

Sea Trek

Safety on
the Water

www.vskc.org.au

Summer 2015/16



Issue 85



The VSKC

The Victorian Sea Kayak Club was formed in 1979, aimed at bringing together sea kayakers in our part of the world, creating opportunities to meet and organise trips, and to promote the interests of sea kayakers. Club members have done some marvellous and sometimes very challenging trips by sea kayak around our nearby coasts of Victoria and Tasmania and further afield. Our founding members made the first sea kayak circumnavigation of Tasmania and the first south to north crossing of Bass Strait. Members regularly paddle across

Bass Strait, and take their kayaks to remote and interesting areas. Equally, we all love relaxing short trips in our local waters, with plenty of time to socialise. We welcome new members and encourage a culture in which members help each other with skills, gear, safety, trip information and organisation. The club runs training courses and has a grading system, although training is not aimed at absolute novices. New members are expected know something of sea kayaking, have access to a kayak, and be ready to explore the marvellous opportunities which sea kayaking offers. The club gets together once a year for

its annual general meeting held as part of a weekend of activities on and off the water, with informative training sessions and presentations from interesting speakers. We run a range of club trips throughout the year for all levels of ability, helping members to improve their proficiency and take part in trip leadership. We keep in touch through this website, email news, and our club magazine Sea Trek.

For more information read go to the Docs and Downloads link from the Web page, and download our Operating Principles and Membership application, or contact our Membership Officer.



In this Edition



Cover

Photo: Ben Flora (Red Eye, 14 Feb 2016)

Sigla

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Regular Columns

Editorial 4 ■ President's Podcast 4

Feature

A Frustrating Day Out (Terry Barry) 5 ■ Spray Skirt Safety (Terry Barry) 6 ■ Caught in a Gale (Helmut Heinze) 8

Gear

Why the Sirona? (Bruce Downes) 10 ■ A Humble Safety Device (Helmut Heinze) 11

Day Trips and Overnighters

A Winter's Journey around French Island (Peter Wilson) 12 ■ Christmas Turkey Burn-off Crossing (Helmut Heinze) 14 ■ A Furneaux Adventure (Terry Barry) 18

Club Life

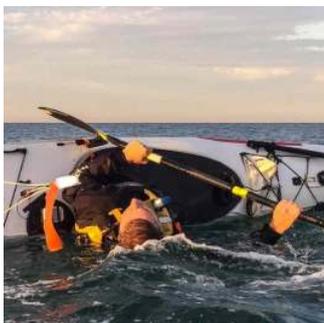
Four Blokes, Five Islands (Simon Lehman) 25 ■ Paddling Red-Eyed (Ben Flora) 28 ■ Paddling, Peddling and Puddling — A Newbie on the Sorrento Circuit (Laureen Knight) 30 ■ My First Day Trip with the VSKC (Gayle Burke) 33 ■ Rescue Training at Barwon Heads (Peter Wilson) 35

Photo Stories

Those Mornings — Photo Story (Ben Flora)

p35

Editorial



Finally another Sea Trek is out, thanks to our trusty authors and photographers. Your editor struggled a bit to keep his head above wa-

ter (see image) due to some unforeseen work commitments that took priority. Yet it was a heart-warming to see how many chipped in and wrote terrific pieces on short notice and helped out with great photo shoots. Apologies to everyone whom I kept waiting for this edition, and apologies for the contributions that have been deferred into the next number of Sea Trek.

This issue collects a couple of contributions about

safety on the water. Not only is safety something important 'anyway' to warrant attention but it goes to the core of the Club: enjoying the adventure of sea kayaking in many forms while trying to mitigate its inherent risks through safe practices. It is not good enough to have training schemes and rules on paper, what is required is a *lived* culture of safe paddling.

Paddling and practising in a cohesive group with

mixed skill levels and experience is a great way of sharing the adventure of sea kayaking. Have a read of Terry Barry's article on group cohesion and then go out and paddle *together* (and feel free to dunk your head under water, polish your strokes or zigzag within the pod if you need a bit a technical challenge or need to let of steam).

— Ed.



President's Podcast



Welcome to another issue of Sea Trek. This edition's focus on safety at sea is very timely given the fact that our sport has very real risks and potential dangers when things go wrong.

I have just returned from a few weeks pad-

dling out from Tasmania to two Island groups in the Bass Strait—in the North East (Furneaux Group) and the North West (Hunter Group). We experienced some pretty challenging weather at times and I became keenly aware of the importance of being well prepared for problems, both on and off the water during expeditions.

From tiger snakes to mid-crossing capsizes, sea sickness, and pod separation, the priority of being 'prepared, provisioned and practiced' well before things go wrong looms

large in my mind. On the scary side, when those three 'P's are neglected, consequences can be severe, if not terminal. On the other side, when they are well covered, even very serious combinations of problems can be managed and overcome.

You'll find some very helpful articles to this end in this issue. You'll also find some inspiring stories of a range of other short and long sea kayaking adventures undertaken by club members in recent months. I'm sure you'll enjoy the read.

My thanks, on behalf of all club members, go to editor Helmut and all the article contributors. I'm sure you'll find, as I have, that this is another wonderful read. Summer may have passed, but the cooler months provide some fantastic opportunities for paddling and so I hope to see you out on the water enjoying all of the challenges and pleasures of paddling our long skinny boats together.

Cheers

Bob Fergie

(VSKC President)



Terry Barry

A Frustrating Day Out

Terry Barry is VSKC Instructor with a long history of contributions to leadership and kayaking safety as practitioner, educator and author of training material – (Ed.)

When you go sea kayaking you make a conscious decision whether to paddle solo or with a group and who you will paddle with.

Most paddle with a group or at least a buddy. The main reason is a feeling of safety, having someone to help out if you find yourself in the water instead of on it!

Paddling with others also adds a social side to sea kayaking and a chance to learn skills. It also allows you to participate in paddles that otherwise you may not have the knowledge and /or skill to safely attempt. It is arguably the main reason why we join the VSKC in the first place.

Paddling solo has its own rewards, some of us enjoy the added adventure and challenge. However it comes at the cost of significant risk increase and should only be attempted by the more experienced.

I am prompted to write this piece as recently I was on a club paddle with 14 other members being led by an experienced club member. The group was made up from a wide variety of paddling experience from new and relatively unskilled through to instructors.

A great recipe for a social adventure. One where the lesser experienced could learn and develop skills from others. A feeling of safety in numbers. Certainly the leader could take comfort that given the good spread of ability in the pod any difficulties could be overcome. The adage of safety in numbers certainly should apply here.

This surely is the essence of the VSKC.

Sadly this turned out not the case, a scenario I have seen played out time and again on VSKC paddles for well

over a decade. Here is what happened.

After a good pre-launch briefing and group consensus of the days paddle given the conditions and make-up of the pod, the group paddled off to our first destination some 6–7 kms away. This involved a ferry glide to overcome tidal forces as well as a 1 km crossing of a busy shipping channel.

There was a designated leader and two tail enders appointed. The group quickly headed off through a flotilla of moored boats and it was soon apparent that the pace of the group was going to be a problem for a couple of the less experienced. Not to worry, the leader will soon realise this and regroup and perhaps set a more realistic pace after the initial ‘adrenalin’ of the launch. Sadly no.

The group did regroup before crossing the shipping channel, then as we set off again. It seemed to be a case of who could reach the first destination the quickest. The leader was left mid-field and the less experienced were left at the rear, albeit shepherded by the designated tail enders

Let me be clear — at this point there was no safety concern. The destination was close, the less experienced were being looked after. Just a pity that they were made to feel less than adequate and missing social interaction; the leader was also left feeling that pace and behaviour of the group was being somewhat dictated by a few ‘rebels’ at the front.

After a break we departed for the second destination. Five or so kilometres away, rear-quartering wind and with the tide. The pattern repeated itself with the same small group at the rear and members of the pod arriving at the island destination for lunch as small groups, some ahead of the pod leader and some landing some distance from the main group. The

leader was again torn between the ‘rebels’ at the front and the tail enders. Quote from the leader — *I agree that the next leg we got spread again, and I was torn about pulling everyone up, including those that went to play in the waves. Again we had the rebels head off and I did blow a whistle to try reel them in.*

After lunch this is when the situation further deteriorated. As did paddling conditions!

Destination was again five or so kilometres away, into the tide and a headwind causing small choppy conditions. Tough going if you are not used to it. And remember the less experienced had already had a tough morning.

So off we went, quickly the pod spread ahead of the tail enders, also the spread went to the sides.

It was not long before if you looked hard, you could see some heads in the distance and to the sides similarly.

I would estimate the spread to be $\frac{1}{2}$ kilometre front to back, a little less side to side.

Ask yourself if you needed assistance in this situation, who would see you? Chances of being heard are next to nothing.

Meanwhile, at the back, four of us, one needing a tow and only two kayaks with graded paddlers set up for towing. Whilst not the end of the world, it was a long tow into head wind and tide. Where were the fit paddlers? All at the bloody front of course!

Paddling way out front outside the parameters of the trip briefing is nothing short of ‘selfish’ paddling. These paddlers have no concern for the pod as a whole, if something happens to them, they have the whole pod coming from behind to help them out. If something goes wrong behind, they are virtually useless to assist as they have no idea that there is an issue

in the first place. I have also found that these paddlers rarely bother to look behind them in case there is a problem within the pod and from the distance between us what hope have they of seeing anything anyway?

At one stage the leader held the group and we made ground, only for them to take off again before we could get close enough to communicate.

Quote from the leader — *On the next leg, I agree the spread was too great, but again I was caught trying to manage a few less experienced paddlers up front v what was unfolding down the back. I blew my whistle twice and we stopped several times but the chop you note (indeed reasonable runners coming in) caused me to judge that it was best to get that front group to the destination and then wait for you guys. I could see that you were towing and if we had a VHF up back I could have checked to see if you required assistance, I did head back at one point but was concerned for the group already there — on the horns of a dilemma you could say.**

Once at the next destination, at a feature in the middle of the bay, I certainly made my feelings known to the assembled group. (Sorry if this spoilt the mood guys. Well no I'm not sorry at all!)

The pod then completed the rest of the paddle, another 6–7 kms as a group. The way every paddle should be conducted. Each person aware of where they were positioned in relation to the group and within communication distance. Some towing was still required, but this time there was back up if needed.

As you can see the behaviour of a few had a negative impact on the experiences of many. Importantly it should be noted the 'pressure' that the leader felt in trying to control the

group and conduct a safe and enjoyable experience for all.

This pressure is a major reason some Grade 3 members do not place trips on the club calendar. Instead choosing to privately select who they paddle with.

So what is it going to take to finally extinguish this type of 'ugly' behaviour on club paddles?

I have personally witnessed two near-miss incidents and felt that cold sinking in the gut feeling when a paddler is overdue and whereabouts unknown. Luckily, and only by luck, they turned up ok.

We all know better, are trained in group paddling and the leaders are drilled and tested on decision making, pod control and risk management. Why do we still have this type of behaviour on a club paddle?

To me this was a frustrating day, a day when the very worst of pod behaviour was demonstrated to new members. A day when I wondered had any progress been made in risk management on club paddles and had the efforts of training, grading and instruction given by so many for so long been a waste of time.

I certainly hope not and hope I never witness the 'ugly side' of pod behaviour again.

Let's all learn from this and move on- in the right direction.

The following extract is from the *VSKC Operating Principles* available under *Documents & Downloads* on the Club Web Site:

3 Conduct of VSKC Trips

3.1: The Decision to Paddle Key Points:

- The decision to paddle rests with the paddler
- The paddler must be objective and honestly disclose material facts about their skills
- All VSKC trips have a nominated and graded Trip Leader

●The Trip Leader has the final decision on who may participate on a VSKC trip

●The Trip Leader is entitled to ask paddlers to alter their conduct if it is affecting group safety or cohesion.

Key learnings and points to consider

Key learnings and points to consider from this are:

The leader doesn't need any extra pressure from you by uncooperative actions/ behaviour. They are running this paddle as a service to the club. Respect the responsibilities of their role.

Be objective in assessing your ability to undertake the planned paddle in the conditions on the day. Don't be afraid to speak up.

At **ALL TIMES** participants need to be attentive to their position in the pod and paddle as a cohesive and group. Experienced members should be an asset to the leader not an encumbrance.

You should **NEVER** be out of communication range at any stage without permission from the leader. i.e. *is it alright if XYZ head off ahead or over there and meet you at ...*

With a little common sense and awareness we can all have a nice day!

* The leader makes reference to the use of a VHF radio in assisting communication. In my opinion, whilst there may be a case for VHF radios being a useful tool they should not be used to enable pod spread to be the norm and should be totally unnecessary for communication within the pod.

■



Capsised — Photo: BFL

Terry Barry

Spray Skirt Safety

Spray skirts are an important safety feature of all sea kayaks, they keep the water out of the cockpit and keep us warm and dry in cold conditions. They do however pose a safety risk if they are not easily detached from the cockpit combing in the event of capsize.

To my knowledge there have been two ‘close calls’ on VSKC paddles where a paddler has found themselves upside down and unable to exit the cockpit. In both incidents the paddler was rescued by another paddler who had the presence of mind to see the trouble these folk were in and help right the kayak.

What are the common factors in both incidents:

- Both paddlers had previous wet exit experience.
- The ‘pull tabs’ in both cases were obscured.
- Neither paddlers had mastered a roll.
- Both paddlers were small framed and not particularly strong.
- There were other paddlers in close

proximity.

In one case the paddler had performed a wet exit successfully earlier in the day. The rollover was a planned exercise in order to practice rescues. The paddler was wearing full fingered neoprene gloves which impaired their finger dexterity. The pull tab was very flexible being an old skirt it had become soft and had tucked itself alongside the combing making it difficult to locate.

In the other case the paddler had upgraded to a new spray skirt and new kayak which had not been tested in a wet exit. Assistance was required at launch to fit the skirt. It was a tight fit. The capsize was not planned. The pull tab was obscured by a camera bag on the front deck.

Lessons to be learned

- Always ensure the pull tab is clear of any obstruction.
- Always observe any capsize and be ready to assist in needed.
- Always test new gear to make sure it performs as required.

- Consider fitting a small ball such as a float or practice golf ball to the pull tab to ensure it is easily located in an emergency.

- Practice wet exits on a regular basis with and without using the pull tab with an observer.

- Check the location of your pull tab every time you fit your skirt and observe other paddlers skirts for correct fit (pull tabs visible).

- Use fingerless gloves designed for paddling, not dive gloves.

It is also very worthwhile to practice wet exiting without using the pull tab on your spray skirt. Try pulling the sides of the skirt — Push down hard with one hand on the side of the skirt and use the other to grab hold of the edge of the skirt and pull. You can also try pushing up with your knees. Each cockpit combing and spray skirt will be different — see what works for you — *IN A CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT* of course!





Helmut Heinze

Caught in a Gale

I lost my hat the day the Spirit of Tasmania broke from its moorings and lost its loading bridge. This is how it happened and what went wrong.

The 13th of January was a hot day, close to 40 degrees. The forecast promised a cool change late at night. During the day there would be a gusty northerly, turning NW in the late afternoon.

Earlier in the day I had paddled down the Yarra to Sandridge Beach (A), just north of Port Melbourne, for some practice in the shallows.

In the late afternoon the sky became grey and the wind unsteady, with north-westerly component. As forecast. Beach goers started packing up. I readied myself for the paddle home, up the Yarra. Just before leaving I noticed a menacing black cloud just above and a smoke-like whisp of grey in the West, just visible over the top of the sea wall that forms the eastern border of Webb Dock (A–B). I was concerned about lightening and waited for another 15 minutes,

watching. The black cloud moved west and started dissipating. The strange grey ‘smoke’, though, was still hanging in the west behind the sea wall of the dock.

Finally I resolved to go and paddled to the end of the sea wall. Only when I turned west at the corner (B) I saw Williamstown on the far end shrouded in pitch-black darkness. I could see street lights and the lights of cars in the distance. The view was stunningly beautiful and terrifying at the same time. It was like a black band painted along the horizon.

Still fearing an electrical storm I hesitated briefly but decided to paddle on. I told myself I could escape into Williamstown or pull out at various points on the river which I would reach in 10 minutes of brisk paddling. By now the wind has suddenly become very blustery and I was struggling in the rebound off Web Dock. — I lowered the rudder and focused on a fast transit into the river.

Two minutes later it was too late to turn around. A strong wind was gusting from west, and I was rid-

ing rodeo in short steep wind waves with breaking crests. The wind was steadily cranking up. I was fighting to keep the kayak perpendicular to the waves. Sweep, sweep, sweep — and it made barely a difference. I was close to a buoy and realised that I was barely travelling forwards. I could barely prevent the kayak from broaching. Finally I remembered I still had the rudder down (I don’t use it often). In a split-second I pulled up the rudder. Now the kayak was now bouncing more freely. Leaning forward to lock in the bow, I regained control.

Then came the gale-force squalls. The colour of the sea suddenly changed far out at Williamstown and something like the shadow of a cloud came racing towards me.

A second later I was hit by a strong blow that made me duck low over the front deck while fighting to stay upright in steep waves. The initial blast lasted only a few seconds but it pushed me backwards 10 or 20 metres. I stayed upright by planting the blade of the paddle far at the front into the water and let it trail while

travelling backwards.

Then I saw another squall coming. This time the sea turned foggy-white at Williamstown, and two or three seconds later I found myself fighting breaking waves whose crests were blown off horizontally. I barely could see, with the water spluttering into my face. With great difficulty I stayed upright, but after a few seconds I was able fight my way a few metres into the lee of the spit that separated the dock from the river (D), at times going backwards, at other times gaining ground.

A construction container and some big machinery provided some protection, but being close to the edge of the spit had to deal with waves bending around the corner (a physical effect called dispersion). I had to hold my position within a patch of about 10 by 10 metres, wary of getting too close to the rocky spit wall, too far away out of the lee or too far into the waves on my left.

Then minutes later the worst was over. The wind was still strong but steady, and the breakers subsided as fast as they had appeared. I waited another five minutes, and then I was on my way up the Yarra (E), in bouncy but manageable water with a solid westerly giving me a fast ride home.

A bit more than an hour later I arrived at the rowing club houses at South Bank. The air was stale and stuffy, flies were buzzing around, and it felt as if nothing had happened at all.

Lessons learnt

- Turn around or seek shelter *immediately* upon seeing an unusual, menacing sky or sea (in my case deep blackness over Williamstown which I have become aware of at point B).

- Rudder or skeg must be UP in strong headwind!

- In extreme winds crouch forward as much as possible, plant paddle into water at your feet (works as well when caught in the whitewash of a big, freshly broken wave).

- Keep bow pointed into wind or waves, even when travelling sideways.

- In extreme wind, you are entirely on your own. You will be fighting waves blow by blow, both hands on the paddle. There's no way communicating, let alone rendering or receiving help. The noise of the wind deafening.

- Always keep a firm grip on your kayak, lock in your legs (in case of a wet exit keep holding the kayak with at least one hand while getting out of the cockpit).

Final notes

I loath myself having misjudged the severity of the front. I found myself in conditions where had very limited control. I was lucky to be able to creep into some lee just 50 or 100 metres away, but it was a long tug of war, with the strongest gusts pushing me backward and short 'lulls' (all relative) just long enough to gain a few metres over ground. I do not care to ever repeat this experience. Yet it provided some interesting insights, such as:

- It is possibly to weather extreme winds for a few minutes as long as you stay focussed (I also took care not to paddle full force to prevent injury and to be able to sustain the battle for some time).

- My wing paddle worked surprisingly well, it provided a good grip in the messy water and little wind resistance — in rough, complex conditions I usu-

ally prefer a Euro blade for better control.

- Extreme winds can whip up breaking waves even within a short fetch of water (not more than 1 or 1.5km of water across from Williamstown).

It helped that the water was warm, I was dressed for prolonged immersion, despite the heat. The wind was blowing to the shore. In that sense I never was in any imminent danger. This made it less stressful. I could take on the battle in a slightly more relaxed manner. I was carrying a waterproof phone and a VHF radio in my PFD (I always do on the river). If I had capsized and if the wind had blown me into the any structure my kayak could have been crushed, but it also could have been blown away while sitting on the beach — these were just extreme conditions at any rate.

Finally: what were the wind speeds? There had been reports of measurements of up to 100km/h . Fawkner Beacon 20km further south 'only' recorded a gust of 80km/h. I never will know exactly what hit me (and the Spirit of Tasmania).



Wind graph at Fawkner Beacon



In the new Sirona

Bruce Downes

Why the Sirona?

As some of the club members might know, I have suffered some major medical issues over the last year, resulting in restriction of blood flow and nerve damage to my left leg and foot. With the result that I am no longer able to sit comfortably in my Nadgee Solo or paddle for any time.

This has left me with a choice of either giving up paddling altogether or finding another kayak to paddle. Since October I have tried a number of hire boats but my foot didn't feel comfortable in them. At the Cape Paterson Club AGM last year, I was able to take the opportunity to sit in a number of kayaks both owned by club members and the demo boats brought to the AGM.

Selecting a new kayak

My selection criteria for a new kayak was a cockpit with enough foot room to allow me to both rest my foot comfortably and to allow for plenty of movement, the other criteria was no rudder pedals, as I cannot 'feel' the amount of force I'm applying. This left me with a choice of a skeg boat.

After hopping into and out of a number of kayaks at the AGM, I

came down to three contenders, *Valley Etain 17.5*, *Wildness System Tempest Pro 170* and the new *Valley Sirona 16.1* under my initial criteria. With my foot and leg problems, I knew that I wouldn't be able to do any great paddling distances, and until I had some of my medical issues sorted out paddling would be restricted to a few hours at the most, so stowage space for a multi day expedition in the boat wasn't going to be a concern.

I was intrigued with the new Valley Sirona, being a shorter than the most sea kayaks on the market and what was said to be a new design by Valley, though it's close in size to the now discontinued Valley Avocet, it has been designed for larger paddlers, so after Mark Sundin from Expedition Kayak gave me the permission I took the demo Sirona out for a short paddle in the front of the life saving club at Cape Patterson.

I found that Sirona had a nice feel (for me) to it, it paddled well in a straight line into the waves with a small amount of skeg deployed, turned reasonable well and went off like a rocket when travelling with any waves. More importantly I wasn't in any great discomfort after half an

hour of playing around, though I didn't push the Sirona to her limits.

At the time of last year's AGM, I wasn't yet ready to purchase a new boat as the arterial bypass I had done last Easter, was blocking up and I knew I would need another operation before I could commit to anything.

My research on the Valley Sirona via the internet, didn't turn up much information. Very few people had purchased one and there were only a few short reviews so far written, but the comments so far on the Sirona says its "manoeuvrable and playful" and "suitable for ocean play". The stats on the Sirona are 16 ft one inch (4.92 metres), 22 inches (56 cm) at its widest (abreast of the seat), and a weight of 22 kg. There will be three models of the Sirona available 15.9, 16.1 & 16.3, but only the 16.1 is current on the market.

The Sirona is a four hatch boat with the largest rear oval hatch I've ever seen, very nice lines (typical Valley style), skeg, adjustable foot pegs and soft chines.

In January after a second operation on my bypass in December, I was feeling a lot better and wanted to get back on the water. so I contacted

Mark Sundin at *Expedition Kayaks* about the Sirona, Mark answered my question about the Sirona and sent me photos I had requested. He had one in stock ready for delivery and as luck would have it Richard the Kayak Courier was due to do a delivery run down the east coast that weekend. I quickly arranged to buy a Sirona, the only one available for purchase with a white deck, grey hull with red trim, the demo boat I saw in November with orange trim wasn't for sale (damn!!).

After a few days waiting, Richard the kayak courier turned up at my

place on Tuesday with my new kayak. So after unpacking it it went straight on to my car and over to Neil Brenton to be fitted with the latest version of his MagnetX switch and battery technology along with a bilge pump. Picking the Sirona up from Neil later that week I was able to make to the Half Moon Bay rolling night to launch my new kayak, no skills practised, just a relaxing hour or so, on the water.

First impressions

So far to date I've been out four times and I'm just getting a feel for the

Sirona. My paddle fitness is still very low and it's going to take a lot of short paddles to work myself back up to being able to do "Red Eyes" and other club paddles.

One thing I can say about the Sirona is that it does fly down waves, and even mild surf off Ricketts Point I've had the boat running at over 11 km/h !!

First impressions? — This is a really great boat for anybody wanting to play around on waves, it tracks well and its short length will suit anybody who has storage issues.

■

Helmut Heinze

A Humble Safety Device



Have it ready!

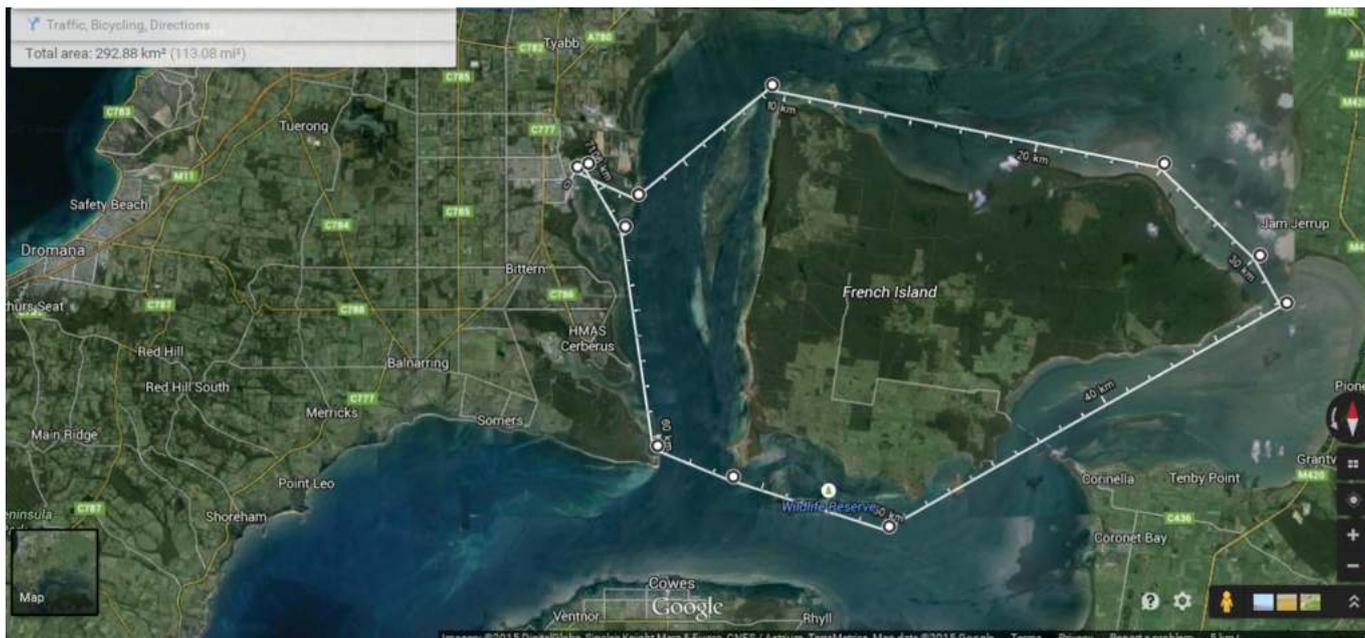
A pea-less whistle. Cost: A\$ 5–15. Weight: 5–15 gramms. When to be used: ideally never (because we are paddling as a close pod and looking after each other all time, aren't we?). But sometimes things fall apart, you need to be heard and the voice does not carry far enough.

I carry my whistle on a short thin cord tied to the shoulder strap of my PFD. The shorter the better. This way it does not get tangled (but it may get trapped *under* the shoulder — I always check when pushing off the beach).

You get whistles from marine and outdoor shops. Anything to watch out for? Possibly a shape that allows you to blow the whistle hands-off. For you may want to use your hands to protect your ears. A good whistle is deafening.

Little money and weight for added safety in an emergency. Highly recommended.

■



Around French Island from Hastings — one of many sketches circulated in preparation of the trip

Peter Wilson

A Winter's Journey around French Island

Hastings to Hastings. 13 June 2015. Start 6:45a.m, return 17:00. Distance about 70km. Participants: Andrew Campbell (Arctic Raider), Peter Costello (Aquanaut), trip leader, Helmut Heinze (Epic 16x), Peter Wilson (Aquanaut RM). Wind: very light northerly, <8kt in the morning, later <3kt est.; sea: some minor chop <0.3m in the morning, later flat. — Photos and plots by various members of the trip.

On the 11 of June last year I received the following email and 2 days later joined 3 other intrepid VSKC members on what was to be an epic day's paddle ...

Hi Pete, interested in a winter French Island circumnavigation this Saturday. Tides are right. So far: Peter C, Andrew C, myself (Helmut H). We have been working out plans the last two nights. It's tough, fast trip, good tidal currents, light wind, early start, early finish: Hastings launch: 6:30am, Return: ~4-5pm, est. 9-10 hrs paddling time. Distance: 71km. Send you the trip details, route,

milestones etc, if you are interested. We need to average over 7km/h over two legs of 30km. So it's tough. — Helmut

71 km in 10 Hr's. Now there's a challenge, was I up to it? I wasn't sure but there was only one way to find out. After checking with the family and some quick Internet cramming on Google Earth and "how to prepare for endurance events", I was in.

The basic plan was to depart Hastings before sunrise and ride the last of the incoming tide as far as possible north and east around the island in an anti clockwise direction, following either Horseshoe channel across the top or venturing in close and shallow through the marine park during high slack water. Somewhere around the eastern corner we'd break for lunch while the current turned and then get sucked down along the south coast as far and fast as possible, rounding Tortoise Head as the low slack approached and catch the incoming tide back north and home. The forecast winds looked

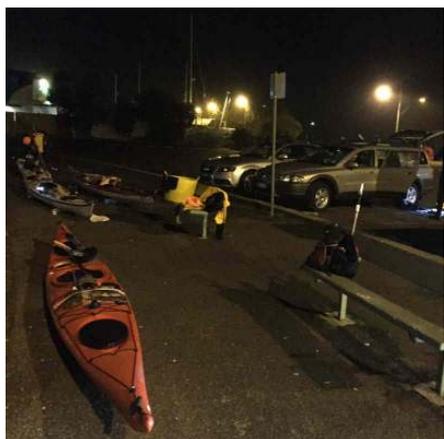
of little assistance/hindrance, so it would come down to careful pacing and endurance. This would easily double the longest distance I'd ever paddled and so was an exciting but rather daunting challenge.

Obviously with only a day and a half left to prepare there was not a lot I could do physically other than eating carefully and well, some stretching and ensuring I was well rested. I did what I could to familiarise myself with the route, channels, banks, beaches and identified some possible bail out points should something go wrong or I keeled over. But most important was to get a sense of the tides and how the current might flow across the day. Pete C, Helmut & Andrew had come up with 3 slight variations on the basic route, all with tight schedules of waypoints we had to make by specific times to maximise our tidal assist and not get caught out by a turning current or left high and dry in the shallows.

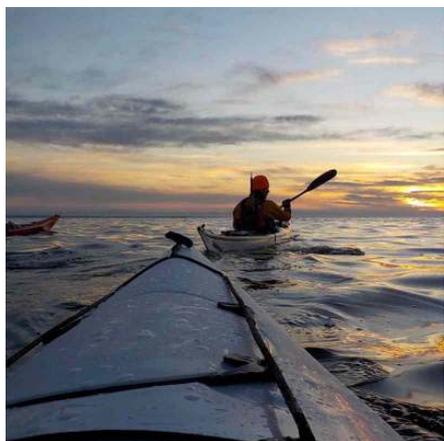
The Paddle

Looking back in hindsight it was a

great day, and fantastic experience ... even fun! I really appreciate the more experienced paddlers taking a chance and inviting me to join the paddle, I learned a lot. At the time it was a serious SLOG, but enough time has passed that if someone asked me to do it again I'd probably jump at the chance.



Pre-dawn launch at Hastings



Sunrise at the top of French Island

The pre dawn launch and sunrise were wonderful and indeed the first 25-30kms across the top through the marine park to Palmer Point and and down past Jam Jerrup on the opposite shore all went smoothly, only pausing briefly back around Joe's Island to decide whether to stick to deeper faster moving water with a longer indirect route or straight line it across the slower shallows to Palmer Point. We opted for the shortest possible route this time. On the hour we'd take

a quick on water break, stretch and snack stop with a decent lunch break through the slack water on a beach a couple of kms north Spit Point.

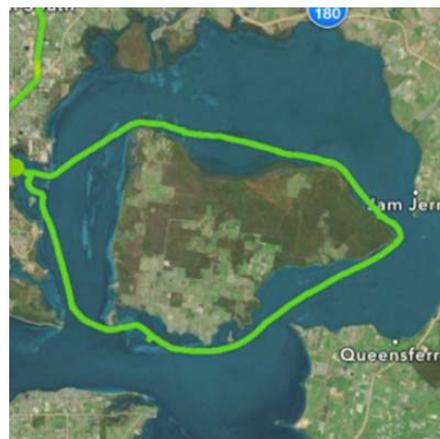


Lunch stop

It was after we got back in the boats, rounded Spit Point and began to tick through the 40's and 50's and into the 60 kms that it started to become hard work. Fortunately we were able to hit all our key tidal milestones and got some great tidal assistance when we needed it most. With the outgoing tide down the East Arm channel we were averaging around 10km/hr for about 6km.

Looking at our tracked route on my phone app we managed to find a very efficient route with only one navigational hiccup. We had turned up Blakes Channel only to find it getting shallow quicker than planned. We then tried to shortcut across Tortoise Head Bank back into the main channel too early and had to backtrack slightly to avoid a long walk in very shallow water.

Our stats via Pete C's GPS show the total distance covered as 69.8 km with an average speed of 6.6 kph, a total paddle time of 9 hrs 24 mins and total trip time of 10 hrs 33 mins. Our maximum speed reached during peak flow on the southern leg was 13.6kph! (note GPS started when kayakers were up next to the cars and stopped when the kayakers were being unloaded)



Actual course paddled

Helmut's notes from the day and my tips for first time distance paddlers follow:

From Helmut's Notes

Paddle 13 June 2015. Start 6:45a.m, return 17:00. Participants: Andrew Campbell (Arctic Raider), Peter Costello (Aquanaut), trip leader, Helmut Heinze (Epic 16x), Peter Wilson (Aquanaut RM). Tides: H 10:15am (Jam Jerrup), L 2:15 (Cowes). Wind: very light northerly, <8kt in the morning, later <3kt est.; sea: some minor chop <0.3m in the morning, later flat.

Hastings to NW corner of French Island (Crawfish Rock/Scrub Point): ~10km: Navigated out of Hastings in darkness, after clearing harbour headed to NW corner of French island on a magn. bearing of 45 degrees NE. Found some shallow water at top of Middle Spit. Reached NW corner at ~8am.

Northern part of French Island: ~15km: Magn bearing of 90 degree. Did not contour the coast nor seek deeper water further north. Passed island (Joes Island?) on the right. Relatively slow progress. Still rising tide did not assist. Speed avg about 6.5 km/h. Close to land some shallow areas but a few hundred meters off we always had deep enough water to allow us to stick to an almost straight line. Short break on the water. No place to land, all mangroves.

Northeastern edge of French Island to eastern corner (Spit Point

opposite Jam Jerrup on the mainland) ~5km. Continuing on SE bearing. Landscape now a bit more varied but still predominantly mangroves. Mainland closing in from east. Reached eastern corner at ~11am. Distance so far: 30 km. Early lunch break on beach just north of Spit Point. Continued at ~12:00 pm.

Spit Point to southern corner (Long Point) ~20km. Found good tidal flow, at times 4km/h, Averaging speed in the high 9 km/h. Again, we went in almost a straight line SW, letting the French Island coast recede to our right and getting closer to the mainland on our left at Settlement Post, Corinella

Southern Corner to Tortoise Head ~10km: Ebb flow now slowing, Tortoise Head clearly visible. Headed there on the inside of Tortoise Head Bank which started emerging. Reached Tortoise Head at 2:45pm, half an hour after low tide.

Tortoise Head to Hastings ~11km: Found slack water, decided to head to Hastings without a further break cutting across the Northern Arm diagonally (compass bearing about NW)), but staying in deeper waters not to miss any little help the incoming tide could offer (it was very little judging from the water movement at two channel markers), Headed closer to land at Crib Point, passing the submarine on the left, skimming along the right side of Sandstone Island and meandered into Hastings following some channels as the water was still too low to go direct line.

Finally noteworthy:

1. Each member of the team had done their navigation plan independently — we were travelling on four sets of routes, way points, lapsed

time goals etc. and were able to agree about the strategy (at times taking a punt).

2. Funnily the *magnetic* bearings after correcting the compass variation around French Island turn out mostly very simple ones, like exactly NE, then E, then SE etc. It paid off sticking to these figures and travelling almost straight lines. We beat the calculated distance by a 1km or so (by crossing the North Arm back to Hastings in a more efficient way than initially sketched out, not stopping at Sandy Point) — a sign that we were paddling extremely close to the optimum (bar a minor blip close to Tortoise Head).

3. Lots of redundancy of equipment (not just charts, GPS') but spare paddles (we were travelling with twice the number of paddles than actually used to cater for all sort of personal preferences, including a Greenland paddle and a wing paddle.

What you need ...

Find below some personal notes for long-distance paddles, based on what worked and what didn't work on our French Island circumnavigation.

- During the paddle eat like you're hiking, little snacks often. Your body can only process food at a given rate, if you exceed that rate while you're paddling it can lead to queasiness and stitches. I found my home-made trail mix and oatly muesli bars interspersed with fresh fruit great. Munching a grape every so often was fantastic and my Lady Finger banana at the 50km mark tasted incredible and gave me a huge pep.
- Stay hydrated, as with food, little mouthfuls often. Along with 2L of

water I also took 2 x 600mm electrolyte drinks to help prevent cramps.

- Pack a couple of clothing combo's, again like hiking layers are best, pack a wind shell to quickly chuck over your wet paddle clothes during shore breaks. Changing your head wear can quickly adjust your temperature with minimal effort.

- If leaving pre dawn don't forget your boat light, but just as importantly don't forget a light to read your compass by ... knowing which way is forward can be quite helpful! A headlamp with a red light setting allows you to maintain your night vision.

- Laminate a computer screen grab from Google Earth to the back of your chart and spend some time prior to the paddle trying to find features that should be identifiable from the water. Landforms, man made features, vegetation types all help. Low slung, gently curving land masses and mangroves can make it very tricky to gauge distance and speed.

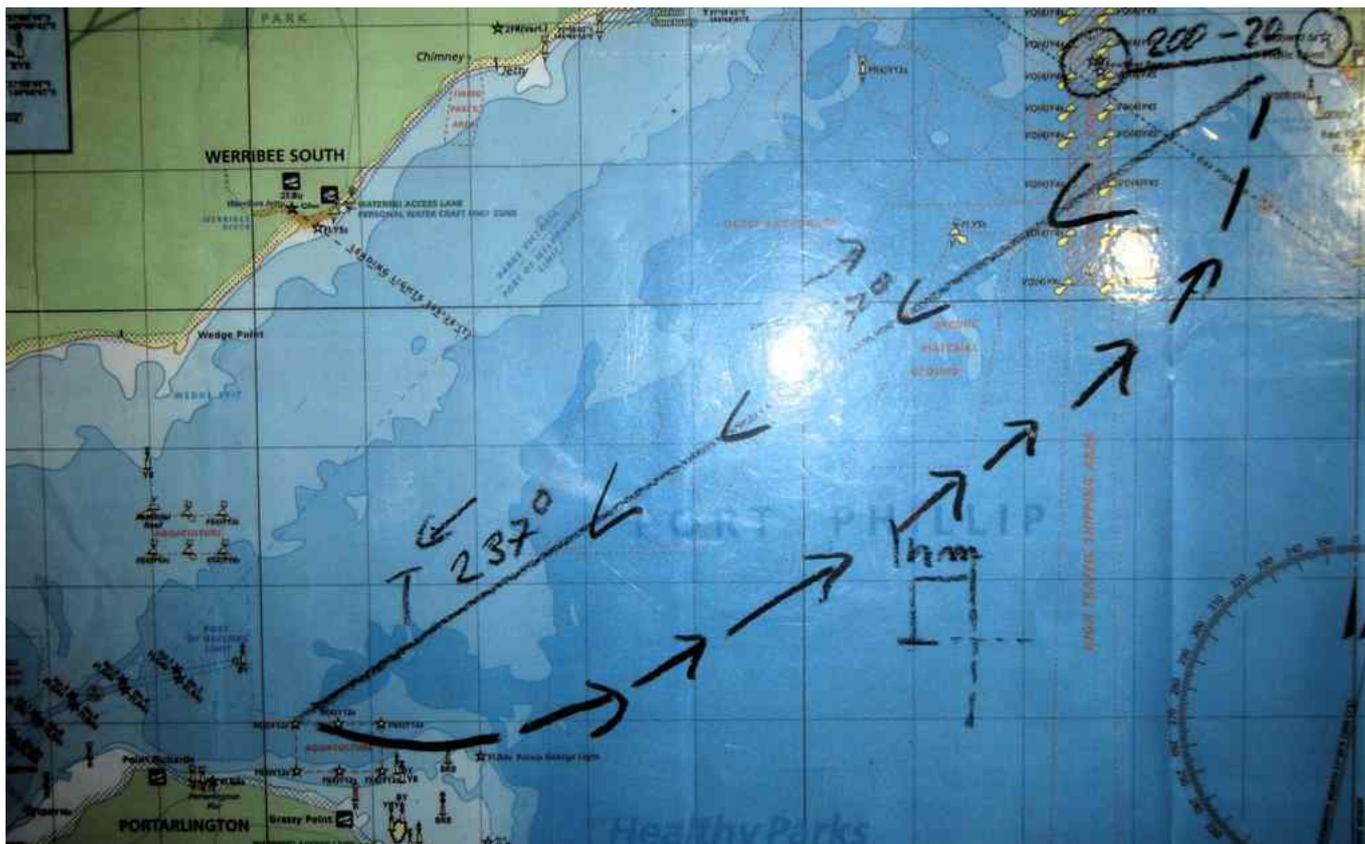
- Paralleling your boat to the shore, taking a compass bearing and finding the parallel on the map can sometimes help.

- Mark your key waypoints, milestones, tides and forecasts directly on the laminated chart with permanent pen, (wipe off with metho after)

- Take note of potential tricky/interesting spots and try and identify some bail out options in case of emergency

- And finally the distance to the next waypoint is ALWAYS longer than it looks, don't get too excited, pace yourself, and always try and keep a reserve of energy incase something unexpected happens.

■



Sandringham — Port Arlington — Sandringham return (chart with navigation notes)

Helmut Heinze

Christmas Turkey Burn-off Crossing

Sandringham to Port Arlington and return: 28 Dec 2015 — Peter C, trip leader (Valley Aquanaut), Helmut H (Epic 16x); Sandringham to Port Arlington one way: Andrew M, (Stellar Intrepid 18). Paddled distance ca 80 km.

Red Eye paddlers are creatures of habit, have to be. Otherwise one would not do it. When Christmas comes around it has to be framed by the traditional Chrissie Red Eye with a breakfast and by the no less traditional “(Day after) Day after Boxing Day Christmas Turkey Burnoff”. It’s a movable holiday which can fall on any day after Boxing Day and before New Year’s Eve.

The 28th of December was shaping up as a suitable day. The wind forecast promised light south-easterly winds in the morning and a fresh south-westerly for the ride home.

Bumpy but within the limits. So our annual pilgrimage to Port Arlington (including its famed bakery) was on, and dutifully we were going yet again through the set stages of our journey which would span the hours from dawn to dusk. All the ribbing would not affect us — “why would you do it *again*, you are either very forgetful or a slow learner” (Terry B), we just followed the rules of the Order of the Red Eyes.

Prime — at day break

Sandringham Yacht Club. Our small group — some regulars were missing due to injury or other commitments — pushed off in beautiful fresh morning air, at the break of dawn. The air was almost still, the Bay was calm and welcoming. And so we began our epic crossing, at 6:15 am exactly, our

regular Red Eye time — creatures of habit we are. The plan was simple, we would follow a straight line on a bearing of about 225 degrees (mag), exactly SE on our compasses.



Ready to push off at 6:15 am ...



... and sail into a beautiful calm morning

The first hour passed pleasantly. The sun rose in the east behind our backs. A bit of chatting, but mostly silent paddling. Soon we crossed the shipping channel, Fawcner Beacon in sight to our right. First snack stop. And off we paddle again. It got warmer and brighter. We kept paddling at a steady speed, enjoying the absence of any head winds. A light easterly was even helping during the early hours. Some big ships under anchor over our right shoulder were happily debated, other things as well. And so passed another hour, and we became eligible for yet another brief pit stop.

Terce — mid-morning

The third hour was a quiet one. Conversations started thinning. Tedium crept in. Yet we were making happy progress, our destination coming into sight as a hilly streak of land. First opinions were offered which hill we should be aiming for or whether Port Arlington may still be hidden behind a land feature.

During the fourth hour our crossing was briefly enlivened by a police launch stopping by for a brief chat. They had been attracted by the glow of my orange hat and were a bit curious about three kayakers pretty much in the middle of the bay. Two young boys in blue looked a bit sceptical. The conversation went about this way: “Where are you from?” — “Sandringham.” — pause — “Hm ...

where are you heading?” — “Port Arlington ...” — pause — “Good bakery!” — “... and then back to Sandringham in the afternoon.” “Are you aware that there’ll be a fresh south-westerly later in the day?” — “So we hope!” ... and off they went, ploughing a wide lane into the sea.



Off they went ...

We lapsed back into our meditative mode of paddling. The mind was drifting, the odd sailing yacht popped up and disappeared. The wind freshened a little. We were now paddling into a light head wind. The first niggles in the wrists or shoulders were setting in.

The only thing that did not change was our destination. It kept looking the same for hours. A hill with a town, assumed to be Port Arlington. We endlessly speculated about the exact location of the beach and the harbour. There seemed to be a strange navigation curse hanging over the town, for nobody could ever remember exactly the final approach. You just had to let it happen ...

During the fifth hour another kayaker in a Greenlander popped up, seemingly coming from nowhere— a sign that we must be close to land (it turned out that he had come from behind a large oil tanker anchored close to our destination).

Finally, I don’t really remember details, we made it around a break into the harbour, then the last 50 metres through shallow water with sandy ground towards the beach. Just

before I hit ground I looked at my watch: 12:14 pm — exactly 5 hours, 59 minutes since Sandringham, paddled in a straight line of about 37 km.

We extracted our aching bodies from the boats, caring little whether landing on dry sand or halfway in the water. Anything was good as long it wasn’t a kayak seat.

Sext — noon



VSKC kayakers are renowned for being impeccably organised — getting ready for the journey home

The long awaited lunch break at last. Visit to the bakery. Food and drink on dry land. Andy M who was doing a one-way trip started cleaning up and packing up. The time passed, as always, too fast.

By almost exactly 2 pm we were gliding out of Port Arlington. Beautiful, clear and shallow water provided for a tropical scenery. The forecast promised S to SW wind later in the afternoon, but at this point it was still more like ESE — which meant we had the wind almost on our nose. In addition we encountered some unfavourable tidal flow pushing us north.

Usually one would head back to Sandringham almost on a magnetic bearing of about 45 degrees (NW) but we decided to counter wind and current with an additional 15–30 degrees further south (WNW) in order to have an easier downwind run later into the crossing.

Initially progress was modest. We traversed an aquaculture a few km off Port Arlington, then aimed for a lonely marker, and then there was nothing but blue sky and blue water.

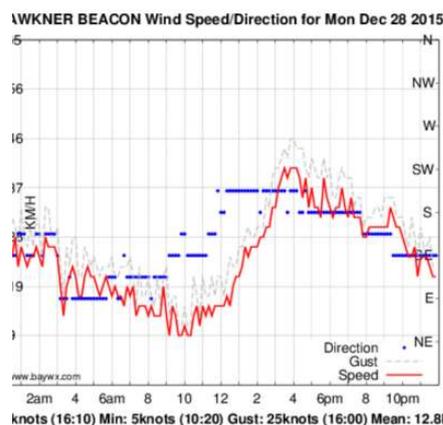
Nones — in the afternoon

The wind picked up and turned more southerly, and waves were emerging. Waves were running from SE, but with the increasing and shifting wind a second wave pattern developed, creating complex textures.

In the distance the first whitecaps appeared. Gradually the water became more agitated and charged with energy. We were flying along, zipping down the slope of the occasional bigger wave. This was fun, fun, fun! We were zig-zagging, making the most of any tempting wave, often ending up in need of correcting course and re-joining the paddle partner.



... the paddle partner appeared ...



Wind plot Fawkner Beacon — Source <http://www.baywx.com.au> Wind Archives

By now I no longer was chasing waves and more than once I backed off from the edge of a particular steep wave. A couple of times I had to brace harder than I wanted, on the verge of capsizing.

We had a forced break at the shipping channel, letting three ships pass: first the *Spirit of Tasmania* steaming south, followed by a German cargo ship, the *Wilhelmshaven*, and finally a particular ugly car transporter creeping north. While waiting we to maintain an upwind stall to deal with steep waves rolling in from SW.

Finally we crossed behind the car transporter and began our final approach. The last few kilometres were easy paddling, with wind and waves pushing from behind, but our hearts were no longer into it. We reached Sandringham and finally pulled into the harbour.

Compline — conclusion of the day

And thus we hit ground (that is: mud — it's Sandringham!) at 7:15pm. Thrilled, happy, tired. We made probably around 40km in 5 hours and 15 minutes, some of them spent waiting for shipping traffic to pass. And the best: being greeted by a grinning reception committee (Andy and Graeme) with two steaming cups of coffee! They presented us with the most difficult decision of the day: getting out of the seat first or having a coffee first.



Leaving Port Arlington on an easterly course



... and disappeared

Snack stops were kept short, and two or three hours into the crossing we were no longer rafting up as conditions became quite bouncy. Now the troughs of a bigger waves were deep enough for the paddle partner to disappear out of sight. One would quickly check the position of the partner while on top of a wave, and then catch a few runners.

When we were finally approaching the transit zone of the shipping channel (still aiming off south, towards the cliffs of Black Rock instead of Sandringham Yacht Club), we were dealing with a stiff SW wind of 18+kts and the occasional 2m wave (see Fawkner Beacon wind plot).



The waves became lumpier and ...



Terry Barry

A Furneaux Adventure

Over the years I have had a few offers to join a 'Bass Strait Crossing' crew but have always declined. The thought of long ocean crossing just doesn't sound appealing to me. One thing that did interest me was the islands encountered along the way. I also heard many groups talk about how good it would be to spend more time exploring rather than being destination focussed. So the idea was born to paddle across Banks Strait to the Furneaux Islands and spend some time exploring the area.

Being a holiday I didn't want to open the trip up to all and sundry with the leadership and risk management that goes along with that, instead I quietly invited individuals who I knew would be more than capable skill wise and more importantly be easy to get along with on a 3 week trip. I thought a group of six would be ideal but this quickly expanded and I had to put the brakes on, sorry for those that missed out or didn't get invited!

So what I referred to as the 'Dream Team' was soon assembled. There were originally 10 of us but as the date approached two had to pull out for health and other reasons, leaving a group of eight: Terry Barry, Robin Boundy, Steve Collins, Pete Dingle, Richard Rawlings, Graeme Thomp-

son, John Woollard & Bill Zombor.

The only itinerary firmly fixed was the booking for the *Spirit of Tasmania* to take us to and from Victoria to Tasmania. The in-between part was purposefully left to be planned as the trip unfolded and fitted in with the overall aim of "spending time to explore". Although we discussed things we wanted to do, places to visit and must-see attractions in reality our plans would be at the mercy of the weather and tides.

We departed on the Spirit on the 11th Jan and arrived early in the morning at Devonport on the 12th. On board that night we planned our first part of the trip as we now had an accurate weather forecast for the next few days. There was a small weather window to do the most difficult part of the whole adventure — make the 30 odd kilometre crossing of Banks Strait to Clark Island.

So after disembarking breakfast was had at the 'Hula Hut' a themed café in Devonport where we soon got into the holiday spirit.



A great place to get into the holiday mood

After shopping for fruit & veg and methylated spirits all of which you cannot take on the Spirit, we drove to Little Musselroe Bay arriving mid afternoon

Robin had used his contacts and we had a very kind offer from Liz Ponting to park the cars securely at her house. The wind was blowing hard, 18 knots ESE, there were white caps everywhere but the forecast was for the wind to drop and we set our sights on making a start and paddling 6 km to Swan Island for the night so as to set ourselves up for a small weather window to make the rest of the crossing to Clark Island in the morning.

We quickly set about packing the kayaks with gear and supplies, each of us wondering what would not fit in. We also carried 20 litres of water each. To our surprise not much had to be left behind and soon the first of many kayak carries was underway. Eight to a boat made it not too heavy but time consuming and we had to allow 20 minutes each time to launch and recover the kayaks.



A mountain of gear and supplies to pack

At 5 pm we launched and quickly made the 6 km crossing by 6 pm and set up camp on the beach on the Western side of the island. A very star-filled night with a new moon.

Next day was an early start up in the dark at 4.45 am and on the water by 5.45. Winds were 8 knots NE and predicted to increase to 20 knots by 11am. This was a head wind so we were keen to go as early as possible but still had to take into account the tides. They run at up to 3 knots in an east/west direction through Banks Strait. Banks Strait has an awesome reputation for rough water with wind against sea. With an ebbing tide it was certainly a lively bit of water. The predicted tide change was for 7 am but as became the norm for the area the change was an hour and a half late and we were drifted over 4 km off course before the change brought us back on course for the SW tip of Clark Island.

In our rush to get on the water and nervous energy for the first big leg of the journey one of the party neglected

to refill his water supply for the days paddle and as we approached Clark Island he had become dehydrated to the point of cramping up and required assistance. The weather was warm, we made landfall at a nice albeit rocky bay where we were able to get out of the kayaks and rehydrate him with water and hydrolyte. A good lesson on the importance of making sure you stay well hydrated for us all.



Rehydration stop

After 20 min or so he had recovered enough for us to complete the paddle

by heading up the Western side of Clark Island to Spike Bay. The last part of the paddle was made difficult by a now 20 knot NNW wind and we were glad to make camp after 28 km at 11.30. During the crossing we saw the first of many flying fish we encountered on our trip and one of only two seals seen on the entire voyage.

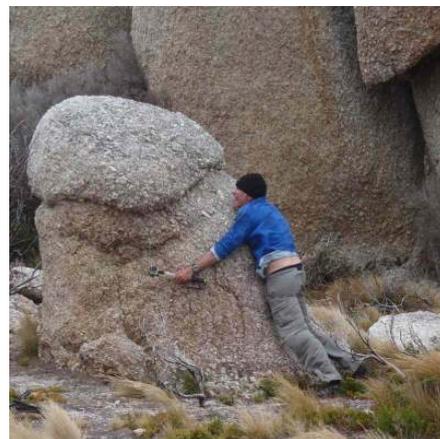
The weather was hot so a swim or snorkel and much lazing about was the order of the day. The first of many snakes was encountered when I went for a look at the dry creek bed nearby. A 1.4m copperhead .

During the night a southerly change swept in at 2 am and we woke to winds gusting to 40 knots. An off water day!



An off water day!

We went exploring the immediate area, there were many granite tors and boulders. Walking was made easier by a recent fire that had swept the island making the vegetation much less dense than would have otherwise been the case.



Richard was feeling homesick as is shown by this photo – We were glad we each had our own tents!

We saw a few wallabies and one tiger snake as well as great views and exposure to the winds on top of the rocky outcrops made you feel like you were in a remote and adventurous place. On return to camp it was evident we needed some shelter from the wind. The tents were taking punishment, but gladly all survived intact.



Tents taking a pounding

There were a few pieces of roofing iron lying about and some star pickets so we soon constructed the 'Spike Bay Hilton' a structure that served us and a NSW Bass Strait crew a few days later well. We also returned to Spike Bay for a night at the end of the trip and the 'Hilton' was again a saviour, this time from the heat of the sun.



'Spike Bay Hilton'

Next day we woke to blue sky and a settling sea with a 10 knot southerly wind. After a leisurely pack we were on the water at 10 am and enjoyed great conditions heading north along the shoreline of Clark Island. Sails were deployed and we revelled in the rugged granite coastline. We continued North and crossed over to Rum & Preservation Islands in calm conditions, enjoying a bit of rock gardening and very conscious of the historic significance of this place. (This is the site of the wreck of the Sydney Cove

in February 1797 and was a catalyst for exploration and exploitation Bass Strait and the beginnings of the decimation of the Tasmanian aboriginals) We contoured the SW coast of Preservation Island and landed at the hut for lunch and did a bit of exploring. After lunch we decided to head over to Thunder & Lightning Bay on Cape Barren Island for camp. We were met by a large barrier of sea grass which required some ingenuity to overcome to reach the beach. A 22km day full of highlights.



A large barrier of sea grass



Proud fisherman Steve, notice Richard trying to save face!

Steve & Richard went fishing, no luck, In fact as suppliers of fresh fish for the expedition they were a dismal failure. Despite fishing at many sites over the course of the journey neither had caught anything other than parrot fish. On the last night after

dinner Steve finally caught a Snook, which was quickly despatched to the pan and he regained some dignity.

We were off again next morning after a chilly night. Blue clear sky and calm seas. We contoured the coastline towards the settlement on Cape Barren Island and met up with Three NSWSKC members on the last stages of their Bass Strait crossing.



Raewyn from the NSWSKC

After a few minutes of greetings we went our separate ways and we were soon approaching the small settlement on the NW corner of Cape Barren Island. We were met at the beach by 'Mort' a true 'Straitsman'. He made us feel very welcome and we asked permission to take a stroll around the village.



Welcome from Mort on the beach

There was evidence of a fire being near the village recently. Mort enlightened us with this rather comical

story:

Fire was started by 'igets', a couple of young fellas. Seventh Day Adventists had visited the island and left behind a bible. The two young fellas got pissed one night and decide to burn the bloody thing. Not happy with it burning slowly they threw a couple of aerosol cans onto the fire which exploded and set the bush on fire. It was 2am and soon the whole village was up fighting the fire, bloody 'igets'. A few of the boys gave them a good clip under the ear and they have left the island.

Being Saturday the shop was not open so we were unable to get a pie or ice cream we had been thinking about and soon headed off toward Badger Island.

Badger Island turned out to be our favourite campsite of the trip. The water was warm and crystal clear, white sand that reminded me of Whitehaven Beach in the Whitsundays, and one of the best views I can remember anywhere. We had struck paradise! After 25km for the day we quickly decided that this would be a two night camp.



We had struck paradise!

Next day we went over to nearby Mount Chapple Island a $\frac{1}{2}$ hour paddle away. It had been a goal of mine to see one of the infamous Black Tiger Snakes indigenous to that island. Mt. Chapple Island is famous for these

snakes and the thousands of shearwaters that nest on the island in burrows each year. The local Straitsmen still harvest the chicks each year. Chicks are caught prior to fledging by putting your arm down the burrow and pulling them out. I asked how the locals know which burrows have chicks in and which have tiger snakes? Answer — *You don't, if you feel something cold pull your hand out quick and when you stop shaking try another burrow!*



Wasn't long before I got my wish and we were up close and personal with one of the local inhabitants

We also wanted to climb to the summit of Mt Chapple but after walking right around the island we were unable to find any track and were reluctant to go through the scrub for some reason! Found out later that no such track exists and the locals would not recommend walking off track either.

We returned to Badger Island and spent the day relaxing and planning the next few days.

The next morning we departed at 7am for Trousers Point on Flinders Island, 13km in a NE direction. With a forecast of 12 knot NE winds we were ready for a slog but fortunately the winds did not arrive and we made the crossing in good time in calm conditions. As we pulled up on the beach dolphins were spotted just offshore. I immediately grabbed my mask and had a wonderful experience as they headed straight for me and in the

clear water came within 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ meters of me. It was amazing as we checked each other out. My only regret is I didn't take the time to grab my camera as well. The others joined me in the water but the dolphins has satisfied their curiosity and departed. What a welcome to Flinders Island!

We made camp and then set about fulfilling another goal of the trip—climbing to the summit of Mt Strzelecki.

John elected to stay behind, it was a 4 km walk to the start of the track up the mountain. It was hot and the light gravel road we walked along amplified the heat. By the time I reached the start of the mountain track I had had enough. Blisters were forming on my feet, I didn't bring good walking shoes. I left the others and started to walk back. Soon a car came along and pulled up, Graeme was in the back, he had given up shortly after me. The ride back to camp was more than welcome. The three of us at camp were concerned about the others. They didn't have enough water for the trip, we had underestimated the heat of the day. In the afternoon a family arrived and made camp, we soon befriended them and Mike and his family kindly agreed to drive to the start of the walk and wait for the others with some water. This proved to be a real saviour, the others had made the summit (except Richard who stopped short) and Steve had gone down ahead of the group to source some water from a nearby house. He met the car waiting and returned partway up the track to deliver some well needed water. They returned to camp after 6pm, buggered but happy to have made the summit in clear blue sky's.

After a swim, rehydrating and dinner and early bed was the order of the day.

Next morning all were feeling well so we departed for Lady Barron, the second largest town on Flinders Island. Winds were 15 knots NW and increased throughout the day. This made for a great down wind run along the coastline with many beau-

tiful bays and rocky headlands. Sails were soon up and we made good progress, later in the morning Graeme (the only one without a sail) was getting tired so we rafted up and still made 8km/h.



Sails were soon up and we made good progress

We arrived at Lady Barron at 11.15, not bad for a 29 km paddle in 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ hrs.

We had been informed there were two camping options at Lady Barron, The park in the centre of town by the wharf or the camp ground 2 km out of town called Yellow Beach. After checking out the park we thought maybe Yellow beach would be the go as we didn't want to upset anyone camping in the park. As it turned out Yellow Beach was a shocker and the newly installed toilets were not in use. So we returned to the park and set up camp. There was a new toilet block there too, but this one was in usable condition. Robin discovered a shower and told the rest of us *after* (!) he had showered. It felt great to have a fresh water shower, albeit cold water as the hot water system did not have and gas bottles on it yet. We then set off around town and the boys quickly identified the pub and had a cold one. We then found the general store and had lunch there. The owner was very friendly and said we would have no trouble camped where we were.

The only problem with our camp was that it was right next to the loading dock for the islands supply barge

and it was arriving at 5 am the next morning! Furthermore it was loading with livestock from the island which were being delivered to the yards all afternoon. So we found ourselves adjacent to a great number of stressed cattle and sheep. At least we didn't hear each other snore that night!

Pete 'avachat' Dingers quickly made friends with Mick one of the local wharf employees who kindly left out an electrical cord for us to charge any gizmo's we had.

It later turned out Mick also let us refill with water from the sheds tank as the town water was not of drinking quality.

Dinner that night was a pub meal, really friendly service and great food

we returned the owner to Whitemark, the main town of the island and had breakfast in a local café. Not great fair and we were a little disappointed, We then headed off to the north of the island to check out Killakranki, North East River and Lilly Beach. It was our first wet day so we were glad we were in the van. We also spent some time at the Furneaux Museum. This was the highlight of the day with many interesting displays and information on the areas we were visiting.

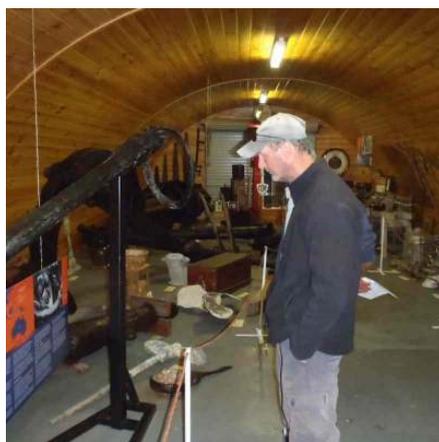
We returned to Whitemark for lunch, again disappointing fair on offer but restocked on supplies for the remainder of our trip. Dinner that night was at the pub again. There we met up with Chris a local yachtsman who had *Google Earth* printouts for us and gave us much needed local knowledge for the eastern side of Cape Barren Island. This was all due to Pete 'avachat', a handy bloke at times. Chris had crossed Bass Strait over 200 times and had lived aboard his catamaran for 4 years in these waters. He was a wealth of knowledge on the tides and camping spots.

The next day we timed our departure to coincide with slack water at the entrance to Lady Barron at Vansittart Island. So it was on the water at 7.15 after an interesting launch over rocks as there was no beach near the wharf. I had scrounged a big lump of shade cloth the night before and this made a good slide for the kayaks as I stood in the water holding all the boats until they were all launched. The hire car guy from Whitemark turned up to watch the proceedings, curious as to what these silly people were up to.

We were soon off and had made our timing spot on hitting the entrance at near slack water. We cruised past Vansittart Island and then came across another of our aims for the trip to see the wreck of the Farsund, aground in sand in the entrance between Vansittart and Cape Barren Islands. However by the time we got there slack water was over and the tide was ebbing a great speed. We all managed to scoot past the wreck



Barge waiting to load



Furneaux Museum

The following day we had arranged to hire a mini van and tour the island. The van arrived at 8.30 and

snapping photos and disturbing hundreds of birds using the wreck as a roost.



A good slide for the kayaks



Little thirsty, lunch stop

We made good time along the coast with a NW wind of 12 knots and soon found ourselves rounding Cape Barren and then a short hop to ‘Tinker Gut’ a small sheltered bay on the SE end of Cape Barren Island. A total of 37 km for the day.

travelling along at great speed. We were then faced with a major hurdle — getting through Sea Lion Passage between Cape Barren and Passage Islands. It was more like a white water river than a sea passage as we paddled furiously between eddies and made progress along Cape Barren Island. We were now battling raging ebb tide and headwinds. Luckily we were all up to the task and soon were clear of the passage. We had intended to cross over to Passage Island and make camp but the conditions put that option out of reach. Instead we opted to continue along Cape Barren to Kent Bay. Kent Bay being the first white settlement south of Sydney, used for whaling and sealing.

Expecting a hard paddle we were surprised that the wind dropped out completely and we enjoyed a cruise along shallow water and on arriving at Kent Bay spotted a shack through the trees. It was raining and the thought of some shelter was welcome.

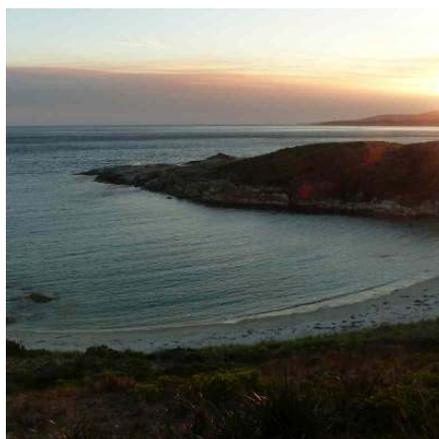
The shack turned out to be an ideal campsite, but as we were on aboriginal land we thought better of it. A fresh track had been slashed to the shack so we opted to make camp a short distance away in the bush. 27 km for the day.

Shortly after setting up camp we heard vehicles and a group arrived at the shack. We went over and introduced ourselves seeking permission to camp, conscious it was very close to Australia Day- invasion day for the locals. We met Colin, Bill and Bourbon, three locals who were newly made rangers for the island. We received a warm welcome and discovered they had just slashed the track into the shack (11kms) two days previous. The shack was unknown to them until recently. They had discovered it on Google earth and it was a poachers shack, fully set up with heater, chairs, kitchen and flushing toilet! They were there to give the ‘owners’ a surprise and do some fishing while waiting. As they figured it was their shack now and a few others of the village were arriving the next



The wreck of the Farsund

We continued contouring the eastern side of Cape Barren Island. This was new ground for all of us and we were not disappointed with the majestic scenery we encountered. First stop was at ‘Little Thirsty’ a small estuary with a tidal entrance. We were informed there were 6000 year old Pilot whale bones there but could not locate them, later we were told they were slightly north of where we stopped.



‘Tinkers Gut’

Camp was made on the beach with only a small margin for high tide. Steve and Richard went off fishing so I went for a snorkel and we had a few abalone cooked with garlic and other spices —delicious.

We awoke in the morning to thick smoke, with eighty bushfires burning in Tasmania the smoke had enveloped the island overnight.

We got underway at 6.45 and a NW wind kicked in soon after at around 12–15 knots making headway tough going. The rugged coastline made things interesting and we spotted some dolphins in the distance

day.



Colin, Bill & Bourbon, newly appointed Rangers

Richard and Steve went of fishing again, no luck the locals got 24 flounder that night!

That night we checked the forecast, we had about a week to get back to the mainland of Tasmania to catch the Spirit home and Banks Strait to cross. There was a weather window to achieve this in two days and the rest of the week was not looking good so we decided to go for it.

Next morning we left for Spike Bay on Clark Island, a 24 km paddle. The smoke had mostly cleared so visibility had improved. We said our goodbyes to Colin, Bill and Bourbon and they paid us the compliment of “you guys are welcome back anytime.”

We contoured the coast of Lady Barren into a 10 knot westerly wind until reaching ‘Sloping Point’ where we angled across to Clark Island, The tide was with us and it got pretty bouncy our there with wind against tide conditions. Waves were breaking at up to 1/2 metre, great fun! A brief stop when we made Clark island was welcome and then we set off toward Spike Bay. The swell on the western side was up to 2 meters making for more lively conditions and we gave the shoreline the respect it deserved keeping clear of bommies and reefs along the way.

Arriving at Spike Bay in time for lunch we set up camp and went swimming, Steve and Richard went fishing with Steve catching the only ‘edible’ fish of the trip after tea.

I went to the dry creek bed to see if the copperhead snake was around, the small water hole was a bit bigger after the rain and to my surprise there were two copperhead snakes there. They were entwined and mating mostly in the water with their heads on about 30 cm out on the bank. We watched for around 20 min as this seldom seen act of nature took place. It finished when one broke free of the other and headed off leaving the other on the bank resting — I’m sure it was looking for a cigarette!



Timing for the next day was crucial crossing Banks Strait so we hit the water at 8.45 with the last of the two hours of the flood tide. Visibility was again poor, the smoke had returned. Within 40 minutes of leaving the end of Clark Island it was out of sight and we spent the next 2 1/2 hours with no sight of land. The sea was still a bit lumpy form the previous days swell and the wind was negligible. Robin and Bill took turns watching the compass. The GPS indicated the tide was slowing and we ended up 6km off course before it finally turned and start to send us back on course. Soon after this the Tasmanian mainland came back into sight and we stuck to our bearing and ar-

rived back at Little Musselroe Bay.



Back at Little Musselroe Bay

All up we paddled 250km for the trip. It was everything we had hoped for and more. The group dynamics were superb, at all times we paddled as a pod and all decisions were made as a group. Although it may seem we didn’t get to too many places we achieved our objective in taking our time to explore and enjoy the environment. I would enjoy another trip to this area, it has so much to offer — remoteness, strong tides, and rough water, but it is not a place for the inexperienced.

Thanks to Robin, Bill, Graeme, John, Pete, Richard and Steve for helping make this such a wonderful adventure.





Rabbit Island Beach

Simon Lehman

Four Blokes, Five Islands

Photos by TB and SL – Ed.

When Terry Barry drew my attention to an upcoming Prom trip he posted on the VSKC website, I wasted no time reading up on the details. From an ungraded newcomers perspective it was an opportunity too good to miss. Ultimately, I took up sea kayaking to do these types of trips.

A few days before the trip date Terry informed me that there would be four of us, Terry Barry, Tony Chick, Steve Collins and myself. What a lineup, three Grade 3 paddlers and one ungraded. How lucky was I!

My decision to take part in this trip was a little last minute, leaving me with about four days to prepare. Some may consider this to be ample time but for a newbie to kayak camping it seemed a little tight! I have quite a few years of hiking and camping experience to draw on, so I had some idea. I also participated in the expedition packing seminar at the paddle fest and have watched numerous You Tube videos. The occasional email from Terry with his “little tips” was also a great help. A test pack of my Kodiak the night before was of great benefit and left me with a good

nights sleep knowing everything had its place.

Day 1

Day 1 was Monday 14th December, meeting at Port Welshpool jetty and on the water no later than 8:30. I left home at 5:00 am as I wanted to leave plenty of time to load my kayak. I also don't like the stress that's induced by the thought of running late. Besides, I have been late previously on a paddle with Terry and I know he looks dimly on being unpunctual and I didn't think it would make for a great start to a five day trip. As it turned out, Steve Collins was on the water last which was great from my point of view since it took the heat away from me!

We were soon off and finding our paddling rhythm. The 40 kg of equipment made a huge difference to the way my kayak behaved. I had never paddled with this much weight before and I was wondering if it would float! In fact it took the weight quite well. The waterline was noticeably lower but not by much and the primary stability was even more “luxurious” than before. It still turned like the Queen

Marry and took a little longer to get up to speed but all in all it was certainly better than carry a pack and hiking. The conditions on the water were very calm, probably a little too calm for my liking. I was hoping to experience some chop but it was early days.

Staying in the main channel to take advantage of the outgoing tidal stream, we paddled west around little snake Is. and then south across Corner Inlet towards the northern tip of Wilsons Prom. The aim was to be at the point before the end of the outgoing tide. We were out in the channel of Singapore Deep when Terry (with a smile on his face) informed me that it was a renowned breeding ground for White Pointer sharks. I could only hope that they find fiberglass more palatable than plastic!

Our first night was to be at Tin Mine Cove. We arrived with ample time to prepare lunch. The camping site and beach were everything I hoped. In the distance Bennison Is and Granite rock beckoned for a visit. We pitched our tents and organized our communal kitchen. During lunch, a visit to Bennison Is. was mentioned. A study of the tide charts and our watches gave rise to a simple paddle

plan. We had already paddled about 15Km from Port Welshpool so why not add another 12!

Feeling a bit lazy, I could have easily succumbed to an afternoon nap but there was no way I was missing out on this! One thing I love about kayaking is the ability to “sneak up” on bird life. It wasn’t long before we spotted a mature Sea Eagle, gliding effortlessly over the beach.

As we drew closer to Bennison Island a small beach, maybe 50m wide came into view. We landed and took a wander along the beach looking back toward the Prom. The skies were blue and the water was clear, we could have been in Queensland for all I knew! After a quick look around we were back in our yaks and paddling around the island taking in and marveling at its intricate rock formations. One last look as we were off to visit Granite rock.

As we drew closer to granite rock, it became apparent why it appeared white. It was home to hundreds of sea birds. Great Pacific Gulls and cormorants adorned every possible position of the rock with their nests. We meant them no harm as we glided past their home but they weren’t too pleased to see us nonetheless. The occasional Pacific Gull saw fit to fly out and swoop us.

We said our goodbyes to Granite rock and set a course back to our camp site. Steve got a little excited when a tail wind briefly appeared. Desperate to try out his new sail before the Tassie trip he wasted no time in hoisting his latest pride and joy, only to find a wind change foiled his plans. Secretly, hoping for no tail winds since I was the only person without a sail!

Back at camp and our conversation was centered around what we had seen on our island visit and the amazing birdlife. However it wasn’t long before all our paddling caught up with us and our attention turned to diner and meal preparation. In terms of equipment, it seemed that everyone who had a sail on their kayak, also had a Trangia! I’ve been hik-

ing and camping for a quite a number of years and always enjoyed the use of my multi fuel stove and never really given these Trangia’s much of a thought, that was until it became very obvious that sand gets everywhere and a stove with no moving parts seems the obvious choice for kayaking! Nonetheless my stove performed beautifully, albeit a little noisy. It was from then on that Tony referred to it as the Oxy acetylene kit and future use of my stove on this trip drew much attention. The fact that it precluded any normal conversation was found to be a source of amusement, at least by me anyway. I found myself turning it up just that little bit more just to watch the reaction.



Cooking up a storm ...

In the evening we planned the next section of our trip. Johnny Souey beach was our next destination. It was discussed that an outgoing tide would be advantageous while we paddled north and then around the northern tip of the prom and back south down the east coast. The aim was to be as far south as possible, away from the influence of an incoming tide before the tide changed. It was decided that a 6:30 am start on the water would give us the best opportunity with the tides. From a personal point of view, I was learning just how much we (as kayakers) plan our trips around the tides and (naturally) the weather. With less than 12 months of kayaking experience, it was occurring to me how much I had un-

derestimated the influence that these two phenomena play on trip preparation.

Day 2

After a blissful night’s sleep and breakfast, we were once again on the water. With the tides in our favour the coastline seemed to whiz past with next to no effort. The seas were very calm and the winds were light. In fact I was a little disappointed in the size of the swell as I was hoping to throw myself into some challenging conditions.

Well as it turned out I may not have gotten any more experience with big waves that morning but what I did get was a lesson in paddling in tides. Staying out in the deeper water, we made the most of the tidal movement. Paddling with Terry, Steve and Tony was like paddling with an encyclopedia of kayaking! Rarely was a conversation had where I didn’t learn something. Steve was still looking out for that ever-elusive sail friendly wind but he was to be disappointed once again!

With the influence of the tides no longer noticeable, we continued our paddle along the coast. Lighthouse point could be seen in the distance. It was mentioned that it would make a great stop for lunch on the way back, weather dependent of course. Soon we were experiencing the slog of Three Mile Beach and I was reminded that Five Mile Beach (further south) seemed to go on for even longer, go figure!

We rounded the northern point of Johnny Souey beach and landed at the southern end, well ahead of schedule and in time for lunch. The beach landing was a non-event with barely 1 foot waves. I’d had an absolute ball but after 20 km of paddling it was still nice to get out and stretch my legs. We scouted around for the best camp spot and location for our communal kitchen. There was no signs of life. In fact the beach was ours for the taking and remained that way for the two days we stayed.

It was everything you would expect to see in a postcard, clear blue water, clean uninhabited beach, Rabbit Island in the distance, kayaks in the background and four dudes hanging out in a makeshift camp kitchen complete with drift wood.



Jonny Souey camp kitchen

We pulled our gear out of the kayaks, set up camp (Steve got the best spot) and got ourselves organized for lunch. The rest of the day was pretty cruisey, the other three lounged on the beach with a good book, I lay in my tent listening to the ocean before succumbing to an afternoon nap.

Day 3

The third day was a pretty easy day incorporating a trip out to Rabbit Rocks, northern end of 5 mile beach, lunch at Rabbit Island and return.

After a lazy morning we left out camp at around 10:00am paddling south and hugging the coast nice and close. The sandy beach once again gave way to granite boulders encrusted with barnacles and kelp. The swell wasn't massive but it was a little bigger than the previous days. Terry, Tony and Steve took some enjoyment in getting in nice and close with some rock gardening. Personally, I struggled to judge just how close to get before being washed up on the rocks but after some playing around I was getting better.



Me rock-gardening

After a short paddle past rabbit rocks we rounds the point and landed on the northern end of Five Mile Beach. After a quick visit of the camping spot and a wade in the creek we were off once again. From here we headed to Rabbit Island via the rabbit rocks.

We passed through the gap in rabbit rocks and on the other side, three seals lounging on their bellies greeted us. Fins in the air like they just didn't care!

The west facing side of Rabbit Island had a beach approximately 50m long but before landing we paddled around the island. The eastern side was as beautiful as it was rugged. Anyone interested in rock gardening would find it a delight. The swell was just enough for me to present a challenge but not feel as though I was risking life and limb. Having said that, a bit further on and we were rewarded with a magnificent sea cave. We all propped just outside and after a bit of chit chat, Terry decided to paddle in for a closer look. The cave would not have been any wider than maybe 2 metres so reverse parking was the way to go. The cave went in a lot further than I could see and soon Terry was all but a silhouette. Before long Steve and Tony decided to explore the cave too and then came the inevitable question, "what about you Simon?" Well at first I wasn't keen. The swell inside the cave made things very interesting. I wasn't keen on the idea of catching a wave and surfing

backwards inside a cave!

OK, it got the better of me and I had to have a go. What an amazing experience. The swell echoed inside as the cave opened up behind me. It went in a lot further than I was prepared to go but hey I went in, I did it. In any case if I didn't have a go then it would have eaten me for the rest of the trip! I find it's often a fine line between stupidity and challenging yourself. While I certainly don't want to be the recipient of a Darwin award, how am I supposed to improve if I'm always in my comfort zone! Paddling with Terry, Steve and Tony, who are Grade 3 paddlers presented the best environment to safely challenge myself; these opportunities don't often come along.

Still buzzing from my cave experience, we continued on, back to the beach we first saw. Sheltered from the prevailing conditions, the beach was very calm and landing was once again a non-event. First impressions were of an island without much animal activity but a closer look revealed it was host to large colony of penguins.

After lunch we headed back to camp. All in all we covered about 12Km today, this gave me plenty of time for some R&R. It was time for a swim.

The afternoon gave way to evening and the end of another day was near. Tomorrow we would head off to Snake Island leaving this paradise beach camp. I'm really going to miss this place.

Day 4

Next morning we were abuzz with activity. After breakfast we all began to pack our kayaks once again. It didn't seem to matter how much time I allocated to this activity, I could never beat the others! With most of my food consumed and only about five litres of water left, packing really should get easier and quicker. It just seems that the hatches in my kayak shrink towards the end of a trip!

Routine is definitely the key to being organized and the only way to

achieve that is to do lots of trips. This was definitely the case with meal preparation too. Terry, Steve and Tony had their nice, neat ground sheets with everything they needed for their meals. While I too had my ground sheet, I found I had stuff everywhere. I must have been a constant source of amusement. No wonder they were keen for me to come along!

It wasn't long before we were all kitted up and ready to go. A couple of the others were performing last minute adjustments on their (yet to be used) sails. I saw it as an opportunity to have a play in the waves. The swell was up a little; certainly the highest so far on the trip and it produced some nice breakers just off shore. I was keen to catch a wave or two. Soon enough we were all out catching waves, it seemed as though none of us were in a hurry to leave. By this time I'd caught a few waves and was getting a bit cocky with my bracing techniques. It was then that I completely underestimated a wave and it got the better of me. Over I went! Did I mention that I'm yet to master rolling? I let my kayak go and it caught a wave back to the beach, I was forced to do the walk of shame to recover it.

The swell was up and it was producing some entertainment. Catching waves made up a good part of the trip to Snake Island we must have spend the entire length of Three Mile Beach doing just this, which made the seemingly endless beach pass by just that bit quicker. We all gathered at Lighthouse Point with the intention of a beach landing for lunch, a nice surf break needed to be negotiated in or-

der to do this.

We landed one at a time and in the end we all made it through unscathed. Playing in the waves had built a healthy appetite so I was starving. Lunch was looking good.

After 45 minutes or so at Lighthouse point we departed for Snake Island. We passed the northern tip of Wilsons Prom and there was a stiff SSE wind from the rear. The other three couldn't get their sails up quick enough. I'd dodged a bullet so far but not this time. With no sail I really had to pull my finger out.



Rafting up to Snake Island

We were half way across to snake Island in the channel when the others must have taken pity on me as we all rafted up under sail. Now that's what I call kayaking! Time for a well earned rest and a drink. We continued this for about 15 minutes before breaking off and paddling again. The channel between Snake Island and Little Snake Island seemed to take forever to get to. Eventually, in what seemed an eternity we made our final camp site next to the jetty on Snake

Island.

Apart from the miggies, it was a nice spot to camp. We were only a few feet from the water and so transferring gear was pretty easy.

Day 5

In the morning we were heading back to Port Welshpool, not much more than a 15 minute paddle. I couldn't believe how quick these five days had gone. I was amazed at how much kayaking experience I had gained in these five days. As a newbie, I would never have been able to achieve this on my own. My club fees paid for itself many times over. Furthermore, due to the nature of the trip, I was able to successfully demonstrate my ability and competency required for a level 1 paddler. I left as an ungraded paddler and came back as a Grade 1 and got to see some of the best kayaking places in Victoria.



I couldn't believe how quick these five days had gone





Red Eye launch Jan 2016

Ben Flora

Paddling Red-Eyed

The idiom “Red Eye” is usually used for late night flights. The Red Eye paddle can be seen as just that. Some getting up at 4.30am to make it to the waters edge by the 6am start. I started going to the Red Eye paddles shortly after the Cape Patterson

VSKC AGM, having sat next to Andrew Campbell, one of the Red Eye leaders on the Saturday night program. I heard that it is for the hard core with a strong pace covering about 14kms. Later, I found out that they do look after stragglers, my-

self being one, on a particular paddle. More about this later.

I have been paddling around in the bay for a while in smaller craft, so paddling wasn't new to me. But taking my regular 6km paddle to a 14km one was something that played on my

mind, could I hack it? What would happen if I got too tired? What if it was too rough? Well the only way to find out is to get out there and give it a go.

My first paddle was from Ricketts Point south to Mordialloc. There was about 14 of us on this day, which as I found out later was a large number for the Red Eyes. I have been attending the Red Eyes most weekends for the last 3 months. The numbers are usually from 6 to 10. We travelled the hypotenuse of the triangle to get to 'Mordie' pier, cutting across the deeper water. It wasn't a calm day, blowing about 15kts with a bit of chop, just on the edge of white-capping. Enough of a challenge for me on my first Red Eye.

On the water I met another relatively new sea kayak paddler to the Red Eye, Stephen, it was great to discuss how we found our boats and what we have learned to date as we pushed through the 14 kms bobbing up and down. On the way back we hugged the coast passing the Parkdale Yacht club and then cut north west to Ricketts Point just before reaching the Mentone Surf Life Saving club. I managed to complete my first Red Eye all in tact. What a relief.

During these three months I have also learnt that the Red Eye paddlers go out in all conditions day and night. People are free to come and have a look but if it's too rough sit out and meet up for the coffee and camaraderie afterwards.

Having paddled a few more weekends where it was nice and flat I came to a Red Eye where the swell was BIG. At least BIG for me. Unfortunately this day I forgot my paddle and was lucky enough to borrow an emergency paddle so I could get out on the water. I thought the worst that could happen was for me to get blown back onto the beach. The blade was small

and square, not ideal for challenging conditions.

I needed a little help keeping my nose straight just getting off the beach. Then it was an adrenaline rush as I pumped through the waves. This time we paddled north towards Sandringham Yacht club. I was fretting having to paddle sideways to the large waves, but managed to head north with the group. It wasn't long before I ran out of energy and started to fall back. I struggled to get to Half Moon Bay.

We paddled around the Cerberus with following seas, had a rest and then had to paddle back out through the waves. It was too much for me as it seemed I was gaining centimetres heading back out through the waves. I was ready to throw in the towel and beach it half way through. I mentioned this to a few other paddlers. It was at this point when, Peter Costello the other Red Eye paddle leader came to help.

He talked me up and said that it will be easier if I can just make it out past the rocks and head south. His support did the trick. As we pushed south Peter was close by and he taught me the brace stroke. A stroke where you lean into the wave and hold the paddle on the face of the wave forming a solid stable triangle, between your blade, your boat and the face of the wave. It was a new sensation for me to feel this stability in rough conditions. I could feel the water moving under the blade as I held it still on the face of the rising wave.

Just after learning this technique a nice big wave started to lift my boat. I planted the brace as the wave moved under me and to my delight I slipped down the back without learning how to see the world from under the water. Yay, I learnt a new technique and pushed myself through ner-

vous exhaustion to complete my most challenging Red Eye to date. Without the support of Peter and the paddling group I wouldn't have been able to complete this one.

It's now February and it's dark at 6am so another adventure awaits as I learn to paddle in the darkness with lights.

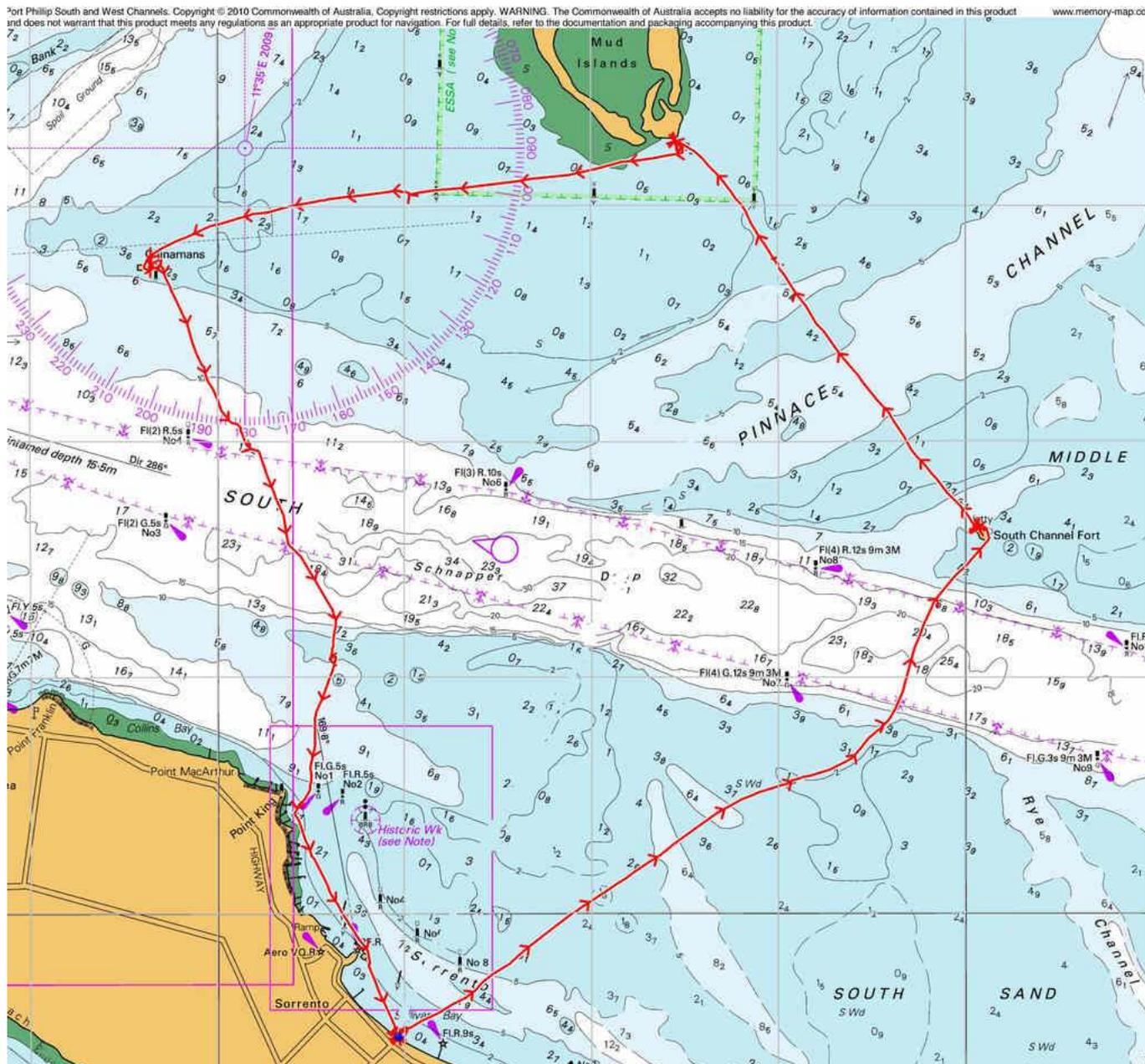
The Red Eye is a great way to get experience in a lot of different and challenging kayaking conditions, and if the opportunity presents itself, learn to push oneself beyond your own expectations. It's a great way to mix with interesting, supportive, like minded people, stay fit and enjoy the marvels of nature. There is always some sea life to see, and the scenery is stunning, watching the sunrise over the bay lifting the fog and turning the soft blues and greys of the twilight zone into the reds and oranges of the early day is breathtaking. Isn't this why we love our kayaking?

We are usually back on land between 8 and 8:15am, followed by a coffee or brekkie at the Ricketts Point cafe. What a great way to start the weekend.



Heading into the twilight zone





Sorrento Circuit 27 Dec 2015 — Plot by Richard Rawling

Lauren Knight

Paddling, Peddling and Puddling — A Newbie on the Sorrento Circuit

Me? What an exhilarating and scary thought, at the same time!

life of any sort has had a strong appeal.

What me?

You mean, I can actually have a go at paddling out in Port Phillip Bay doing the iconic Sorrento Circuit?

I always relish any opportunity to be on the water, and sea water preferably. As a regular visitor to the Mornington Peninsula from a young age, and later in life, Yamba, N.S.W., beach

Kayaking came my way in late teens, when on a camp. Since then, I and my family, have hired kayaks regularly over the years. We also owned a Canadian canoe, but living in the

Dandenongs and raising young children, did not create good use of the boat.

One year, while camping on the Clarence River, in Yamba, I decided to take a paddle in the canoe to go fishing. My family were all happily occupied at camp, so why not push out into the middle of the river and find those elusive fish? I was totally enthralled with the experience, and took my time. Eventually, I began to paddle back to camp, only to find that my husband had sought out the camp manager to come looking for me in his motorised boat. I was slightly indignant, but they insisted I be towed back to camp, as the wind was lifting. I hadn't noticed really. The entire experience provided a great sense of freedom, peace and delight. The Clarence is a wonderful river to explore, with an exciting rock wall mouth to the sea. (No, I didn't head that way! I went towards the inland direction.)

Over the years, any opportunity to be outdoors camping, boating, boogie boarding, water skiing, playing tennis, all have contributed towards a continuous desire to be outside, rather than inside.



Like a light bulb moment ... it was cycling

I have rarely needed encouragement to be active, but by the ripe old age of 50, I recognised that my body was showing signs of becoming sedentary. It was time to intentionally focus on something weekly.

Six months of gym work with a

friend, created a stronger urge to find something *outside*, which will maintain fitness. How could all those people find it 'enjoyable' to repeatedly do the same workouts, with the most miserable looking faces? Not for me!

So, what activity can I do, which will carry me through my senior years, to maintain a level of healthy fitness? What can I do that is outdoors, requires no money every time I do it, and doesn't require bookings and appointments? — That was my big question. It took a few months of pondering.

The answer came like a light bulb moment ... it was cycling. (No costs? Ah, well, yes there was an initial outlay).

All riding events and challenges, over the last decade, have been a delight. Cycling has taught many valuable lessons, not the least being: *endurance*.

But then ...

... came the moment when I found myself in a canoe shop, drooling over the various boats and thinking: it's time I stopped wasting money hiring kayaks to paddle. It's time I stopped puddling around with this. It's time to buy my own boat!

A humble 'sit on top' kayak. How exciting!

My new venture began. But not quite how I thought it would. After regular summer time paddling, I discovered greater flexibility, increased core strength! And, this aided my cycling ... (high priority)!

Logically, it's time to stop just summer paddling and puddling. It's time to find out how to continue paddling right throughout the year! Woo hoo!

Can someone my age start another hobby?

Can someone my age actually 'do' sea kayaking?

Cycling *and* kayaking ... the perfect combination for fitness ... and fun!

My first kayak lesson was with Rohan Klopfer. (Eastcoast Kayaking). With his practical knowledge

and guidance, I came away hooked even more. Oh, what fun. Oh, wait, there's more ...

To be able to kayak in winter too, meant more requirements. More gear, better kayak! *What?* I just bought one kayak. How can I tell my family I 'need' *another* kayak, already?

After some caution, many questions and research, here I am paddling a sea kayak and a member of the VSKC!

It has been a pleasure, and scary, as I learn to paddle correctly. I had no idea there are 'correct' paddle strokes to learn, and practice and practice. Paddling in the sea, with the club, means dealing with waves! I know, that's no surprise to anyone reading this. But some of these waves present a few new challenges for a beginner, like me.

I found out that sea kayaks do not turn as quickly as smaller boats.

I found out that you don't get attacked by sharks every time you go out in the Bay!

I found out that you can get hand injuries paddling! No one told me that!

I found out that the VSKC are a really nice bunch of people.

I found out ... that not everyone in the club is *young*!

I found out that they organise a great AGM week-end too! I think I am on the right track, but what an interesting one.

On the Sorrento Circuit

With minimal sea kayaking experience, I accepted the opportunity, and massive challenge, to tackle the paddle in Port Phillip Bay. Out to the Fort, across to Mud Island and then on to Chinamans Hat to visit the seals, and back to Sorrento. But what if ... And what if ... The trip leader (Richard R) assured me that this is doable. (I won't die doing this.) I will be supported by experienced people. He was right. There were supportive and kind people assisting me. (I was the weak link.) Fourteen eager kayakers ventured out that day.

The buzz for me was actually surviving and arriving, at each planned destination. But, I have to admit, the trip was a *big* step and marvellous experience. With wind and currents providing challenges, I struggled to keep up with the main bunch, but was kindly supported by several guys. This meant actually being towed in a couple of spots. (I *did* continue to paddle, but it was a great relief to be moved along in those moments. Thanks guys so much!)

Arriving at the Fort was stage one. What a fabulous site to view and be allowed to walk over it! It was built in 1880's to protect the Bay from intruders. It is worth a visit. The challenge there, is to extract yourself from your kayak safely, and climb a vertical ladder, *and* return into your kayak, without capsizing. (Yes, I made it.)



Mud Island — no coffee shop!

The experience and enthusiasm of many paddlers was demonstrated

when, out of nowhere, we came across a bunch of surf waves, seemingly going in the 'wrong direction'! It was not explained why they went one way, and the general flow of the waves seemed to travel in a different direction. Several guys lunged at the opportunity to have a surf, in the middle of the Bay!

Mud Island ... Which isn't all mud! Not that I explored it all. We had our lunch on the sandy shores. This was exciting for me. To think, that after all these years of seeing Mud Island way out there, I was actually sitting on it, with a bunch of people, happily devouring some food. (No coffee shops out there though!).

Next, we were off to Chinaman's Hat. This is an old sea marker, revamped, especially to provide 2-star accommodation for seals. I was very keen to see them, but ... Could I make it? We were now heading towards the lower part of the Bay where the incoming tide decided to come our way, accompanied with the wind, coming our way. This is not a good set up for a beginner kayaker! That is, when I found that I was tiring and getting slower and slower.

To be able to venture to these locations, we had to cross the south channel twice. This is an interesting event, as it is necessary to commit to the crossing with an element of speed. Something I left behind somewhere. It is evident, that ships which appear to be a long way off in the distance, can suddenly appear a lot closer, within a short time. Therefore,

crossing the Channel requires good judgement and focus.

The return towards Portsea and Sorrento, provided a calmer sea to ease up with. Though I was helped with some towed sections, the experience came to a completion with relief and joy. I remained upright. I was not eaten by sharks. I actually did arrive at the three planned destinations. And, everyone were still talking to me, slow though I was. Thank You everyone! You are a pleasure to paddle with.

So, what is it like ...

... to be a beginner sea kayaker in the VSKC?

Firstly, scary. These guys like to take on big seas, none of this calm, flat water stuff! They like adventure. So do I, but being battered by waves, and currents, *and* wind, all going in the *wrong* direction? Crikey mate!

I have not given up though. I may not ever gain great speed, but I aim to improve in strength and skills, to enjoy the whole adventure!

A big thank you to the VSKC Membership Officer Richard Rawling who has been an encouragement, providing me with advice and guidance since I first contacted him early in the year. A big thank you to Rohan Klopfer for his on-going encouragement and knowledge! And thank you to all in the Club whom I have met and shared the joy of kayaking with!

■



Left: Werribee South / Port Arlington (plot by RR) — Right: the pod leaving Port Arlington (GB)

Gayle Burke

My First Day Trip with the VSKC

Werribee South to Portarlington and return, Sunday, 21st February, 2016, ca 35km. Participants: Gayle B (*Mirage 530*), Helmut H (*Epic 16x*), Peter N (*Nordkapp*), Richard R (*Rockpool Taran* — trip leader), Roger B (*Nadgee Solo*), Matt T (*Seabird*). ESE 10kts in the morning, some minor chop, dropping off to almost flat conditions in the early afternoon.

Under the watchful eye of trip leader Richard, our small group set out from Werribee South in conditions that were a little more challenging to me than the forecast had lead me to believe.

Accompanied also by Peter, who was doing a one way trip, Helmut, Roger and Matt, I tried to calm my nerves and headed straight into the heavy chop over the sandbar, and out into Port Phillip Bay, with a plan of heading straight across to Portarlington, visible in the distance.

Once clear of the sandbar the

waves spread out a bit, but we still had 2 foot waves coming sideways at us. Pleased that I had managed to stay upright in the messy waters of the sandbar, with no real idea of how to tackle them, I was feeling pretty confident until a couple of steep waves in a row managed to dump a lot of water in my lap. Amazed that I was still upright, I pushed on a bit more confidently.

Richard decided we would do better to head a little more east, to make the going easier, and then head back with the waves into the beach at Portarlington. Seemed like a good idea to me, as full on side waves are not greatly to my liking.

Those early few kilometres were the most challenging conditions I have paddled out in the Bay, as I do most of my paddling solo, and I was really pleased that I hadn't disgraced myself in the nasty conditions on the sandbar, where I was still in view of

quite a lot of fishermen and families on the beach.

A rest stop to drink and refuel around the half way mark allowed me to notice that conditions were improving, with just a nice gentle swell rolling in from the east.

Approaching the Portarlington jetty, some went left around the jetty, and some of us went under it, where Roger managed to catch an unseen fishing line. I was amused to see that fisherman was so annoyed that he followed us all the way in to the beach where we had landed, just to tell us what he thought!

A short lunch break saw us saying goodbye to Peter, whose wife had met him at Portarlington, to spend the day in the local area.

Feeling refuelled and refreshed, the remaining five of us headed back into tranquil green waters, all the way back to Werribee South, a very pleasant and easy paddle.

It took us around 2 hours 45 minutes to do the 16km trip each way, with a pretty consistent speed the whole time.

Upon nearing Werribee South Roger, Helmut and Matt did a few successful rolls which impressed me. That's next on my "learn to do" list!

For me this was a very successful

trip, where I raised my personal bar just a little. It has given me the confidence to be a little more adventurous when I go out on the Bay by myself, always keeping in mind my relative inexperience.

Thanks to Richard for allowing me, an ungraded newbie to sea kayaking, to accompany the group.

Everyone was very helpful and offered advice and encouragement all the way.

I look forward to my next big adventure on the water with a lot more confidence



Peter Wilson

Rescue Training at Barwon Heads

On a mild Sunday morning, 14 Feb 2016, I met with seven other club members for some Basic Rescue training lead by VSKC instructor John E at Barwon heads. After introductions and a briefing we jumped in our boats for a quick warm up paddle to find some deeper water out of the main river current and start some flat water demonstrations.

We soon settled upstream of the bridge in what was still lovely warm water, this was comforting because I'd volunteered for the first swim. John took us through a thorough demo of the heel hook rescue, paying particular attention to the order of tasks, importance of speed, efficiency and talking through the rescue with clear vocal instructions to the rescuee. We discussed and explored variations of the rescue and worked through options to consider when dealing with different body shapes, weights and flexibilities, skill levels and exhausted or panicking paddlers. We looked at ways to minimise the effort required to empty and manipulate the rescuee's boat and, importantly, things to consider to ensure our own safety before and during the rescue. We

then divided the group for some one-on-one practice, swapping partners to broaden our experience with different boats and bodies.

After regrouping we moved onto options should the heel hook fail or the rescuee is injured or incapacitated, including the scoop and Hand of God rescue. Thanks to Andrew for donating his body to the cause while John demonstrated different grips, weight and body placements. During all this the wind had come up and it was time for another quick warm up paddle back under the bridge for more one on practice of the scoop rescue.

We then began some basic towing training with John offering appraisals and advice on our various tow line set ups, describing the advantages and disadvantages of different clip and rope combinations, thick or thin ropes or cords, preferred tow points on the boats and also storage locations on your body or boat. The critical points being the priority of maintaining personal safety, ease and efficiency of deployment and the speed of pack up and stowing.

We then partnered up for some

one on one towing, trying forwards and backwards tows from bank to bank across river current. With everyone starting to get a little peckish the group split again to explore the advantages and disadvantages of multi paddler V and inline tows. These group tows culminated in a 3 tower, 3 towed convoy under the bridge which was a great demonstration of compensating for current and the length of tow to ensure the tower's don't pull the towee's into obstacles (bridge pylons). It was also a good opportunity for Helmut to practice some 'tow rolling'.

After a much needed lunch and hot coffee break several of us ventured out for a very short surf session where I got to put my rescuee skills quickly back into practice after falling out twice in five minutes and so neatly concluded the day as it had began ... with a swim

Thanks to John and the experienced paddlers for running this training and contributing to a fun and very worthwhile practice session.





Those Mornings — By Ben Flora