

# Eagle Canoe Club Newsletter

## Autumn Winter 2014



Hello all and welcome to the winter edition of the newsletter.

I hope you all had a great summer paddling and are chomping at the bit for the weather to break in the spring so the season can get fully underway again.

If you are still hungry for Eagle activities while it is cold outside remember that the club still runs throughout the cold months. Why not pop down on Wednesday and get involved in one of the classroom sessions. These are great fun and you might learn something (the way to the Fat Cat at about half eight being top of the list).

Well we have another bumper issue this time from epic exploratory adventures (part one) to injury prevention for the new season, from white water experiences to lovely touring paddles. We even have a review of a magic piece of kit that will turn even the most miserable paddler into a functioning human being again.

Remember if you have any stories or paddling experiences you would like to like to see in print them send them over to me and I will include them in the next newsletter. Anything and everything is welcome – within reason! ☺ **Pete**

## EDITORIAL



## PROGRESSIVE PADDLING WEEKENDS

When I first took on the role of chairman, one of my objectives was to develop a programme and range of opportunities which would encourage members to stay with the club and to give them an opportunity to develop their skills to a high level. I wanted the club to be able to run its own foreign white water trips and for these to run on a bi annual basis so that members had something to aim for.

In 2011, 4 coaches (Pete, Tony, Spencer and myself) headed to the French Alps to look at the possibility of running a club trip and came back enthused. From this trip was born the “progressive paddling programme” which is a series of weekends which concentrate on developing white water skills, with each trip becoming slightly harder, such that members starting in one year should be at a standard which would allow them to take part in the foreign trip the following year.





Our first foreign trip became reality in 2012 when a group of coaches and members went to the French Alps and had a great week paddling.

In 2013, we sought to develop the progressive paddling weekends further by encouraging members to try both kayak and canoes on moving water and this saw several members trying canoes at Symonds Yat for the first time. The 2013 series culminated in this year's trip to Slovenia which was amazing (see the summer edition of the newsletter for Pete Lawrence's article).

This year has been the first time we have managed to run all three summer progressive paddling week ends and has also seen many more people getting involved in the canoeing side of paddling on moving water, which for me is a great boost for the club and has resulted in some amazing feedback on the river bank from coaches of other clubs who were at the same venues as us. (Does make me proud to be part of Eagle when you overhear such feedback from complete strangers).

For me, seeing members having a great time and enjoying their weekends, gaining in confidence and pushing their own paddling has been the realisation of a dream. It has also been amazing to watch us develop and learn as a club, as we review each trip and look to see what we can do better next time, which makes each trip run a little smoother. I have also seen many coaches develop their own skills in terms of coaching styles, leadership skills, as well as their own paddling skills. Many of the coaches have attended personal development week ends at Plas y Brenin and attended courses such as White Water Safety and Rescue, and this all goes towards us running better and better week ends.

Personally, I got back into white water kayaking in about 2009 with an interesting trip down the river Tees which ended in a very uncontrolled fall off Low Force which broke the boat ! My paddling has come on a bit since then and I have a lot of people to thank for that (mainly Pete, Si, Tom, Tony and Jas) and this winter I am looking forward to pushing my own personal paddling with trips to the Lake District, Canoe Symposium and the north east.

The club sets out to give members the skills they need to enjoy their paddling and to know how to be safe, but it's up to you to take the next steps and either start heading out on your own mini adventures or come up with new places for the club to go, to push you to the next level. Any suggestions always welcome! **Stuart**



# DORDOGNE RIVER OPEN CANOE TOUR

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2014

## Part 1

I've known the Dordogne River since I was a baby. There is a photo of me as a baby sitting in an inch of water at the river's edge with my parents behind me. Aged 7 I used to take a kitchen sieve to the river and try and catch minnow's. When I was a teenager we used to have an inflatable dinghy and hours would be spent jumping in and out, or turning it upside down and hiding underneath or even paddling my mum or dad 100 meters upstream and back. There were two or three popular river 'beaches' of stones or grass where we used to go for picnics and swimming. I never considered where the river came from or where it might end up.

In 2011 I joined Eagle Canoe club which is located on the Wensum minutes from my home. (This doesn't help to explain why I'm always late to club nights). I began to learn how to kayak and remember well the anxiety of trying to balance when moving elegantly from the bank to the cramped interior of the boat. I was overjoyed that year to make a couple of trips on local rivers. More recently I have participated in progressive white water trips to the Wye, the Dee and the Tryweryn. I love these trips and while my white water skills are still quite tame I have started to learn what is needed to be confident on moving water. And as with most risky activities the more confident you become the more fun it is but also the more you appreciate what the risks are if things go wrong. While training for my 2\* award I had to learn how to canoe. Again, despite the cross-over with kayaking, the sensation that you I was always on the verge of falling in was frustrating. However, I enjoyed the fact that while on trips I could carry more stuff (I like travelling heavy!) and getting in and out of the boat was much easier.

Sometime in 2013 an idea was hatched in my mind I wish I could remember when or where or why but I can't. I decided I wanted to canoe the Dordogne River from source to mouth. This did coincide with a decision to change my life quite dramatically and move to France and I obviously had some familiarity with a few short sections of the river. And so the idea began to grow. I knew from planning local trips that a thorough knowledge of the river would be necessary before actually canoeing it. Although people do obviously do first runs of rivers, it would be foolish and time consuming to paddle the river without knowing it. I started by accumulating detailed maps of the river. Some of these I ordered from Stanfords in London and others I bought along the way. I ended up buying a mixture of local, regional and national maps – 28 of them in total!

I began to research where the river started and could see that there were some big dams and reservoirs along the way. It was clear that a reconnaissance mission to the river was going to be pretty useful and this was planned for April 2014.

I was delighted to be able to persuade Damon from Eagle and another friend with no canoeing experience but an enthusiasm for a bit of adventure to join me on the 'reccy'. So in April Damon and I drove down to Le Mont Dore, the ski resort through which the meter-wide Dordogne starts. There are actually two tiny tributaries, the Dore and the Dorgne which in April were gushing downhill through a snow field many meters deep.

For a while we contemplated at which point a canoe could be launched but then realized we were being a bit naïve as the river remained pretty shallow, very windy and full of boulders for some miles.





We followed the river past two smallish dams where portages would be almost impossible and then through woods and fields where the chances of paddling seemed marginal. But I did note down the name of a sort of religious, tourist hostel/camp site in case that became the start point. Then there was Sants Sauves d'Auvergne, which had a camp site next to the river and the river potentially had enough depth to paddle. Some 40 miles downstream was the first of the big dams at Bort-les-Orgues, at 120 meters tall.



There are three more big dams beyond Bort before the river continues unimpeded for another 150 miles or so. In between Sant Sauves and this dam was a 25 mile gorge with access by road or foot. We made one stop and walked down a very (very) steep valley to find the river at the bottom.

The river was quite shallow even in April and there were a lot of big rocks and overhanging trees. The chances of paddling down here were marginal but not out of the question – well someone with more experience might have said it was out of the question. I think this is the difference between wisdom and enthusiasm! As getting down to the river from the road was so hard and we were in a rush to meet my friend this was the only bit of the gorge d'Avèze that we looked at.

Ben joined us from Brussels and we continued downstream. The main objective here was to find get-out points, at some point upstream from the hydro-electric dams where there was no safety issue, then to find a place downstream of the dam that was safe to get back in the river. All along this stretch there are signs warning of the dangers of rising water levels and statements prohibiting swimming in the river.

Canoeing down here started to feel a bit ominous. With some of the portages round dams consisting of ascents of 1:15 gradients and 17 km long walks I began to wonder whether the upper section could be paddled at all. But, the scenery was magnificent and I felt determined. At one point we spent two hours walking down a steep track and along the river bank looking for an easy way to get up from the river 10 meters below. We didn't find a satisfactory spot but after crossing the river we found the perfect spot on the other side consisting of a ramp at just the right distance upstream from the Chastang Dam.



After passing the last big dam at Argentat we made fairly swift progress and we hadn't seen any major obstacles on the maps. I was on the lookout for good camping spots but as it would be difficult to predict progress down the river it was very hard to know where we would be stopping each night. Around Bergerac there are a series of three dams and weirs which required a closer inspection but there were relatively easy portages at each one. My only issue being that I didn't know whether I would be paddling this section on my own and therefore even small banks would be quite challenging to exit with a heavy boat and lots of baggage.

About 40-50 miles downstream from Bergerac the Dordogne starts to become tidal. As the water flows up and down the channel it fills with silt which does not settle and becomes milky brown and has the appearance of being much more powerful. At low tide the banks become very high and covered in a deep, sticky mud which makes it almost impossible to drag a canoe out. We were looking for pontoons, ramps or causeways which seemed to be in short supply. This problem continues as the Dordogne joins the Garonne and becomes the Gironde estuary. This is the biggest estuary in Europe and is roughly 12 miles wide where it meets the Atlantic Ocean. I was a bit of a conundrum trying to work out how a paddler would exit the river at the end of the day. You must get in during slack water at high tide when the water is high and about to flow back out to the sea. It would be (almost?) impossible to paddle against the incoming river. So you paddle with the river as it flows downstream. Then you arrive at a point, about 6 hours later (although this time seems to change depending how far you are from the sea) when the river will change direction and flow back upstream. Unfortunately this will be at low tide when the water is at its lowest and it will be (almost?) impossible to get out of the river.



Various options seemed possible: get out before the river reaches its lowest point when a suitable get-out is found; find something to tie onto and wait until high tide and get out when the water level is higher; swear loudly and repeatedly as you are carried back up the river with the incoming tide wasting a whole day's paddling! As with a few of the quandaries which the reccy had thrown up it seemed a case of having to 'cross that bridge when you come to it'. Carrying on along the right (northern) bank of the estuary we soon encountered wide, flat beaches and tourist resorts which would be a pleasure to arrive at.



The right bank of the estuary ends at a lagoon behind a spit next to a pine forest, on the other side of which is the Atlantic Ocean. Although I didn't know exactly where I was going to start the trip, I knew that this was where I wanted to finish. I knew that paddling the estuary (essentially the ocean but slightly protected) would be a big challenge but if I could get to the end of those 50 miles I could paddle into the lagoon and pitch my tent in the pine forest overlooking the Ocean. That would be the perfect way to end a trip down the Dordogne. **Joel**

## INJURY PREVENTION FOR PADDLERS: A PHYSIOTHERAPY PERSPECTIVE

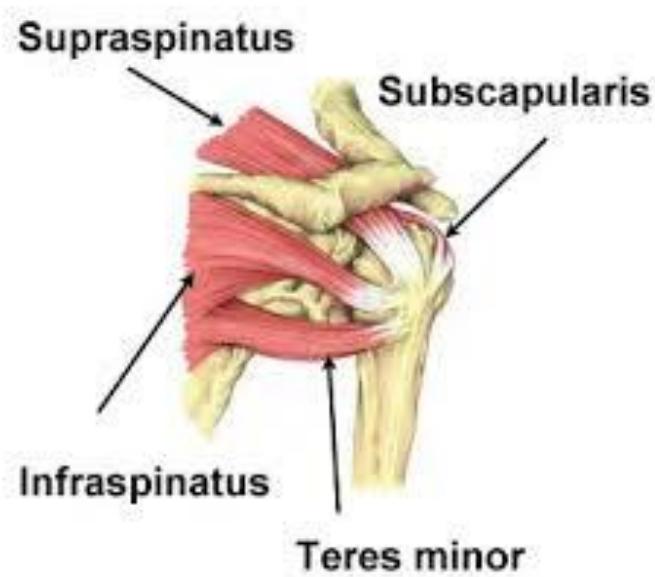
As the dark nights are drawing in and we are perhaps paddling less during the week it's a good time to focus on other areas of your paddling that may have been neglected over the summer. This article is going to focus on the importance of strength and conditioning for paddlers and give you an idea of some good core exercises. It is by no means exhaustive but will focus on shoulder and core strength and flexibility.

### Intro:

Although shoulder dislocation is the most feared of paddle sport shoulder injuries, overuse injuries or impingement of the rotator cuff (RC) are far more common in both canoeing and kayaking.

### The Rotator Cuff:

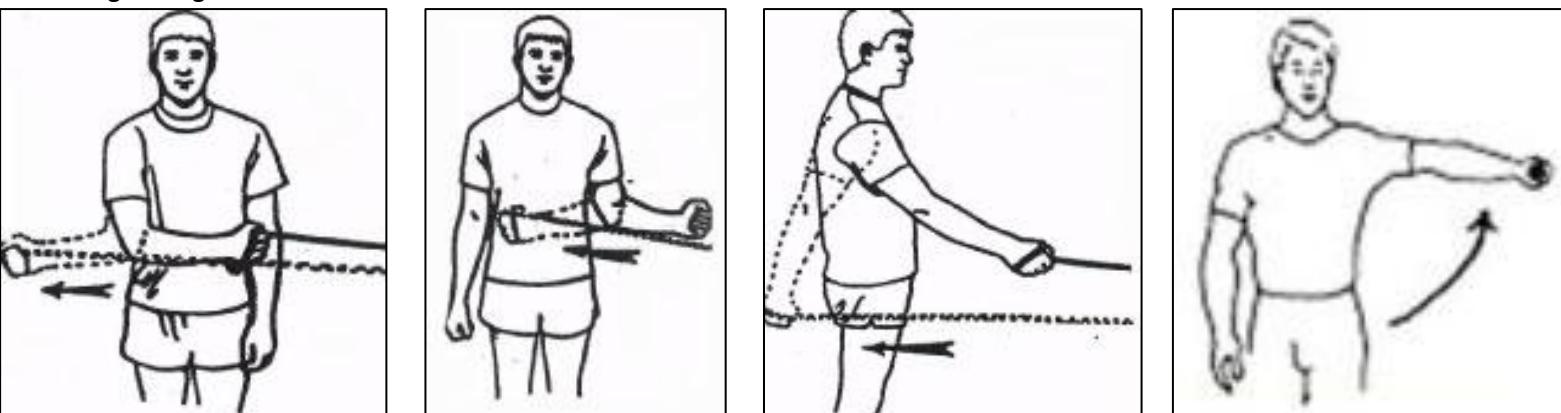
The shoulder is a ball and socket joint which means that it has the greatest range of movement of any joint in the body.



This also means, however, that little of the stability is provided from the bones but instead comes from the muscles and ligaments. Every time you move your shoulder there is a complicated interaction between the RC muscles that aims to keep the ball centred in the socket. If there is any muscle imbalance the head of the humerus can be misaligned and will catch in the socket on certain movements, this is called impingement syndrome. Equally if the muscles are working repeatedly in a position where they are at a mechanical disadvantage you are at risk of a tendinopathy or overuse injury.

The first obvious preventative measure to these injuries is to paddle with good technique. I will however leave this to the expertise of the coaches of the club and focus on the second preventative measure- strength and flexibility. Without these you may find it difficult to implement your good technique.

#### RC Strengthening:

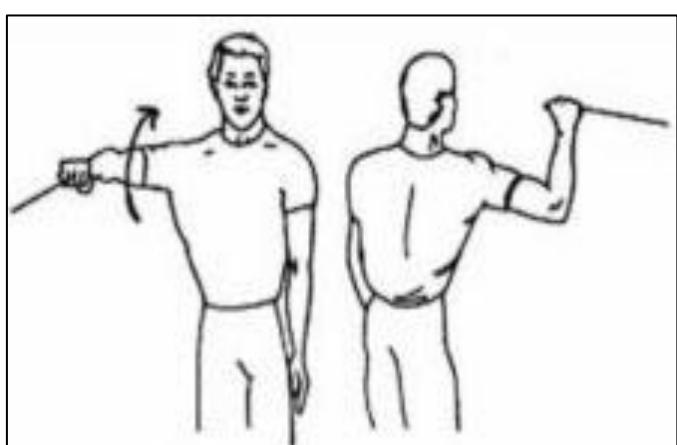
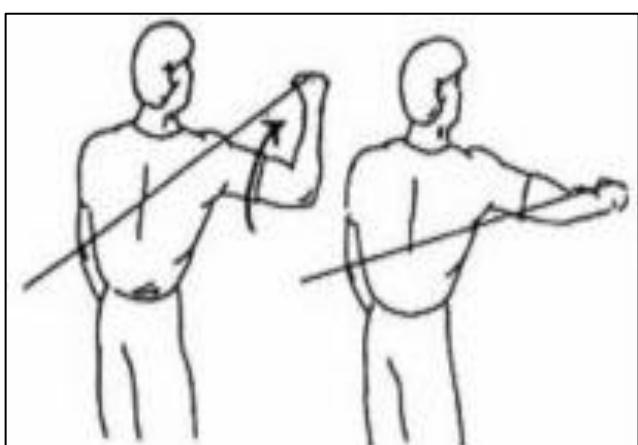


External Rotation

Internal Rotation

Extension

Abduction



External and Internal Rotation with a 90 degree abduction

Use a hand held weight or a resistance band. It's important not to use too heavy a weight with these exercises as this will result in you compensating with your stronger power muscles rather than working the RC. Ensure you maintain good posture throughout.

#### Importance of good posture:

Sit in a slouched position and try to lift your arms above your head. Now sit up tall and do the same thing. It should feel much easier. If you imagine paddling for hours at a time in a slouched position with the shoulder getting jammed every stroke it's easy to see how injuries can occur. In order to sit with good posture for extended periods of time we need a certain level of strength in our core and flexibility in our trunk.

#### Core strength and flexibility:

We all know that trunk rotation is one of the key aspects to the paddling stroke. Without this in order to gain the same stroke movement the shoulder has to work through a greater arc and joints are always more vulnerable to injury at the end of their range of movement. But... if you have a stiff thoracic spine your trunk rotation will be severely limited. The following exercises will help with the flexibility of your upper back.



We should remember that our 'core' is not just our abs (as much as we all love a good six pack!). The 'core' involves the muscles around your hips, torso, pelvis and lower back. Without core strength your muscles will get tired and you'll begin to slouch and then we all know what happens! (see above injury risks). In order for all of our limbs to work efficiently they must be supported by a strong core. Below are some basic core exercises:



It's also good practice to warm up not only from a flexibility point of view but to switch on the muscles we are about to use. For this reason dynamic stretches and movements can be more useful than static stretches.

Warm up drills: neck movements, shoulder circles, squats, dynamic lunge with trunk rotation.

#### Summary:

In summary we need a combination of strength, stability and flexibility to not only prevent injury but to become an efficient paddler. Remember that whilst I have focused mainly on the upper body in this article we also have a lower body so don't neglect your legs and hips - we need these to paddle well too!

Think about your paddling goals and whether there is anything physically limiting you or stopping you achieving these and tailor your strength training to these. For example are you having trouble learning to roll? Is it your technique that is stopping you or is it your inability to get into the correct position (flexibility)? Do you want to be able to keep up on trips (muscle endurance), or to simply avoid injury (strengthening)? There is a lot more we can do in terms of strength and conditioning and I'm happy to chat to anyone if they have any questions on any of the exercises or want advice on more advanced exercises. Go forth and paddle safely! **Alex**

## PADDLING AN AFRICAN CANOE

A number of years ago Tammy and I had a trip to east Africa. We flew from Norwich to Kilimanjaro International Airport, little more than a concrete runway in the jungle, with a tin shed as passport control. We did a camping safari round the Serengeti, Lake Manyara and Ngorongoro, and then flew to Zanzibar for a chillout.

Once there we got picked up by a tiny boat and headed out into the Indian Ocean, to stay for a few days on Chapwani, an island 100 metres wide by 1km long, little more than a vegetated sandbank with a few palm trees and thatched rooms on.

While we were there, one day a dugout canoe appeared out of nowhere. It was anchored about fifty metres offshore, a brief swim. I assumed it belonged to someone who would soon be returning, but it floated unguarded and unused all day, and by late afternoon, as the African sun was dipping over the Arabic buildings of Stone Town, the Zanzibari capital back on the main island, temptation got the better of me and I decided to take it for a spin.

So I swam out over the reef, and clambered in. My first impressions were how small it was, even smaller than our solo canoes at the club. It clearly hadn't come from a very big tree. It had been hollowed out pretty crudely, with axe-marks still evident all over. It had also split in one location, with water seeping in. In true African style, it had been fixed, with whatever happened to be available at the time. So a small metal plate about the size of a postcard had been fixed over the split. It looked like a piece of heat-shield from an exhaust system, something like that.



The paddle was stowed safely in the boat. It was a lot smaller than I was used to from paddling in the UK, and the blade was far narrower too, shaped more like a spear than a paddle. I wasn't sure how easy it was going to be, using something this small, but I settled in, planted the blade and off I went. It was a bit tippy, because it was so narrow and founded, but it tracked OK, and there were no seats or thwarts so I could trim it as I needed, no problem at all.

And so I did a lap of the island in my temporary African dug-out canoe! There is little more to say, other than that I loved being on the water, looking back to the island across the turquoise sea, sun beating down, dhows sailing in the distance. Stunning. I've not got a photo of the canoe, but I've included a photo of the island purely as a means of making you all jealous! **Simon**



## CAMBRIDGE TRIP

There are a few trips in the Eagle programme which have a certain character and which over the years have proved to be peoples favourites. The Symonds Yat week end always has a good vibe about it and the need to book quickly is soon known by new members. The Thetford camp at the end of the summer has also always had a good reputation as being a fun week end.

For me, the Cambridge trip has always been a bit different to many of the trips that we run and has evolved over the years to become a really fun week end. I think that this years was the best yet !

The first day starts in the narrow head waters of the River Cam and gently meanders its way through fields with trees overhanging the river. Along side are footpaths with cyclists and walkers heading into Cambridge. Occasionally you come across other river users, including paddlers, people on punts and wild swimmers.

There was a big group on the trip this year and as we paddled along there was a good bit of chat between the group and people up on the bank, enjoying the sun. As we neared the centre of Cambridge the number of people on punts significantly increased (a sign that the backs of the colleges was going to be very busy!)

As you get into Cambridge we have to move the boats from the upper to the lower Cam.

This is done by using the punt rollers. This causes much entertainment as we sit in the canoes and charge down the rollers into the lower Cam.



This is the lunch stop, where we pull up on the Green, frequent the local pub and Colin talks to all the Hen Parties !.

The following section is through the backs of the Colleges. This is a very busy section of the river and is full of hired punts (who have no idea what they are doing) and commercial punts who give guided tours (which you can follow and listen to for free) and who take great delight in running into the hired punts and knocking people off into the river !

At the far side of the colleges we reconvened at Jesus Lock for ice creams and then progressed onwards to our second pub of the day – it's a really tough trip !!!

That evening we camped near Huntingdon on a caravan site which at first looked very crowded and a really bad choice, however we had our own field which was screened by a row of willow trees which as you passed through was a bit like going through the wardrobe to Narnia !

The following days trip was from Huntingdon to St Ives and involves going through the quiet back waters which run parallel to the navigable river. They were lined with water lilies and were so peaceful (except for Joel & Alex having a water fight [in the same boat] – no escape !!).

We stopped at Houghton Mill for lunch where everyone took the opportunity to go for a swim before they opened the sluice for the water wheel on the mill, which then gave us an opportunity for a spot of white water !.

The weather over the week end was amazing and everybody on the trip had a really relaxed approach which resulted in a great week end. Its unlikely that we'll run the trip next year, but it will definitely be back for 2016 ! **Stuart**



## AIM FOR THE ROCK

"Aim for the Rock!.....Let go of the tree!" are but two of the commands which I associate with white water paddling and the Eagles club.

I decided to join the Eagles earlier this year, having been paddling elsewhere for two years, and because I wanted to progress onto white water. After a brief conversation with Stuart and a couple emails I was invited along to a Symonds Yat trip. I accepted and found myself on a mini bus with some 15 people I'd never met before. It was excruciatingly uncomfortable at first....everybody seemed to know each other...and I had no idea how the trip would pan out. It turned out just fine, the journey was really good natured and that was just the start of a great weekend.

Before we got on the water, young Fred was assigned to look out for me.

A complete stranger, the same as age as my daughter; he stepped up to the task and was a marvel. He was kind, encouraging and took every opportunity to help me to improve my skills. Learning to break out of the flow and into an eddy, Fred's shouts of "aim for the rock" are still ringing in my ears.

The chores were shared by all, with everybody helping with cooking, washing up, clearing up and clearing out. We had a few beers in the evening, sat outside and enjoyed the banter. I returned to Norfolk with a real sense of achievement. I faced my fears on two counts...hanging out with complete strangers and learning to aim for rocks!

Next came the Dee Trip.....an unknown river, and camping weekend. I was so worried about putting up my tent in the dark, and whether people would help me, but these guys had done it all before. They were all old hands, the cars were arranged so we had full headlights to guide us. Someone forgot their tent pegs and everyone chipped in with a few, the shelter was erected in the middle of camp, and we were set for another adventure. The Dee trip was a delight, this time myself and a couple of other newbies had Simon and Fred to look out for us, and to lead the way. I felt safe at all times, and with Simon's coaching I quietly grew in confidence. I loved the Dee and look forward to going back next year. It was lovely to see other people shine too. At a stretch of river called

the Serpents Tail, there were people running it for the first time. Their sense of achievement shone through.



The Tryweryn was a different kettle of fish! Way beyond my ability, the lower Tryweryn was a seven mile obstacle course. I swam lots and lots, and as always, there were experienced paddles ready to fish me out within minutes. I was scared and cold, and Stuarts roar of "Let go of the tree" sounded like he really meant it! I did let go of said tree and found myself perched on the river bank waiting for Tom to retrieve my boat and bring it back to me. It didn't quite go to plan and I saw Tom, the guy that was going to get me out of this mess hurtling down stream without his paddle cursing F\*\*\*, F\*\*\*, F\*\*\* . Of course, he made his way back to me with boats and paddles enough for two and off we set.

I have just returned from the Dart trip. I tried to back out at the last minute, worried about river levels, and YouTube videos. It all looked so daunting, and always in the back of my mind is what an inconvenience I'll be. Having to rely on the good will of the senior paddlers and coaches doesn't come naturally to me. This time it was Stuart and Pete who gave their time, their skills and all the encouragement we needed, to enjoy what was for me the best trip of the year. By the end of the trip I didn't recognise myself as the same paddler. I had the most wonderful time: the camaraderie on and off the river, seeing other paddlers improve, enjoying the wonderful weather, eating al fresco in November and being voted best co-pilot by Martin. GREAT STUFF! If you are ever in two minds as to whether to join a trip....do it....the Eagles Club will help you shine. **Pia**



# POGIES



This piece is intended both as a cautionary tale and as a rave review of a piece of kit for winter paddling, possibly the best £10 you could ever spend on paddling gear...

I've always suffered with being a cold person (physiologically, not necessarily emotionally. Best ask the wife on that one?) I have terrible circulation, possibly even Raunards according to Doctor Pontin, where blood supply to the extremities effectively gets cut off as blood vessels go into temporary spasm due to the cold. So when the temperatures dip I begin to get affected. Obviously it's exacerbated when I'm paddling, because being wet means I get colder quicker; it's even harder to retain any warmth.

The next step when the body temperature drops, beyond just being cold, is hypothermia, and paddling whitewater in single figure or even sub-zero temperatures means this is a big risk. I've had a couple of instances when I've been pretty close to this, I think. The first was four or five years ago on

an eventful trip to the Tees. This was the weekend where Pete knackered his knee, Steve got pinned on a drop beneath Low Force and Olly's boat got split open like a banana skin. Before all of these incidents the cold had been so much that I basically nearly passed out on the bank. Dizzy, tunnel vision, nausea, general confusion. Happily Steve was there to do the honours and get me right again, so after a while I was able to carry on.

I had similar issues last winter, on a couple of rivers with Stu, Pete and Evellina. You've gotta question the wisdom of paddling in the snow, I agree, but having put these dates in the diary and travelled all that way I wasn't about to sit it out. After a short period on the river on one particular occasion, snow falling, and settling all around, I could feel myself getting cold hands. Really cold hands. Painfully so. Every paddlestroke resulted in my hands getting splashed, and any rapids saw them getting immersed in the icy water. The discomfort was getting worse and worse. This was coinciding with my feeling more and more lethargic, and paddling really badly, none of the usual skill or finesse, making silly mistakes. Happily we weren't on a particularly pushy river.

Evellina had suggested that I borrow her pogies – amazing (yet incredibly simple) neoprene bits of kit that go over hands and paddle shaft, keeping the worst of the water and wind off them. Confusion was setting in though, possibly as a result of moving into the first stages of hypothermia, so I declined the offer and carried on paddling. I think I thought she'd get cold if I borrowed them, and I didn't want that.

But a few more minutes passed and I clearly wasn't myself. Action was taken on my behalf, and I'm very grateful to Stu for all but forcing me to borrow Evellina's pogies. They got velcro'd to the paddle shafts for me, and my hands thrust inside. Evellina had done a good job at warming them up for me, and a rapid transformation began. Within literally five minutes, with no splashes and no wind chill, my hands were not just not cold, they were warm! They were so much more comfortable, no pain at all. But way more remarkable than that, I instantly began paddling better, cheered up massively, got back into the group dynamic, and ultimately was less of a risk, less of a liability, to myself and the rest of the group. A real change.

So the first thing I did once back to civilisation, along with Pete, was to order a pair. Just £10, for a fairly insignificant piece of kit that, in this case turned me from cold to warm, from miserable to happy, and most importantly by far, from an accident waiting to happen, to a cohesive, active, safe group member. Best £10 I've ever spent on paddling kit. **Simon**

