

Eagle Canoe Club Newsletter

Spring Summer 2014



Welcome to the first newsletter of the 2014 Eagle season.

A big hello to all the new and returning members, I hope you are enjoying the new season and the great trips that are on offer.

As I am preparing this newsletter I am beginning to realize it has a bit of a white-water theme about it. We have articles about the winter Dart trip, Canoeing flooded rivers, White-Water safety courses, Symonds Yat and of course the clubs second foray into organising its own overseas trips, Slovenia.

Personally it was nice to see everyone enjoy themselves in Slovenia, especially as a couple of the members had only had their first taste of moving water at Symonds Yat 11 months earlier. It is great to see a new white-water gang forming and beginning to plan their own adventures, under their own steam and without coaches input – this also means we can piggy back onto their trips and not do any organising – HA HA.

If the following articles tickle your white water genes then how about popping down on one of the Horstead sessions Eagle run over the summer or drop in at the pool sessions and practice bracing and rolling – there is a whole world of adventures to be had with your canoe or kayak – and you could spend them like minded Eagle members.

If you have any articles about anything Eagle related then send them through and see your words in print (on an emailed PDF anyway). Take care and have fun. **Pete**



EDITORIAL



DART TRIP – NOVEMBER 2014

There is a saying that I like to use and apply to whatever I am doing, which is “Start as you mean to go on”. I however could not help but laugh to myself hoping that it would not be the case on this trip as it ran into my dreary head as we were stuck in the ever stationary traffic on the M25. A quick look back at the previous 6 hours or so will show that sitting stationary on the M25 was the least of the problems we had already encountered on a “routine” trip to the river Dart.

It was with great relief I arrived at Eagle after a long day of Uni work and an even longer couple of weeks of high stress working conditions at the day job. I was looking forward to having a fun weekend away with friends and forgetting all of life’s little problems (what we perceive as problems anyway).



After loading the boats and the van we waited for people to arrive from work so we could get away 1730 sharpish allowing us to make the 6 hour drive and as I quote from Tom's email "arriving in time for last orders". It was during this wait I was somewhat annoyingly informed that the river was running low.....one notch off being empty low, permission to say C**k please.

Never the less we were going and as the last of the group arrived we would soon be on our way, or so we thought. Just as we were about to pull away a quick check of the trailers lights was done and it had what us engineers like to call a successful failure result. We had lights however we had indicators for brake lights, brake lights for indicators and a fog light dreaming of being a strobe at some heavy metal gig. This is obviously unsafe for a 6 hour drive across the country. So my true nature came out and just as if it was a fully loaded airliner waiting to go I gave the plug a wiggle and a gentle kick (No hammer was to hand) all to no avail however and as we discussed the options it became clear that this was going to need a bodge and a fairly major one at that. After a quick root around for tools the extent of the problem was found. The plug needed rewiring which would not be easy as the screw heads were corroded to powder, the light was also fading, including the light from my phone's battery and there was no real way of knowing which pin each wire should go too as they were all going to every pin. There was however two things in our favour we had the two most important things for any self-respecting bodge mechanic toolbox and indeed any paddling trip kit bag; duct tape and WD40. After an undisclosed period of time Stuart and I raised victorious and we were finally on our way.

We then had a really nice long run down to the petrol station on the A11, that's right, the one about ten minutes away from the club were we found Olly and Pete parked up with Olly's car in a bad way. The rear right brake was sticking on and he had to get home for a bike race on the Sunday so he headed for home. So to sum up as I sat laughing to myself about starting as you mean to go on we were; A paddler down, Two more were playing catch up behind us, trailer lights which were in a bad way, I was getting Chinese language lessons off Sam (Maybe seek professional lessons if you plan on not offending anybody on your next trip to china) and we were going to miss last orders by a good couple of hours. However at some time in the morning we arrived to a bunk house complex which was all locked up (including the bar). Happily though after gaining access to bunks Tom's paddlers bar (situated just behind where ever his van happens to be parked) opened for anybody wishing a nightcap.





The next morning over breakfast we checked the levels and prayed for rain and got ready to run the loop today and tomorrow to see how it was and if it was too empty we would head for lee valley on the way home on the Sunday getting home early after a couple of hours on some dependable white water.

As we reached the get in slab, which confirmed how low the river was running, I could not help but feel a little nervous as this was only my second white water trip with eagle and most of what I know was learned at Horstead mill. That and I was still fresh from a battering I received at lee valley a couple of weeks before. As I slip onto the water and surfed the little wave under the bridge all of that went along with all of the memories of what had happened the day before and the weeks running up to the trip. That is the real reason I paddle - not only is it wicked fun I just drop all of my worries the moment I get on the water. The morning was spent playing on the small features along the loop, getting used to the speed of the river and learning quickly as this was my first real river running trip. The learning curve was made steeper by the low level which meant a rocky ride if you did not read the water right.

We reached triple step, and got out to have a look to pick safe lines down. This is a key skill for river running as the unknown is a big danger especially when thousands of litres of ice cold fast flowing water are involved. I would follow Stuart down and as I sat in my eddy river right above the first drop I watched him like a hawk, watching his line, edge, stroke positioning and over he went. I instantly felt alone in my thoughts and this sport which is centred around the people you paddle with suddenly became me all by myself I became a figment of concentration similar to when I bat in cricket. Although it is a team sport when you are out in the middle with 11 people all around just either wanting to hurt you or get you out you have to have a special place in your mind you can hide in and concentrate on the only thing that matters in your life, the ball. The same was true here but instead of a lump of cork and leather traveling at 80MPH towards me, I was faced with a river a much bigger challenge and demanding a much higher level of respect. Then I was over I

edded out right and was safe. Reunited with the group and we got busy playing in the feature and then Duncan found his pop out. An area in the fall where if you put your bow into it would push it down forcing the boat vertical like a freestyle paddler would do to initiate a loop or similar move (There are some brilliant pictures on the clubs photo site). This sensation in a big creek boat was awesome and it led to a good amount of playing.

After this the run down the next step was easy as I was in heaven and all worries of my paddling ability left as I just did not care as I was having so much fun. The fun level was about to go off the scale however as the next drop had an awesome surfing wave perfect for someone who had been getting bored surfing Horstead's wave. It was long, had a brilliant view upstream and had a good amount of retentiveness. It was a joy carving from one side to the other and by the end I was doing this with little or no strokes, heaven. Down the next step Duncan decided to play about rolling up against rocks and to be honest it looked more like head-butting them and then rolling away like a quick ambush on the rock (sorry mate). The layout of the feature lent itself perfectly to a bit of rescue practice, an opportunity which was not missed.

After a short shuttle run we were back at the bunk house and a good evening of drinking, chatting and Tony's jelly bean cake from Waitrose no less, you now know who to ask for a tenner. Joel who was unable to get the Friday off work was on his way and after the bar closed (so the staff could go out drinking) Tom's paddlers bar kindly opened its doors again and a waiting party sat up who were either worried about Joel or just wanted another few drinks, I will let you decide which.

The second day was much like the first although it being a Saturday the river was a bit busier this caused a massive problem for one of the members of the group. Poor old Kev, every time we saw another group at least one member of them would be wearing something which matched or clashed with what he was wearing and to his annoyance this meant one thing, he had to change his outfit. Three, four even five different outfits were put on.



At one point presumably when someone paddled by in the same pants as him he pulled a full moon at the culprit as they played on a feature downstream. I have never seen and will possibly never see again so many items of clothing packed into such a small boat. On a side note the lunch stop for the second day had stunning views as the low winter sun pierced the trees and hit the spray coming off the river.

That night a talk was held in the bar as two polar explorers visited (obviously heard about the water temperature and fancied some training) and talked about the latest trip kayaking around Greenland, this gave Tom the perfect reason to open Tom's paddlers bar early which was quickly heaving.

Breakfast the next morning Sam had finally stopped moaning about his hatred of mushrooms and I can happily report Joel the vegetarian of the group was very fond of the bacon but not so much of the sausage. It was also decided to run the loop a final time but it would be a quick blitz down to the washing machine and triple step to maximize our limited time on the features with water. The biggest question of the day was why everybody in playboats would play in these features once and paddle off, too what? I hear you ask, I don't know I'm afraid. It also showed the importance of getting a helmet with full coverage of your head. As in the pop out I got the back of my head shoved up against a rock and there it stayed until I abandoned ship, if my helmet did not cover the back of my head that would have been an even bigger headache for me than it already was and possibly for my mates as they worked out how to get me out of there.

Overall this trip was amazing fun on and off the water and a really good chance to learn some key skills leaving me ready for the next trip away. Yes it did not get off to a brilliant start but maybe things do not always have to go on as they start, possibly a new motto for me there? The drive back to eagle was without fault and Sam and I even set up a sandwich shop in the back of the van. You may also be interested to know that the trailer also has a new plug on it now. See you on the water. **Adam**

CANOEING ON THE FLOODED LUNE

I was on holiday in the lakes with Stuart, having fun, relaxing and chilling out. We got a call from some fellow paddlers who were in the neighbourhood and paddling the river Lune, did we want to join them for a days paddle?



We had our canoe and all the kit and we decided that we would join the small gang of 3 kayakers and a canoeist, found out the get in, packed our lunch in to the dry bag and off we went. Having hurt my shoulder at Christmas I have not soloed for a while and have learned lots tandem canoeing with Stuart; how the boat feels when you have your edge and angle as you ferry glide effortlessly across the flow, using the river to take you from one side to the other, how vital edge is and that it isn't just leaning over, reading the river and taking the best line, thinking about the specifics of the boat that you are paddling and how this will help you to navigate tricky bits and much more.



If you have not had the chance to tandem down white water and think that it might help, it's really worth doing. I now have much more confidence than before.

The day began wet and cold and dry suits were definitely required, we met up with our fellow paddlers and shuttles were organised (never my strong point, so I am always left at the get in to guard kit, try and keep warm, eat something and rescue chocolate bars from trouser pockets, encased in dry suits! you'll need to ask Simon for more on that escapade)

I am happily chatting away to the other shuttle ground crew, eating my banana trying to work out if the farmer's gate that I could see would be big enough for a discrete tiddle etc. It came up in conversation that the day before this intrepid group of paddlers had run the river Greta, a river not for the faint hearted, fast flowing and technical in places with regular sections of white water. It gradually began to dawn on me that these hard core folk were not paddling the Lune for a pleasant Sunday activity to while away a few hours before returning to far away Norfolk, this was going to be a trip which would push my experience of white water to a whole new level.

The shuttle crew returned and we began, I elected to sit in the middle of the canoe as I had a feeling that there may be the possibility of swamp-age as on the upper Wye (a whole other story) with Stuart steering at the back. Thus began four challenging hours of almost constant rapids, with very little time in between to take a breath and look at the beautiful Lakeland scenery unfolding around us. Having up to now paddled mainly grade 2 with some grade 3, I was not prepared for the nonstop roller coaster ride, I looked longingly at river banks as they flashed past thinking of Wye trips of old when we would stop for coffee (no chance).

The river leading by Simon, Pete and Jaz was safety all the way and we stopped often to scout the rapids that we could not see from the river. This was a vital part of the experience and allowed us to pick the safest line and look for any obstacles or danger points. We had lunch which was (for me) a welcome respite from the river, as we ate, our boats which had been pulled well out of the river began to bob and then to float, the river was rising around us. We carried on and came to the final stretch which involved a fast flowing rapid, which was scouted by us all. Looking at the rapid from the bank I was praying that Mark (our fellow canoeist, decided that this section was best portaged for us ... my prayers were answered!). This was the end of the trip and the get out was over a wall and in to the inevitable lay by to load up boats and get changed.

My reflections on this trip have changed from sheer relief that I could stop paddling and concentrating, to a real appreciation of safety on a fast moving

river, the experience of some big (for me) white water in a canoe and the realisation that I did contribute to our safe passage down the river, tandeming is a skill that takes both bow and stern paddlers to play their part in manoeuvring the canoe safely. I am now looking forward to the Yat trip to hopefully improve my solo paddling too! **Kate P**

SYMONDS YAT AND ALL THAT – THE VIEWS OF A FIRST TIMER



"I'm off now Lors" I said to my daughter Laura as I was about to walk out of the door.

"Going to be doing any ferry gliding" she said.

"If you think I am wearing a pink tutu you are very much mistaken" was my response "it will clash with my red boat, and besides, how am I supposed to hold my paddle and wave a wand" followed by "and presumably the fairies know where they are going"



"All my days" was the weary response of someone who first went to Symonds Yat at the age of 12, 4 years ago, "I said ferry gliding not fairy guiding"

Woops.

Arriving at the club, Stuart had already sorted the boats to load in the various trailers. Whilst helping to load others started arriving, and I couldn't help notice that most seem to be carrying sleeping bags and other vital kit. I sudden had a panic attack, had I overlooked the most important piece of kit,.... the beer. No worries I'll pop into the Tesco's when we get there. There isn't a Tesco' I was told, never mind I thought Morrison's, even Asda or Lidl will do, I'm not proud.

"No you muppet" (that wasn't actually said but I could tell that was the thought) " there isn't any supermarket in walking distance".

Woops

An excellent journey and having the opportunity to buy beer at the services (Waitrose, so posh beer) we arrived at the Symonds Yat Travelodge. After finding a bunk and unpacking, actually unrolling my sleeping bag, I went to look for the bar and swimming pool.



I didn't find them, they must have been just around the corner, but I did spend an interesting few hours reading the fascinating literature posted on the walls.

Thanks to helpful labelling I found out some of the wood panelling came from different types of tree. I also discovered, we could only use the generator four hours a day, if we wanted to carry out dangerous activities such as canoeing we had to read and adhere to Gloucester County Council Youth Services Outdoor Activities Of The Risky Type Guidelines, a cleaning schedule complete with number of people and time needed to complete each task, a notice saying there was no mobile signal (pew thank goodness I thought my phone was bust), no alcohol allowed on the premises (aghh!), and most worryingly of all, a big sign high on the wall where everyone could see it saying "No Swimming or Paddling in the Wye"

Woops

Things then took a turn for the worse when Stuart outlined the plans for the next day. He and a few others would be going out at 7 to recky the scene and would be back for 8 and it would be good if the rest of us could have breakfast ready by then. Two horrendous thoughts hit me at the same time, to have breakfast ready for 8 would mean getting up at least 5 to, and I was on holiday, and this Travelodge had no room service, not even a Little Chef next door.

Woops

Saturday arrived, breakfast was made, Stuart and the advance party returned and plans for the day outlined. Due to the height of water in the Yat we would go upstream 8 or 9 miles and then paddle down to it.



We duly got into our vehicles and made our way upstream, (by road that is, not Top Gear hovercraft style) unloaded and placed into groups. Stuart asked all of us our experience, 4 or 5 holidays on the Ardeche I over confidently replied. Only later in the day would I discover;

Woops

We then spend a very pleasant day paddling down the Wye, in and out of small eddies with expert coaching, tips and encouragement along the way.

After an enjoyable paddle we came to the rock—A couple of nutters, sorry, Martin and Fred were perched on the top with some other nutters, eagle members preparing to slide down. We watched in amazement as they launched themselves off, slid down and brilliantly demonstrated the submarine qualities of the Pyrahna Burn.

I nervously turned to Dave and Katie to ask “you doing it” rather hoping they would say no, but instead got the reply “are you”. “Why not” I replied before I could stop my mouth opening.

So we all duly took our turn to climb the rock and slide down, notable incidents being Adam demonstrating that it is impossible to climb a sheer face with no handholds and Katie’s combined scream and constant repetition of “my goodness what have I done.” At least I think that is what she was saying, but in retrospect the sentence, no, the actual words, did seem a lot shorter than that.



Then we arrived at the Yat. In front of us a bubbling cauldron of white foam with waves higher than a Volkswagen beetle and monsters lurking in caves at the side. My nervousness however was diminished by the thought that in few moments we would be through it and paddling home for tea and that my expertise from my holidays in the Ardeche would see me through.

Stuart turned around and addressed us, stressing the importance of edging when we turned into the eddy's . What turning into eddy's I thought, and then it dawned on me that unlike my holidays we would be playing (although playing is not exactly the word I would have chosen at that particular point in time) in the white water rather than paddling straight through it.

Please see woops number 5

Stuart went, others followed, I followed, I hit the white water, the boat started bouncing around as if on a mid Atlantic swell in winter, Stuart turned, others turned, I turned, I capped. A split second of panic before I remembered to pull the spray deck, and then I dropped out whilst the water level of the Wye temporarily dropped by about a meter due to me swallowing most of it.

After recovering and a few pointers, yes, I *can* see the benefit of edging now, I nervously paddled out into the oncoming torrent , I leant over, I edged, I turned, I grinned, I leant over, I edged, I turned back into the eddy, I grinned.

I repeated, not once but many times until I decided to try an eddy on the other side, I leant over, I edged, I turned, I grinned, I capped, wrong flipping edge!

I am not sure how long we spent at the Yat but it seemed to pass in an instant.

The evening was spent in super company and thanks go to those who cooked a fantastic meal, before dropping into bed.

Sunday morning was spent on the Yat, once again time flew by, my only regret was not getting back on sooner at one stage when I lost my bottle a bit.

Driven home in style by Em and Colin, we unloaded at the club and I got home about 10:30.

Laura was watching the telly, "Did you slide down the rock" I asked "yep" she said turning back to the TV. I followed up with "did you paddle in and out of the eddies" "yep" was the response followed by "good init"

And it was.

PS A huge thanks must go out to everyone who organised, coached, cooked, drove and generally made a fantastic weekend possible. **Trevor**

LADIES PADDLE SYMPOSIUM 2014

I just so happened to catch this event on Facebook clicked on the link and before I knew it Ann and I were booked to go. I was about to then share it with the club to then discover the event was full! This is the second year of the symposium running with 58 participants last year and 110 this year!





I had booked a day's beginner white water kayak and a day's beginner sea kayaking. As usual, I had normal nerves of not quite knowing what to expect but we arrived at Glan Llyn and were met with a warm welcome and a free t-shirt! Not a bad start. Found ourselves sharing in dorms of 6 people in a very nice centre with excellent facilities.

In the usual paddling style we started the day with a cooked breakfast, collected lunch and went to meet our coaches. I met James Stevenson- my sea kayak coach for the day; we loaded cars and set off for the Menai Straits. Ann had kindly given me a quick intro to sea kayaking so I vaguely looked like I knew what I was doing but we got kitted up and briefed and off we went. We did some forward paddling exercises to help with trunk rotation and looked at manoeuvring a long kayak with tight turns and turns on the move. (My abs had a great workout!) We spent a lot of time looking at dynamic edging and opposite edging to turn. On the way back it was time to use the tide to help. All of a sudden, the potential power of the water made me slightly nervous as we were paddling into a head wind with some rather big choppy waves. But unlike white water, at least you can see what's coming... It took us no time at all to get back and we tucked in to a bay to look at some sea kayak rescues (far easier than river kayaks!). What a fantastic day.

After a shower to wash off the salt crust, we headed for a well-earned dinner. There were some talks provided in the evening- definite inspiration to quit our jobs and go paddle the world. I haven't done the deed yet but... ;0)

On the Sunday came the great challenge for me. Not only did I have to face my fear of going on white water in kayak but, I was also going to be running the stretch that had put me off white water for 18 months!

So, met my very lovely coach Deb Cook and with 2 other participants we got kitted up. In true Welsh style we were soaked from the rain before even getting on the water (which I will add was in flood and pumping rather fast!). Started off with simple exercises and the joy of working with a coach who doesn't know you is that they can push you further out of your comfort zone! And push me she did. Deb set me some tasks- ferry gliding, reverse ferry gliding, breaking in, breaking out, ferry gliding into the flow and reverse gliding out... It was time to run the river- and it was fantastic! Deb spotted one kayaker and led and spotted the other. I even got to lead some sections (I know we are not talking anything drastic here but a huge step for me!) and even supported in a rescue.

Finally my nemesis had arrived. Jim's Bridge. The spot where not making decision had led me to fail my 3* kayak. So we popped out and scouted the rapid. Sounds daft but the way Deb talked about the river made a real difference and looking at the positive features rather than thinking of things you are trying to avoid. So I followed Deb down and made it! Not that there was any doubt! I was on cloud nine and very happy. Deb then asked if I wanted to run it on my own. How could I say no- so I did! I was absolutely buzzing when I got off the water. It was a great end to an amazing weekend.

So, in a summarising thought- feel the fear and do it anyway. I am sure I was quite unlucky with my bad experience of white water and I even surprised myself as to how much it knocked my confidence in even flat water kayaking and white water canoeing. However, with weekly sessions down at the mill and a few moving water weekends I am now building in confidence and look forward to a few more ladies events. I will be sure to let the ladies in the club know the dates for next year.

I know female only courses/ tuition/ sessions can cause some debate but I thought I'd add a couple of really good articles to read:

<http://www.palmequipmenteurope.com/blog/en/getting-fifty-percent> This article summarises really well some of the potential issues for females in what is still a male dominated sport. This is what I am often trying to explain about my own paddling...

<http://www.chrisbraincoaching.com/news/2014/4/20/ladies-rock>

Another article from a male coaches perspective on female paddling. Any questions/ comments please feel free to chat to me. **Em D**



WHITE WATER SAFETY RESCUE AT PLAS Y BRENIN

That'll be Whitewater Safety and Rescue Course at Plas y Brenin, for the uninitiated, a fantastic two-day course for those who enjoy paddling on whitewater, and who want to know to deal with the sticky situations that are inherent in this aspect of the sport.

So I'd pulled the short straw and ended up organising this trip. Happily, it was fairly easy, and there was certainly no shortage of keen coaches and club members happy to spend over £200 on the weekend; I filled all twelve spaces within 36 hours of advertising it, which was excellent. And despite a minor hiccup in the logistics the day before we were due to hit the road (thanks to the guys at Barford Hire for getting us out of that one, you're superstars!) all went really smoothly.

So a seven hour drive to Wales was followed by warm, comfy beds, a fantastic breakfast and a short trip to the Tryweryn, the north Wales paddling fall-back for rain-free weekends. We donned drysuits over, in my case, every item of clothing I'd bought with me, and spent an inordinate amount of time jumping in and out of fast-flowing, freezing cold water. We learnt and practiced all sorts of defensive swimming techniques to rescue ourselves, throw-lining to rescue swimmers from the bank, how to deal with stoppers, live-baiting, safe river-reading from our boats, dealing with swimmers and abandoned kayaks etc.



Looking back, we squeezed a massive amount into the weekend. For some of us it was an excellent refresher, whereas for others it was the first chance to experience this sort of course, the rescue skills that we covered and coaching from some of the best in the country. For me, one highlight was seeing Kate and Em get back in the water after two identical scares courtesy of the infamous chipper, where the sheer force of the flow held them underwater against the metal grill, until they were forcibly extracted by a well-placed PYB coach Chris Evans, one of the two coaches with us for the weekend. It looked pretty scary from where we were, so to actually have been through this must have been traumatic. For them to get back into the river afterwards was seriously plucky. Hats off to you both.

Other entertaining events include seeing Lee in a less-than-generous drysuit that, if worn for a second day, would have seen him singing soprano for life, watching everyone systematically but unintentionally fail to rescue Pete no matter what skill we were practicing, and to look back upstream mid-swim, having caught the throwline but having carried on downstream instead of swinging into an eddy, to realise that I'd somehow pulled Pete, Jaz and Emma off their feet and into the river, all of them following me down the rapids. I'm sure there are lessons in there for all of us; I just don't know what they are! Cheers guys, it was a great weekend. **Simon**



EAGLE SLOVENIA WHITE WATER TRIP 2014

Saturday 10th May - 12:30pm

It's currently 12:30pm and we're winding our way south through Germany and on towards the Alps. The flat open fields of Holland have been replaced with gently rolling hills covered with trees, and the picturesque windmills replaced with their modern electricity producing descendants. We've just had our first stop of the day, and with 3 1/2 hrs of driving down we've still got another 10 hours to go - it's going to be a long day. In the front of the minibus discussions are being had as to whether we should continue to follow the sat-nav or whether we should swap over to a good old fashioned map, following on from some wrong turns being taken earlier in the day, whilst in the back the remainder of the group are listening to music, reading books, or in Adam's case revising for an exams that he has the day after we return.

A few minutes ago, whilst wearing my headphones, I was volunteered to write an article for the newsletter, and so rather than trying to recall everything that happened on this trip at a later date, I thought I'd write it as a journal instead.

24 hours earlier I had been sat in my office staring out over the market place wishing for 5pm to arrive. Eventually it did, and after a quick change of clothes and having loaded up the car headed to the club to meet up with the rest of the group, many of whom had been at the club most of the day loading kayaks and kit into the van that we'd be taking to Slovenia.

Having loaded the last remaining kit into the minibus and van we left the club shortly before 6pm, and after a good run down to Harwich and a chance to stock up on food we arrived at the ferry terminal shortly before 8:30pm. At the security checkpoint the van was stopped for a search - but after seeing the mountain of kayaks and paddling gear crammed into the back they quickly changed their minds and waved us through. Despite being one of the last vehicles on the ferry, we had managed to get parked by the exit door, and so happy in the knowledge that we'd be able to get a good start the following morning we headed off up to inspect our rooms and grab a bite to eat before heading to bed shortly after the ferry left Harwich at 11:30pm ready for the long drive the following day.





This morning we awoke bright and early to see the ferry pull into the Hook of Holland ferry port. After a chance to grab some hideously over-priced breakfast we headed on down to the minibus ready to set off to Bovec, the town in which we'd be staying in for the week. Our journey was not to get off to the best of starts however, as upon arriving at the minibus we noticed that not everyone had made it there. Thinking we still have a few minutes Shaun set off to locate Jaz, but moments later the door to the ferry began to open and we were left looking out at Holland with a ferry load of vehicles queued up behind us, whilst the port staff were waving at us to drive off. Fortunately both Shaun and Jaz had had their passports on them, and we were able to meet them at the foot passenger exit only a couple of minutes after the van had managed to leave the ferry. Our journey had begun.

Saturday 10th May - 11:30pm

We continued heading south down the western half of Germany for the rest of the afternoon, gradually the landscape began to flatten again and soon fields of golden oil seed rape could be seen well into the distance, reminding me of the scenes we'd left behind the previous day. These thoughts were soon forgotten about though as the Alps appeared in the distance - slowly they grew at first, but before long they were towering over us and we were afforded some great views of them illuminated by the setting sun. We pressed on further south, this time towards Austria where we were greeted by even more stunning views of the Alps. Slowly night crept in and we were left winding our way through the Alps into Italy with only the vague silhouettes of the peaks surrounding us on all sides. We eventually arrived in Italy, where we came across the first sign for Bovec. A steep and windy mountain pass took us up to the border with Slovenia, where we stopped to take a few photos of the border sign before descending into Slovenia towards Bovec.

It's dark at the moment, but I'm looking forward to being able to see just where we're staying when the sun rises tomorrow.

Sunday 11th May - 4:45pm

This morning I awoke early to the sound of rain beating down on the Velux window of my room for the week. Through the rain I could see snow-capped mountains, stretching far into the distance in every direction. By the time we'd had breakfast the rain had subsided and a small group had headed into town to pick up our river passes for the week and food for our evening meal, whilst the rest of the group began sorting through the mountain of kayaking gear that had been unloaded from the van.

Shortly before 10:30am we loaded our kit and ourselves into the minibus and van and set off to our first get-in of the week. Within minutes we were standing beside the emerald green Soca river, excitedly waiting to jump into our kayaks and get paddling.





Our paddle today was to be a warm up for the week ahead, a stretch of river where we could get use to the speed of the river and to practice breaking in and out, ferry gliding and surfing standing waves - skills that we'd be using throughout the week. Our day on the river was interspersed with the occasional shower, but everyone was too pre-occupied by the river and scenery to be bothered by them.

We reached the get out around mid afternoon and whilst waiting for the shuttle to be run a storm rolled in. Being already damp from earlier showers we initially braved it, but soon found ourselves scuttling for cover in the woods as the rain intensified. Eventually the rain subsided for long enough to allow us to load up the van and we headed back to the apartment, keen to dry off and get some food inside of us. As we wait for Tom to cook us up a risotto for dinner the rain continues to fall heavily, and as I write now comes with thunder and lightning. Everyone has now set up camp inside the apartments and are filling up on nibbles, talking about the days events and wondering what effect the rain would have on the river levels tomorrow.

Monday 12th May - 9:30pm!

The following morning could have hardly been any more different than the previous evening, we awoke to find beautiful blue skies with only the occasional fluffy white cloud nestled up against the mountain peaks. A trip had been made to the local bakers and an array of pastries could be found on the dining table. With all of the rain from the previous night we decided to paddle the second half of the previous days trip before continuing onto the following section which would be a bit a little trickier.

We arrived at the get-in around 10am and in front of us sat a totally different stretch of river to that which we had paddled the previous day, the previous nights rain had caused the river to rise and flow much faster. Gentle rapids from the previous day had turned into bouncy wave-trains, and friendly waves were now grabby holes.

Having made our way down the section of river that we'd paddled the previous day we stopped for lunch at the previous days get-out. Whilst eating I sat in awe, admiring the beautiful scenery that we would be paddling through all week.

After lunch the river began to get bouncier, and rather than travelling down one after the other as we had been up until then, we switched to running short sections one at a time, as we had been practicing in Wales a few weeks early, so that if anyone did get into trouble the remainder of the group would be safe whilst the paddler in trouble could be rescued. The first few sections we got through safely, however on the fourth section a swim and a nasty stretch of river led to us choosing to walk off the river rather than continuing down any further.





Due to the swim and the state of the river we had been split into different groups, each having to find their own way off of the river. In front of the group that I was in lay a steep 80 metre gorge that we would need to get ourselves, our kayaks and our kit up. Between us we had a good number of throw lines, slings and carabiners, so we set off to set up a system of lines that we could use to get us to the top.

A little over 2 hours later, tired and covered in mud we reached the top of the gorge and had found our way to a road where we met up with the remainder of the group who after walking around a nasty stretch of river realised they were only a short distance from the get-out and so we able to run the very last bit of the river safely and get off at the intended get-out.

Drained of energy and covered in mud from the afternoons activities we headed back to the apartment looking forward to a chance to shower and get some food inside of us.

Tuesday 13th May - 8:30pm

We awoke today to again find glorious sunshine without a cloud in the sky. After picking up and eating some freshly baked croissants from the local bakery we headed off towards the source of the Soca. Along the way we stopped off at a few points to inspect the river.

We came across a grade 4 rapid that we didn't fancy paddling, with a dubious eddy just before it that we didn't feel confident about catching, so with this in mind we continued upstream a short distance where we found a nice eddy that we'd be able to get off at, with a path leading to a spot to park our vehicles. With the get-out sorted we headed up to the very first bit of the Soca river that you can kayak. This section of river was a nice and gentle stretch, and would get us back into the rhythm after the previous days events - that was the plan at least, as within 30 minutes we'd already had three people take a swim, including one in the very first eddy and one as a result of a deliberate role in just a few inches of water.

Half way down we stopped off beside a quicker flowing stretch of water where we were able to get a little throw line practice in before the swimmers got too cold from the water running off of the mountains, before continuing down to the get-out.

With much of the day still remaining we decided to go paddle the very first bit of river that we had paddled on Sunday. Although we had only paddled it a few days earlier, the extra water flowing off of the mountains made stretches of it very different, and although it was a bit pushier in places it didn't cause anyone any troubles. Inspired by the warm weather Tony and I prepared the evenings dinner, featuring pork cooked on the BBQ, which we were able to enjoy eating outside.

Wednesday 14th May - 4:15pm

We awoke today to another beautiful, if slightly cooler day. With everyone rested slightly from the previous days easier paddles we headed to paddle a more difficult section of the river. Today we would be joined by Si, who had finally managed to make it to Slovenia after the plane he was flying in got hit by lightning and was forced to turn back to the UK.

Having arrived at where we had hoped to get-in we decided that it would be a bit of a hassle getting all of the boats onto the river as there wasn't a particularly nice route from the road to the river, so we opted instead to use the next get-in which admittedly being simpler was also a fair bit longer. By the time everyone had made it to the river with their boat and all their kit there were quite a few tired paddlers and were grateful that we'd have a little wait for the shuttle to be run. Unlike the relatively open sections that we'd run up until now this section was narrower and ran through a gorge, which meant that the river was flowing quite a bit quicker and there were many more features to play on. We reached the get-out at around 3pm where the group split into two, with some opting to rerun the section whilst Mark, Jaz and a couple of helpers would head home to start preparing a curry for tonight's dinner.

Thursday 15th May - 7:30pm

Once again we awoke to find a nice sunny Slovenian morning. After the now traditional selection of pastries from the local bakers for breakfast we headed off to the Koritinica, a tributary of the Soca, from where today's adventures would start from.

Wanting a bit of a change I had opted not to paddle today, but rode in the shuttle to the get-in in order to watch the rest of the group paddle the first stretch of the river - a tricky stretch of river that led into a narrow gorge, barely wide enough to get a kayak through in places. A couple of the group were capsized and forced to swim, but were quickly picked up at the end of the gorge. Once the remainder of the group had made it through they continued downstream, whilst I headed upstream to take some photographs of the scenery and see some of the fortifications left over from the 2nd World War. My walk took me on a similar route to the rest of the group, and a few hours later we were reunited at the get-out.

For dinner tonight we chose to treat ourselves to a meal at a local restaurant. After looking at the menu and the vast selection of dishes on offer we were a bit skeptical about what would arrive, but were pleasantly surprised when all of our dishes arrived promptly and were all well received. At the end of the meal Pete was presented with a collection that we had put together for him to put towards something for his new house, as a way of saying thank you to him for organising the trip.

Friday 16th May - 8:15pm

Today the group was awoken by the sound of the wind battering the apartment and surrounding buildings - despite this the skies were largely blue, and so I decided to go for a walk through the town with a view to taking some photos to turn into a time-lapse. Despite being only 6:30am the town was already starting to get busy, the baker was busy baking our breakfast, locals were already on their way to work and school children were heading off to school. I meandered my way through the maze of little streets of the town, working my way slowly up the hill until I reached a place that gave me a good view of the town and the valley below. Whilst on the way back to the apartment it struck me just how crucial to the town tourism is - every other building was either a water-sports camp, shop or holiday apartment, and every sign was written in English as well as Slovenian.





Back at the apartment we decided to re-paddle the section that we'd paddled a couple of days earlier, a pushy but not too challenging stretch of grade 2-3 river to top the week off with. We arrived at the get-in shortly before 11am, and after the usual getting ready faff and hauling our boats down the steep windy path we were ready to depart. As we'd paddled this stretch before we decided to give some of the non-leaders a chance to gain some leadership experience and guide the rest of the group down the river.

The river itself was a running a bit lower than it had been a couple of days earlier, making the river not quite so pushy, but exposed more rocks that could knock an un-suspecting paddler off balance. After a leisurely paddle we reached the get-out around 3pm and after packing up the van set off back to the apartment where the challenge of getting all our boat, kit, personal belongings and supplies packed for the journey back would begin.

As I write, the last of the bags are being packed into the back of the van, and some of the group have already started retiring for the night, tired out from an enjoyable week of paddling and ready for our 14 hour journey back to Holland where we'd once again catch the overnight ferry back to the UK.

Saturday 17th May - 7:30am

We are now well on the way home - Slovenia, Italy and Austria are now well behind us, and we've now started the long stretch through a damp Germany. Ahead of us still lies another 12 hours of driving before we reach the overnight ferry back to the UK. The back of the minibus has been quiet for much of the journey so far as everyone takes the opportunity to catch up on some of their previous nights sleep.

For me this has been my first time at paddling an alpine river, and though I had been wary at times I had had a thoroughly enjoyable time. The Soca river had been a great introduction to running alpine rivers and I personally had learnt a lot from it, and am pretty certain others had too. The river was nicely complemented by the scenery that it ran through, along with the group of paddlers that I had been paddling with. On the rivers I felt safe knowing that we were all looking out for each other, whilst back at the apartment the group continued to work as a team to do the shopping, cook the dinners and to drive the vehicles.

For anyone wanting to develop their paddling skills I'd thoroughly recommend one of the overseas trips organised by the club. Don't worry if you've not paddled much whitewater before as there are a number of trips to Wales organised each year where you can develop your skills, and there's plenty of time to get some practice in.

Finally I have to say thanks to the whole of the group for making the trip so enjoyable, and especially to Pete Sykes who arranged the whole trip pretty much single handed. Happy Paddling. **Pete L**

MONTGOMERY CANAL TRIATHLON

Mountain bike 13.5 miles/Canoe 11 miles/Walk 10.5 miles

‘I want to do this....’ ‘ mmmm’ says Darryl, who was reading something slightly more interesting than the BCU newsletter I was. ‘It’s a canal triathlon, want to do it?’. ‘mmmmm’ says Darryl (I took this as yes). I text Emz “can I borrow your boat?” “Why” ask Emz “Cause it wants to go to Wales of course” “Ok” says Emz.

I enter us both, tell Darryl he has entered and then have to explain to him what he has entered (note to self, wait until he is reading a good book, then ask for that new canoe I want). I then forget about it for five months until its Thursday afternoon and we are leaving for Wales the next day. Get boat. Emz boat looks a lot bigger on my car than when it is on the water. I have to take Friday off work as nothing is prepared; we both do triathlons but you need a lot more kit when a boat is involved.

We set off for Wales in the rain and a strong wind. We stop three times before Wymondham, I am convinced the boat is moving on the roof and the vibration from the straps is already annoying. We arrive five hours later, both slightly relieved that we survived the motorway and wind with the canoe still insitu. We pitch the tent and I discover campsite has a kettle for campers to use – I am happy.

Next morning, after laying in our sleeping bags listening to the rain on the tent, we set off to drop the boat in Welshpool. There are a lot of cars driving around Welshpool with canoes on top looking for the wharf – no signs, no marshalls, no nothing – we all eventually unload and leave boats on the wharf, not entirely sure they would be there when we got back (sorry Emz I never told you this bit). Then it was off to Newtown to park the car and unload the bikes; this time it was cars with bikes driving around looking for the start. We eventually found it up a side street, 5 minutes before the start .

The first section was a 13.5 off road cycle, along the tow path, a narrow, cinder and mud track – made interesting by having to negotiate going under bridges, get that wrong and you were in for a swim and the water did not look inviting. Worse for Darryl being 6’1” – I’m only 5’5” and I had to duck. The cycle passed uneventful and we arrived in Welshpool an hour or so later, locked the bikes in a warehouse for the day and it was onto the water for an eleven mile paddle.

It had started to rain and the wind was blowing across the water pushing us into the bank. I’m steering in the back and Darryl accuses me of not paddling on several occasions, we swap positions and he suddenly understands why I am not paddling, I’m fighting the wind to keep the boat in a straight line. Nine portages later, I never realised how heavy Emz boat, we arrive in Llanmynech for a very welcome pot noodle provided by the organisers.

It’s drizzling nicely as we set off for the 10.5 mile walk. It is now that the title Bikes, Boats and Boots of the event means something to me – boots.... should have worn boots, we both slide around in the thick mud in our running shoes and OAPS in good stout boots overtake us. There is a welcome cake stop at mile 7 and then it was on to the finish, only the finish that I thought was the finish was not.... the finish was a further half mile at the top of a set of locks, we walked up here to get a raffle ticket, to get a medal from the tent we had walked past which I thought was the finish. I was not happy at this point.

A cup of tea and I was being civil again – we had made the 6pm coach back to the start by a whisker and it meant we would not be standing around until the 7pm one. Only the 6pm did not turn up and became the 7pm. It was then a 35 mile drive back to the start to collect the car, then to drive back up to collect the bikes and the canoe – we arrive back at the tent at 10pm after setting out at 7am.

Would we do it again? No, not till next year anyway and I think we will be taking the kayaks. Anyone coming? **Kerry**





LIVING THE BEST DAY EVER

For those of you unfortunate to have ever asked me where my ideal holiday destination would be, you'll know I harbour an unquenchable passion for Africa. I've done a bit of travelling round Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar and South Africa, and have designs on Botswana next. I've got shelves full of modern and out of print books on the history of the place, the natural history, fifty year old scientific studies of lion populations by well-known scientists and conservationists. I also have a family connection, in that my great (great) uncle, was in east Africa for the first world war, where he stayed when peace arrived, as a self-styled white hunter/explorer, chief of police in Uganda, and then a District Commissioner in Nairobi.

So when I stumble across a book by south African paddler, the late Hendri Coetzee, it was destined for my collection. I'm part way through, and hanging on every word. So Hendri Coetzee, after training as a medic in the South Africa Special Forces, trained as a raft guide on the Zambezi. This spawned a passion for exploring African rivers by raft and kayak, including the Nile from source to sea, taking four months and clocking up over 4000 miles. As his paddling grew, so did his spirituality, which really comes across in the book, there's very much an unspoken connection with the rivers, the land through which they flow, and the people of the continent who are an inherent part of life on the rivers, who rely on them as such a big part of their life.

Coetzee died in late 2010. He was paddling the White Nile in the Democratic Republic of Congo with two American kayakers, which were making a movie of the expedition. He was taken by a crocodile at the tail end of a rapid. The other kayakers were filming at the time, using helmet cams and handheld cams, and the footage they took, and the film they were making, changed into a documentary about Coetzee and his untimely death. The film is called Kadoma - the name he was given by locals on the river. There are millions of dialects and languages in Africa. On the eastern side of the river where he died, they called him Kadoma for his bravery in the face of a river they fear and respect greatly. Along the western bank, locals speaking a different dialect call out the same name, but with a different meaning - the little bee that travels and improves lives everywhere it goes. Both definitions fit Coetzee perfectly. The film has a trailer that you can find on YouTube. The full version is available on iTunes.

Since his death family and friends have set up the Hendri Coetzee Trust, which, through uses the proceeds of sales of this book and movie on worthy causes aimed at improving the quality of life for communities and individuals in his home continent.

So if you want to read a fantastic book, by an amazing guy on some awesome travels by kayak in an incredible country, but Living the Best Day Ever. You'll be inspired, and indirectly funding charitable work in Africa, allowing his legacy to live on. **Simon**

