Foster Talk
9 Feb	Melbourne Training	Nigel Foster Group Training
10 Feb	Melbourne Training	Nigel Foster Group Training
11-13 Feb	Melbourne Training	Nigel Foster Private Training
15 Feb	Barwon Heads	Nigel Foster Private Training
16 Feb	Barwon Heads	Nigel Foster Train the Club Trainers
17 Feb	Barwon Heads	Nigel Foster Group Training
18 Feb	Barwon Heads	Nigel Foster Private Training
3 Mar	Corio Bay	David Golightly
9-11 Mar	Corner Inlet	Derek Wilson
23 Mar	Waikerville Weekend	Raia Wall
24 Mar	Waratah Bay	Raia Wall and Robin Boundy
29-31 Mar	Nooramunga Coastal Park	Peter Sharp
29-31 Mar	Nadgee Coast	Tom Davis
6-7 Apr	Rosebud	First aid Course
13-14 Apr	Port to Port 100km	Peter Costello
20-21 Apr	Torquay	Training Group
27-28 Apr	Corner Inlet	Terry Barry & Tony Chick
12 May	Altona to Pt Cook	Peter Sharp
19 May	South Werribee to Portarlington Return	Richard Rawling
26 May	Flinders	Terry Barry
8-10 Jun	Snake Island	Neil Brenton
30 Jun	Cleeland Bight	Robin Boundy
14 Jul	Sandridge to St Kilda	Richard Rawling
28 Jul	Barwon Heads	John & Tina Evertze
11 Aug	Altona to Williamstown Yatch Club	Neil Brenton
25 Aug	Shoreham	Terry Barry
8 Sep	Altona to Pt Cook	Neil Brenton
TBC		Training Group
29 Sep	Mallacoota	Tony Chick
10-11 Oct	Gippsland Lakes	Peter Sharp
27 Oct	Cleeland Bight	Raia Wall
2-5 Nov	Melb -Cup	To Be Decided
13-14 Nov	VSKC AGM 2013	Committee



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'if I die trying this, will I feel stupid?' (John Robinson)